

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In June 1939, the Nansemond Collegiate Institute officially closed its doors for the final time. This event marked the conclusion of a forty-nine year effort by Blacks in Nansemond County, Virginia to provide a quality education for their children. Although Virginia law had, by 1881, authorized several efforts that were to provide education for Blacks, including the establishment of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia, there was no public high school education available to Blacks in Suffolk as the nineteenth century drew to a close (Burton, 1970).

It should be noted that public education had its beginnings in Suffolk in 1871 when the first School Board was formed to provide an education for all of the students in the City of Suffolk and Nansemond County (Burton, 1970). There were scattered private academies and free schools for Whites but nothing for Blacks (Maguire, 1986). Seeking to ameliorate this lack, the Reverend William Washington Gaines opened the Nansemond Normal and Industrial Institute in 1890. Reverend Gaines was the pastor of the First Colored Baptist Church and it was from that base that he operated (Lowe, 1984).

The Nansemond Normal and Industrial Institute provided both an elementary and high school education to Black youth in the county who wished to attend. The school was supported by contributions from local Black churches of all denominations, tuition, and donations from patrons, including a few local Whites. The Institute was private only in the sense that no public dollars were used in its support or operation. The school

was very public in that no student was turned away from its doors regardless of the ability to pay the tuition.

Tuition ranged from five to eight dollars per month during the school's existence. There were times, however, when parents could not afford the tuition in cash. They were allowed to pay with livestock, vegetables, firewood, or the provision of services. These services might include cleaning or the lighting of fires for heat and cooking (E. Lowe, personal communication, July 1995).

Some students struggled to pay their own tuition. One student worked several jobs including a shoeshine business and a cleaning service for local businesses to pay the tuition for his sister and himself (H. Benn, personal communication, February 1997).

The name of the school was changed to the Nansemond Collegiate Institute when the "normal school" was added in 1930. The normal school was a teacher preparation program. It was accredited by the State Department of Education and authorized to issue professional teaching certificates (Journal and Guide, May 1930) .

Need for the Study

This study is undertaken to provide a comprehensive historical account of one of the efforts of Blacks citizens in Nansemond County to provide an education for their children prior to this need being met by local government. This document should be viewed as a chapter in the not yet written history of education in the City of Suffolk. The study will chronicle the existence of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute during the period from 1890 to 1939. Nearly all school records were lost during

the series of fires which destroyed the school in 1933. It is a testament to the determination of the persons involved that the school continued to operate for six more years after the fires before finally closing in 1939.

The significance of this effort must not be lost. In 1984, a class reunion committee listed, in its reunion document, some of the historical events in the existence of Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Many of those recollections will be referenced in this document. This document will also attempt to put the evolution of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute into proper historical perspective.

The times during which the Institute operated were not amenable to educational opportunities for Blacks. Government agencies and other supposed benefactors used education as a tool for managing Blacks and for maintaining vestiges of slavery, if not the formal institution. The period of the school's existence was congruent with the great debate over the appropriate type of education for Blacks. One school of thought, including W. E. B. DuBois, argued for a more complete classical education (Lewis, 1993). This school of thought contended that a classical education was needed to properly train the minds of Blacks. DuBois and others suggested there existed here an untapped wealth of skill and ability. This mental training was seen as the means of uplifting Blacks from their post-slavery status, a status which found most Blacks at the bottom of both social and economic strata.

The opposing school of thought included the noted Booker T. Washington (Anderson, 1988). This school took the position that a practical education was needed to assist Blacks in adjusting to their

proper place in society. This practical education sought to teach Blacks to accept the status quo. The desire to have Blacks accept their place was based, in part, on assertions by persons like Samuel Armstrong. Armstrong was no stranger to Blacks. His personal history included the commanding of Black troops during the Civil War. His desire to improve the situation of Blacks was likely sincere and likely influenced by the work and lives of his missionary parents. Armstrong, founder of Hampton Institute and self-proclaimed friend of the Negro race (Anderson, 1988), promoted the position that Blacks possessed innate characteristics that made them ill-suited for intellectual pursuits and limited them to a subordinate role in American society. The practical education, therefore, had a heavy emphasis on vocational and industrial training.

Often ignored in this argument was that, regardless of the type of education received, there were limited opportunities for Blacks to apply any type of acquired skill (Spivey, 1978). Practical education was of limited value because jobs were not readily available or the skills provided were already outdated. A classical education was also of little value because of the limited arenas available to practice the philosophies which had been studied.

In 1933, Carter Woodson wrote his classic work "The Mis-Education of the Negro." The major thesis of this book is that no people would be adequately educated as long as they waited on others to provide the education. Although they acted forty-three years earlier, the founders of the Nansmond Collegiate Institute seem to have anticipated his advice. Blacks, in Nansmond County, established their

own elementary and high schools. They also added their own two-year college (Lowe, 1984). No matter the adversities faced, the founders held on to control of their dream of educating their children.

This local control allowed Blacks to determine the content and focus of their schooling. As a result, the emphasis of Nansemond Collegiate Institute was on a classical education, designed to train the mind and open possibilities (Lowe, 1984). Noticeably lacking was an emphasis on vocational and industrial training. In fact, the only concessions to vocational training were in the provision of Home Economics and an apprenticeship in the print shop that was a part of the school's financial support system (E. Lowe, personal communication, July 1995).

Those who graduated from Nansemond Collegiate Institute were generally well prepared for their subsequent schooling experiences. They found that four-year colleges accepted all of their credits from Nansemond Collegiate when they enrolled to complete Bachelor or Masters programs. This included schools as far away as New York University (M. Davis, personal communication, February 1997). Further, it was a point of pride for some graduates to have been able to study courses like Algebra, Religion, French, Latin, Biology, Trigonometry, Drama and Chorus at Nansemond Collegiate Institute (Lowe, personal communication, March 1997). Other graduates enjoyed the range of options available, such as the ability to choose between French and Latin (B. Wynn, personal communication, February 1997).

Summary

This study was undertaken to record historical facts about and the ideals of the Nansemond Collegiate within a chronology of its existence. One purpose of this study is to preserve the history of the institution and create an interest in the readers of this document. The Institute was a testament to the efforts of the Black educational pioneers of Nansemond County, Virginia. Many graduates of Nansemond Collegiate Institute went on to successful careers in the segregated but later integrated Nansemond County and Suffolk City school systems. Others went on to successful endeavors in fields including law, funeral services, construction, medicine and religion (Russell, 1981).

It is hoped that this work will stimulate thoughtful conversation regarding the contributions this school made. Nansemond Collegiate is a case study in local control. The existence of the school demonstrated the power of a community to control its own destiny. When no high school education was available for their children, Blacks in Nansemond County, started their own school. The founders and administrators struggled financially but were able to keep the school open until 1939 (Lowe, 1984). There is no way, today, to know if the supporters of Nansemond Collegiate Institute knew how the acceptance of financial support from philanthropists like George Foster Peabody had changed the course of Fort Valley High and Industrial School, in Georgia, from its original classical educational program to an industrial one of the Hampton model (Anderson, 1988). It does appear they chose to struggle rather than surrender control of their curriculum to such

philanthropic influences.

It is not likely that racial discrimination will create the need for another Nansmond Collegiate Institute in America. The historical fact that it has happened does, however, prove that such a thing is possible. Studies of history provide examples of how other people at other times have handled similar problems. Historical examples provide possible paradigms for action when problems arise today.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Classification of the Study

The History of Nansemond Collegiate Institute is an historical account of the series of schools that ultimately became Nansemond Collegiate Institute. The account is qualitative in nature in that the data collected are “in the form of a protocol of events observed over a time” (Kreppendorf, 1986, p. 10). Michael Patton describes qualitative research as including the analysis of written data. He further states that such data analysis begins with raw descriptive data about programs, activities, participants, staff actions, and other events.

