THE PINNERS POINT COLORED SCHOOL

A HISTORY OF THE SUGAR HILL NEIGHBORHOOD AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATION IN PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA

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Introduction

Located on a small peninsula in a tributary of the Elizabeth River known as Scott’s Creek, the neighborhood of Sugar Hill consists of only about thirteen homes, several abandoned properties, and numerous vacant lots. The current condition of the neighborhood, however, masks the history of the once-thriving neighborhood of Sugar Hill, which, at its height, was home to nearly eight hundred fifty residents, a thriving commercial district, several churches, and an elementary school. As a result of various social, political and economic factors, however, the population of Sugar Hill declined throughout the mid-twentieth century. With this decline, many buildings and houses that once stood in the area have been demolished. One such building that has been demolished is the Pinners Point Colored School that stood as a central monument in Sugar Hill from 1922-1982. Unlike many of the buildings in Sugar Hill, the Pinners Point Colored School was a public building and thus more information can be found in public records related to this piece of Sugar Hill history. An examination of the history of the Pinners Point Colored School provides insight into the history of the neighborhood of Sugar Hill and African-American education in Portsmouth.

Growth and Annexation of Sugar Hill

By the early 1890’s, the end of the Atlantic Coast and Southern Railroad had reached an area of Portsmouth known as Pinners Point. According to Sanborn Maps, development in Sugar Hill, a neighborhood adjacent to Pinners Point, did not begin until sometime between 1898 and 1903. On January 1, 1919, the city of Portsmouth, Virginia, annexed an area of Norfolk County known as Port Norfolk. This annexation included both Pinners Point and the neighborhood of
Sugar Hill.\textsuperscript{1} This was the fourth annexation in the city’s history, and “as the city extended its boundaries, naturally the schools within the annexed territory became a part of the Portsmouth School System.”\textsuperscript{2} Subsequently, as a part of the 1919 annexation, “The Mount Hermon School, a Negro School came into the City.”\textsuperscript{3} During this time period, not only were additional colored schools being added to the Portsmouth school system, but there was also “a constant increase in enrollment in the Colored schools.”\textsuperscript{4} Not long after the 1919 annexation, on September 13, 1921, a reporter for the \textit{Portsmouth Star} wrote that, “a considerable increase is noted in the colored schools and some congestion will exist in these schools, it is said. Congestion had already been bad in the Colored schools and part-time classes will be necessary.”\textsuperscript{5} By 1920, the population of Sugar Hill had greatly increased, and the neighborhood contained many dwelling units, several stores, and a wood yard. According to a Sanborn Map dated 1920-1950, a school called the Pinners Point Colored School was built in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill in 1924. Portsmouth Public School System documents suggest, however, that the Pinners Point Colored School built in 1922 and was designed by Charles M. Robinson, one of the most important architects in Virginia during the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{1} Lelia A. Deans, \textit{A Brief History of Public Education in Portsmouth}, 1964.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.
Charles M. Robinson, Architect

Charles M. Robinson was born March 3, 1867 in Hamilton, Virginia, to architect James T. Robinson and Elizabeth Crockett Robinson. Charles M. Robinson studied architecture under D.S. Hopkins at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and under John K. Peebles at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Robinson opened his first architectural practice in 1889 with G.T. Smith in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The firm was known as Smith & Robinson. In 1891, Robinson married Annie Custer of Altoona, and in 1893 their son Charles Custer Robinson, who also would become an architect, was born. Twelve years later in 1901, Robinson opened his own practice in Pittsburgh, only to move again to Richmond in 1906. The practice of Charles M. Robinson, Architects, was active in Virginia from 1906 until 1932 when Charles M. Robinson died and the firm was acquired by J. Binford Walford, a junior partner in the firm. The firm later merged into Walford & Wright, which became Wright, Jones and Wilkerson. The firm eventually was acquired by Boynton Rothschild Rowland Architects.

