

# SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN ARLINGTON: 1922-1979

By

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Until 1922, Arlington schools were administered by three separate school boards with a jointly shared superintendent through three magisterial districts: Arlington, Washington and Jefferson. On September 9, 1922, a single school board was formed carrying out an act of the Virginia General Assembly, which became effective on September 1, 1922, and prescribed that the newly appointed members "shall meet and organize the County School Board on or before September 20, 1922." The Arlington School Board minutes of September 20, 1922, lists the teachers and schools for the 1922-23 school year:

## **Arlington District:**

<b>Schools</b>	<b>No. Teachers</b>
Fort Myer Heights	5
Clarendon	8
Ballston	11
Columbia	5
Barcroft	2
Glencarlynn	1
Aurora Heights	1
Kemper	1

## **Jefferson District:**

<b>Schools</b>	<b>No. Teachers</b>
G. Mason High School	7
Mount Vernon	10
Hume	3
Jefferson	4

## **Washington District:**

<b>Schools</b>	<b>No. Teachers</b>
Cherrydale	12
Carne	2
Saegmuller	1
Sumner	3

None of the schools listed in the three magisterial districts is still in service as a County school. A number of the names of the schools listed will sound familiar, but the reader is advised not to confuse them with later schools for which the same names were used. For example, the original section of the present Barcroft School was first built in 1924, two years later than the listing in the minutes book. The present Glencarlyn School was built in 1955. Kemper School was closed by the School Board in 1964 and for a time the building was leased to the North Arlington Child Care Center, but in 1972 the building was transferred to the County. The original Jefferson building that is listed became a part of the building that formerly housed the Hoffman-Boston Junior-Senior High School. The Cherrydale School buildings continued in use until they were closed in 1971 and the property was transferred to the County. Of course, the Hume School listed is the same building on Arlington Ridge Road that is now the home of the Arlington Historical Society.

The building listed as George Mason High School should not be confused with the building in Falls Church because the site of the G. Mason building listed is confirmed as being on N. Randolph Street in Arlington. The School Board minutes (3/9/25, p. 133) states:

“...The Superintendent advised the Board that the Commonwealth Attorney had proposed the deed for the settlement of the old G. Mason High School property which was purchased by the St. Agnes School for Girls...The Board instructed the chairman and clerk to sign the deed conveying the property to the St. Agnes School and that the sum of \$24,461.50 be received by the Board for the transaction be placed to the credit of the Jefferson District School Fund...”

At the same time we find that the Board was contemplating building a new George Mason High School in Arlington and this is reflected in the minutes (Jan. 24, 1924, p. 69) in an order to “erect a new building at Mt. Vernon Blvd. and Mt. Ida Avenue, on the site of the Mount Vernon School property, Jefferson District (Del Ray).” In the minutes of February 29, 1924 (p. 72) we find that “The Board entered into contract with H. W. Cauffman for the construction of G. Mason High School for the sum of \$90,400.” The saga of G. Mason and Mount Vernon schools in Arlington ends with the annexation of the area by the City of Alexandria and the minutes of October 30, 1929 (p. 345) tell that “...the above school (G. Mason) will be under the jurisdiction of the City of Alexandria in a short time... (p. 346) surrender of property at George Mason and Mt. Vernon Schools...”

There are a great number of interesting stories that can be told about

Arlington schools that no longer exist, but our purpose here is to tell of the growth and changes in the Arlington Public Schools from 1922 until the present. The fact that Arlington's schools are modern and up-to-date is attested to by the fact that of the present thirty-four existing schools, twenty-eight have been built since 1950 and almost every other building that was built before that date has been renovated, and/or added to and enlarged to improve the existing facility. A total picture of the age of Arlington schools would look like the following:

<b>Years Built</b>	<b>No. New Schools</b>	<b>No. Additions/ Renovations</b>
Before 1920	4	0
1920-29	11	2
1930-39	6	5
1940-49	5	9
1950-59	20	30
1960-69	3	19
1970-79	6	12

