

**Standing in the Schoolhouse Door:
The Desegregation of Public Schools in Cecil County,
Maryland, 1954-1965**

A Senior Thesis

By

Kyle M. Dixon

Submitted to

Dr. Kenneth Miller

December 2013

Dr. Kenneth Miller

Introduction

The desegregation of public schools in Cecil County did not happen immediately. It was a long, drawn-out battle that started in 1954, the same year as the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling when African-American families stationed at the Bainbridge United States Naval Training Center filed suit against the Cecil County Board of Education for refusing to allow their children to attend the all-white elementary school located on base. It finally came to an end in 1965 with the permanent closures of the George Washington Carver School and the Levi Coppin Elementary School.

Despite the fact that full-integration was achieved eleven-years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Cecil County was still the first of the nine counties on Maryland's Eastern Shore to do so. There were many social and political factors which played a role in this. The first chapter will be dedicated to analyzing the social and political factors in Cecil County starting right before the American Civil War and running through 1954. In addition, this chapter will also explore what was occurring at the federal and state levels of government pertaining to the rights and education of African Americans, and how they played a role in the fight for equality in Cecil County education during the mid-twentieth century. The second chapter of this study will discuss key events from the summer of 1954 which set into motion the events that would ultimately lead up to the lawsuit involving the families at Bainbridge and the Board of Education. Chapter three will ultimately discuss the lawsuit and the events following which led to full integration in 1965.

Chapter One: The Beginning, 1860-1954

Cecil County sits at the head of the Chesapeake Bay and is situated at the top of Maryland's Eastern Shore. What makes the county unique compared to the rest of the Eastern Shore is that it is the only Maryland County to sit on the edge of the Mason-Dixon Line. It is in this county a wedge between Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, where different cultural, legal and societal norms all converge. This is important to note because while the county is defined by a geographic boundary there is an invisible social boundary that exists within Cecil County. There is a huge difference between the social and political attitudes of citizens of Rising Sun and Conowingo on the county's northern end, and the attitude of citizens in Warwick and Cecilton on the county's southern end.

Evidence of this social divide can be found by simply examining data from the year 1860. According to data compiled by the Census Bureau, 4.5 percent of the population in the county were slaves. This number is relatively low compared to Cecil's two neighboring Maryland counties of Kent and Harford. Kent, which is a part of the Eastern Shore recorded 25.5 percent of the population as slaves. Harford County, which is a part of the western shore, reported 9.1 percent of the population as slaves. On the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line, New Castle County, Delaware reported slaves as being 0.5 percent of the population.¹ The county's neighbors to the north, Chester and Lancaster Counties in Pennsylvania did not have slaves as of 1860 because the state had abolished slavery generations earlier, with the passage of the Abolition Act by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1780.² This legislation was known as gradual emancipation.

Of Cecil County's 4.5 percent slaves, the Census Bureau reported only one slave living in the ninth election district, which is in the northern end and shares and straddles the Pennsylvania border.

¹ Hergesheimer, E., *Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population of the Southern States of the United States*. Map. Washington D.C, September 1861. Library of Congress Maps Division.

² "Gradual Abolition of Slavery, March 1, 1780." Black History in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Web. <<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community>

Conversely, the first election district, located in the southern end of the county along the Sassafrass River, reported 15% of the population as slaves.³

At the outbreak of the American Civil War, Maryland remained in the Union. However, the state's loyalties were divided. The loyalties of many Marylanders nested with the Union, while many other's loyalties went with the Confederate States of America. Cecil County was no exception, with many fighting for either the North or South. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery in the South. The only exceptions to emancipation were the border states of Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky. On November 1, 1864, article twenty-four of the Maryland State Constitution of 1864 officially abolished slavery within the state.⁴

With the abolition of slavery within Maryland came the need for the education of former slaves as well as freed African-Americans. In March of 1865, the United States Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment, which officially abolished slavery in all the states. Following the end of the American Civil War, Radical Republicans pushed for a reconstruction of the South. Reconstruction included the founding of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, better known as the Freedmen's Bureau. It was the duty of the Freedman's Bureau to aid the former slaves of the South. One of the agency's functions was to provide education, including the establishment of schools. In Cecil County, there is no doubt that some of the schools for African-Americans were in part funded by the Freedmen's Bureau. Rights for African-Americans were even more enhanced with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, which granted the right to vote and citizenship rights to males native-born or naturalized citizens. The Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 guaranteed the right to vote to all African-American males.⁵

