

Alex Wood's  
speech to the  
Rockbridge Historical  
Society

Ted Delany  
Ellen Eslinger  
Megan  
David Coffee  
Me

## Introduction

Good evening everyone -

I'm grateful for the opportunity to come to you in this way. A special thanks to the Rockbridge Historical Society and to David Coffee the Program Director.

I'm thankful too to my wife Freddie who helped in so many, many ways...

I have been able to formulate in my mind many facts about the early Lexington Afro-American community from the family programs, paper clippings, and pictures that have accumulated through the years.

My presentation will be made in 4 different areas. Namely the social, education, economic and religious aspects of that community from 1900 - 1950.

Dean of the Congress  
of Christian Education  
for the state of Va'

# Social

## Page 1

In gathering the following information to make this presentation, I found it very difficult to separate the social life and the religious life of the African-American community. True the two are indeed different so much of what happened socially happened either at the Randolph Street United Methodist Church or at First Baptist Church, be it a religious play or a choral songspiration. It was not unusual that the same activities may have ~~take~~ <sup>taken</sup> place at school or in a private home.

1. Men and women of the African American community thought highly of the sense of belonging. <sup>1.</sup> Hence, joining the Masons, Elks, K of P, Odd Fellows, Eastern Star, <sup>2.</sup> The Rockbridge-Walker Federation of Colored Women Club were instances that gave them a feeling of personal worth and dignity. Such organizations aided greatly in solidifying Afro-Americans into a homogeneous community. I must say sadly that such is not the case today.
3. Music played a great part in the community. <sup>Wright Orchestra</sup> There were musical and vocal <sup>4.</sup>

Contests held at First Baptist Church on December 9, 1915, with special accommodations for white friends. Admission 10¢, reserved seats 15¢.

5. A dramatic cantata - Jephthah - Jef-Tha and his daughter was given at the First Baptist Church on May 25, 1923 or 1928. <sup>6.</sup> The Charity Nightingales who sang at the Lexington High School (white) in the 1930's are the

6. Same singers who took ~~part~~ part in the Great McCormick Celebration on Sept 25 1931 in episode III, a plantation in 1800.

7. There was great oratory given by many distinguished men and women such as Congressman Oscar DePriest of Illinois, and <sup>(2)</sup> Mrs. Janie Porter Barrett, President of the Virginia Federation of Colored Women.

There was a strong effort made on my grandmother, Eliza Bannister Walker's part to alleviate the suffering of persons who were handicapped, underprivileged, and illiterate. Much effort went into her dream of a Lexington Memorial Old Folks Home and orphanage. She travelled many miles speaking and soliciting funds

Change to  
#2 on  
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# Social

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For her dream.

The last thing in The Social  
Presentation is this shot of an  
advertisement concerning spending  
your Summer at Blandome, our  
private residence and a copy of one  
of many of the poems she wrote.

Read Poem

Economic

# Social

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So much of what happened socially occurred at either the Randolph Street United Methodist Church or at the First Baptist Church, be it a religious play or a songspiration. Such plays or songspirations may have also taken place at the Public School or even in a private home.

Men and Women of the African-American Community thought highly of the sense of belonging. Hence, joining the Masons, Elks, Odd Fellows, Eastern Star, or the Rockbridge-Walker Federation of Colored Women's Club, were instances that gave them a feeling of personal worth and dignity.

This first overhead is an Elks Program held at the Randolph Street United Methodist Church in 1925, Next a group of dignified men. Name them

The fore mentioned organizations aided greatly in solidifying Afro-Americans into a homogeneous community.

Music played a great part in the life of the community. Here is a photo of the Wright's Colored Band ~~who~~ from

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Columbus, Ohio who had come to play for a dance at Wandlee in 1917. They also played at Blandome.

\* No date is given here but it was probably in the 20's or early thirties, where the Charity Nightingales sang at the Lexington High School Auditorium. The group was well received.

\* The same group, the Charity Nightingales sang at the McCormick Celebration which was sponsored by the Washington and Lee University. Note how the group had grown, from ten to 18.