During his forty-three years of practice, Robinson was a prolific architect. While he designed many homes, hotels, and hospitals, he is perhaps most well-known for his educational and institutional architecture. Shortly after Robinson returned to Virginia in 1906, he began work on a master plan for the State Normal School (now James Madison University), and between 1908-1928 Robinson designed all of the buildings laid out in his master plan. In 1921, Robinson was hired as the College Architect for the College of William and Mary, and between

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
1921-1931 he designed over sixty buildings, renovations, and additions for the college.12

Robinson was also the School Board Architect for Henrico, Norfolk County, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Richmond, Suffolk, and Danville, completing almost four hundred public schools.13

While these commissions represent only a portion of Robinson’s work, they suggest that Robinson completed educational architectural work at various scales, including entire university master plans, larger university buildings, and smaller public school buildings. It is out of Charles M. Robinson’s role as School Board Architect for Portsmouth, Virginia, that the history of Pinners Point Colored School as a monument to neighborhood change and African-American education in Portsmouth, Virginia, begins to unfold.

Robinson as the Portsmouth Public School Board Architect

In 1921, Charles M. Robinson produced one of the most important documents related to the history of the Pinners Point Colored School. This document is called, Portsmouth, Virginia Public Schools: Report and Survey of School Housing Conditions. Robinson opens the report with the following the statement:

Practically ten years have passed since we were elected School Architects for the city of Portsmouth and submitted to you a report on a survey made of your school housing conditions. At that time the immediate problem was that of satisfactorily locating a new building so as to best serve the City’s future population, but the survey was made without attempting an extensive analysis of conditions throughout your City. This method was repeated when considering the location of your new high school. Since this time there have been material changes in conditions and territory has been annexed. The following

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
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report is, therefore, supplementary to reports already made and is carried further into
detail in order that all important points may be considered.14

This introduction to the report on the public schools indicates that the Portsmouth School Board
hired Robinson in 1910 or 1911 to be the architect for the city’s schools. Robinson’s role seems
to have been that of a planner, as well as an architect, because Robinson was advising the School
Board on the selection of sites for the schools as well as designing the buildings. The new high
school that Robinson refers to in this passage is the Woodrow Wilson High School that was built
between 1917 and 1922. Robinson asserts that this report will include proposals for specific
schools, as the previous report did in relation to Woodrow Wilson High School, but that it will
also be an overall assessment of the school housing conditions.

The Portsmouth School Board and Superintendent of Schools Harry A. Hunt
commissioned the report completed by Robinson. In his Annual Report on the Portsmouth
Public Schools, Superintendent Hunt writes the following of Robinson’s report:

‘The Report and Survey of School Housing Conditions of the Portsmouth Schools’
prepared by our Architects, Charles M. Robinson Company, is a pamphlet well known to
all of you, but should be mentioned here as one of the most important achievements of
our school system for the past year. I have found this report invaluable in all studies with
reference to location and size of new school buildings. Although this report shows that
the buildings of the last ten years have been, in general, wisely located, evidencing that
the Board has had definitely in mind the centers of school population, yet it has not
always been easy to show to others the wisdom of certain buildings nor their locations. It

is now a comparatively simple matter to prepare a building program, and to prove its soundness.\textsuperscript{15}

Indeed, Robinson’s report would serve as a catalyst for school construction in Portsmouth. Regarding the need for schools in Portsmouth, Robinson suggests that “The demand for better education is insistent, and unless the school housing conditions can be kept practically on a par with the educational standards, material improvement will be unattainable.”\textsuperscript{16} As a result, Robinson suggested both general and specific policies for the Portsmouth School Board to adopt, several of which related directly to the need for, design of, and construction of the Pinners Point Colored School.

The main factor that affected Robinson’s report on the public schools of Portsmouth was the dynamic of a major increase in population of the schools. Robinson suggests that, “Today’s problem is to care for [Portsmouth’s] population increase occurring since [the] last white elementary school was built in 1912, and to replace old buildings which have outlived their usefulness and are not well suited to the demands of a modern school system.”\textsuperscript{17} Robinson indicates the importance of providing for this population increase by including a chart that describes the increase in school population between 1910-1921, as well as the projected school population growth through 1930. According to this chart, between 1919 and 1920, the white school population increased from 4,100 to about 5,300 students, and the black school population increased from 1,900 to about 3,600 students.\textsuperscript{18} In one year, the white school population increased by 29% and the black school population increased by 89%.

