

BACKGROUND ON LAURA MISSOURI DORSEY

HISTORY

Laura Missouri Dorsey – A Special Teacher

BY CHAR MCCARGO BAH

After the Civil War ended, the Federal government helped Alexandria start two public schools in 1870 for colored citizens. One of the schools was Hallowell School for Colored Girls and the other school was Snowden School for Colored Boys.

One of the most popular teachers that came out of the Hallowell School was Laura Missouri Dorsey; she was born in 1879 in Alexandria. Clem Dorsey and Hannah Lyles were Laura's parents. Clem migrated from Charles County, Md. and Hannah Lyles' family were freed-people-of-color prior to the Civil War in Alexandria. Laura and her sister Mary were educated at Hallowell School. Hallowell only offered their students education up to the seventh grade. After Laura completed her education at Hallowell School, she went to school in Washington, D.C. When she returned to Alexandria, she was unable to get a teaching job in Alexandria, so she applied to the Stafford, Virginia School System. She taught in Stafford for a few years until a position was available at Hallowell. Miss Dorsey taught at Hallowell School for Girls until a coed school for colored children was made available.

THE OTHER ALEXANDRIA

Parker-Gray School was the first public coed school for colored students in Alexandria. Miss Laura Dorsey was one of 10 teachers that was selected to teach at Parker-Gray School. Her reputation for excellence was impeccable by the time she arrived at Parker-Gray. Parents were eager for their children to be in Miss Dorsey's class. She taught first, second and third grades. She love teaching. Her kindness and gentle ways made her a favorite teacher in Parker-Gray School. Whenever one mentions her name in public, her former students that are still living would smile and reminisce about the years they were in her class.

Miss Dorsey was a dedicated teacher. She taught at Parker-Gray School from 1920-1949. She witnessed the growth of Parker-Gray going from an elementary school to a high school. Miss Dorsey retired from the Alexandria Public School system with 49-years of service; it was noted at her retirement party that she only missed one day from school in her 49-years of service.

Miss Dorsey came from a progressive family who believed in the value of high standards, civil responsibility and respect for others. She followed in the footsteps of her grandfather, the Rev. Richard H. Lyles who was born in 1834.

The Rev. Richard H. Lyles was literate, a pastor at Roberts Chapel Methodist Church (Roberts Memorial United Methodist



Laura Missouri Dorsey, sometime prior to 1920.

an automobile in Alexandria. Miss Dorsey became a teacher and property owner just like her grandfather.

She purchased land on Dec. 29, 1927 and her house was built on Jan. 17, 1928 at 319 North Alfred St. The house cost \$8,547. Laura and her sister, Mary Elizabeth Dorsey never married. They lived together until Mary's death in 1958. The house at 319 North Alfred St. stayed in the family until Miss Dorsey's cousin, Fayrene Lyles Richardson sold it in January 2016.

On March 16, 1968, Miss Dorsey died at the Beverly Nursing Home in Washington, D.C. It was reported that she was 88-years old but actually, she was 91. Miss Dorsey was a member of Roberts Memorial Methodist Church and a member of Esther Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star. She is buried in Alexandria at the Presbyterian Cemetery.

Although, Miss Dorsey has been dead for almost 50 years, her former students still have fond memories of their elementary teacher. She was their special teacher.

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Church), a teacher, and a skilled caulker of ships. He owned property and his children were one of the first colored families to own

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