At the same state constitutional convention in 1864 that abolished slavery in Maryland, a huge change would come about in the realm of education. The revised Constitution of Maryland stated that the

³ *1860 U.S Census*: United States Census Bureau

⁴ *"A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland"*. Annapolis, MD: Maryland State Archives, 2007. Print

⁵ *"A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland."* Annapolis, MD: Maryland State Archives, 2007. Print

State Board of Education would be formed with the responsibility of supervising and governing a public education system within the state. In addition, School Commissioners would be appointed in each county with the responsibility of governing education at the county level, and appointing a Superintendent of Schools who would report directly to the Board of School Commissioners. Out of this article, the contemporary public school system in the state was born.⁶

In addition to the establishment of the public education system, it was also established that the respective County Boards of School Commissioners would see to it that schools for African-American children between the ages of six and twenty would be established in each election district. The taxes for these schools would be collected from the African-American residents of the election districts.⁷

During the period between 1864 and 1867, a subscription school was established in Elkton, Cecil County's seat of government, devoted to the education of the African American children. Classes were held in the Providence A.M.E Church.⁸ This would make the Elkton Colored School the first school for African Americans in the county. However, there is some debate over which school was the first public school. A 1939 graduate school thesis written by Watson Phillips of the University of Maryland titled, "The History of Public Education in Cecil County Before 1876", claims that the school in Elkton was also the first public school for African Americans. Phillips states:

As a result of the freeing of the slaves and the establishment of a new State public school system, the county board began receiving petitions and requests for the founding and support of colored schools, the first request being for the payment of a ton of coal for a colored school in Elkton in 1867, which the request was granted. In April of that same year, the colored people of Elkton made application to the board for a public school in

⁶ Myers, William Starr. *"The Maryland Constitution of 1864"*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 1901. Print.

⁷ Myers, William Starr. *"The Maryland Constitution of 1864"*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 1901. Print.

⁸

Elkton. The board considered this application and found that according to law, taxes collected from colored people were to be used for colored schools. They found that in the two years 1865 to 1867, the colored population owning property in Cecil County had paid, through a State tax of fifteen cents and a county tax of twenty cents on the one hundred dollars of taxable property, the sum of \$296.55. It was ordered that the sum of \$200 be appropriated to complete the school in Elkton, then under construction, provided the building and lot were placed in trust of the board for its supervision and maintenance.⁹

Conversely, a 1972 issue of the Historical Society of Cecil County Bulletin states “The first public school for Negroes in Cecil County was opened at Rowlandsville on 21 October, 1865, with 60 pupils enrolled. The second opened at Chesapeake City on 1 January, 1866, with 34 pupils.”¹⁰

It is very likely that the Historical Society of Cecil County Bulletin is correct, because the Elkton Colored School may have been the first school for African-Americans in Cecil County, but it did not become part of the public school system until 1867 when the County Board of School Commissioners collected funding in taxes from the community to build a schoolhouse. The Rowlandsville and Chesapeake City Colored Schools were respectively the first public schools opened as public schools.

There is record in the April 20, 1867, edition of the *Cecil Whig* which confirms that members of the African-American community met and discussed the issue of building a schoolhouse. The article stated that members of the community met at Providence A.M.E Church with William J. Jones, an Elkton lawyer and African American Minister, Rev. John Brice of Baltimore.¹¹ Jones had been the Maryland District Attorney during President Andrew Johnson’s administration before being removed in 1866, for

⁹ Phillips, Watson, 1939. “*The History of Public Education in Cecil County, Maryland Before 1876*”. Master of Arts Thesis, University of Maryland

¹⁰ “*Briefs*.” Bulletin of the Historical Society of Cecil County November 19, 1970: 5. Print.

¹¹ “*Meeting of the Colored People in Elkton*.” *Cecil Whig* [Elkton, MD] 20 Apr. 1867. Print.

disagreeing with Johnson on the policy of Reconstruction.¹² Both Rev. Brice and Jones encouraged the community to build the school immediately and believed that the funds for building would be allotted by the board.¹³ As recorded by the board, funds were set aside out of taxes collected from African Americans between 1865 and 1867.¹⁴

While there are no definite figures provided in the 1860's as to the number of African-American children of school age, data located in the 1860 Census documents that there were a total of 1,466 African-American children between the ages of five and nineteen.¹⁵ Out of that number, it is hard to determine how many that would have attended the schools for African Americans. What is known is that there were sixty pupils enrolled at the Rowlandsville School when it opened in 1865, and thirty-four enrolled at the Chesapeake City School in 1866.¹⁶ Out of the three known schools by 1867, it is likely that there were somewhere between 120 to 150 African-American children attending school at this time.