The goal of this study is to provide a description of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute, a description of some of the primary participants, and a description of how the school affected the participants and perceived impacts of the school. The data collected for this study will be descriptive. It will come from three primary sources: documents, quantitative records and interviews of participants.

Borg and Gall (1983) identify documents as the most commonly used type of historical materials. Documents include newspapers, diaries, legal records, notebooks, diplomas, institutional files and business records. For this study, the documents identified as having references to Nansemond Collegiate Institute include the Norfolk, VA based Journal and Guide Newspapers from January 1926 to December 1939, Nansemond County School Board Minutes from 1926 to 1942,

photographs and pencil sketches of the school and several of its graduating classes and the memoirs of the 1984 class reunion committee. The memoirs of the class reunion committee were published in booklet titled "Historical Events of Nansemond Collegiate Institute".

Quantitative records are defined as those documents that provided numerical compilations of data (Borg and Gall, 1983). These data include school budgets, census records, test scores and other types of reports. For this study, the other records found of value were Nansemond County Superintendent reports to the State Department of Education, and several Masters theses completed at Virginia State University.

Interviews with participants provided the third data source. The participants identified are all graduates of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute. A standard set of interview questions was developed and may be found later in this document. The purpose of the interview schedule was to assure that certain basic topics were covered by all respondents. The interview schedule was not designed to limit the range of the discussions with the respondents. These interviews are not of the intensity of those which might have been conducted had this study been focused on recording in the research style known as oral history.

Structure of the Research Presentation

The structure of a historical account is extremely important. Barzun and Graff submit that these writings must be presented in such a manner that the interested reader will be able to follow the

presentation without an unusual amount of effort. They offer an important question for the writer of a historical document. That question is “Can another willing mind, not expert in my subject, understand what I am saying?” (Barzun and Graff, 1992, p. 30).

The preferred format would be a chronological presentation of the significant events in the history of Nansemond Collegiate Institute. The school existed approximately fifty years. It had a total of five principals, each with some reportedly significant events attached to their tenure. This would suggest a presentation based on the tenure of the principals.

Investigations of this possible format revealed that while the tenure of principals Huskerson and Morris marked significant points in the school’s history, a limited amount of verifiable information on the remaining principals was found. It is likely that these gaps in information would have obscured certain themes that are essential in understanding the value of Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

The alternative to a strict chronological presentation was to present the information in a thematic format. Each theme would be presented in a separate chapter for each aspect of the school’s evolution. Borg and Gall caution, however, that the danger of this method is a loss of unity and the overall continuity of the document.

The format chosen for this document is a combination of the two primary formats for historical documents. After the statement for the need for the study, thematic chapters will be presented in as nearly as possible a chronological order. This combination of the chronological and thematic approaches may help overcome the challenges of lack of data.

A chapter will be dedicated to each of the following themes: the historical period in which Nansemond Collegiate Institute developed, the need for Nansemond Collegiate Institute because of existing disparities, the chronology of Nansemond Collegiate Institute, the perceptions of some of the graduates of Nansemond Collegiate Institute and summary/conclusion. The internal order of each chapter will be chronological. Every effort will be made to use the language of the period described in the chapter.

Focusing of the Research

Locke, Spirduso and Silverman assert that “ all research emerges from a perceived problem, some unsatisfactory situation in the world that we want to confront” (Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, 1987, p. 39). The struggle, by the Black citizens of Nansemond County Virginia, to secure a quality education is not recorded in a readily accessible manner. This lack of documentation is an unsatisfactory situation in need of rectification.

The purpose of this research project is to collect and document in a single volume all available information on the school that was known as Nansemond Collegiate Institute. No such single compilation exists. Nansemond Collegiate Institute was not the only effort by Blacks of that era to secure an education. It is, however, the sole subject of this research document. It is hoped that this work will inspire the search for similar efforts in the future.

Data Collection

Data collection specific to Nansemond Collegiate Institute led this researcher to several productive sources. Each data source led to the next in a fairly logical sequence. There were also several leads that did not produce the expected results. These leads were productive in that some of the sources provided information that refuted some generally accepted beliefs. This section highlights some of the sources that were uncovered in the attempt to reconstruct the history of Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

This process began with a historical marker on the corner of East Washington Street and Fifth Street in Suffolk, Virginia. This marker commemorated the existence of the school eventually known as Nansemond Collegiate Institute and identified the founder of the school as Reverend William W. Gaines. Gaines was pastor of the First Colored Baptist Church in Suffolk at the time he founded Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

The information on the historical marker led to a review of the history of First Baptist Church and to the Historical Commission for the State of Virginia. The Historical Commission led to Mr. Elgin Lowe. Mr. Lowe is a local historian and a graduate of Nansemond Collegiate Institute who had compiled a book on the historical events in the life of Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Mr. Lowe also provided the names of several other graduates of the former school.

Background information on the development of educational opportunities for Blacks in Nansemond County Virginia was found in the archives at the Virginia State Library. The archivist there, Mr. Conley

Edwards, was extremely helpful in directing the researcher to State Department of Education annual division superintendent reports as well as census data.

Three searches that did not produce the expected results were of the archives at Hampton University, the archival records of the Suffolk News Herald and the archives of Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia. The Hampton University archives and the George Foster Peabody Collection produced no references to Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

The archives at the Suffolk News Herald were searched for a complete copy of the article on the 1933 fires at the Nansemond Collegiate Institute. The Suffolk News Herald is a local newspaper that has been printed in the Suffolk area since the late nineteenth century. This lead was pursued because of a portion of an article that mentioned the suspicious nature of the fires. This article was found in a scrapbook housed at the Suffolk Nansemond Historical Society. The archival records of the Suffolk News Herald were incomplete with the years between 1929 and 1935 missing.

The search of the archives at Virginia State University was conducted in order to confirm a reported relationship between this university and Nansemond Collegiate Institute. The accepted reported relationship was that the normal school at Nansemond Collegiate Institute was certified under the auspices of Virginia State Normal School (now Virginia State University). This seemed a logical relationship as Virginia State Normal School was one of two normal schools established by the Commonwealth for the purpose of training

Black teachers.

Neither the University's histories nor its archives contained any direct references to Nansemond Collegiate Institute. In fact, there were only two connections found between the two schools. The first was a mathematics teacher named Samuel Alphin who appeared on the roster of the school's teachers in 1935-36 and was also listed as a teacher at Nansemond Collegiate Institute. The second connection was that Elgin Lowe, a graduate of Nansemond Collegiate Institute, served on the Board of Rectors of the University during the 1970s.

The mystery of the reported connection was resolved only through a visit to the Kirn Memorial Library in Norfolk, Virginia. This library contained a nearly complete archive of the Journal and Guide newspaper. This publication is a longstanding Black newspaper that has been published in Norfolk, Virginia but also covered national news of concern to Blacks. A 1932 article in this paper explained the reported relationship. When the normal school was accredited, that accreditation was given by the Virginia State Department of Education. Somehow, over the years, the "Department of Education" became "University".