\textsuperscript{16} Charles Robinson, 2.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 3.
While the sharp increase in black school population between 1919 and 1920 was specific to Portsmouth and its annexation of several sizeable neighborhoods, there was a statewide trend of increasing enrollment in black schools in Virginia during the first two decades of the twentieth century. According to the Reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Virginia from 1871-1921, the percent of school population of blacks was 45.0% in 1900, 55.0% in 1910, and 65.0% in 1920.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to the increase in enrollment, black schools in Virginia not only experienced a shortage of school facilities overall, but also a lack of acceptable conditions in the facilities that already existed. Indeed, “the Public Survey in Virginia in 1919 gave the majority of Negro schools very low ratings in almost every detail of grounds and buildings.”\textsuperscript{20}

Furthermore, the increase in school population caused a shortage of teachers in the school systems in Virginia, and officials considered this, in addition to the shortage and inadequacies of training facilities for teachers, “one of the greatest difficulties confronting the colored schools of Virginia since the founding of the system.”\textsuperscript{21} The school housing conditions of black schools in Virginia seemed to be in a state of crisis.

Portsmouth public schools fit into this statewide trend of increased enrollment and lack of adequate facilities during the early decades of the twentieth century. During the school year of 1909-1910, the black schools in Portsmouth had a combined enrollment of 1,010 students and employed fifteen teachers. Just before the annex of 1919, during the school year of 1917-1918, Portsmouth colored schools had a combined enrollment of 1,649 students and 33 teachers.\textsuperscript{22} During this nine year period, student enrollment increased by about 63%. By the end of the

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{22} Smith, 19.
1918-1919 school year, there were 3,667 students and 65 black teachers in the black schools. During this one-year period, overall enrollment in black schools in Portsmouth increased by almost 82%. While the urgency of the shortage of teachers in Portsmouth is not known, “After the annexation of 1919, a description of the colored teaching corps of that year showed seven high school teachers; two special teachers; and fifty-six elementary teachers. There were three principals among the staff of sixty-five. The male teachers including the principals were four and there were sixty-one female teachers. Teachers holding Collegiate and Normal Professional certificates amounted to two; elementary professional certificates numbered thirty-one; special certificates numbered four; first grade certificates numbered twenty-one; and second grade certificates numbered one.”

A portion of the increase in black students and teachers in the Portsmouth School Districts was the result of the 1919 annexation of the Mount Hermon School District, a black school district. Children in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill would have most likely attended the Mount Hermon School prior to the building of a school in their own neighborhood, as the neighborhood was part of the Mount Hermon School District. According to Robinson’s map entitled “Portsmouth, Virginia: School Population Survey,” that was included in the 1921 report to the Portsmouth School Board, the Mount Hermon Colored District was home to about 528 “colored elementary pupils.” The Mount Hermon Colored School was a two-story brick building constructed in 1907. The building measured fifty-two feet by seventy-eight feet and contained eight classrooms and one office. The total cost of construction, including the building, equipment, and the value of the lot, was $10,500. The Brighton Colored School was built in the

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23 Ibid., 19
24 Deans.
25 Charles Robinson, 10-11.
same year and was of identical construction to the Mount Hermon School. At the time of Robinson’s survey, the Mount Hermon School was one of the three worst schools in the city in terms of school housing conditions. Robinson suggested that it was “in such bad condition that only the alternative of turning children out on the streets justifies [its] use.” Furthermore, Robinson notes that the “Mount Hermon School is not a satisfactory unit and should be replaced before 1930; it has already outlived its useful life and cannot be counted on to last much longer.”