Regardless of the lack of numbers available from the 1860's it is certain that the number of African-American children attending school increased. The 1870 Census reports that there were a total of 143 students. Of that number, seventy-two were male, seventy-one were female.¹⁷ 1890 Census data indicates that there were 738 African-American children enrolled in public school, and a total of fourteen African American teachers in Cecil County.¹⁸

In the 1910's and 1920's, New York philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, the co-owner of Sears and Roebuck, set up the Rosenwald Fund, a fund dedicated to financially supporting public schools and institutes of higher education for African Americans as well as museums and Jewish charities. During this

¹² "William James Jones." Cecil Democrat [Elkton, MD] 4 Feb. 1894. Print.

¹³ "Meeting of the Colored People in Elkton." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 20 Apr. 1867. Print.

¹⁴ Phillips, Watson, 1939. *The History of Public Education in Cecil County, Maryland Before 1876*. Master of Arts Thesis, University of Maryland

¹⁵ "Historical Census Browser." University of Virginia Library. Web. <<http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>>.

¹⁶ "Briefs." Bulletin of the Historical Society of Cecil County November 19, 1970: 5. Print.

¹⁷ "Historical Census Browser." University of Virginia Library. Web. <<http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>>.

¹⁸ "Historical Census Browser." University of Virginia Library. Web. <<http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>>.

period, many projects were funded throughout the South, including the construction of school buildings, and these schools became known as Rosenwald Schools.

An internet database compiled by Fisk University has attempted to identify Rosenwald Schools throughout the southern states. According to the database, one African-American school in Cecil County received funding: the Elkton Colored School. The new Elkton Colored School was built following the Five-Teacher Plan and was funded for the 1926-1927 fiscal year. It was built through \$500.00 collected from taxes in the black community, \$5,800.00 from the public, and \$1,300.00 dollars from the Rosenwald Fund. The new five-room school was constructed at the cost of \$7,600.00 and \$120.00 was given for the addition of a school library.¹⁹

On October 30, 1929, the stock market crashed, plunging the United States into the Great Depression. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President in 1933, attempts were made by the federal government to help employ the unemployed and projects were created to help improve American infrastructure and the country as a whole via New Deal legislation. Out of the New Deal, many new government agencies were formed, including the Work Progress Administration, better known as the W.P.A. As a result of the W.P.A, infrastructure was improved, and many schools, libraries, and public buildings were constructed as a result. One of these construction projects included a brand new Port Deposit Colored School. The previous school building which was likely constructed in the late-1860's or early-1870's, was located within the Port Deposit city limits on Granite Avenue.²⁰ This new school would sit just outside the city limits on a hill off of Liberty Grove Road. It was a three-room school plan that would accommodate first through eighth grades. The new school was finished by 1937.²¹

The Great Depression also witnessed a fight for equality of teacher's salaries amongst the African-American schoolteachers of Maryland. William Gibbs, an African-American elementary school

¹⁹ "Rosenwald Database." Rosenwald Database. Fisk University, Web.

<http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MTU1OQ

²⁰ "Port Deposit School." WPA Today. Web. <http://wpatoday.org/Port_Deposit_School

²¹ "Port Deposit School." WPA Today. Web. <http://wpatoday.org/Port_Deposit_School

principal in Montgomery County filed a suit with the Maryland Supreme Court concerning unequal pay. After the suit was filed -- with support for the teachers by Governor Harry Nice--the Montgomery County Board of Education back-peddled on their decision and other Maryland counties also agreed to equalize.²²

Shortly after the end of the Second-World-War, the federal government completed a survey of school buildings in 1948. According to the report, there were only four African-American Schools left in Cecil County: the George Washington Carver School (formerly Elkton Colored School), Port Deposit Colored School, Cecilton Colored School, and the Cedar Hill School. The Port Deposit, Cecilton, and Cedar Hill Schools served grades first through eighth. After the eighth grade, students at these schools had the option of taking a school bus ride of up to twenty miles to Elkton to the George Washington Carver High School. George Washington Carver served grades one through twelfth.²³