\* Great oratory took place in the community by many distinguished men and women, such as Congressman Oscar Depriest of Illinois, and Mrs. Janie Porter Barnett, President of the Virginia Federation of Colored Women. ~~Abstract~~

A strong effort to alleviate the suffering of persons who were handicapped, underprivileged, and illiterate was made by my grandmother, Eliza Walker. She had a dream of building a home for old folks and an orphanage. She travelled many miles speaking and soliciting funds for same. Here is a cartoon that appeared in the Washington D.C. Eagle of her soliciting funds.

# Education

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Probably the most controversial and least solved problem for persons freed after the Civil War was the matter of education. Not even laws handed down by the Supreme Court had the hoped for effect.

The age old debatable question of why laws do not work <sup>FOR US</sup> can be summed up in this manner, we are a race <sup>in other words</sup> America be-deviled by our high visibility. Most of us can be easily identifiable by our color.

Case in Point ~~Oliver Wood~~ Eastman Kodak  
" " " ~~Snare Jackson~~ Government in D.C.

Lexington had its trying moments in education during the teens, 20's, and the 30's, and the 40's probably the most

sneaking lie ever conceived by mankind was the phrase "Separate-But-Equal". Millions of our white brothers and sisters have gone to their graves still believing in that old Bug-A-Boo. <sup>CRAYON Eraser NEW</sup> Bldg, old desks

Lexington needed a building that was conducive to higher learning, a building that was well heated, ~~and~~ amply ventilated, well lighted, and a curriculum geared



# Education

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high school. Imagine Paying Tuition TO attend a Public School!! \*

When the deal fell through, my mother and father had to send 3 children to what was called Boarding School. Imagine ~~three~~ <sup>paying</sup> ~~children~~, ~~room~~ <sup>FOR 3</sup> and board and tuition <sup>in child</sup> the dead of the great depression, ~~in~~

1936-1937. There is NO justification. Don't forget that we were tax paying citizens of the town of Lexington.

# Economic

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\* Contrary to Popular belief, There was at one time a real concern about The lack of work opportunities in Lexington among African-Americans. This is evident by The overhead projection. The dates are estimated to be in The 20's and early 30's.

There were several means by which people of The Community were able to secure a livelihood.

There was The Charlie Franklin Barber shop located at where Sunday's child is now located. The barber shop in The Robert Lee Hotel, operated by Hugh Williams, T. Jackson Barber shop ~~where~~ located in front of The State Theatre, Dixie Scott Barber Shop, location unknown to me, \* and My Uncle Joseph Wood's barber shop, located in The Old Jacob Ruff House now occupied by The Meade Realtors.

There were a few places where a good meal could be ~~gotten~~ <sup>Had</sup>. Namely at I. Rowlands, location unknown to me, Washington's Cafe, located where Lexington Art Gallery is now, and Docks Tea Room, across from The Wilson Walker Restaurant.

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There were several groceries, namely W. Carter, Unknown to Me, U. Johnson, Presumably located at Carruthers and Diamond Streets, and The Walker and Wood Brothers, located at where The Willson-Walker Restaurant is now located.\*

There were at least two tourist homes, The Rose Inn, located on ~~South~~<sup>North</sup> Main Street, and Franklin Tourist Home, located on Tucker Street.

There was a Pool Parlor, operated by Fisher and Clark. Many persons at different times were hired as domestics in private homes, especially women, and at Wth and VMI

this ~~next~~ overhead will give you some idea of how my grandfather, Harry Lee Walker, made a living for himself and his family.

\* He purchased the Colonial Building shown here on June 22, 1911. It is now, as said before, The Willson-Walker Restaurant.

\* Below is a picture of the same building and two different characters, my father Clarence Wood, and my uncle Joseph Wood who each had a third interest in my grandfather's business, hence Walker

# Economics

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and Wood Brothers, Lexington Market. \* Let Me Name for you the Persons in the TOP Picture That was Taken about 1919. From left to right Harry Lee Walker, Eliza M. Walker, Edwin T. Walker, adopted son, William Tyree, Rob Poindexter, Abner Greenley and Buzz Lindsay.