One can easily see from this chart that the greatest period of school growth took place during the 1950's, which brought twenty new buildings and thirty additions and/or renovations. This building period, of course, corresponded with the greatest increase in Arlington's population which increased 181% between 1947 and 1960. Two other building periods are worthy of notice. The period of the 1920's brought Arlington a substantial number of new buildings: nine of the eleven buildings were built between 1924 and 1928. The period of the 1960's brought fewer new buildings but nineteen additions and/or renovations to schools took place. The 1960's might be looked at as a time of consolidations and changed needs brought about by the previous decade of rapid growth of population and the corresponding need for more new buildings. When the priority is on new building, renovation takes a back seat. The high point of school population growth was reached during the 1963-64 school year, and until the 1966-67 school year remained almost the same. Beginning with the 1966-67 school year, the Arlington schools' student population has continued to decline.

The period of the 1970's is rather more difficult to characterize. Why, one could ask, are so many new and renovated buildings listed during a time of decreasing student population? Probably the most responsible answer to this question would have to be given by the school boards which made the decisions in the late 1960's or early 1970's. One type of answer to the question would be because of school consolidation, shifts in population, and the fact that buildings wear out. Another type of answer might have to

do with suitability of buildings to new directions in program. For example, the Career Center was built because of what was foreseen as a change in emphasis. Jefferson was replaced with the combined junior high school and community center because of the combined needs of schools and county; the old Jefferson-Henry complex either had to be completely renovated or replaced because of hard use over a thirty-year period. The decision to replace the 1924 section of Washington-Lee was made for a variety of reasons, including perhaps political considerations. Some of the construction of the 1970's was the result of 1960's planning and to have altered plans very much could have had a domino effect. And some of the decisions made were probably purely political decisions demanded by public pressures on the representatives of the people.

Now let us move to a decade by decade look at the buildings of the Arlington County School Board. Arlington experienced a large building program during the 1920's. Population increases following World War I, while not substantial, still were enough to make necessary the building of new schools:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Schools Built</b>
1924	Barcroft Washington-Lee High School
1925	Henry Langston
1926	Clay Jackson Lee Marshall Monroe Woodmont Addition to Wilson
1927	Addition to Cherrydale
1928	Custis

Of these schools only Barcroft and Jackson still occupy the 1920's buildings that have been added on to and renovated. The original 1924 section of Washington-Lee was replaced in 1977. The Henry and Woodmont buildings were completed in 1975 and 1972 respectively. The other buildings have been closed as school buildings: Langston (1971), Clay (1973), Lee (1971), Marshall (1965), Monroe (replaced by Key in 1968), Wilson (1968), Cherrydale (1971), and Custis (1979).

A rather modest building program took place in Arlington schools during the 1930's:

1931	Addition to Clay Addition to Custis Addition to Henry Addition to Jackson
1935	Addition to Woodmont
1938	Jefferson Junior High School Reed Stewart
1939	Barrett Madison Swanson Junior High School

Of the building program of the 1930's only Reed, Barrett and Swanson still occupy the buildings of the period with later additions and renovations. Stewart was closed in 1971 and James Madison was closed in 1975. Jefferson was torn down in 1973, after the new building on the Old Glebe Road site was occupied in 1972. The original site of Jefferson on Walter Reed Drive is now occupied by the Arlington Career Center (1975).

During the decade of the 1940's building needs were fairly modest, especially during the war years when materials were not available. Nevertheless, a number of new buildings and additions to existing buildings entered service to Arlington children.

1940	Woodlawn
1941	Addition to Washington-Lee High School
1943	Addition to Barcroft
1944	Drew Fairlington
1945	Dolly Madison
1946	Addition to Barcroft Addition to Barrett Addition to Stewart Addition to Woodmont
1947	Randolph
1948	Addition to Jackson Addition to Woodlawn
1949	Addition to Dolly Madison

Among the buildings built during the 1940's Drew and Randolph still occupy the original buildings, but both have had additions and Randolph has also been renovated. The Dolly Madison School building is an interesting chapter in Arlington School history. It is probably the school building that has had the greatest number of different names of any in Arlington.

