

Alexandria Times

Denise Dunbar

Publisher & Executive Editor
ddunbar@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens

Sales Director
mstevens@alextimes.com

Caitlyn Meisner

Editor
cmeisner@alextimes.com

Sydney Kodama

Reporter/Photographer
skodama@alextimes.com

Hannah Marr

Intern

ADVERTISING

Margaret Stevens

mstevens@alextimes.com

Marty DeVine

mdevine@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan

pculligan@alextimes.com

Tina Franco

Office Administrator
tfranco@alextimes.com

DIRECTOR OF ART & DESIGN

Jessica Kim

graphics@alextimes.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Kim Davis

Mark Eaton

Mark Edelman

Thompson Eskew

Kim Gilliam

Ryan Hopper

Lexie Jordan

Audrey Keefe

Louise Krafft

Brianne McConnell

Jim McGrath

Erin Shackelford

Dr. Vivek Sinha

Sandra Smith

Kathryn Ziemer

ALEXTIMES LLC

Denise Dunbar

Managing Partner

The Ariail family

Suzanne Brock

William Dunbar

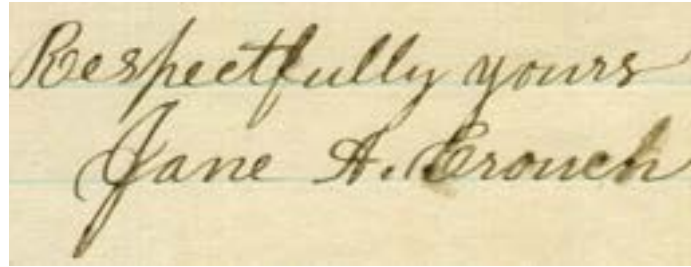
Jane A. Crouch: Teaching for the elevation of her race

Jane A. Solomon Crouch was born free in Alexandria in 1835 when Virginia laws prohibiting education of enslaved and free Black people were not enforced in Alexandria because it was part of Washington, D.C.

Once retrocession became effective in 1847, Alexandria closed the schools for Black children, including the one she had attended since age 6. Years later Crouch recalled how a constable startled the teacher and students, ordering the school closed and leaving them “half frightened out of our senses.”

Crouch was eager to continue her studies and may have attended St. Frances Academy, a Catholic school for Black girls in Baltimore. Her sister, Sarah Solomon, attended St. Frances as did Sarah Gray, another Alexandrian Crouch would later teach with.

Crouch obtained a diploma in the District that qualified her to teach. She established an evening school in Alexandria and had about 40 students but only allowed those who were free to attend. She believed if



PHOTO/HAMPTON UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Signature of Jane A. Crouch.

she taught enslaved children, she would be arrested and unable to teach anyone.

Around 1860, Jane Solomon met and then married in the District a white English musician named Frederick William Nicholls Crouch noted for composing the song “Kathleen Mavourneen.” When the Civil War began, he left to serve with the Confederacy.

In 1861, with Alexandria under United States military control, Jane Crouch and Sarah Gray opened the St. Rose Institute, one of the first schools established during the war to educate Black children.

Once the war ended, she hoped to reunite with her husband who had never returned. She wrote to him after seeing

his advertisement in a Charlottesville newspaper offering music lessons but did not get a reply, so she asked the Freedmen’s Bureau for assistance in locating him. The Freedmen’s Bureau soon confirmed that he was there.

She visited him and about three months later appealed to the Freedmen’s Bureau to have her husband return to Alexandria because she was sick with “no one to look to for support.” Later that year, she gave birth to their daughter Carrie, and there is no indication her husband ever returned to Alexandria.

Jane A. Crouch committed herself to her daughter and her profession. In 1871, after formally qualifying as a teacher,

she began teaching at the Hal-lowell School, a public school for African American girls. She was highly respected as a teacher and in the community and was active with St. Mary’s Church.

She sent Carrie to St. Frances in Baltimore for a “thorough course of training, so that her usefulness may be a blessing to her race.” Crouch continued her own education and in 1881 attended a summer program for teachers at Hampton. She planned to return the next summer but died of pneumonia in 1882, shortly after turning 47.

Her superintendent recalled Crouch as “an excellent disciplinarian and devoted to her work...[T]hough her acquirements were limited, she made the best use of them for the elevation of her race.”

Carrie Crouch Brooks also became a teacher and briefly taught at Lyles-Crouch School, named in part for her mother, after it opened in 1935.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.