\* Next, here is a ~~contract~~ letter of Bid from the Virginia Military Institute to Supply Meat for the year 1923-1924. Look at just three of the many items, (1) 1,500 lbs fresh Pork loins, 12 to 14 lbs average (2) 9,000 lbs of fresh Boneless Sirloin Butts, in 100 lb Boxes, 10 to 12 lb average and (3) 150 Crates of eggs.

\* Next is a Contract, Not the one to Bid on just shown, but an earlier Contract, dated April 23, 1919. It has all its witnesses, its said Meats, it ~~is~~ is also understood, and etc that most Contracts have.

\* Take a look at these Prices in 1925.

\* Another way of securing income was the early Bed and Breakfast accommodations my grandmother provided at Blandome.

# Religion

Page 1

\* Lexington has been greatly blessed over the last 134 years because of the two churches viewed here. Both have played vital roles in the every day life of the Afro-American Community. First, The Randolph Street United Methodist Church, Formerly The Colored Methodist Church, Formed on October 17, 1864. Then The First Baptist Church, Formerly Called The Lexington African Baptist Church September 22, 1867.

\* Here are just two instances among many that shows one type of activity that took place at the church. A musical and vocal contest given at The First Baptist Church on Thursday Night, December 9, 1915.

and a dramatic  
cantata

Look at the Finger Point and the admission.

\* Here is a Pamphlet entitled a Thanksgiving <sup>Souvenir</sup> ~~Memorial~~. That apparently was to be read in African-American churches from The President of The United States, Theodore Roosevelt. It was read in The First Baptist Church by Miss Lillian Greenlee on November 26, 1906.

In Part it reads thusly ... Our goodly

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heritage is because of Our Country, Our Government,  
our educational institutions, and Our Churches,  
and it doth not yet appear what we shall  
be For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,  
Neither have entered into the heart of man,  
The things which God hath prepared for  
them that love Him.

Thank you

1859-1942 Cousin Charlotte, you're free you're free  
Harry Lee Walker, 7/4/75

# Education

Page 1

Probably the most controversial, ~~not~~ and least solved problem for persons freed after the Civil War was the matter of education. Not even laws handed down by the Supreme Court has had the hoped for effect.

The age old debatable question of why laws do not work can be summed up in this manner. We are be-deviled by our high visibility.

Lexington had its trying moments in education during the teens, 20's, 30's and 40's. Probably the most dastardly lie ever conceived by Mankind was the phrase "Separate But Equal." Millions of persons have gone to their graves holding on to this old Bug-a-Boo!!

Lexington needed a building that was conducive to higher learning, a building that was well heated and amply ventilated, well lighted and a curriculum geared towards finishing high school and on to college.

1. The Rockbridge Historical Society has supplied us with our first overhead projection. This was the Afro-American School from 1865 to 1927. My mother

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attended this school at the turn of the century. After 40 years of existence she spoke of it as "being worn out".

2. Here is an article from the County News dated 2/7/1923 written by one James Lewis Howe who states "The school building is wholly unfitted and inadequate to the purpose to which it is put, and perhaps worse of all, there is no playground."

3. Next overhead begins with whereas and the two Resolved decisions

After much deliberating the new school was erected in 1927. There arose a most disturbing problem in that a student was unable to secure enough units to attend college with all that the ~~the~~ Downing School had to offer. Consequently a student who wanted to attend college had to matriculate at one of many ~~the~~ schools that ~~was~~ had high school curriculums and provided room and board.

4. Can you imagine having to pay tuition to attend a public school? The tuition varied and persons who were not Lexingtonians,



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were charged a higher Tuition Fee.

4. Two or three years later the tuition goes up from \$5.00 per Pupil TO \$12.00 Per Pupil. How about that? How about Paying Tuition For educating a child in Public School, who was the child of a tax paying citizen and in 1934 we were five years into the great depression. That's what several African American families had to do. ~~My~~ My Parents had three children for more than three years who were in ~~Boarding~~ high school Boarding School.

I have been informed that the first full graduation class to finish Lybourn Downing High School was in 1947.

