

From "*Let Our Rejoicing Rise*"
Emancipation Day in Loudoun County
The Loudoun County Emancipation Association, 1890-1970,
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"A History of the Loudoun County Emancipation Association, Inc."

by

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In 1890 a group of men, living in the shadow of slavery, met in Hamilton, Virginia, and formed an organization whose primary purpose was to commemorate the issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862. It is not known exactly when the first celebrations were held because informal celebrations predated the official establishment of the Loudoun County Emancipation Association.

The earliest written minutes still extant are dated April 9, 1899. This meeting was held in the Galilean Fisherman Hall in Hamilton. J.R. Hicks was the president and Howard W. Clark was the secretary. The executive committee consisted of representatives from each district in Loudoun County. The representatives in 1900 were Henry Chinn of Mount Gilead; Jesse Moton of Leesburg; George Anderson of Lovettsville; William Sinkfield of Jefferson; and Madison Taylor of Mercer.

The early celebrations were held on rented property. One entry in the 1902 minutes records a \$5.00 rental fee paid to a Mr. Brown for the use of his woods near Hamilton. Many people traveled great distances to attend the celebrations. They traveled by train, bus, car, and on foot. Some years attendance numbered in the thousands.

Activities at the celebrations included parades, marching and drill teams, memorial services, speakers, band performances, pageants and contests, and baseball games. Church Sunday Schools and organizations such as the Pioneer club, the Masons, the Odd Fellows, and the Elks were invited to "turn out." Groups and uniformed clubs were admitted at reduced fares. Food and concession stands were commissioned to bidders, but the ice cream stand was always reserved for the Emancipation Association.

In 1905 the Association began a discussion concerning the purchasing of land. Twelve trustees were elected. Constitution, corporation, and location committees were formed. Special fund raising activities were undertaken. J.W. Gregg, a lawyer who practiced in Purcellville, was engaged by the Association in 1909. By-laws were written and the Association filed for incorporation. The purposes for which the Loudoun County Emancipation Association was formed were to establish a bond of union among persons of the Negro race, to provide for the celebration of the 22nd day of September as

Emancipation Day or the day of Freedom, to cultivate good fellowship, to work for the betterment of the race, educationally, morally, and materially.

On January 17, 1910, the State Corporation Commission issued a certificate of incorporation to the Association. This act enabled the Loudoun County Emancipation Association, Inc. to finalize the purchase of ten and one half acres of land in Purcellville from Eli W. Birdsall. B.F. Fenton loaned the Association \$800 with interest at six percent and payable within one year. The transaction was made through the Purcellville Bank.

The minimum capital stock of the corporation was \$600, which was divided into 120 shares at \$5.00 each. The officers at the time of incorporation were as follows:

J.R. Hicks of North Fork, President
Luther Stewart of Purcellville, Vice President
Howard W. Clark of Hamilton, Secretary
Isaac Waters of Hillsboro, Treasurer

The directors were Dennis Pierce of Purcellville; Julius Caesar of Hamilton; Richard Clark of Hamilton; Henry Jackson of Purcellville; John T. Rector of Hamilton; John Lewis of Purcellville; Clifton Coates of Lincoln; Burr Rhodes of Hamilton; Jacob Dade of Purcellville; and William Sinkfield of Hamilton. These officers and directors were charged with the responsibility of selling shares of stock, managing the property, and representing the stockholders.

During the decades following the purchase of what became known as the Emancipation Grounds, the Association prospered. A log cabin was purchased in Hamilton, dismantled and rebuilt on the grounds, and served as the office. Later, a tabernacle was built. The property was a source of pride and convenience for the community. When not being used by the Emancipation Association, the grounds and buildings were rented to churches and other organizations for conventions, pageants, revivals, baseball games, and school activities such as the county-wide field days.

During the height of its popularity, the Emancipation Day celebration drew crowds from many surrounding areas. Former residents made a point to come home for September 22nd. Some traveled from as far away as New York and North Carolina. Crowds would gather early in the morning and by lunch time the grounds would be covered. Good food and fellowship abounded. Inside the tabernacle, noted speakers of the day such as Finley Wilson, Elder Micheaux, Charles Houston, Henry McDonald, Nannie Burroughs, Bishop A.P. Shaw, Bishop Wesley Clair, and Mordecai Johnson, would address the audience. During the 1930s the famous 10th Cavalry from Fort Meade was a major attraction.

Over the years, the Association was led by a number of presidents including J.R. Hicks, J.W. Parker, William Sinkfield, Dennis Pierce, Burr Rhodes, Howard Clark,

Lewis Rector, Linden McWashington, Clifton Coates, George W. Dean, and Thomas E. Thompson, Sr.

The 1960s was a period of great change in our county, and the organization that withstood reconstruction, two World Wars, the Great Depression, the forms of discrimination, Jim Crow laws, and segregation, died a slow and agonizing death. During the last decade of its existence, attendance at the annual celebration dropped dramatically, and rental usage was nil. The cost of maintaining the grounds and buildings was being borne personally by the individual members of the board of directors. The shareholders, who were no longer receiving dividends and many of whom had inherited their shares, showed little interest in the organization.

The last officers and directors of the Loudoun County Emancipation Association were as follows:

Thomas E. Thompson, President
Sara Boyd, Vice President
Otis Jasper, Secretary
Mackley Lucas, Assistant Secretary
Katherine Gibson, Treasurer
James H. Raby, Counselor
Lewis Rector, Renter
William Hogan, Assistant Renter
Daniel T. White, Rachel Jasper, Directors

Although the Association tried various methods to rekindle interest in the Emancipation Day celebration, including changing the date to the Saturday nearest September 22, they were unable to compete with the hopes inspired by the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1971 the Loudoun County Emancipation Association sold its property to William Jones for \$20,000. The corporation was dissolved and the proceeds, less expenses, were divided among the fifty shareholders. In their final statement, the directors expressed the hope that the work of the Association would not be forgotten and that what happened on September 22, 1862 is still worthy of commemoration.

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Elaine Thompson prepared this summary history by examining information contained in the minutes, bylaws, and other surviving documents of the Loudoun County Emancipation Association, Inc., and by interviewing Charles P. Clark, Rachel Jasper, and Lillian Thompson.