Researcher Bias

Every effort will be made to reduce researcher bias to a minimum. Historical writings are, however, extremely vulnerable to this phenomenon. Data presented must be carefully scrutinized because the sources are not infallible. Many documents used are not written to be historical accounts. Researchers must often infuse their own interpretations on the data because of the problems with these

documents. These interpretations may be guided by three assessment criteria. According to Barzun and Graff, the key questions to be answered in applying the criteria are: 1) is the record the only authority on the subject, 2) is the record based on observation and inference, and 3) is the reporter of events a competent witness.

The danger for this project and researcher would be a desire to paint a larger than life picture of Nansemond Collegiate Institute and of the participants in the school. To that end, the researcher commits to using all possible interpretative aids, so that the account presents the historical facts in an interpretative framework within which they are given meaning and significance.

Chapter 3

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Overview Development of Education in the South

Throughout history, education and schooling have served two primary functions. The first was to perpetuate a society's existing culture. When Jefferson, Franklin, Rush, Webster and others began to help shape the American system of education, their goal was to enhance the growth of a new republic (Tyack, 1974). Schools were to be the vehicles through which participants in this new form of government would be prepared for the challenges they would face.

After the Civil War, White southerners were faced with rebuilding their culture without the very institution on which that culture had been built initially-slavery. One of the major issues faced was how to treat the freed slaves. The question was whether the freedmen should be forced to remain ignorant and dependent or should be allowed to become educated and independent (Bennett and Dwight, 1979). The choice was clear for those who wished to reestablish pre-Civil War social and economic climates. An uneducated and unskilled workforce was a must. One of the ways to preserve such a workforce would be the continued denial of educational opportunities.

Tyack (1974) contributed the following analysis of early schooling efforts for Blacks:

“...those in control of schools generally agreed that the function of schools was to sort and train students to fit into the existing order”

A historical review seems to indicate that the position of southern state governments was to force freedmen to remain relatively ignorant and dependent. This assessment is based on the observation that while state governments passed legislation that allowed for public schooling for Blacks, the needed accompanying money was not appropriated to build schools and hire qualified teachers (Bennett and Dwight, 1979).

Further evidence of the efforts to use schooling to control the economic and social mobility of Blacks is found in the views of Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Armstrong was the president of Hampton Institute, which was primarily a teacher training school. Armstrong expressed the sentiment that Blacks were morally inferior to Whites and that the *proper* education for Blacks was essential to the salvation of the country (Anderson, 1988).

Many years after Armstrong's work at Hampton University, Carter G. Woodson did an analysis of education and schooling for Blacks in America. His assessment in 1933 was that education was still a tool being used to subjugate Blacks. In fact, he wrote in his 1933 work - The Mis-Education of the Negro:

When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him to stand here or to go yonder. He will find his proper place and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary (Woodson, 1933, p xiii).

Woodson's main thesis is an argument that educational opportunities, to that date, had done little to better the plight of Black Americans. He argued that this would remain the case as long as Blacks waited for someone else to provide for their needs as even the most benevolent of benefactors were often condescending in their treatment of Blacks.

There should be little debate that education was seen and used as a tool to maintain vestiges of control over the freed Blacks in both the north and south (Spivey, 1978). The full denial of schooling, however, was only one of the control tools used. An analysis of literature and textbooks used between 1830 and 1900 showed book publishers provided another mechanism used to influence the grassroots efforts by Blacks to provide an education for themselves. Unable to control these phenomena, publishers and writers used books to perpetuate Negrophobia and myths of White supremacy (MacCann, 1989; Anderson, 1988; Spivey, 1978).

A second major function of schooling is to reform society. The evolution of education for Blacks was heavily influenced by this school of thought. Freed Blacks sought education as the means of preserving

their new-found freedom. James Anderson, in his 1988 book, credits Thomas Jefferson with first making the connection between education and freedom in the United States. He reported that Jefferson had submitted that any nation that expected to be both ignorant and free, expected the impossible (Anderson, 1988).

At the 1845 education convention of Virginia, Governor James McDowell further emphasized the linkage between education and the improvement of one's station in life (Hunt and Simmons, 1994). The 1845 education convention was the third such convention held in Virginia within a five year period. The focus of the desired schooling was to provide free public education for Whites and predates the focus of this document. The struggle did, however, highlight several of the major problems with providing such an education including: the resistance to use public tax dollars for the general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth, the lack of quality control over teachers, and the lack of school buildings.

The preservation of the recently earned freedom of post-Civil War Blacks was irrevocably linked to education. Improvement of economic and social conditions were also tied to schooling. Black parents had high career aspirations for their children. In fact, a mid-1930's survey by Virginia Daniels (Tyack, 1974) showed that while only 4.4 percent of Black men were employed in professional occupations, 58.6 percent of the male students in secondary school wanted this type of occupation.

Education was seen by Blacks as the primary means through which they could improve their social and economic situations. Blacks

were unwilling to accept governmental and philanthropic efforts to provide the *appropriate* education for them. Racial solidarity and self-help were major factors in the development of public education for Blacks in the South (Bennett and Dwight, 1979). These attitudes led to the development of nongovernmental efforts to educate Black children. These efforts surfaced in the form of Sabbath schools, church schools, native schools, normal schools, training schools, and private schools (Anderson, 1988).

Post-Civil War Public Schooling Efforts in Virginia

The debate about public schooling in the South after the Civil War was not focused as much on whether there would be public schooling as much as on what the functioning of that schooling would be. Most Whites, on both sides of the debate, singularly assumed White superiority to Blacks and sought to disenfranchise Blacks. Generally, Southern Whites felt that formal education was not appropriate for those persons destined to be laborers. What was needed was an education of the manner proposed by Samuel Armstrong and Booker T. Washington. Southerners seemed agreed that the proper education was a tool for controlling the aspirations of Blacks and limiting their social and economic mobility (Anderson, 1988).

Even the northern industrialists who supported a universal system of education sought to maintain Blacks in a lower class status. These industrialists were interested in improving the productivity of future generations and saw universal schooling as one method of doing so. This schooling would have to have the proper curriculum. The Industrial

Education Model was the one they supported. This model enforced the status quo. It emphasized, in many ways, to Blacks that they were inferior to Whites and as such, should happily accept the more menial jobs. This model, if totally successful, would have instituted a chainless slavery on Blacks (Spivey, 1978).

Blacks, themselves, also had perceptions of the role of education in their lives. Neither those who wished to reestablish pre-Civil War standards nor those hoping for a new slavery convinced Blacks of the rightness of their positions. Blacks had dreams. They also had eloquent champions like W. E. B. DuBois who wrote in The Souls of Black Folk:

“The training of the schools we need today more than ever-the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears and above all, the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts.

The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defense, else what shall save us from a second slavery?” (DuBois, 1903).

Whites may have felt that slavery or at least keeping Blacks in a lower social class reflected the natural order of things but Blacks were not convinced. Blacks desired, for themselves and for their descendants, futures with full autonomy and equality (Anderson, 1988).

The Evolution of Education in Virginia

The efforts to establish public schooling or universal education in Virginia faced challenges similar to those throughout the South. It would be difficult to adequately cover all who influenced the process. There is, however, one man whose life work is singularly important to

the effort - William Henry Ruffner. William Henry Ruffner picked up the public education torch borne by his father, Henry Ruffner. The younger Ruffner became the first state superintendent of education in 1870. This man was a strong advocate for education for both Blacks and Whites. He did, however, fight to keep those efforts separate. Though he would ultimately lose his position as state superintendent partly because of his support of education for Blacks, Ruffner was one of the most effective opponents to a Congressional Civil Rights Bill in 1874 (Hunt and Simmons, 1992). This bill, if successful, would have required the racially mixed schools which Ruffner found, in view of the social and political climate of that time, unacceptable.