# Economic

Page 1

1. Contrary to popular belief, there was at one time a real concern about the lack of work opportunities in Lexington among Afro-Americans. This is evident by this overhead projection. There is no date, but the paper the information is typed on coincides with dates estimated to be in the 20's and early thirties.

2. The next overhead projection gives evidence of the several means by which persons in the community were able to secure a livelihood.

Out of respect for my deceased sister Marie, this overhead is in her handwriting as she attempted to gather information on the ~~African~~ African American community and our family.

Barber Shops - Charlie Franklins,

Hugh Williams - Robert E. Lee Hotel

Dixie Scott

3. Joe Wood - Jacob Ruff House (Meat)

T. Jackson - In Front of State Theatre

Cafes/Restaurants

I. Rowland,

W. Washington

Julia Dock

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Groceries - W. Carter

V. Johnson

4. H.L. Walker and Wood Bros

Full Employment - V. M. I., Washington and Lee Univ

Tourist Homes - Rose Inn Tourist Home

Franklin Tourist Home

Pool Parlor - Fisher and Clark

Domestic Employment - Private Homes

4. The next overhead will give you some indication of how my grandfather Harry Lee Walker made a living for himself and his family.

4. He purchased the Colonial Building at 30 N. Main Street on June 22, 1911. It is now known as the Wilson-Walker House, a restaurant.

4. Here is a picture taking of H.L. Walker on extreme right, my Uncle, Joseph M. Wood, and my father Clarence M. Wood. Note the sign over the window at left and over the door at the right. Walker and Wood Brothers.

Next is an overhead projection of a contract made between the Lexington Market and the Virginia Military Institute, in

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5. The Next Overhead is Probably Older, Than The Previous one. There is NO writing on Window or over the door. Here you see the horse and buggy used in Transporting Meat and groceries To The Two institutions and To Private homes. That's My grandfather on left with apron on, My Grand Mother, Eliza M. Walker, Edwin T. Walker, adopted son, William Tyree, Rob Poudexter, Abner Greenlee and Buzz Lindsay.
6. Here is a Contract Made between the Virginia Military Institute and the Lexington Sanitary Market on April 23, 1919.
7. Contract was the result of having received a bid such as The Next Projection dated August 8/11 1923. Let Me Call your attention To Just Three items (1) 1,500 lbs Fresh Pork Loins 12 to 14 lbs average (2) 4,000 lbs Fresh Boneless Sirlain Butts, in 100 lb Boxes, 10 to 12 lb average and (3) 150 Crates of eggs.

8. Take a look at The Prices in 1925 and Compare To Today's Prices.

The Next Overhead Shows some of The Ways The Lexington Sanitary Market

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advertised. One was a  
the other was a pamphlet with how to  
prepare the Old Virginia Hams, The next  
one was a Manila Tag used to ship  
Old Virginia Hams all over the world.

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Lexington has been greatly blessed over the last 134 years because of the two churches viewed here. Both have played vital roles in the every day life of the African-American Community. First, The Randolph Street United Methodist Church, Formerly The Colored Methodist Church, Formed on October 17, 1864. Then came The First Baptist Church, Formerly called The Lexington African Baptist Church, September 22, 1867. These two churches were bulwarks of the African-American community indeed.

One must be grateful for the presence of the Reverend W. N. Holt <sup>Pastor</sup> of the Randolph Street United Methodist Church. <sup>1922-1923.</sup> He gave exceptional encouragement and leadership in dealing with the education situation that had deteriorated greatly in the 1920's.

Suffice to say, so much more could be said besides the 4 categories I have chosen. There was the Political, Recreational, ~~Health~~ and other areas of life situations which played an equal important part in the African-American community.

I'd like to conclude now by reading just three sentences from a Thanksgiving Proclamation

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that apparently was to be read in African American churches from the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt in 1906. Miss Lillian Greeley read the proclamation in the First Baptist Church, Lexington, Virginia on November 29, 1906.

Read from original material well being...

→ It <sup>Further</sup> reads in part "our goodly heritage is because of our country, our government, our educational institutions, and our churches," and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.