

The Bethlehem School

Source: Yesterday's Schools by Lucy Phinney Walsh

There is no record of when the Bethlehem School opened, but available information makes it possible to determine the year, if not the exact date. It was schoolhouse #7 in the Manassas district which means it opened before #8 (The Manley School) both of which were built in 1871. Therefore, the Bethlehem School was also built in 1871 since the schools were numbered in the order in which they were established.

Bethlehem was a one room school on the Wellington Road where it crossed the road leading to Milford Mill. It had a checkered pattern of openings and closings due to fluctuations in enrollment. In 1873, among the students at Bethlehem were Dave and Katie Harrover. Ashby Lewis of Rosemount and his brother Charles and sister Molly; the three Lewis brothers, Robert, Warren and Charles of Portici; and the four Lee brothers-Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It was a long walk to school (Rosemont was two miles from Portici) for this group but they did it daily with the big ones watching out for the little ones along the way.

District School Board minutes show that in 1893-94, the Bethlehem School, with an average daily attendance of only sixteen students, was, at a per pupil cost of \$11 a year, the most costly of the white schools to run. The school board obviously could not keep it open regularly with expenses at such a high level.

Indeed it did close sometime in the next few years, because in January of 1905, the School Board records note that the Board voted to re-open the school for the remaining five months of the school year. It stayed open for a year and a half until August 23, 1906 when the Board voted to close the school and consolidate the students at the Wellington School.

In 1907 however, after parents objected to having to transport their children from their communities to the Wellington School, that school was closed and the Bethlehem School opened again. On Sept. 16 of that year, the teacher appeared before the School Board to plead for footbridges over Dawkins Branch and an adjacent creek to make the students walk to school safer. The Board promised to pursue the matter but its outcome is unrecorded.

In a 1920s listing of Manassas District Schools, the Bethlehem School is included but no later mention of it has been found. Presumably it was closed sometime in the twenties when consolidation began to take hold in Prince William County. No trace of the building remains.