Ruffner, like his father, faced many challenges in his efforts to improve the status of public education in Virginia. One of these challenges was the financing of education. Virginia was left with a debt of \$45,000,000 after the Civil War (Hunt and Simmons, 1992). This debt negatively impacted the ability of the Commonwealth to pay for school buildings, teacher training and teacher salaries, even if those in control had been inclined to spend on these items.

This is not to say that there were no funds available to help educate Blacks in Virginia. Northern philanthropists and church organizations established many foundations whose express purpose was to advance the education of Blacks. These foundations included but were not limited to: the Peabody Education Fund, the John F. Slater Fund, the General Education Board, the Anna T. Jeanes Fund, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund (Franklin and Moss, 1988). One of the problems associated with the monies provided

by these funds was that the existence of this revenue source gave those who opposed spending tax dollars on education for Blacks an additional argument. The logic of which was that it was inappropriate to spend tax dollars to educate those who paid the fewest taxes, especially when their education was being supplemented through other means.

Another challenge to the development of education for Blacks was politics. Often this became a hotly debated issue. Political candidates sometimes courted the support of Black voters by promising to support issues important to them. Franklin and Moss (1988) document an instance in which a candidate for the Georgia legislature “. . . won many Negro votes by demanding free Negro schools....” In some instances, there was no sincere concern for providing education for Blacks. The courting of the Black vote was simply an effort to access a new available support system.

Another of the challenges facing the development of a system of public education for Blacks was the mind set that Blacks were in some ways inferior. Perhaps the most dangerous people holding this belief were those like Samuel Armstrong, a self-proclaimed friend of Blacks (Anderson, 1988). Though much of his work at Hampton Institute was commendable, Armstrong sought to limit the range of educational experiences available to Blacks out of his belief that Blacks were inferior. While Armstrong acknowledged the intellectual ability of Blacks, he used his perception of the moral inferiority of Blacks as his rationale for limiting educational options (Anderson, 1988).

The Need for Nansemond Collegiate

Nansemond County, like many other areas in the South, was sparsely populated and predominately agricultural in the late 1800's. Kaestle (1983), cited economic conditions and accompanying attitudes as problems facing the development of public education in the South.

Those same conditions existed in Nansemond County. Consolidation of efforts and resources was made difficult in a jurisdiction that spanned some 432 square miles and which as recently as 1958, had only 27,000 residents (Suffolk-Nansemond Festival, 1958). This was also a county where education was not a high priority. The editor of the local newspaper, in what appears to have been an annual review of the status of major economic indicators, made the following assessment of the use of county tax dollars:

“The revenue derived by taxation in Nansemond County easily suffices to meet the current expenses of the County. The roads, bridges, county buildings are kept in good condition and the public charities are liberally supported” (McFall, 1902).

Noticeably missing from this statement regarding the use of public funds is support for public education. In fact, when the report does address education, it simply noted the existence of 89 public schools, an enrollment of 4,072 pupils (from a school age population estimated at 8,695), the name of the superintendent and the existence of several “high class private academies”. It should be noted that the alms or parish tax of Nansemond County, was three cents higher than the five cents school tax (McFall, 1902). The alms tax was an assessment on

residents to provide for the poor of the county. The fact that more money was raised for assisting the poor than for providing education seems to indicate that education had a lower priority than did charity.

Further evidence of the lack of emphasis on education in the City of Suffolk and the County of Nansemond is found in a February 1929 analysis of industrial potential. Education was identified as a secondary factor and was given only one and one-half pages in the over 100-page report (Humbert, 1929). This report spoke to the advantages of having a large unskilled labor force available. Thus the recommendations of this report did little to encourage increased governmental support of public education. In the absence of governmental intervention, local communities were often left to their own resources. Until such time as local governments assumed the responsibility for providing education for all youth, education for Blacks came in the form of private ventures like the Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

Summary

A state system of education evolved slowly in Virginia after the Civil War. Though the City of Suffolk began its public school system in 1871 (Burton, 1970), high school opportunities for the Black residents of Nansemond County were not locally available in 1890. Local Blacks were thus left to use their own resources to meet this need. It is beyond the scope of this document to delineate all of the factors which impacted the development of education for Blacks during the period from 1890 to 1939. Some of the major factors and attitudes have been identified. The nexus between these factors and the evolution of Nansemond

Collegiate Institute will be explored further in subsequent chapters of this document.

Many of the challenges faced by the founders and supporters of Nansemond Collegiate Institute were similar to those faced by other rural southern communities and to the challenges facing supporters of public education, in general. These challenges included funding, securing qualified teachers, curriculum and enrollment. Some of the issues will be further explored. The problems facing the founders of Nansemond Collegiate were, however, compounded by the issue of racial prejudice. The evolution of Nansemond Collegiate Institute was in response to several factors, the prime of which was the lack of public schooling in Nansemond County in 1890.

Chapter 4

THE NEED FOR NANSEMOND COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

A Case of Disparities

The period from 1890 to 1912 was a defining one for public education, in general, as well as for Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Public education had its beginnings for the citizens of Nansemond County in 1871. Proponents of public education were struggling for financial support. As indicated in a previous chapter, the fact that the County taxed heavier to support relief to the poor than it did to support public education was an indication of the relative importance of public education.

It was during this period of definition that courts began legislating relationships between Blacks and Whites in the United States. One of the court decisions which had the most impact on public education was the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision. While the original decision allowed the separation of ethnic groups on railroad coaches in Louisiana (Reutter and Hamilton, 1976), the principle became unilaterally applied to all services and resources. This included public education until the 1954 Supreme Court declared, in Brown v. The Board of Education, that the state and local laws that required public school separation based on ethnicity were unconstitutional.

While service levels of Blacks and Whites were never equal in Nansemond County, the “separate but equal” principle seemed to have an added negative effect on the education of Blacks in Nansemond

County. This negative impact is surmised from observations of data found in the superintendent’s annual reports. Illustrative cases of the data leading to this conclusion are found in Table I. Prior to the Plessy decision, the annual superintendents’ reports supplied salary information by gender but not by race. By 1900, just four years after Plessy, the reports show information by gender and by race. The implication is that subsequent to the 1890 report, ethnicity became a more important issue.

Table I

Average Monthly Salaries in Nansemond County

Year	B Male	W Male	All Male	B Female	W Female	All Female
1890	N/A	N/A	\$30.31	N/A	N/A	\$26.40
1900	\$27.58	\$58.76	\$43.17	\$26.63	\$28.38	\$27.51
1924	\$41.00	\$136.00	\$88.50	\$33.00	\$67.00	\$50.00
1939	\$59.00	\$127.00	\$93.00	\$41.00	\$72.00	\$56.50

The data in Table I imply that ethnic-based salary differentials did not exist prior to 1890. Data were not available for the period prior to 1890. From 1900 throughout the remainder of the comparison period, salary disparities were clearly based on ethnicity as well as gender. White males were paid the highest salaries while Black females were paid the lowest salaries.

The annual superintendent’s report to the State Department of Education provide vital information related to the need for institutions like Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Reviews of these documents show that while Nansemond County was providing public education for both Blacks and Whites, the level of effort was substantatively less than

equal.

The data reported in the table which follows may vary due to the type of data requested and submitted in the annual superintendent reports. For example, during the period between 1890 and 1939, the number of private schools was found only in the 1912 report submitted by L. Britt, Superintendent (Annual Superintendent Report, 1912).

