

A Brief History of the Schoolhouse in Oakton Community Park



Oakton Elementary School's roots in our community date back to the 1850s. The building located in the Oakton Community Park is the third elementary school building constructed since that time—overall there have been five.

The schoolhouse in the park is currently opened only once or twice a year for special occasions, but in future years, the Oakton community hopes to complete the installation of an additional ADA exit and otherwise take the steps necessary to make the schoolhouse accessible as a historical park attraction for educational purposes such as local school field trips, as well perhaps community gatherings, bringing its uses full circle back to those the community enjoyed in 1897.

The First Schoolhouse

In February 1848, William Speer, desiring to have a permanent school near him, deeded to the County trustee a half-acre of land and an “old field” schoolhouse at the intersection of Sutton Road (currently Blake Lane) and the road that became Chain Bridge Road. This school, of which no photos have been found, was called the Flint Hill school, as the name ‘Oakton’ came later. Classes were first held in this building in 1849-50. It purportedly burned down following the Civil War.



Location of 1st schoolhouse, established in 1850.



Flint Hill School's first teacher, Mary Holland Bell, and family.

The Second Schoolhouse

The Civil War devastated the Flint Hill Community. The farms and land were laid to waste and poverty was rampant. This delayed the building of a new school.

The free public school system was officially established in Virginia in 1870 as mandated by the 1869 Reconstruction Constitutions for Virginia. In 1874, Gilson R. Whaley transferred the deed to one acre of land, upon which a schoolhouse had recently been constructed for \$50, to the Trustees of the School Board of the Providence District for a Flint Hill Public School. The schoolhouse was located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Hunter Mill and what is now known as Chain Bridge Road. The school did not serve the Black community. Classes were held there until 1897, when the building was relocated to Jermantown Road to become a private residence.



This photograph, taken around 1875, shows the second schoolhouse built in 1873. It was originally called the Flint Hill school. The name Oakton purportedly came from the oak shown here, and became official when Flint Hill got a separate post office in 1883.

The Third Schoolhouse

In 1883, Flint Hill was renamed Oakton, so when the third area schoolhouse was built in 1897 a few yards east of its predecessor, the building became known as the Oakton Schoolhouse.

The addition of an annex in 1904 made it possible for the schoolhouse to become a graded school, with the small student body divided by age and grade level between two teachers. By 1905 the school had a capacity of 45 students. In 1907, a room was added to accommodate the growing number of students; as of 1909, the increase in the student body meant that some classes had to meet in the Church of the Brethren.

Throughout its period of significance (1897-1912), this building served as a school, a community center, and a religious meetinghouse. While this building served as a schoolhouse for only 15 years, it subsequently underwent 90 years of additions and alterations. After 1912, the structure was used as a private residence, a multifamily residence, a retail hardware store, and a very popular camping and outdoor activity supply store, Appalachian Outfitters.

In January 2007, this historic building—without its 20th century additions—was moved from the corner of Hunter Mill to this location through the efforts of a public/private partnership. The same public/private partnership funded its substantial rehabilitation and restoration, returning the schoolhouse to its 1897 appearance.



Map from 1897, when the 3rd school house was established.



Third Oakton Schoolhouse in 1907. An annex was appended to the main building in 1904.



The third Oakton schoolhouse, with extensions, as it looked when housing the outdoor outfitters store Appalachian Outfitters from 1972 to 2003. The building began operation as a store in 1934.

The Fourth Schoolhouse

Around 1914, a separate high school was built on the grounds of the current-day Oakton Elementary School for a cost of \$9,250. This school had six classrooms and an assembly space. Both elementary and high school students attended class in this building until 1935, when the high school students moved to the newly completed Fairfax High School. The 1914 building continued operation as an elementary school until January 1944, when it was destroyed by fire.



Photo of the fourth Oakton Schoolhouse, which existed from 1913 to 1944.

The Fifth Schoolhouse: Today's Oakton Elementary School

The fifth and current Oakton school, located on the same site as its predecessor at 3000 Chain Bridge Road, opened in September 1945.



Photo of today's Oakton Elementary School.

Credits

Primary source: "What's in a Name?" video, Oakton Elementary School website,
<https://oaktones.fcps.edu/about/history>

Supplemented by information from:

Evans, D'Anne, *The Story of Oakton, Virginia: 1758-1990* (second edition), The Optimist Club of Oakton, 1991.

"Oakton PTA Honors Mrs. Magarity, Hears History of Community," The Providence Journal, November 18, 1955

Robison, Debbie, "Oakton Schoolhouse," Northern Virginia History Notes,
http://novahistory.org/Oakton_Schoolhouse.htm, December 2004.

This history is a work in progress, built on the efforts of many others over the years. It is a goal of the Greater Oakton Community Association to continue to expand our community's knowledge of its past. For more citations and further information on the old schoolhouse in Oakton Community Park, as well as other information about the history of Oakton, please visit <https://www.greateroakton.com/oakton-history>.