Occupied during World War II to service the temporary federally operated housing project on the south side of Shirley Highway, it had its own tunnel leading to the school under the highway. Operated as Dolly Madison Junior High School until about 1953, the building was renamed Brandon Junior High School until Kenmore Junior High School was opened in 1959. The same building then was used as an annex to Wakefield High School while Yorktown High School was being built until 1960. From 1960 until 1964 Dolly Madison had periods of disuse and of use as an annex of Drew School. Finally in 1965 the building was sold to an apartment developer and torn down. A high rise apartment building by the same name now stands on the site of the school. Woodlawn was closed in 1978 and Fairlington ceased being operated as a public school in 1979.

The greatest building program ever undertaken by the Arlington School Board took place during the 1950's. The following new buildings and additions came into use in the years listed:

1950	Abingdon Oakridge Addition to Reed Stratford Junior High School Addition to Washington-Lee High School Yorktown (Elementary)
1951	Addition to Cherrydale Hoffman-Boston (Elementary) McKinley
1952	Claremont Addition to Jackson Addition to Hoffman-Boston (Jr.-Sr.) Nottingham Addition to Washington-Lee High School
1953	Addition to Barcroft Addition to Drew Edison (County owned) Fillmore Jamestown Addition to Langston Page Addition to Stewart Taylor Tuckahoe Wakefield High School

1954	Addition to Cherrydale Fort Myer (Federal Government) Addition to Maury Addition to Wakefield High School Williamsburg Junior High School
1955	Glencarlyn Addition to Henry Addition to Jefferson Junior High School Addition to Swanson Junior High School
1956	Ashlawn Kenmore Junior High School
1957	Addition to Drew Addition to Fort Myer Addition to Jamestown Addition to Lee Addition to Oakridge Addition to Wilson Addition to Woodmont
1958	Addition to Clay Addition to Kenmore Junior High School
1959	Addition to Fort Myer Gunston Junior High School Addition to Hoffman-Boston (Jr.-Sr.) Addition to Langston Addition to James Madison Addition to Randolph

The buildings built in the 1950's would have been thought to have had few changes. However, changes there have been! Yorktown (elementary) became part of Yorktown High School (1960). Hoffman-Boston (elementary) was closed in 1971. Edison was returned to the County Board in 1971. Fillmore became part of the new Long Branch School (1973). Fort Myer is slated to be closed in 1980 by the school board. The Glencarlyn built in 1955 replaced a building with the same name that became part of Kenmore which was built in 1956. Gunston was closed in 1978 and is now used for adult education and the performing arts. The Stratford building was closed as a school by that name in 1978 and reopened the same year as a home for the H-B/Woodlawn Program (an alternative grades 7-12 secondary school).

As one would expect, the building program of the 1960's was much smaller than that of the preceding decade. Three new buildings came into use, but numerous additions were erected:

1960	Yorktown High School George Mason Center
1962	Addition to Custis Addition to Nottingham Addition to Randolph Addition to Reed Addition to Wakefield High School
1963	Addition to Swanson Junior High School Addition to Taylor
1964	Addition to Abingdon Addition to Claremont Addition to Drew Addition to Glencarlyn Addition to Langston Addition to Wakefield High School
1965	Addition to Jamestown
1966	Addition to Reed Addition to Swanson Junior High School
1967	Addition to George Mason Center
1968	Addition to Ashlawn Addition to Fairlington Key

All of the 1960's newly built schools are in operation. Yorktown High School added to the elementary building of the same name that was already on the property. The George Mason Center, a special school for the educable mentally retarded, is located on County Board owned property and was built with a large portion of federally financed funds. The Francis Scott Key School was built on the Monroe School property and replaced both Monroe and Wilson Schools. A number of the additions to existing buildings listed were extensive. Langston was closed as a regular elementary school in 1971. Fairlington was closed in 1979.