These reports provide support for the need of additional schooling opportunities for Blacks in Nansemond County. The reports show disparities in pupil-teacher ratios and teacher salaries. As shown in Table I, average monthly salaries for Black teachers were significantly lower than those of White teachers. The data from the State reports condensed in Table II show that in some years, the pupil-teacher ratio in schools for Blacks was nearly double that in schools for Whites.

Hunt and Simmons (1992) remind us that a system of public education for all citizens was one of the conditions for Virginia's re-admittance to the Union. They further document the struggle that was faced in establishing such a system with public dollars. There was a similar struggle in Nansemond County. One report shows a time when the tax for the relief of the poor was greater than the tax for the provision of public schools (McFall, 1902).

Even during this time of struggle, Blacks in the County bore a disproportionate share of the burden. Not only were schools overcrowded and teachers underpaid, minutes of county school board meetings showed instances when Black teachers were either paid a portion or none of their contracted salary while White teachers received their full compensations (Nansemond County Board Minutes, December, 1933). Minutes from a Depression era meeting record an instance when the Board voted to pay White teachers their entire salary for the month of December (1933) and to pay Black teachers one-half of the monthly salary they were due.

Class size was another area where disparities were clear. Again, the source of this information is the annual superintendent’s report to the State Department of Education.

Table II

Student to teacher ratios

Year	# Black Students	# Black Teachers	Ratio	# White		
Students	# White Teachers	Ratio				
1890	1750	28	63 - 1	1498	41	37 - 1
1900	1598	28	57 - 1	1877	57	33 - 1
1912	4900	37	132 - 1	3266	82	40 - 1
1924	2327	64	37 - 1	1896	74	26 - 1
1939	3242	79	41 - 1	1680	69	24 - 1

Note. The number of reported Black students for 1912 may be an estimate. The division superintendent report to the State Department of Education for this year included the number of “colored” private schools but not the number of students.

Table II speaks to the disparities in class size in the publicly provided system of education. Note that there were times when the number of students per class in the schools for Blacks was nearly double that in the schools for Whites. In 1910, the only year for which enrollment data for the private Nansemond Collegiate Institute, was included in these state reports, the student to teacher ratio was 14 to 1 (State Superintendent Report, 1910). The schools for Black students were severely overcrowded making small group or individualized instruction very unlikely. Class size in the private Nansemond Collegiate Institute, however, made these things likely to be the norm rather than the exception.

Further evidence of the disparity in service levels is found in Nansemond County School Board records which show that bus transportation was provided for White students but not for Black

students (Nansemond County School Board minutes, April, 1931). Further, a letter from Superintendent H. V. White dated June 17, 1942 indicates that bus transportation was not offered to Black students until the 1942-43 school year (Nansemond County School Board minutes, June, 1942).

Even the length of the school year varied for Black and White students. White students attended school for nine months while Black students attended only eight months per year. Petitions by Black parents to extend the school year for Black students were rejected by the School Board because of budget restrictions (Nansemond County School Board minutes, December, 1933). In fact, the school year for Blacks remained at eight months until the 1938-39 school year when the Board voted to “run Negro schools for nine months” (Nansemond County School Board minutes, May 1938).

Summary

Nansemond Collegiate Institute was founded, in part, to provide an educational alternative for the Black community of Nansemond County. The county had begun the establishment of a system of public schooling for both Blacks and Whites in 1871. The level of services provided to the two communities, however, varied greatly.

Nansemond County school board records are not available prior to 1926 and all records of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute were destroyed in the series of fires which began in 1933. It is not unreasonable, however, to conclude that educational disparities similar to those found in the available records existed in the years between

1890 and 1926.

While not providing secondary level work for the Black students in Nansemond County, the local school board did not entirely ignore that responsibility. There is evidence that the School Board maintained a working relationship with Nansemond Collegiate Institute. In 1910, the county superintendent listed Nansemond Collegiate as a private school in the county when he submitted his annual report to the State Department of Education (State Superintendents Report, 1910).

Official School Board records document several instances when the county School Board authorized the superintendent to contract with Nansemond Collegiate Institute regarding the provision of instruction to the county's Black high school students. The initial contract was for the 1936-37 school year (Nansemond County School Board Minutes, May 1936). The contract required the Institute to provide high school services to 150 of the county's students at a cost of \$1,600.00 to be paid in \$200.00 monthly installments over the course of the eight month school year for Blacks in Nansemond County.

This arrangement obviously proved successful as the relationship was renewed for the 1937-38 school year (Nansemond County School Board Minutes, August 1937) and for the 1938-39 school year (Nansemond County School Board Minutes, August 1938). The terms of the two subsequent arrangements were not recorded.

An interesting notation appeared during the March 24, 1939 meeting in that a discussion was held regarding use of Literary Funds to purchase Nansemond Collegiate Institute (Nansemond County School Board Minutes, March 1939) . This is the final reference to the school in

county school board minutes. All subsequent references to secondary education for the county's "Negro students" focus on the newly opened East Suffolk High School.

Disparities in teacher salaries, class size, transportation, and overall funding did not just materialize with the 1926 records for the Nansemond County School Board. These factors are likely contributors, when coupled with the philosophy of self-determination reported by James Anderson (1988), to the move by the Rev. William Gaines to found the Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Rev. Gaines was pastor of the church now known as First Baptist Church, Mahan Street (Anniversary Committee, 1971). Rev. Gaines and several subsequent ministers of the First Baptist Church served in varying capacities at the Institute, including the positions of president and teacher.

Chapter 5

Nansemond Collegiate - The School

Introduction

The founding date for Nansemond Collegiate Institute is variously reported as somewhere between 1890 (Lowe, 1984) and 1905 (Russell, 1981). The deed book in the Clerk's Office of Nansemond County first references the school in February 1911. Documents (Anniversary Committee, 1981 and 1996) from First Baptist Church set the origination date in the early 1900s.

The school was established to provide an educational opportunity for Blacks in Nansemond County as public schools were not yet available. That Nansemond Collegiate Institute was the first opportunity for secondary education for Blacks in the county is not in dispute. What is difficult is to trace the evolution of this school. The Reverend William Washington Gaines is consistently given credit for the founding of the school (Lowe, 1984 and Russell, 1981). Both Lowe (1984) and Russell (1981) report that the school's founding was in response to a consistent lack of action on the part of the county school board when requested to provide secondary educational opportunities for Blacks in the county.

Lowe (1984) credits Rev. Washington and local churches, including the First Colored Baptist Church of which Washington was pastor, with supplying the initial funding for Nansemond Collegiate. Russell (1981) acknowledges the role of local contributors but largely credits the Sharon Baptist Association with providing the necessary

startup funds.

It is likely that the school was founded, in concept, in 1890 by Rev. Washington and his local supporters but only became a viable institution in 1905 when the Sharon Baptist Association provided the capital necessary to rent a farm in the area of the county known as Lloyd place. This farm was converted to a combination elementary and secondary school (Russell, 1981). A state accredited normal school was later added to this facility. This school remained a viable educational entity until finally closing in 1939.

Chronology of Nansemond Collegiate

The first buildings for Nansemond Industrial Institute, as Nansemond Collegiate Institute was first known, were constructed around 1900. The first principal was Reverend William H. Morris of Rich Square, North Carolina (Russell, 1981). Reverend Morris supervised a staff of five teachers, one of whom was his wife (Lowe, 1984). There were approximately twenty students enrolled. He remained principal until 1912. During his tenure, the Sharon Association purchased the Lloyd farm for the school. This farm included a three-story house with sixteen rooms. This house was converted into a combination classroom building and boys' dormitory. A dormitory for girls was also added during Morris' tenure (Russell, 1981).

