

Carver Nursery School / Post 129



This modest, wood-frame building has played an important role in the segregated history of Alexandria. During World War II, the federal government encouraged women to join the war effort by providing safe and affordable day care. In Alexandria, as elsewhere, racial segregation was the norm; the Carver School was completed in 1944 and operated as a segregated nursery school for children of African American war workers. After the war, federal support for day care ended but Alexandria's working mothers lobbied the city to keep the nurseries open. The city agreed to operate two white nurseries and the Carver School, but doubled the monthly fees to \$27. In the black community, social clubs helped fund Carver students. The nursery ultimately closed in 1950 and the building then served as a segregated American Legion post. By 2010, the building was vacant and neglected and came close to demolition. It was finally preserved and adaptively reused in 2014.



Carver School students take part in a Christmas pageant, ca. 1940s.
Courtesy Office of Historic Alexandria, Black History Museum

Carver School teachers Lucille Smith and Velma Leigh take out the trash as ordered by the city, Winter 1946.

Courtesy Washington Afro American, February 2, 1946



William Thomas, ca. 1917

Courtesy Office of Historic Alexandria, Black History Museum

New Home for William Thomas Post 129

In 1950, the Carver School became the home of American Legion Post 129. While the U.S. military was desegregated during the Korean War, veterans' organizations remained segregated for a number of years afterward. Formed in 1931 as the "colored" post in Alexandria, Post 129 was named after Private William Thomas, one of two African Americans from the city killed in World War I. He and Private Christopher Cloxom died in battle in 1918. In the 1950s and 1960s, the post offered social activities and educational and sports programs.

"I have been at the Carver Nursery School a long time, and have enjoyed working with pupils, but when janitorial duties were added, I had no alternative but to resign," said Mrs. Smith, a graduate of Spelman College and Atlanta University.

Washington Afro-American, February 16, 1946

City's Controversial Decision, 1946

Alexandria decided to end janitorial services at the nursery schools in 1946 to save money. At the Carver School, the two professional teachers, Lucille G. Smith and Velma D. Leigh, were required to perform janitorial duties including cleaning the building and maintaining the furnace. When it was learned that white teachers were not subject to the order, the teachers resigned. They were quickly replaced by a single teacher who agreed to perform the janitorial work.

Carver School construction documents were prepared by the state's Department of Education in Richmond, 1943. Federally-funded nursery schools of similar design in both rural and urban areas were built throughout the state.

Courtesy Virginia Dept. of Education, School Buildings Service, Architectural Drawings and Plans, 1920-1970. Accession 28487. State Government Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA

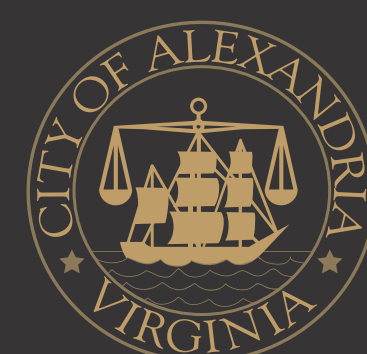


Post 129 beauty contest winner, ca. 1950s

Courtesy Office of Historic Alexandria, Black History Museum

Post 129 members meet outside during the summer, ca. 1950s.

Courtesy Office of Historic Alexandria, Black History Museum



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