The federal government agents sent to investigate the status of public school buildings in Cecil County took note of the poor conditions of the county's African-American schools. The two-room Cecilton School and the one-room Cedar Hill School, which were left-over remnants of the Freedmen's Bureau era, were noted to be "obsolete and inadequate."²⁴ The report recommended that the Cedar Hill School should be "abandoned and pupils transported to Elkton."²⁵ The Cecilton School should be "...rehoused in a new 3-teacher building including three classrooms, multi-purpose room, central heat, modern toilets, and water system. This school should be erected on a good five acre site. The present location may be satisfactory if sufficient land can be acquired"²⁶ The George Washington Carver School was not immune from the strict eye of the federal government inspectors either. They noted:

²² Fairclough, Adam. *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. Print

²³ *School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland*. Washington D.C: United States Office of Education, 1948. Print.

²⁴ *School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland.* Washington D.C: United States Office of Education, 1948. Print.

²⁵ *School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland.* Washington D.C: United States Office of Education, 1948. Print.

²⁶ *School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland.* Washington D.C: United States Office of Education, 1948. Print.

The Negro School in Elkton presents a real problem, it almost means starting from ‘scratch.’ The old frame structure may be written off without any loss. It would be desirable to secure a new fifteen acre site and start over. However, the purchase of the community building seems to fix this as the location, provided additional land can be acquired. The temporary community building may be used to meet some of the Negro School housing needs, but it should be considered as only a partial and temporary solution to the problem.²⁷

The only African-American school building which met the approval of the inspectors was the Port Deposit School, which they said was “a good building, but one additional classroom should be added to relieve overcrowding and to provide for anticipated increase.”²⁸

Many of these needs were not met right away and would not be taken care of until after 1952. The only exception to this would be the construction of the new Cecilton Colored School in 1950. This school was also renamed Levi Coppin Elementary School in honor of the African American Episcopal Bishop who had been a slave in Cecil County.²⁹ The majority of these changes arrived after 1952, when Morris W. Rannels was appointed Superintendent of Cecil County Public Schools. Rannels, a veteran of WWII, had previously served as a mathematics teacher and Supervisor of Transportation with Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Rannels would later play a crucial role in the road that led to the desegregation of Cecil County schools, which will be discussed in the next chapter. During his tenure, Rannels was credited with the modernization of the school system, with the construction of many of the

²⁷ “*School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland.*” Washington D.C: United States Office of Education, 1948. Print.

²⁸ “*School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland*”. Washington D.C: United States Office of Education, 1948. Print.

²⁹Coppin, Levi Jenkins. “*Levi Jenkins Coppin, 1848-1923 Unwritten History.*” Philadelphia PA: A.M.E Book Concern, 1919. Print.

schools still in operation today, and with the closure of the remaining white and African-American one-room and two-room schoolhouses.³⁰

Shortly after Rannels' arrival, the Cedar Hill School was closed in the small African-American community five miles north of Elkton. Those students would now attend the George Washington Carver School. A brand new George Washington Carver School was constructed in the period between 1953 and 1954. The new school building was officially dedicated on January 16, 1955.³¹ The former school building, which was constructed under the Rosenwald Fund, was converted into a storage facility for the school system maintenance department.

At the national level, the period immediately after WWII saw the stage being set for a battle that would ultimately shake up the Jim Crow South. In Topeka, Kansas, a young African American girl by the name of Linda Brown, along with many other young residents of the Topeka African-American community had to walk several blocks to catch a bus to ride to the segregated elementary school, instead of being able to attend the all-white school that was closer to their homes. This was not unlike the conditions for many of the African-American students in Cecil County, who had to catch a five to ten mile bus ride to Levi Coppin or Port Deposit. To attend high school, they had to ride sometimes up to fifteen or twenty miles to Elkton. The Brown family filed suit against the Topeka Board of Education requesting that the long practice of racial segregation be overturned. The case ultimately made it to the Supreme Court with the support of NAACP Attorney and Maryland-native, Thurgood Marshall. The Supreme Court ultimately decided that the doctrine of separate but equal was unconstitutional, and that the long standing practices endorsed by the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* were no more.³²

³⁰ "Morris Wolfe Rannels." Howard County Times [Ellicott City, MD] 11 Oct. 2007. Print.