Reverend James Harrell became the second principal of the Institute in 1912. The length of his tenure is disputed. One source (Lowe, 1984) indicates that he was principal until 1928. A second source (Russell, 1981) records that he remained principal until 1917.

The 1912 Nansemond County superintendent's report to the State Department of Education indicates the principal of Nansemond Collegiate Institute to be Mr. Bruce. Whatever his tenure, it was during this period that the instructional program of the school became strongly oriented toward industrial education. No significant growth is attached to his tenure. Russell (1981) did note, however, that a visit by representatives of the United States Bureau of Education in 1915 produced the assessment that "instruction was unsuited to the needs of the pupils" (Russell, 1981, p. 99). No other notations regarding Rev. Harrell's involvement with Nansemond Collegiate Institute were found.

The third principal of Nansemond was a Mr. Bruce about whom no background information, not even his first name, was found. He was credited with the founding of the printing operation that was a part of the financial support system for the school. This printing operation also became one of only two vocational education experiences available to the students of the school. Mr. Bruce left the Institute in 1919.

The fourth principal of Nansemond Collegiate Institute was Reverend Thomas Johnson. His tenure lasted until 1925. He is credited with strengthening the printing operation, restoring academic integrity to the curriculum and organizing choral and glee clubs for the schools (Russell, 1981). The Glee club performances became major social events in the Black community of the county. The May 27, 1933 edition of the Journal and Guide newspaper devoted almost a third of a page in the social section of the paper to a detailed description of an annual concert. This description included songs performed, names of performers and a listing of the names of many of those in attendance.

While noted for his dedication to education and Christianity,

Johnson did not appear to have expanded the school. He was the pastor of a local church while principal of the Institute. Lowe (1984) noted that Rev. Johnson would, not infrequently, suspend classes and conduct devotional periods. He does, however, appear to have restored a strong sense of direction to the school, including its focus on a classic curriculum.

The final principal of Nansemond Collegiate Institute was Professor William Huskerson. Huskerson was trained as a civil engineer but it has been noted that he could teach any of the subjects offered at Nansemond Collegiate Institute (E. Lowe, personal communication, 1995). Huskerson became principal in 1926 and remained until the school closed its doors for the final time in 1939.

One of the first things he did upon his arrival was to complete an unfinished building program. The Board of Trustees had borrowed fifteen thousand dollars from several local banks in the hopes of expanding the school. Members of the Board of Trustees for Nansemond Collegiate Institute had to secure these loans with their own personal property. Some of them lost this property when the school was destroyed by the fires that began about 1933 (M. Davis, personal communication, February 1997).

Russell (1981) notes that by late 1928, the secondary school had been accredited by the State Department of Education and was actually the first school in Nansemond County to receive this status. Huskerson's efforts did not end here. In an April 1932 issue of the Journal and Guide newspaper, Professor Huskerson made the following statement "The condition of Nansemond Institute is better now than ever

before. Recent improvements in the physical equipment, including additions to the laboratories for study and experiment in chemistry, botany and zoology; addition of more than 500 books to the school library; decoration and addition of seats in the auditorium; and improvement through addition of equipment in the economics department have placed the school on a new high level.” It was also this article that announced the normal school accreditation of the school by the State Board of Education. This accreditation made it possible for the school to train teachers and award teaching licenses.

The need for the normal school was not just a Huskerson dream. There was a desire by some graduates of the high school and their parents to continue the educational process begun at Nansemond Collegiate. Prior to the establishment of the normal school, students had to leave Nansemond County for post secondary experiences. One graduate continued her schooling at Morgan State College in Maryland. There she found that Nansemond Collegiate Institute had prepared her to be more than competitive with students from other locations (B. Wynn, personal communication, February 1997).

The school lost the ability to award teacher licenses after the fires that nearly destroyed the school. One graduate related that the class of 1934 had to take additional classes at the Norfolk unit of Virginia State College in order to earn teaching licenses. This may have been necessary because one of the resources lost in the fires was the school library (W. Benn-Davis, personal communication, February 1997).

Huskerson is remembered by the interview respondents as being dedicated to the point that when the normal school lost its accreditation

in 1934, he took each of that year's graduates to Norfolk to enroll them in the newly created Norfolk Unit of Virginia State College (B. Wynn-Davis, personal communication February 1997).

Huskerson assumed the leadership of Nansemond Collegiate Institute at a challenging time. He is credited with growing the school to its zenith as an entity which included an elementary school, a high school and a normal school (E. Lowe, personal communication, July 1995). Just three years after Huskerson's arrival in 1926, the County opened its first free public school for Blacks (State Department of Education Survey of School Plants, 1940). This provided competition for students. Public schools had the edge in this competition as there was no charge to parents while Nansemond Collegiate charged a five dollar per month tuition. Lowe (1984) notes that though some of the students who formerly attended Nansemond Collegiate moved to the new public school, there was not an initial mass exodus from the private school.

During Huskerson's tenure two other significant events occurred that led to the eventual demise of the school. The first was the economic depression era that gripped the entire country. The Depression forced many parents to withdraw their children from Nansemond Collegiate Institute. It was during this time that the Institute contracted with the Nansemond County School Board to provide secondary education to the county's unserved Black students. These contracts supplemented the Institute's income for at least two years (Nansemond County School Board Minutes, August 1937 and Nansemond County School Board Minutes, August 1938).

The second significant event was the push by the Black citizens of Nansemond County to force the county to provide a free public high school education to the Black youth of the county. Parent groups organized into School Improvement Leagues and the Suffolk-Nansemond Civic League. These organizations filed a series of lawsuits against the county to force the issue.

These events, when coupled with the public perception of Professor Huskerson, may have helped to create the tension that led to the fires that ultimately destroyed Nansemond Collegiate Institute. The fires, which began in 1933, were described as suspicious in nature and may have been designed as an attack on Huskerson as well as the school.

Professor Huskerson was described as a proud man. He was believed to have been of West Indian descent and trained as a civil engineer. He was said to have carried himself in a manner that caused him to be disliked by the Whites in the community. It was felt that his public perception and the things he had accomplished for the Black community caused the school to be a target (B. Wynn, personal communication, February 1997).

Size of Nansemond Collegiate

While records do not exist that document the size of classes, an estimate of class size was estimated from the several pictures of graduating classes (Appendix B) that have been located and from a 1933 newspaper article. The article covered the 1933 graduation of Nansemond Collegiate Institute. That article listed seventeen students.

The photographs of six high school graduating classes were found. These pictures were for classes from 1927 to 1932. The largest class was in 1931 with thirty-three students. The smallest class was twelve students in 1927. These pictures showed an average class size of nineteen students.

The one picture of a normal school graduating class that was found was for 1932. This picture showed a total of twelve graduates. The June 3, 1933 issue of the Journal and Guide featured a story on the Nansemond Collegiate Institute graduating class of 1933. The normal school list of graduates included seventeen names. Though limited, these two data points produce an average class size of fifteen students for the normal school.

Summary

Nansemond Collegiate Institute represented a nearly fifty year struggle to provide education for an underserved population of Black youth in Nansemond County. The school opened when no elementary school was available for Blacks in the area. It continued to expand from that point to meet identified needs.

When the need for a high school alternative was identified, a high school program was added. This high school program was used as an option by the county School Board for several years while the Board was preparing a public high school for the Black youth of the county. The cooperation between the local school board and the school may have pushed the enrollment at Nansemond Collegiate to its highest point.

Under the direction of Professor Huskerson, the school continued to attempt to meet community needs. When the need for a teacher preparation program was identified, Nansemond Collegiate Institute started a state accredited program.

