

## **Nina Honemond Clarke, Educator and Historian**

The story of Nina Honemond Clarke began with her grandfather, Joseph. Originally from Africa, he came from England to Virginia as valet to his master, Ino Hunnicutt. He was called “Honey’s Man,” a name that evolved to Honemond. Joseph met Sallie, a runaway slave and had 14 children including Nina’s father Percival ‘James’ Honemond (born 1879).

Sarah Elizabeth Copeland (born 1876) became the first in her family to wed when she married James in 1897. They moved to her birthplace in the freed slave enclave of Jerusalem where her father, David Copeland taught James about farming. In 1910, the couple purchased and settled on a four-acre parcel, Resurvey on Hanover, a tract near Peach Tree Road. James built the original three-room log cabin (one down, and two up) adding three more rooms later.

One daughter, Nina Elizabeth Honemond, born in 1917, is our focus here. Like most of her 10 brothers and sisters, Nina attended the Old Union School built on her parents’ property with the aid of a Black benevolent society, the Grand United Order of the Oddfellows.

During the 1920’s and 30’s Nina attended several one or two room schools available to Black children in Montgomery County. At times, she reported that her only book was a tattered dictionary and that the school bus had to be manually pushed uphill by students. Despite these challenges, Nina graduated as the valedictorian of her class at the Rockville Colored High School in 1934 and went on to earn her teaching degree from Maryland’s Bowie State College in 1937.

Nina began teaching at Quince Orchard Elementary School and taught at several other segregated schools, including a 1942 stint during wartime gas rationing at the Sellman School near her family home on Peach Tree Road. She married Samuel Ellis Clarke, a World War II serviceman and the son of Noah Edward Clarke (our first profile in this series). They had a daughter, Camille Alexis in 1944.

Nina earned her bachelor's degree in education at Hampton Institute in Virginia and completed her Master of Education degree at Boston University in 1952. She continued teaching during the racial integration of Montgomery County schools and was a member of the Professional Advisory Commission on Integration like her father-in-law, Noah Clarke. All the students she taught in integrated schools were white. In 1962, she was chosen as the first Black Reading/Language Arts teaching specialist in Montgomery County Public Schools. Nina served as the Assistant Principal at Brookhaven Elementary and retired as the Principal of Aspen Hill Elementary after a 36-year teaching career.

In her retirement, Nina was active in dozens of organizations including the Montgomery County Historical Society. She wrote The History of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Churches in MD and DC; co-authored The History of Black Public Schools in Montgomery County with Lillian Brown; and co-authored her family's history Chips Off the Old Block, with her brother Maxwell. She also wrote about her father-in-law, Noah Clarke, and his crusade for Black education.

Nina won many civic and community awards for her contributions to education and preservation of Black history in Montgomery County. In later years, she regularly made public appearances sharing her experiences. She emphasized the positive outcomes of integration and reminded students of their significant role in our country's future. For her courage and conviction, along with her compassion, we salute Nina Honemond Clarke in her 103<sup>rd</sup> year of an exemplary life.

Look for our next installment in this series when we will highlight Noah's granddaughter and Nina's niece, Christine Clarke.