³¹ "Dedication of Carver School Planned for Sunday Afternoon." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 16 Jan. 1955. Print.

³² "Plessy v. Ferguson Supports Segregation - Exhibitions - myLOC.gov (Library of Congress)." myLOC.gov (Library of Congress). Library of Congress. <<http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/naacp/prelude/exhibitobjects>

Although the Supreme Court ruling proclaimed that the era of segregation was over and later rulings declared that integration should be achieved “at all deliberate speed”³³, the southern states dragged their feet in moving towards integration. This was the case in Maryland as with the other southern states, but, not the case state wide. The Baltimore City Public School System would be fully integrated by 1956, two years after the Supreme Court ruling. Prince George’s County and Baltimore County likewise integrated shortly after the ruling. Cecil County however would not make any attempt to immediately integrate. Instead, a series of events, including a lawsuit filed against the Cecil County Board of Education in 1954, would ultimately start the long-winding, eleven year trip towards racial equality in Cecil County Public Schools.

³³ *“With All Deliberate Speed (Reason): American Treasures of the Library of Congress.”* Library of Congress Home. Library of Congress. <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr007>

Chapter 2: The Build-Up, April 1954-August 1954

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Supreme Court decision on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* had a major impact on the long-practiced “separate but equal” society of the Jim Crow South. The importance of the ruling was by no means overlooked by the nation. The May 22, 1954, issue of the *Afro-American* featured a political cartoon illustrating a mushroom cloud with the words “decision on segregated schools’ emboldened within it.”³⁴

Maryland’s Attorney General and Cecil County resident Edward D.E. Rollins happened to be in the nation’s capital on the day of the decision attending a convention of the National Attorneys General Association, and decided to stop by the Supreme Court chambers to hear the decision while he was in town. Shortly afterwards Rollins issued this public statement:

The Attorney General of Maryland will accept the invitation of the Supreme Court to participate in the new discussions relative to the questions whether the court should order immediate desegregation in the public schools or the gradual adjustment of the complicated problems resulting from the decisions; or whether the court should make specific decrees or permit the problems to be worked out in the lower Federal courts.

I must wait for the published opinion and my office shall give intensive study to the questions and problems involved. I plan to consult promptly with our Governor and the State Board of Education.

³⁴ Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Rollins Hears Warren's Address on Segregation," May 20, 1954.

How and when desegregation takes place will be solved finally by the Supreme Court in supplemental rulings of the court in the late fall. Nothing can be accomplished until next year following the court's final ruling.³⁵

In a meeting during the last week of May, the Maryland State Board of Education unanimously voted to allow segregation to stand in the public schools and the state teacher's colleges. The state board made this decision following the advice of Attorney General Rollins. Rollins advised the board that the May 17th ruling was only an opinion of the Supreme Court because the nation's highest court decided to wait until all the attorney generals of the southern states submitted briefs to the court in October.³⁶

Morris W. Rannels, the Superintendent of Cecil County Public Schools declined to comment on the issue when approached by the *Cecil Democrat* and stated that "the Board of Education has not had a chance to discuss the decision since it was handed down" and mentioned that "there has been a good deal of thinking on the subject beforehand."³⁷ Rannels' statement on the issue appeared in the May 20, 1954, issue of the *Cecil Democrat*. Upon checking the Cecil County Board of Education minutes from the May and June meetings, there was no mention of discussion on the issue, if any.

While there was no mention of discussion of the issue in board meeting minutes, in late June of 1954, the Board of Education announced that it would be conducting a survey to gauge the opinions of the citizens of the county and to determine how the county schools would be impacted by desegregation. This survey would coincide with a committee organized that

³⁵ Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Rollins Hears Warren's Address on Segregation," May 20, 1954.

³⁶ Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Rollins Hears Warren's Address on Segregation," May 20, 1954.

³⁷ Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Rollins Hears Warren's Address on Segregation," May 20, 1954.

summer by Thomas Pullen, the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools to discuss the matter further. The state committee asked all the boards of education in all twenty-four school districts to conduct surveys with their rationale being that each county would be impacted differently due to the varying population of African Americans in each respective county.³⁸ Once these surveys were submitted to the Maryland Board of Education, they would pass this information onto Rollins who would use this data in his brief submitted to the Supreme Court.

