

**A HISTORY OF NANSEMOND COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE
FROM 1890 TO 1939**

by

Milton R. Liverman

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APPROVED:

Thomas C. Hunt, Co-Chairman

Robert R. Richards, Co-Chairman

Steve Parson

Patrick W. Carlton

Michaele P. Penn

Abstract

The goal of this effort was to write the definitive history of a high school for Blacks in Nansemond County. The destruction of school records in the fires that eventually led to the closing of the school made that task difficult. While attempting the historical research, however, two factors were found which still make the effort worthwhile. First, there was a definite sense of pride found in all who had been associated with the Nansemond Collegiate Institute. This pride gave one the sense that attending Nansemond Collegiate Institute was almost as much an expression of freedom as it was an effort to secure an education. The second factor was the determination of the need for Nansemond Collegiate Institute based on the disparities in services offered to Blacks when compared to Whites in the public school setting.

Public education in Suffolk and Nansemond County, Virginia had its beginnings in 1871 when the first school boards were appointed for those localities. Nineteen years later, there still existed no secondary educational opportunities for the Blacks of Nansemond County. In order to address this lack, Blacks in the county pooled their resources and started their own school, Nansemond Collegiate Institute.

Founded in 1890, Nansemond Collegiate Institute provided for the elementary and secondary educational needs of Black youth in Nansemond County, Virginia for nearly fifty years. This school was a case study of local control and self-help. The school maintained a classical educational curriculum during the time when the Hampton Industrial Education model was being touted as the preferred model of education for Blacks.

Under the leadership of five principals, four of whom were ministers, the Institute demonstrated the power of a community to control its own destiny. The

Institute's supporters raised the funds needed to establish and run the school. It struggled for many years with funding and curriculum issues. The school's last principal, Mr. William Huskerson, arrived in 1926. He made several advances in terms of funding and building. His tenure, however, began just one year before the county established its first public high school for Blacks. This competition and a series of "suspicious" fires ultimately led to the close of the Nansemond Collegiate Institute. This closing did not occur before the Institute had opened possibilities for many Blacks who might not otherwise have had varied career choices. By having existed, Nansemond Collegiate Institute had a lasting impact on the lives of many Blacks of Nansemond County.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Chapter	
I. Introduction	1
Need for the Study	2
Summary	6
II. Methodology	8
Classification of Study	8
Structure of Research Presentation	9
Focusing of the Research	11
Data Collection	12
Researcher Bias	14
III. Historical Perspective	16
Overview of the Development of Education in the South	16
Post-Civil War Public Schooling Efforts	20
The Evolution of Education in Virginia	21
The Need for Nansemond Collegiate	24
Summary	25
IV. The Need for Nansemond Collegiate	27
A Case of Disparities	27
Summary	31
V. Nansemond Collegiate - The School	34
Introduction	34
Chronology of Nansemond Collegiate	35
Size of Nansemond Collegiate	40
Summary	41

VI.	A Case of Self-Help and Pride	43
	Introduction	43
	Profile of Respondents	44
	The Interviews	46
	Summary	49
VII.	Summary	50
	References	54
	Appendix A	59