Robinson did not only emphasize the deplorable conditions of the Mount Hermon School, but he also suggested ways by which to improve these conditions. In a chart relating to the needs of the Mount Hermon District, Robinson suggested that nine additional school rooms were needed at once, two more rooms were needed before 1925, and still eleven more rooms would be needed before 1930. Robinson suggested that the twenty-two necessary rooms be divided between two new school buildings. First, a new “Building near where shown at Pinners Point at once” would be constructed having four classrooms. Then, a “New Mount Hermon School (needed at once) [would be built] before 1925” and would have eighteen rooms for instruction.

The description of a new “building near where shown at Pinners Point” is the first reference to a school that would be built in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill and that would become known as the Pinners Point Colored School. On Robinson’s “Portsmouth, Virginia: School Population Survey” map, a star symbol exists on Centre Street between Fifth Street (later Rogers Avenue) and Monroe Avenue, indicating that that site “represents [an] appropriate

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26 Hunt (1922), Table 16.
27 Charles Robinson, 7, 10.
28 Ibid., 9.
29 Ibid., 12.
location of the site for a new colored school.” At the end of his report on the Portsmouth, Virginia Public Schools, Robinson made both “General” and “Specific” policy recommendations to the School Board. Robinson outlined the “Specific” policy recommendations in the following way:

(11) That a lot be purchased for Glasgow Street School, also lots be purchased for the Pinners Point and Mount Hermon colored schools; also, lots for addition at Washington and Ann Street Buildings.

(12) That other lots near where shown on map sheet No. 1 be obtained as soon as funds are available.

(13) Replace Glasgow, build Franklin Circle and replace Elm white schools in order named as soon as possible; build Pinners Point and replace Mount Hermon colored schools as soon as possible. The above, which are the most urgent, should be followed by additions to Washington and Ann white schools and the building of the Maupin Street (near where shown) and the building to replace Chestnut Street School.

(14) Erect an administration building not connected to any school where in addition to suitable quarters for the officials’ supply rooms and stock rooms can be provided.30

The policy recommendation proposed by Robinson suggests the immediate purchase of a lot for Pinners Point Colored School and indicates that the school’s construction is a “most urgent” need within the Portsmouth School Districts.

30 Ibid., 17-18.
Robinson’s report on the public schools is most likely the source of origin for the name of Pinners Point Colored School. Perhaps for the sake of clarity, Robinson referred to the school proposed in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill as being located “at Pinners Point.” This name distinguished the school from the Port Norfolk and Glasgow School Districts, two white school districts adjacent to the neighborhood of Sugar Hill. Because the Mount Hermon School was referred to often throughout Robinson’s report, a new school in that district needed to be distinguished from the existing school. Thus, most likely because of the neighborhood’s location near the rail lines and its residents’ connection to the industry at Pinners Point, the school was thenceforth known as the Pinners Point Colored School.

**Pinners Point Colored School**

According to deed records and the Annual Report of the Portsmouth Public Schools from the years of 1921-1924, the Portsmouth School Board followed the policy put forth in Charles M. Robinson’s Report on the Portsmouth Public Schools regarding the purchase of a lot and the construction of a new school to be located at Pinners Point in the Mount Hermon District. The Portsmouth School Board purchased the land on which the school was built from Charles F. Harper in 1921. Harper owned but did not live on this site. According to the 1920 census, Charles F. Harper, a white male, lived at 149 Mount Vernon Avenue with his wife, Lillie K. Harper, and six children. While his wife and children did not work, Harper appears to have been employed at the Reed Estate. Based upon the 1920 Sanborn Map for this area of Portsmouth, Harper’s residence was about four blocks east and three blocks north of Sugar Hill in the neighborhood of Port Norfolk. Harper owned a two-story dwelling on a large lot on

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32 Ibid.
Mount Vernon Avenue. There were also five one-story outbuildings on the lot, including one designated for an automobile. This suggests that Charles F. Harper was wealthier than most of the residents of Sugar Hill would have been, and Harper may have owned land in several parts of the city of Portsmouth.