Before discussing the issue of desegregation in Cecil County further, it is important to look at events one month prior to the landmark decision by the Supreme Court. While Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP legal team was fighting for equality in education in the hallowed halls of the nation's highest court, a battle was being waged between two communities over the construction of a new elementary school.

In 1942, the United States Navy opened the Bainbridge United States Naval Training Center on the grounds of the Jacob Tome Institute on the outskirts of Port Deposit. Following the post-war boom, the number of trainees being stationed at the base skyrocketed, and coupled with the baby boom, led to a need for housing for the families of troops there. Traditionally, children of the families of Bainbridge USNTC would attend the public schools in the seventh election district. The families of white personnel would attend Perryville Elementary School and Perryville Junior-Senior High School located five miles south of the base. The families of African-American personnel would attend Port Deposit Colored Elementary School, which was close to base, and then attend high school at George Washington Carver High School twenty miles away in Elkton.

³⁸ Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Cecil County to Share in Survey on Integration," June 24, 1954.

The families of white elementary school-aged children were not satisfied with having to send their sons and daughters to the school five miles from base, and by 1954, felt that the population of children on the base was adequate enough for an on-base elementary school facility to be constructed.³⁹ The African-American families of Bainbridge USNTC were arguing that if a new facility was constructed, their children should be allowed to attend the new facility, instead of the inadequate facilities at Port Deposit Colored Elementary School. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 which ordered the desegregation of the U.S armed forces⁴⁰. Subsequently, in 1952, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Secretary of Defense, Charles Wilson, issued an order known as Wilson's Order, which ordered the integration of school facilities on military bases.⁴¹ The African-American community on the base would use these two orders handed down by a President and Secretary of Defense to justify the equal right of attending the same school facilities.

The Cecil County Board of Education felt that it was best to continue the practice of busing white children on base to a school in Perryville. Therefore, the board decided to fund the construction of a new twelve-room elementary school facility which would serve the Perryville and Bainbridge USNTC communities. Superintendent Rannels requested a grant from the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to fund the construction of the super-school facility. The federal government granted the board of education \$339,550 for this project.⁴²

³⁹ Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Board Allocates Eight Room School to Bainbridge, Six Rooms to Perryville Site," April 8, 1954.

⁴⁰ Executive Order 9981, Harry S. Truman, July 26, 1948.

⁴¹ Beilakowski, Alexander. Ethnic and Racial Minorities in the U.S. Military: An Encyclopedia. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013.

⁴² Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Federal Funds Reserved for New Elementary School," March 4, 1954.

This decision by the board of education greatly unsettled members on the Bainbridge USNTC community. One man in particular who was outraged by this decision was the base's commander, Captain Clifford A. Fines. Out of anger, Captain Fines published the following statement in the *Perryville News* on April 8, 1954:

Over two years ago when plans were first started to build Wherry Housing at Bainbridge, it was realized that an elementary school coming under the Cecil County school system would be required. It is a well-established fundamental of school operation that schools must be placed where and only where children are to attend them.

It is, however, well known that too frequently politics and the greedy personal desires of powerful minorities enter into school systems to provide private benefits to those individuals at the expense of the school children involved. That evil force is now working on the Cecil County Board of Education.⁴³

The following evening, a meeting of the board of education was held to discuss the meetings. These school board meeting tended not to bring a large crowd. However, a Cecil Whig report about the meeting later stated that the meeting room in the county courthouse was filled to capacity.⁴⁴ The *Perryville News* reported that the meeting went on for four hours as members of the Bainbridge USNTC and Perryville communities made arguments for why the school should be built in their respective locations. The heated discussions between the two rival communities resulted with Cecil County Board of Education President, Everett J. Connellee

⁴³ Perryville News (Perryville, MD), "Perryville Citizens and Bainbridge Personnel at Odds Over Use of Federal School Construction Funds," April 8, 1954.

⁴⁴ Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Bainbridge, Perryville Both to Get Schools; 'Tentative' Decision Made Tuesday Night," April 8, 1954.

deciding to construct two separate elementary school facilities for Perryville and Bainbridge. The Bainbridge facility would be an eight-room school, while the new Perryville facility would be six-rooms, located on land behind Perryville Junior-Senior High School.⁴⁵ Rannels also promised that both projects would be constructed simultaneously to ensure that both communities received equal facilities and that no favoritism was shown between one over the other.

