

The History of Manassas

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Did you know that Manassas School, unlike any other school in the Memphis City School System, was the dream, the concerted labor, and the result of the consistent planning of black men in the Manassas area? The students of Manassas and their parents are indebted to Messrs. Finney, C. McCombs, Dunnaway, Spencer Johnson, J.D. Harper, Godfrey Black, and the Rev. William Young for the establishment of Manassas School around 1899. Special recognition goes to Mr. Spencer Johnson who led the effort to establish the school.

The original Manassas building was a two-room frame structure erected on the west side of Manassas Street, north of the Belt Line. The late William H. Foote was appointed as its first principal. In 1902, two more rooms were added to the structure. Between the years 1902 and 1909, Mr. Foote resigned as principal and Miss Rose Washington became the new principal. Miss Washington also became Mrs. William H. Foote during that time.

In 1909, the principalship was entrusted to Mrs. Cora Taylor. Under her leadership, Manassas added one more room for home economics. Mrs. Taylor also led the members of the community in the effort that resulted in the purchase of a tract of land located across the street. On this tract of land in 1918, a 16-room stucco building was erected. In 1921, a two-story frame building was added, as well as a ninth grade.

Thus, Manassas was ready to take its place as a four-year high school. A high school grade was added every year until Manassas graduated its first senior class in 1924. There were 14 members in the class. Manassas was the first four-year accredited Negro high school in Shelby County.

By the 1924-25 school year, competitive sports had been established at Manassas. The school had the first Negro football team in the city, and soon basketball and baseball were added. The success of the athletic teams of Manassas can be seen in the trophies on display in the trophy case in the hall near the Main Office.

In 1924, the auditorium was completed allowing Manassas to move its commencement exercises from the outgrowth Gospel Temple Church to the new auditorium that seated twelve hundred. But this was a sad

year; Mrs. Taylor became very ill and had to direct the school from her bed for the next two years. She died in 1932 after seeing Manassas annexed into the City School System.

In 1929, Mr. J. Ashton Hayes was appointed the principal of Manassas. The year 1935-36 saw the old stucco building razed and a new 50-room modern structure added to the auditorium. The new building was completed in 1938. Manassas prospered under the leadership of Mr. Hayes. A new addition containing a library, a cafeteria, and two science rooms was added in 1953.

After 25 years of service to Manassas, Mr. Hayes retired in 1953, turning the principalship over to Mr. Louis B. Hobson who continued the tradition of excellence of Manassas' illustrious principals. During his administration, Manassas was further recognized for its students' superior academic achievements. Mr. Hobson, a true educator, fostered many outstanding educational programs with the belief that all students had the ability to obtain greatness. The years of 1971-1974 brought many changes to Manassas: the integration of the faculty and student body, the building of a new air-conditioned band room and industrial arts building, and the approval of complete renovation of the school. Mr. Hobson retired, after 25 years of dedicated service.

In 1974, a Manassas graduate, Mr. Logan T. Mitchell, was appointed the principal and served from 1974-1980. The renovation was completed during his administration. This renovation gave Manassas complete air-conditioning, a new office, a library, a vocal music department, vocational office education and home economics facilities. With these gains came the loss of one of its oldest and dearest treasures, the Cora P. Taylor Auditorium.

The year 1980 found Manassas with a new and energetic principal, Mr. Longino A. Cooke. He came with a vision and a plan to continue the tradition of the school. In 1982, Mr. Cooke retired after devoting two years of service to the youth of Manassas High School.

Mr. Robert S. White, a young enthusiastic educator, became principal of Manassas High School in 1982. Within a few months, he had created an environment of academic excellence, school pride, and unity. He served in this position for 14 years. The following innovations and changes were accomplished under this administration:

1. French was added to the curriculum.
2. Advanced courses were added in math and science.
3. Four computer labs were established.

4. A Food Service Management Lab was added to strengthen our vocational offerings.
5. A kindergarten program was added.
6. Manassas was paired with Trezevant Vocational School in an effort to improve our vocational offering.
7. In 1988, the gymnasium was named for a loyal, loving, and dedicated supporter of Manassas, Mr. Louis B. Hobson, former principal.
8. The adoption of Manassas by Baptist memorial Hospital has been recognized as one of the most effective in the Adopt-A-School Program. In 1991, a state award was given to Baptist and Manassas for outstanding services.
9. Band uniforms and choir robes were purchased.

These innovations helped to propel Manassas into a competitive future.

Mr. Joe Davis took the helm of Manassas High School in 1995 as Interim principal. He was appointed the permanent position in 1997. His term can be appropriately deemed "The Years of Empowerment." He determined that, teachers had to become actively involved in the decision-making process. He initiated a renewed partnership between the school, the parents, community leaders, adopters, and alumni. The energetic Memphis Chapter of Manassas Alumni volunteered their services for school activities and community outreach. The athletic department rebounded with new uniforms and upgraded equipment.

Restructuring has become the operative word for Manassas. During the years between 1996 and 2001 the staff adopted three school-wide programs: The instructional reform models, *The Middle School Initiative*, *the Ninth Grade Academy*, and *High Schools That Work* involved all students in a challenging curriculum designed to improve student performance. *Block scheduling*, an instructional strategy, was implemented to give students more time on task. Manassas seniors earned college credits through participation in *Dual Credit Enrollment* at State Technical Institute at Memphis. *School to Careers and Goals 2005*, spearheaded by the Chamber of Commerce, was a working partnership that was designed to propel Manassas into a competitive position during the 21st century.

The 2001-2002 school year brought about a change in vision with the advent of a new superintendent, Mr. Johnnie B. Watson. The school reform models were replaced by **Best Practices**, which emphasized Standards Based Instruction and teacher empowerment. Manassas was further impacted by its change from a middle/high school to a full-fledged high school with grades nine through twelve.

In 2003 Dr. Carol Johnson graced our city as Superintendent. Dr. Johnson introduced the concept of school reform but with a different approach than in the past. School Reform was centered on bringing all MCS schools and students to levels of proficiency meeting state standards. To accomplish this task, Dr. Johnson focused on Literacy implementation including a Reading initiative that resulted in more than 1.4 million books being read by MCS students. Currently the focus is on the Blue Ribbon Plan which is a comprehensive proactive approach designed to create positive school climates so that our students continue to achieve at proficient levels academically. Manassas proudly ranks among the Memphis City Schools that now show academic improvement.

In its rich history, Manassas has undergone many changes. Each one has made it a stronger and more viable institution. The 2006-2007 school year ushered in a significant change in leadership. Mr. Davis, who had led the school since 1995, did not open the school year due to illness. In his stead, Dr. Gloria Williams was appointed as principal. Dr. Williams is a graduate of Manassas and is committed to seeing the school recapture the spirit and vitality that contributed to high student achievement and community involvement during her years here as a student. Her focus is "achieving our goals through teamwork." She proudly states that our concerted efforts will be directed toward "Continuing the Legacy of Excellence."

This year marks the final year in the present facility. During January of the 2007-2008 school year the New Manassas High School will open as a high-tech high school. Each classroom will have a Smartboard, LCD projector, and wireless internet access; additionally, each student will have a laptop computer fully loaded with their textbooks, ACT prep materials, word processing and presentation software.