School Board records from 1922 confirm the purchase of land for the Pinners Point Colored School. In the Annual Report for 1921-1922, Superintendent Harry A. Hunt notes that, “While no new buildings have been completed during the year, three very important builds were begun and will be in readiness for the new school year of 1922-1923…The Pinners Point Colored School will be a four-room building, brick, one story, costing with the site about $19,700.”33 The Annual Report also includes a table that lists all the school buildings in the Portsmouth School System. The table also contains details about the buildings’ locations, sites, and construction. While the Pinners Point Colored School is not listed in the table, the school is acknowledged below the table by a line of text stating that, “A four-room building is under construction in Mt. Hermon section, costing—site $3,600.00; building $14,600.00; equipment, $1,500.00; Total, $19,700.00.”34 Thus, by 1922, a lot had been purchased and construction had begun on the Pinners Point Colored School.

School Board records from 1923 suggest that the Pinners Point Colored School was complete and in use during the 1922-1923 school year. In the Annual Report for 1922-1923, Superintendent Hunt asserts that, “This past year has been a notable one in school building, three buildings having been completed in the early fall…A colored school in Pinners Point of four rooms, costing complete $20,144.82. (Building $14,034.51, Equipment $1,402.06, Site

33 Hunt (1922), 7.
34 Ibid., Table 16.
Similar to the Annual Report for 1922, the Annual Report for 1923 includes a table that lists details about all of the buildings in the Portsmouth School System. However, in the 1923 Annual Report, the table contains a listing for the Pinners Point Colored School, or “Pinners Point (Col.)”. The school is listed as being located on Centre Street (later Central Avenue, then Booker Avenue) and having been erected in 1922. According to Sanborn Maps, the location of the school is slightly different than the location suggested by Charles M. Robinson in his report of 1921. While Robinson’s map suggested that the school should be located on Centre Avenue between Fifth Street and Monroe Avenue, the actual location of the school is on Centre Avenue below Fifth Street (later Rogers Avenue). The building itself is listed as being a one-story brick structure measuring sixty feet and eight inches, by sixty-nine feet and five inches. The building contained four classrooms and was heated by ventilating heaters. The lot on which the building was constructed measured one hundred thirty, by two hundred seventy-five, by two hundred thirty-five, by three hundred thirty feet. The lot was also considered to be “half marsh.”

Although several existing photographs of the school indicate what the exterior of Pinners Point Colored School would have looked like at the time of its construction, little evidence remains that suggests the character and design of the building’s layout and floor plan. Nevertheless, based on comparison with other schools in the Portsmouth School District, it is clear that the Pinners Point Colored School had the simplest design of all the schools. Every other school in the district, including colored schools, had at least one office. Many of the other

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36 Ibid., Table 15.
37 Ibid.
schools had additional rooms and features such as a library, auditorium, “special” room, gymnasium, attic, or basement.  

The simple character of the school was perhaps the result of the movement toward standardization within the Portsmouth School System. In his 1921 Report on the Schools, Charles M. Robinson notes the following regarding “Unit Building”:

Recently we have been devoting more study to the standardized unit building. While costing slightly greater in first cost, these buildings can be added to at any time without destroying any value. While this plan permits the building to meet only present needs, yet it provides for future needs at a minimum initial cost. As you have advocated standardization continuously since we were first elected your School Architects we feel it a waste of time to discuss further its advantages.

The Pinners Point Colored School was the first school to be built after Robinson’s study that indicated a “recent” commitment to the standardized unit building. This is perhaps the reason that while the cost of building was a bit higher at $15,035 compared to a white school of similar size with a cost of building of $13,000 only five years earlier, the program was much more simple. Furthermore, in his “General” policy recommendations to the School Board, Robinson suggested that the Board should “Erect only standardized unit buildings in [the] future.” Thus, it can be concluded that the Pinners Point Colored School was most likely a standardized unit building and that similar buildings can be found in the Portsmouth School District, as well as other school buildings throughout Virginia.

