

The Orlando School

White

1872-1932

Source: Yesterday's Schools by Lucy Walsh Phinney

The earliest reference to a school in the Orlando Courthouse area of the county comes in the Brentsville District School Board records in 1872. There it is mentioned that the Board rented a room from Mr. George M. Goodwin who owned property on the west side of Orlando Drive about midway between Aden and Bristoe Roads. This became the first Orlando Schoolhouse and it is standing today. It had one room, a dirt floor and was heated by a potbellied stove. Two windows on each side let in light. Above the schoolroom, under the eaves, was an unfinished room reached by a winding staircase. It was also heated with a potbellied stove and that is where the schoolteacher lived. The schoolhouse was painted red, one of the few red ones in the county, and its green shutters can still be found in the attic room. Big trees surround the building and a fence enclosed the school yard.

Strangely, the Orlando school is not mentioned again in the minutes of the Brentsville District School Board until the time came for the old schoolhouse to be sold. The school does not appear on the 1901 map of the county either. Is this because, at that time, it was a rented building not belonging to the School District? Did it possibly close for a period of time? No answers have been found.

According to longtime residents, sometime in the 1920s a new Orlando Schoolhouse was built. Perhaps this was to conform to the new state standards set for public schools. After all, the old building was over fifty years old by that time. In 1935, at the direction of Richard Haydon, Superintendent of Prince William County Schools, the first Orlando schoolhouse was sold at public auction. A retired couple purchased it, added a porch, a kitchen and a bedroom, turned the classroom into a living room and used it as a residence. It is still a residence today, appropriately occupied by a current teacher in the Prince William School system.

The second building was located between Barbee's Store and Post Office and the Methodist Church, directly across Orlando Road from the site of the first school. The new one-room Orlando schoolhouse, like the first one in its later years, was under the tutelage of Mr. William Y. Elliott, a descendant of one of the eastern Prince William County's earliest families. He was the school teacher at Orlando for so long that the little school was often referred to as Mr. Elliott's school. When he left Orlando, he went to teach at the Woodbine School and then became a truant officer. In all, he served the county schools for forty years.

The second building, as well as the church and store which flanked it, no longer exist. Only the cemetery of the church marks that part of the community of Orlando.