The building program for the 1970's had been planned for the first part of the decade, giving credence to the fact that most of the buildings and addition/renovations had been planned earlier. The very rapid decreases in student enrollments could probably not have been predicted and the planned building program was already in progress:

1970	Addition to Jackson Addition to Abingdon Glebe Addition to McKinley Addition to Oakridge
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	Addition to Taylor
	Addition to Tuckahoe
1972	Jefferson Junior High School ( & community center)
	Woodmont
	Swimming Pools at the three high schools
1973	Long Branch
1974	Addition to Barrett
1975	Addition to Barcroft
	Addition to Custis
	Henry
	Addition to Randolph
	Gunston (addition: Community Center)
	Addition to Wakefield
	Career Center
1977	Addition to Washington-Lee

The addition of the three swimming pools and the Community Center addition cannot be attributed to the wishes of the School Board as they were built for community recreation use. The same thing can be said for a large part of the Jefferson building. Henry was built on the former Henry School site; the Career Center was built on the former Jefferson Junior High School site; Woodmont was built on the former Woodmont School site; and Long Branch was built on the site of the former Fillmore School site, incorporating most of the Fillmore building in the new school.

What may the future hold for the Arlington County Schools? Since the student enrollment in 1963-64 reached its high point of 263,878 and began its descent during the 1966-67 school year, school enrollments have continued to decline. The student enrollment for the 1978-79 school year was 16,950 and is projected for 16,034 during the 1979-80 school year. There are yet no indications that school enrollments will level off. Thus more school closings should be anticipated. At this time only Fort Myer is scheduled to be closed in June, 1980, but obviously more schools will have to be closed. Rising school costs, political pressures on School Board members, and actual loss of student enrollments have their effect on school closings. Only one thing is certain at this point: Arlington will have fewer schools in 1985 than it had in 1980. Here is a list of the public schools of Arlington that will be open during the 1979-80 school year:

<b>Elementary K-6</b>	<b>Year Built</b>	<b>Additions</b>	<b>Acreage .</b>
Abingdon	1950	1964, 1971	9.81
Ashlawn	1956	1968	7.25
Barcroft	1924	1943, 1946, 1953, 1975	5.14
Barrett	1939	1946, 1950, 1974	7.13
Claremont	1952	1964	15.00
Drew Model School	1944	1953, 1957, 1964	10.70
Fort Myer	1954	1957, 1959	4.50 (Fed. Gov.)
Glebe	1971	— —	8.60
Glencarlyn	1955	1964	9.09
Henry	1975	— —	4.20
Jackson	1926	1931, 1948, 1952, 1970	7.96
Jamestown	1953	1957, 1965	16.45
Key	1968	— —	4.38
Long Branch	1973	— —	2.20
McKinley	1951	1971	7.56
Nottingham	1952	1962	8.95
Oakridge	1950	1957, 1971	8.21
Page Traditional	1953	— —	10.23
Randolph	1947	1959, 1962, 1975	7.33
Reed	1938	1946, 1950, 1962, 1966	10.84
Taylor	1953	1962, 1971	14.36
Tuckahoe	1953	1971	8.0
Woodmont	1972	— —	3.5
<b>Secondary</b>			
H-B/Woodlawn (7-12)	1950	— —	13.89
<b>Intermediate (7-8)</b>			
Jefferson	1972	— —	31.00
Kenmore	1956	1958	32.91
Swanson	1939	1955, 1963, 1966	7.84
Williamsburg	1954	— —	24.98
<b>Senior High (9-12)</b>			
Wakefield	1953	1954, 1962, 1964, 1975	37.50
Washington-Lee	1924	1932, 1941, 1950, 1952, 1964, 1969, 1977	26.81
Yorktown	1950, 1960	1968	29.84