

## **Noah Edward Clarke, Education Crusader**

In the late 1870's former enslaved farm laborer James Clarke left Virginia to work on the Trundle farm near the river in Poolesville. He met and married Leanna Dorsey, a laundress. Of their four children, only Noah Edward, born in 1878, survived beyond infancy.

Noah attended the one room Poolesville school with 60 students in grades one through seven and was at the top of his class. A visiting teacher convinced Noah's parents he should further his education.

In 1895, William Poole sold James four acres of land in the Freed Slave community of Jerusalem where he built a one-room log cabin. The next year with only his 7<sup>th</sup> grade education, Noah became the first Jerusalem resident to attend college. In 1896, Noah rode the "steam car" to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He had few clothes and no money, not even for his registration fee.

His studies were rigorous including the Classics, Philosophy, and Mathematics. In 1901, Noah received his Bachelor of Arts, becoming the first college graduate from Jerusalem. Noah chose to return home and apply his knowledge teaching at the Boyd's Negro School and then the Mt. Zion School in Barnesville.

After marrying Mary Estelle (Molly) Proctor in 1907, Noah left teaching to better support his family. He became a traveling insurance agent, often staying overnight in clients' homes. He observed families' needs, a skill that would later inform his lifelong work to advance educational opportunities for black children.

He was appointed chairman of the Defense Fund for Montgomery County Colored Population and raised the funds to build a two room Rosenwald School for Black students on Jerusalem Road in 1926. He served as a trustee for this school, until it closed in 1949.

Concurrently, Noah applied his educational advancement efforts at the County level. He organized the Trustees of the county's Black schools and served as their first chairman. He petitioned the Maryland State Legislature to include Black children in the state's "12- year public education policy". In 1927, another Rosenwald school, the Rockville Colored High School was constructed, the first for Black students in Montgomery County.

Noah was instrumental in securing transportation for these students. He bought an old bus and helped to secure them subsidized assistance. Enrollment grew and Noah petitioned again for a larger school. Lincoln High School in Rockville was built in 1935 and remained operational until 1950. His continuing efforts resulted in the 1951 construction of George Washington Carver High School, the first County-built high school for Black students and the last county segregated high school. Integration was on the horizon. Following the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board of Education*, Noah served in an advisory capacity to implement these changes. Poolesville schools integrated in 1956.

Noah Clarke and his entire family were members of Jerusalem Baptist Church, one of the oldest Black Baptist churches in Montgomery County. With his deep faith and belief in education, Noah influenced the lives of many in our area until he passed away in 1958.

(Note! Much of this article is based on the writings of Noah Clarke's son's wife Nina, who will be our next highlighted Poolesville Profile in History.)