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 13.
40 Ibid., 17.
Several other “General” policy statements recommended by Robinson suggest the nature and exterior character of the Pinners Point Colored School. Robinson calls for the School Board to “Locate elementary schools within a half-mile of practically every pupil and build as large units as possible instead of several smaller buildings…Erect only standardized unit buildings in future.”\(^{41}\) The Pinners Point Colored School fulfilled these requirements, as it was located near the residents that it served in Sugar Hill, and also in its seemingly standardized design. Robinson also recommends for the School Board to “Eliminate all ultra-refined features which increase the ultimate cost at least until all unsatisfactory or low grade buildings are replaced.”\(^{42}\) This policy of having simple, straightforward exterior design was the reason for the Pinners Point Colored Schools windowless front façade and industrial appearance. The school, therefore, is a good example of the Portsmouth School Board’s policies regarding school design and location during the 1920s.

**Pinners Point Colored School in the Context of Portsmouth and the Progressive Era**

The Pinners Point Colored School indeed reflected the attempt of the Portsmouth School Board to mitigate the effects of large-scale annexation and improve school housing conditions, but the school was also constructed within the cultural and social context of the Progressive Era. During this period, reformers called for schools to be “the center of the community with a wider influence than just providing an education for children… [and] community centers where the citizens could unite for the improvement of the educational, social, moral, physical, civic, and economic interests.”\(^{43}\) The affects of this Progressive Era idea, however, seem to play out

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 17.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 17.  
differently in white schools than it did in black schools like the Pinners Point Colored School. A comparison of the Pinners Point Colored School, a school built for blacks in Portsmouth in 1922, and the Shea Terrace Elementary School, a school built for whites in Portsmouth in 1925, reveals that the facilities and perhaps the overall quality of education were not equal among white and black neighborhoods in Portsmouth during the Progressive Era.

The neighborhood of Shea Terrace is located across Scott’s Creek to the east of Sugar Hill. Much like the Pinners Point Colored School, Shea Terrace Elementary School was built in a flurry of school construction that followed Charles M. Robinson’s Report on the Portsmouth Public Schools. Charles M. Robinson himself, in fact, designed both schools. Different from the industrial appearance and standardized construction of Pinners Point Colored School, however, Shea Terrace Elementary School was a modern and carefully articulated building. The Shea Terrace Elementary School, which still stands today although it is no longer used as a school, had the following external characteristics at the time of its construction:

The interior of the school features a typical academic appearance of the period with its long corridors with terrazzo floors and its classrooms with large coat closets on one end with sliding doors. The architecture of Shea Terrace followed the latest educational standards of its day and created an environment in which children could learn…Shea Terrace Elementary School is a two-story, nine-bay building constructed of textured brick laid in five-course American bond. The tripartite façade has a five-bay projecting pavilion that contains most of the decorative features of the school. The pavilion has paired six-over-six light double-hung wood windows outlined by a soldier course. The second floor windows are topped with a cast concrete keystone in the center of each pair. Elaborate, floral-design, cast-concrete panels are located between the first and second
floors and there is decorative brickwork with colored headers forming a diamond-shaped pattern across the top of the center pavilion. A heavy, metal, modillioned cornice highlights the pavilion. A paneled brick parapet crowns the roof of the center pavilion with sections of cast-concrete turned balusters at each end. The main façade entry is recessed with decorative iron brackets visible in the corners. Poured concrete steps lead to bronze-colored, aluminum, double doors with nine lights flanked by two-lights with a three-light transom…A simple metal awning is suspended over the front entrance by metal chains. A plain metal sign sits above the entrance with the school’s name.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to this decoration and high level of detail, the school had many specialized rooms, such as a cafeteria, gymnasium, multi-purpose room, and offices. In contrast, the Pinners Point Colored School had no specialized rooms, decorative panels, keystones, trimwork, decorative headers, nor front façade windows. Despite stipulations for standardized building practices and avoidance of decorative features described in Robinson’s “General” policy recommendations, Shea Terrace was a particularly designed and decorated school. Indeed, while both schools were built in the same Progressive Era in public school construction in Portsmouth, Virginia, it is clear that Shea Terrace Elementary School would have been better suited for the encouragement of civic, economic, and social interests.