Until forced to close its doors in 1939, Nansemond Collegiate Institute was an educational alternative for the Black youth of Nansemond County. The school maintained a classical style curriculum during an era when the industrial model of Hampton Institute was being pushed for Black students. The school was made possible through the combined efforts of the Black community, especially the churches. It served as a source of pride and a symbol of self-help for that community.

Chapter 6

A CASE OF SELF-HELP AND PRIDE

Introduction

One of the terms for Virginia's re-admittance to the Union after the Civil War was to "never deprive any citizen or class of citizens of the United States the school rights and privileges secured by the Constitution of said State" (Hunt and Wagoner, 1981, 2). Although required by Congressional Act, education for Virginia's Black citizens was not forthcoming. James Anderson noted that by 1880, most White southerners had accepted the reality of that law. Instead of trying to fight the law, they then began attempts to redirect educational efforts in a manner that would preserve southern traditions and lifestyle (Anderson, 1988; Spivey, 1978).

. Samuel Armstrong, at Hampton Institute, was developing a special curriculum for Black students. The purpose of that curriculum was to adapt education for Blacks to the needs and interests of the South's dominant-class Whites (Anderson, 1988). Historians have concluded that the impact that the Hampton Model had on education for Blacks in the South was to teach them to accept their political and economic subordination to Whites (Hunt and Simmons, 1994)

The Hampton Model of Industrial education did not, however, fit with the newly freed slaves' desire to become their own masters and elevate themselves (Spivey, 1978). Education was viewed, by the freedmen, as the means to accomplishing this elevation. Education was seen as providing the power of self-determination. Blacks had come out of slavery with a strong desire to learn to read and write. The

foundation of the post-Civil War freedmen's educational movement was self-reliance and the desire to control and sustain schools for themselves and their children. Education was much more than an academic exercise, it was an expression of freedom (Anderson, 1988).

Interviews with surviving graduates of Nansemond Collegiate Institute produced strong evidence in support of Anderson's assertion that education was more than a means of social and economic elevation. Each of the respondents communicated a sense of pride in having graduated from Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Though three of the five had attended the public elementary school provided by the county, this fact was barely mentioned. They all had had many educational experiences after graduation from Nansemond Collegiate Institute but these were hardly mentioned. There was no question that memories of Nansemond Collegiate Institute were very special to each of the respondents.

A Profile of the Respondents

Even though the Nansemond Collegiate Institute closed nearly sixty years ago, there are many surviving students who still live in the Suffolk/Nansemond County area. Several of these surviving students were interviewed during the data collection for this document. Less formal discussions were held with a number of other persons who had memories of Nansemond Collegiate Institute but they were not included as interviews as their recollections were not based on direct experience with the school. These persons did, however, share the sense of pride that was expressed by the school's surviving students.

The five persons chosen for these interviews were all retired professionals. There were two men and three women in the group of respondents. All of the five persons interviewed had continued their educations at four-year colleges. Four of the five felt they were strongly competitive in their post-NCI schooling experiences. Only one indicated the feeling that she could have been better prepared. She, however, communicated that this lack was not related to the quality of staff but the fact that she attended the school after the fires had destroyed the library. She felt that it was the lack of resources that caused the shortfall in her preparation.

All five of the interview respondents began working with teaching jobs. Four of the five spent their entire working lives in the field of education. Three retired as teachers. The other one rose to the level of central office administration before retiring. The fifth of the respondents began a career in education but switched to a career with a local shipyard after only two years. Another of the respondents rose to the rank of principal of an elementary school before leaving the field of education. His pattern of success continued in the field of law where he became a judge before retiring.

Three of the five respondents attended elementary school at Booker T. Washington Elementary. This school was a public elementary school provided by Nansemond County. The three finished the eighth grade in the public school and enrolled at Nansemond Collegiate Institute (NCI) as ninth graders. They, then, spent two years at the normal school after graduating from the high school program at NCI.

The Interviews

A formal research-type interview was not the best format. In fact, these interviews were more of a discussion or remembrance of the experiences these persons had as students of Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Every effort was made to make sure a common core of questions were addressed by each respondent. These questions included the questions listed below. Additionally, they were asked to share their most vivid and fond memories of their experiences at Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

1. What years did you attend and graduate from Nansemond Collegiate Institute?
2. Why did you attend Nansemond Collegiate Institute instead of the county's public schools?
3. What was the nature and content of the curriculum you studied?
4. What degrees did you earn from Nansemond Collegiate Institute?
5. What do you remember about the teachers at the school?
6. What type of extra curricular activities were available?
7. What was the amount of tuition you paid and how did you pay (cash or other methods)?
8. How do you rate the education, in terms of completeness you received? Were you competitive in subsequent school and work experiences?

Four of the five interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents in February 1997. The other interview was the first interview conducted. This interview was also done in the respondent's

home in July 1995. All of the respondents were anxious to discuss their experiences at Nansemond Collegiate Institute as if there was a pressing need to preserve this piece of history.

One of the most valuable contributions by the respondents was their clear communication of the sense of pride and accomplishment they still felt at having completed, at Nansemond Collegiate Institute, what was for most of them, the first phase of their education. The answers to the interview questions filled few of the gaps left by lost records but the anecdotes shared were valuable in that they gave a picture of the differences in schools now and then.

For example, all of the female respondents shared the same story about having received a love letter from one of the instructors, a Professor Wilson (Davis, Benn-Davis, Wynn). This teacher was described as being from Africa and extremely brilliant with a wonderful way with words but also very lazy (M. Davis, personal communication, February 1997). He is purported to have written letters to all of the female students who attended during his tenure. He included in nearly all his letters such memorable phrases as "I went to sleep last night, hugging my pillow, wishing it was you" (M. Davis, personal communication, February 1997). As Professor Wilson was allowed to continue at NCI until its closing, these recollections document a clear difference in the permissible relationships between teachers and students, then versus now.

The pride, expressed by the respondents, at having completed Nansemond Collegiate Institute was matched only by the level of admiration expressed for the man who was principal during the time

they attended. Professor William Huskerson was the fifth and final principal of the school.

Huskerson was described as a brilliant man of many talents and strong will. Huskerson was remembered by those interviewed as a man of vision. He was a civil engineer and is credited with building the school to its zenith. He designed and built buildings while securing financial support from the governing board and from the community. He was also credited with bringing a higher academic standard to the school (E. Lowe, personal communication, July 1995).

Huskerson was also remembered as a very proud man and that pride was, in part, blamed for the fires that eventually led to the destruction of the school. He was described as a Black man who did not bow to the conventions of the era in which he lived. It has been speculated that the fires were as much an attempt to destroy him as they were to destroy the school (B. Wynn, personal communication, February 1997).

When Nansemond Collegiate Institute closed, a chapter of Huskerson's life closed. His wife left Suffolk to return home to New York City but he remained. He worked various construction jobs that required skills of a substantially lower level than those he possessed. Many former students wanted him to leave so that he would not be disgraced by what had happened. He refused. Some felt he stayed because his spirit had been broken by the loss of Nansemond Collegiate. There were others, however, who felt he stayed as a testament of strength. They felt that Huskerson stayed to remind those who had taken his dream that they could not take his spirit.

Summary

Nansemond Collegiate Institute appears to have been more than just a school to those who attended the school. Its teachers were more than just teachers. Both the teachers and the school were symbols of strength and hope during a difficult struggle to obtain an education. Memories of the school and its educators remain very important for those who attended the school.

