



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Lyles-Crouch during desegregation

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Image: The old Lyles-Crouch School. Photo, Alexandria Library Special Collections.

Fifteen years after Parker-Gray School opened in 1920, another school opened to alleviate crowding of Alexandria's black students during segregation. Funding for the new school, which would serve elementary-school-aged children who lived south of Cameron Street, came at a time when George Washington High, a new high school for white students, was being built. After the superintendent recommended that the City renovate an existing building, an old silk factory at the southwest corner of Wilkes and South Pitt streets was acquired, and in 1935, Lyles-Crouch School opened there.



When it first opened, Lyles-Crouch, seen in this photograph, had ten classrooms and could accommodate about 300 students. During the summers, the field at the school served as a recreational playground for black children. Lyles-Crouch students and their families regularly participated in wartime fundraising with efforts and donations to support the Red Cross and war bond sales. They also supported their own school, organizing benefits for the school's library fund and special PTA programs during "Negro History Week," the precursor of Black History Month.

In the 1950s the student population of Lyles-Crouch grew, as children from the West End and other communities began attending. In spring of 1957, officials broke ground for a new Lyles-Crouch school building, which was erected in the 500 block of Gibbon Street, just south of the old one. The following year, with Alexandria schools still segregated, a Lyles-Crouch cafeteria worker was fired after she attempted to enroll her children at all-white George Washington High.

Lyles-Crouch was finally desegregated in September 1966, when the first white students enrolled there. The original Lyles-Crouch building was later known as the Wilkes Street School and served in the 1960s as a training center for students with severe developmental disabilities, before it was demolished in the early 1970s.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.



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These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.