Issues of equity did not only exist in the physical structure of the schools in Portsmouth, but also in teachers’ salaries and per capita expenditures for students. In the Annual Report for the Portsmouth Public Schools for 1922-1923, the teachers listed for Pinners Point Colored School are S.H. Clarke, Principal, Ardella Bailey, Corinne Wilson, Annie Jones, Zenobia Brown Young, and Grace A. Taylor. Mr. Clarke is also listed as being the principal at the Mount

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 1-2.
In the Annual Report for 1923-1924, the teachers listed as being employed at Pinners Point Colored School are S.H. Clarke, Principal, Ardella Bailey, Marie Johnson, Annie Jones, and Essie F. Overton. All of the teachers listed were black, and most lived in nearby neighborhoods. The Annual Report for 1922-1923, the first year that the Pinners Point Colored School would have been in operation, lists the average salaries for teachers in Portsmouth. The average annual salary for a white male teacher was $2,300.00, a white female teacher was $1,311.77, a black male was $1,311.77, and a black female was $756.69. The Annual Report also lists the salaries according to grade level. A “Colored Elementary Male,” such as Mr. S. H. Clarke would have earned about $1,407.88 per year, and a “Colored Elementary Female,” such as the other nine teachers listed at Pinners Point Colored School, would have earned about $754.41 per year. The Annual Report for 1923 also lists “Per Pupil Costs.” For “White Elementary Schools” the per pupil cost was $43.88, while the per pupil cost for “Colored Elementary Schools” was $20.52. Thus, in Portsmouth in the 1920s, records relating school housing conditions, teacher salaries, and per pupil expenditures suggest that blacks were not given equal standing with whites in the educational and political systems of the city and state.

The Pinners Point Colored School and the Decline of Sugar Hill

While little is known specifically about the Pinners Point Colored School from the mid-1920s until the mid-1950s, one source suggests that in 1940 the school enrollment for Mount

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45 Hunt (1923), 40.
47 Hunt (1923), 8.
48 Ibid., 8.
49 Ibid., 6.
Hermon and Pinners Point was 525.\textsuperscript{50} According to Sanborn Maps, the population in Sugar Hill had begun to decline during the 1930s and 1940s because of railroad expansion. The construction of the Norfolk-Portsmouth Tunnel and Martin Luther King Freeway served as a catalyst for the decline of the neighborhood during the 1950s and 1960s. During this period of decline, the Pinners Point Colored School closed. An article for the \textit{Currents} newspaper stated that, “The school was built in 1922. Every September until 1952, a new group of first-graders joined older brothers and sisters to begin the education which would lead many of them to professional, well-paying jobs across the country.”\textsuperscript{51} After the school closed in 1952, it became an office for black school supervisors for a couple of years but was abandoned by 1955. Once abandoned, the building reverted to the city and was used by the industrial development office and by the Civilian Defense office as storage.\textsuperscript{52} According to deed records, however, the School Board officially sold the site and the building to the City of Portsmouth in 1977.

\textbf{Conclusion}

After sixty years of existence as a landmark in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill, the Pinners Point Colored School was demolished in June of 1982. The city deemed that the structure was “too isolated from most people for it to become useful as a community center” and that the building had become deteriorated.\textsuperscript{53} Contrary to this report regarding deterioration, however, one reporter suggested that, “the building did not give up easily to the demolition contractor’s heavy equipment. The walls were three bricks deep, obviously laid one-by-one into

\textsuperscript{50} Smith, 28.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 2.
mortar made to last by craftsmen of another era.\textsuperscript{54} Designed by one of the most prominent Virginia architects of the early twentieth century, the Pinners Point Colored School served its purpose as an elementary school well for thirty years. After its service as a school, the building continued to be used as office and storage space. Despite the fact that the building has been demolished and is no longer visible in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill, the Pinners Point Colored School still is able to tell the important story of the neighborhood of Sugar Hill and of African-American Education in Portsmouth. Indeed, the story of the Pinners Point Colored School is a call for proactive methods of preservation and is excellent proof of the wonderful ability that buildings have to tell a community’s story that may otherwise be totally erased from history.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 2.
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Deans, Lelia A. A Brief History of the Public Education in Portsmouth. 1964.