While the decision made by Connellee left both parties satisfied, Captain Clifford Fines was by no means off the hook. His published tirade about the “greedy personal desires of powerful minorities” soon made its way to navy headquarters and to the desk of Rear Admiral I.N. Kiland, who ordered Fines to issue an apology statement. The statement released May 6, 1954 read:

Recently in connection with the hearing in regard to additional school facilities for this localized area, I had the occasion to appeal to the people of this vicinity to support a site for the school adjacent to Wherry Housing of the Naval Training Center, Bainbridge. This matter is one of such importance to us at this center that, as center commander, my appeal made through the medium of newspapers was expressed in very forceful language.

If the statements which I have made have given offense to anyone, I most sincerely regret it. In retrospect, the use of the words ‘greedy’ and ‘evil’ was unfortunate and I desire to retract those words from my published statement. It was not my intention to charge individuals or civic groups with wrong doing. I

⁴⁵ Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Board Allocates Eight Room School to Bainbridge, Six Rooms to Perryville Site," April 8, 1954.

am sure that most of you with whom I have worked during the past two years know of my high regard for the community and its citizens and of my endeavor to promote harmony and cooperation between the Navy and the citizenry of this area.⁴⁶

Rear Admiral Kiland also issued a statement which mostly reflected what was already mentioned by Captain Fines. Shortly after the release the statements from the Captain and the Rear Admiral, Fines was removed as commander of the training center, cited for being in violation of Eisenhower administration policy.⁴⁷ Fines was shortly replaced.

During the summer of 1954, Cecil County Public Schools worked to start enrolling students in the brand new Bainbridge Elementary School. Although the facility would not be finished for another two years, plans were made to house the school in a temporary facility on base. Things seemed to be moving forward for this new institute of learning to open on time for the 1954-1955 school year in September. Over two-hundred students were enrolled and Mildred K. Balling, a teacher at Rising Sun High School, was appointed principal of Bainbridge.⁴⁸ However, while things seemed to be moving forward, tensions still existed between the African-American families and the school board.

The Cecil County Board of Education meeting minutes show very little discussion on the issue of blacks and the right to attend the newly established school other than Superintendent Rannels mentioning in his reports that he had phone discussions with the base commander related to the progress of the school.⁴⁹ While the institutional record lacks evidence of

⁴⁶ Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Navy Commanders Issue Statements on Schools," May 6, 1954.

⁴⁷ Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Navy Commanders Issue Statements on Schools," May 6, 1954.

⁴⁸ Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Mrs. Mildred K. Balling Named Head of New Bainbridge Center School," August 19, 1954.

⁴⁹ Cecil County Board of Education, Board Meeting Minutes, May 9, 1954

discussion of the issue, the media shows evidence that there was tension. On August 26, the black culture publication, *Jet Magazine*, ran the following brief:

Ban Jim Crow Schools at Md. Naval Base

Officials at Bainbridge, Md. naval base turned down a request of Maryland school heads to establish Jim Crow school facilities on the base on the grounds such a move violated President Eisenhower's non-discrimination order. At present, children of personnel attend Jim Crow off-the-base schools operated by the state. Maryland officials, contending their schools were crowded, asked for permission to open a base school for whites and one for the 11 Negro children.⁵⁰

During a routine meeting of the Board of Education on August 10, 1954, the meeting minutes state:

The Board of Education was notified that they received a telephone call from the Center Commander of the Bainbridge Training Center to the effect that facilities for the housing of children could not be made to the Board of Education without a lease containing a non-segregated clause. The Board realizing the critical need for housing of youth in the vicinity and recognizing that all youngsters attending the facilities would be living on property owned by the Federal Government agreed to operate an elementary school on a non-segregated basis. Superintendent was authorized to make this decision known to the Commander and complete plans for execution of the lease.⁵¹

⁵⁰ "Ban Jim Crow Schools at MD Naval Base." *Jet magazine*, August 26, 1954.

⁵¹ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting, August 10, 1954

As summer slowly faded and school administrators hectically prepared for a new academic year, there was no resolution to the heated arguments that swirled around the issue of equal education. Maryland's chief law enforcement officer, the Attorney General, who happened to be a Cecil Countian, was encouraging school and government officials to take a wait-and-see approach to the Supreme Court decision. In Cecil County, other dynamics were shaping up and would result in the county becoming the first on the Eastern shore to deal with this landmark decision.

