

Ferguson Has A History Museum

Ferguson, indeed, does have a Historical Society and a History Museum and we are moving forward with the help of our readers of the past many weeks. We encourage any people reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

The following article has two main purposes. The first is seen below – an interesting part of Ferguson history. The second purpose will be revealed at the end.

From 1875 to 1954 State of Missouri law declared it “*unlawful in the public schools of this state for any colored child to attend a white school or any white child to attend a colored school*”. Ferguson Station in 1875 (we were a rural area rather than a city), was essentially a Southern leaning community as was most of rural Missouri. Negro children generally were offered little if any formal education (Negro was a term used at this time and will be used in this article until after 1954). There is evidence of some sort of school existing in the Ferguson Station and Jennings Station area in the early 1880’s. Little is known about this earlier school. Despite Ferguson Station’s Southern leanings, in 1885 a sort-of-miracle happened.



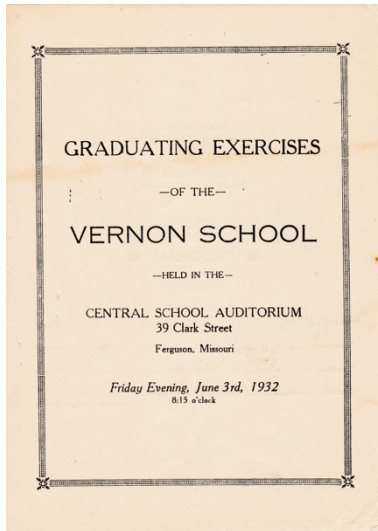
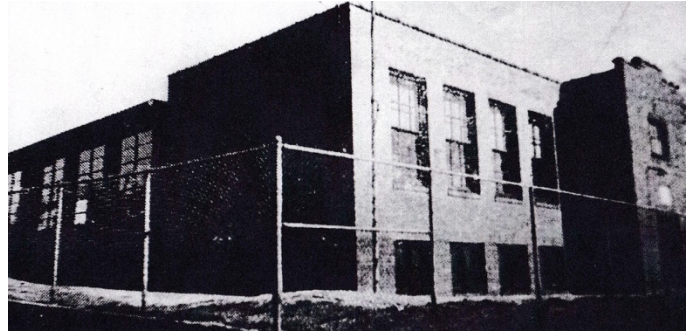
Two veterans of the Civil War -one a Confederate soldier (Christopher Ellerbe) and one a Union soldier (Thomas Allen) proposed that the Ferguson School District #3 Board of Education locate “*a suitable location and erect a proper building for the colored students*”. The board accepted and proposed a 20-cent on \$100 dollar tax to cover the approximate \$1000.00 needed. An acre of land, located on Florissant Road just south of Maline Creek (522 Florissant today), was purchased from Harrison Tiffin for \$300. A Mr. Niebling agreed to build a one room frame building for a cost of \$750.00. At the start of school 1885 the new school was

ready for students. The school board would continue to call this building “The Colored School” but the school was usually known as Vernon School. (We could not find out why that name was selected). In 1903 the old Ferguson Station School District became the School District of Ferguson.

The Vernon School was an elementary school. Negro youth of high school age would normally be sent to Webster Groves Douglas High School – the only accredited Negro high school in St. Louis County until 1956 (Douglas closed in 1978). Black high school students were attending Ferguson High School in the later 1950’s.

It would seem all is well for Negro children in Ferguson Station and later in Ferguson. However, all was not roses and sunshine. White men teachers were paid the most, women about half that and Negro teachers even less than that. Also – the State of Missouri ruled that once a school dropped lower than 10 students it would be shut down for at least six months. While the larger white population only showed a 35% attendance rate and the Negro community a 45% attendance rate, the Vernon School frequently dropped below 10 students and was closed. Negro children then had to attend a school in Jennings Station (4 miles away). With this less than consistent education, it was a tough road.

By 1905 Missouri required attendance of all children aged 6 through 21. At this point, education for everyone became more reliable. As the years progressed the Vernon (one-room) School became too small. In 1927 a new brick two-room Vernon School was built along Carson Road (near Kinloch). In 1952 the School District of Ferguson became the Ferguson-Florissant R-2 School District and two more rooms were added to Vernon School. A 1932 Graduating Exercises program for the Vernon



School displayed the class motto: “*Plan your Work—Work Your Plans*) along with the class colors of Royal Purple and Old Gold. In 1954 the Supreme Court of the United States declared segregated schools against the Constitution of the United States. The district began integrating it’s schools, however the Vernon School would continue as a Black only school until it’s closing in 1967.

That was the first purpose of this article. Now is the second. While the Ferguson Historical Society has many folders of information on other Ferguson Schools (Central, Lee Hamilton, etc.), we have only one thin folder on Vernon School. If you attended Vernon School or know of anyone who has – we need to gather their personal information and any artifacts they might have for us to copy. If anyone knows who Mr. or Mrs. Vernon was or why the school was named the Vernon School – we would love to know. Please use the contact below.

If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact Jerry Benner at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum beginning in summer (hopefully).

“The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest.”