Teachers and principals were moral leaders and role models who were concerned with the total development of the students in their charge and not just the academic aspect. The male graduates contacted for this study remember attending dances at which they were not allowed to dance close to the girls. All teachers provided a close watchful eye. If a boy were to venture to close to a girl while dancing, he could count on Professor Huskerson appearing and warning him “not to hang on the trees” (E. Lowe, personal communication, July 1995; H. Benn, personal communication, February 1997).

Chapter 7

SUMMARY

As this document is being compiled, there remain a diminishing number of identified surviving former students of Nansemond Collegiate Institute. Most of these survivors are over eighty years of age. Soon the only physical evidence of the existence of this school will be the historical marker at the intersection of Fifth Street and East Washington Street in Suffolk, Virginia.

This marker is likely to remain one of the few testaments to the struggle by Blacks of Nansemond County to provide a quality education to their children. There were at least five Rosenwald schools established in Nansemond County (J. Riddick, personal communication, December 1996). These schools were among the estimated five thousand such schools built in fifteen states with the help of this fund established by northern philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. The Rosenwald fund was designed to help improve educational facilities for Blacks in the South. This was often done by providing dollar for dollar matches to local building funds (Franklin and Moss, 1988). One of these frame buildings had been covered with brick veneer and used as part of an elementary school until 1990. It is currently being used as a storage building. One other building serves as a storefront church. The other three were abandoned and have fallen down.

Records from this era are scant. In fact, school records for Nansemond Collegiate Institute were nearly all destroyed in the series

of fires that led to the closing of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute in 1939. Other documentation is scattered and difficult to locate. Yet the impact of this school cannot be denied. While the specific reverberations of Nansemond Collegiate Institute on individuals would be difficult to enumerate because of the lost records, two of the contributions made by this school must be preserved.

The first is the record of the effort made by the Blacks of Nansemond County to provide a high school level education for their children. The combined efforts of churches and individuals led to the partial filling of an educational gap. That effort lasted for nearly fifty years. Many of the successful professional Blacks of Nansemond County and the City of Suffolk in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were impacted either directly or indirectly by Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

While it is true that Nansemond Collegiate Institute provided an educational alternative for the disparate conditions which existed in the county's public schools, Nansemond Collegiate Institute did much more than that. This school or at least the memory of this school provided a source of intense pride to the Black community of Nansemond County (now the City of Suffolk). The memory of NCI, even now, remains a symbol of self-help and self-determination.

The second major contribution is that Nansemond Collegiate provided another example of the power of local control. The directors, supporters and administrators of Nansemond Collegiate Institute never surrendered control to outside funding sources. The one documented and unsuccessful effort to seek outside funding was after the fires.

Funding to aid in rebuilding the school was sought through the local school board.

Remaining in control of the funding allowed the directors of Nansemond Collegiate Institute them to maintain the classic curriculum favored by leaders like W. E. B. DuBois. It is possible that had those running the school accepted outside funding, the school's curriculum would have been changed to the Hampton Industrial Model (see Anderson, 1988, Ft. Valley College reference).

It is beyond the scope of this document to delineate all of the factors which impacted the development of education for Blacks during the period from 1890 to 1939. Some of the major factors and attitudes have been identified. The nexus between these factors and the evolution of Nansemond Collegiate Institute is clear.

Many of the challenges faced by the founders and supporters of Nansemond Collegiate Institute were similar to those faced by other rural southern communities and to the challenges facing supporters of public education, in general. The problems facing the founders of Nansemond Collegiate were compounded by the issue of racial prejudice. The evolution of Nansemond Collegiate Institute was in response to several factors, the prime of which was the lack of public schooling in Nansemond County in 1890.

Nansemond County, like most of the South, was sparsely populated and predominately agricultural in the late 1800s. Kaestle, (1983), cited economic conditions and accompanying attitudes as problems facing the development of public education in the South.

Those same conditions existed in Nansemond County.

Consolidation of efforts and resources was made difficult in a jurisdiction that spanned some 432 square miles. In the absence of governmental intervention, local communities were often left to their own resources. Until public resources were directed toward providing a quality education for all students, education for Blacks came in the form of private ventures like the Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

Nansemond Collegiate Institute was, in the greater scheme of things, a short-lived institution. It was small in size as the best projections of the school's enrollment indicate that it could not have served more than a fraction of the total number of Black school age youth. Yet, in terms of impact on a community, Nansemond Collegiate Institute is still significant in the memories of those whose lives it touched.

Memories of the teachers, the events and the classes are still strong. These factors helped shape those persons who became leaders in the Black community of Nansemond County and of other areas. The values they learned focused the energies and actions of the graduates. These contributions must be remembered. The lessons of self-help are too valuable to be lost.

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Appendix A

Biographical Sketches

The purpose of this appendix is to provide a brief biographical sketch of the five graduates of Nansemond Collegiate Institute who were interviewed in the compilation of this historical document.

Elgin Lowe was the first graduate of Nansemond Collegiate who was interviewed. He graduated from the high school program in 1932 and was a 1934 graduate of the normal school. Lowe is a local historian who has written several books including a book on Nansemond Collegiate Institute titled "Historical Events of Nansemond Collegiate Institute".

Education is very important to Mr. Lowe. He has taught and served as an administrator at many school levels including a term as rector at the Virginia State University (then College) in Petersburg, Virginia. Mr. Lowe has remained a regular and welcome visitor to the schools and administrative officers of Suffolk Public Schools.

Mary Alice Davis was the second graduate interviewed. Davis graduated from the high school at Nansemond Collegiate Institute in 1935 and the normal school there in 1937. Mrs. Davis was the only graduate interviewed who was a boarding student at Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

Education and Nansemond Collegiate were both very important to Mrs. Davis. Her career spanned many years, beginning and ending

in the Nansemond County and Suffolk Public Schools. She was very proud of the classical curriculum she studied at Nansemond Collegiate and the fact that it prepared her well for subsequent schooling experiences.

The third graduate was Wanetta Benn-Davis. Mrs. Davis completed the high school program at Nansemond Collegiate Institute in 1934 and the normal school in 1936. She was the only respondent who felt that the school had not adequately prepared her for subsequent schooling experiences though the lack of preparation was related to the resources lost to fires rather than the quality of instruction.

Davis spent the majority of her professional career in education. The exception was the years spent at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard where she worked in the drafting room through the second world war. Davis returned to teaching and eventually retired from that profession.

The fourth graduate interviewed was Mrs. Bernyce Wynn. Wynn graduated from the eighth grade at Nansemond Collegiate in 1925 and the high school there in 1929. Her post-secondary schooling was continued at Morgan State University in Maryland. She noted that the normal school had not been established at Nansemond Collegiate at the time of her matriculation.

Mrs. Wynn's teaching career spanned many years and several school divisions. Her first job was in Baltimore City Schools. Her second was in Isle of Wight County before eventually returning home to Nansemond County to finish her career. The job from which she retire

as at East Suffolk Primary School, just a few blocks from where Nansemond Collegiate Institute had stood.

The fifth graduate interviewed was Mr. Herman Benn. Benn was a 1934 graduate of the high school at Nansemond Collegiate and a 1936 graduate of the normal school there. Mr. Benn worked several jobs to pay the tuition for himself and his sister.

Mr. Benn had, perhaps, the most diverse career of any of the respondents. He held positions as a teacher and principal before leaving education for a career in the Civil Service. While in the Civil Service, Benn completed law school. He had a distinguished career as an attorney, rising to the rank of judge in this profession. At the time of this interview, he had (at age 85) just retired again.