Chapter 3: The Lawsuit and Desegregation, September 1954-1965

On September 9, 1954, students throughout Cecil County headed back to school for the 1954-1955 school year. Due to the baby boom, the county was experiencing a record enrollment of 7,600 students. As a result, schools were filled to capacity on the first day and temporary facilities were opened in communities throughout the county. The former Howard Street School, a facility which was built immediately following the Civil War, was rushed back into temporary use to house the overflow from Elkton Elementary. Classes for students at Rising Sun Elementary and Rising Sun High School were housed in St. Jane's United Methodist Church. In Conowingo, a brand-new state of the art elementary school was under construction, with plans to open the next school year.⁵² There was only one school in Cecil County which did not welcome students on that Thursday following Labor Day -- Bainbridge Elementary School.

Over the summer, school and base officials struggled in the battle over integration. The Cecil County Board of Education was determined to not allow African American children to walk through the doors of that facility, using the rationale that since the United States Supreme Court had not made an official ruling and that Maryland Attorney General Rollins urged school systems and state/local government officials to wait for the court's official decision.⁵³ The institutional record remains quiet about discussion over this issue except for the August 10th Board of Education meeting minutes:

The Board of Education was notified that they received a telephone call for the Center Commander of the Bainbridge Naval Training Center to the effect that

⁵² "Cecil County Schools Opening Today. Record Enrollment Estimated 7600." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 9 Sept. 1954. Print.

⁵³ "School Opens Everywhere, But At Bainbridge." Cecil Democrat [Elkton, MD] 9 Sept. 1954. Print.

facilities for the housing of children could not be given to the Board of Education without a lease containing a non-segregation clause. The Board realizing the critical need for housing of youth in the vicinity and recognizing that all youngsters attending the facilities would be living on property owned by the Federal Government agreed to operate an elementary school on a non-segregated basis. Superintendent was authorized to make this decision known to the Commander and complete plans for the execution of a lease.⁵⁴

If the institutional record is correct, then the reason why Bainbridge Elementary School did not open on time stands in complete contradiction to why there was a delay. School did not open for elementary-aged children living on the base because construction was brought to a halt by the Federal Government until school officials agreed to open the school on an integrated basis. Superintendent Morris Rannels stated to a local newspaper that “School will be operated on the same basis as last year until a final official decision is reached in the issue.”⁵⁵ School and military base officials scrambled to find temporary housing for students in another building in the vicinity.

With haste speed a temporary home was prepared for Bainbridge Elementary School and the school opened its doors on September 13th. It was on that day that seven African-American children were denied entry into the school. According to reports, the students attempted to enter the school only to be met by Superintendent Rannels and Principal Balling at the entrance. They told them they were not allowed to enter the school and that they needed to attend Port Deposit Colored Elementary School.⁵⁶ Immediately after the incident, families of the on-base children

⁵⁴ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, August 10, 1954.

⁵⁵ "School Opens Everywhere, But At Bainbridge." Cecil Democrat [Elkton, MD] 9 Sept. 1954. Print.

⁵⁶ "Fight is Hinted on Segregation." Baltimore Sun 17 Sept. 1954: 23. Print.

got in touch with the NAACP. Tucker Dearing, an attorney with the NAACP, was assigned to the case and the organization made it known that it was their intention to sue the Cecil County Board of Education.

A story related to the issue appeared in the September 17th edition of the *Baltimore Sun* with the headline “Fight is hinted on Segregation.” Dearing told the *Baltimore Sun* that “the situation is ripe for the courts.” He also mentioned that the students had a right to attend the school because it is on federal government property.⁵⁷ The two main local newspapers, the *Cecil Democrat* and the *Cecil Whig* remained quiet on the issue for the time being, except for an article in the September 16th issue which discussed the September 15th deadline set by Attorney General Rollins for the county school boards to submit their reports. This article does not appear to be related to the Bainbridge incident.⁵⁸

Where the local papers lacked information, the *Baltimore Sun* stayed on top of the story. In their September 22nd edition, the *Sun* managed to get in contact with Everett Connelee, the President of the Cecil County Board of Education and Tucker Dearing. Connelee announced that there would not be a special session of the board to discuss the impending lawsuit. However, he did instruct the board’s lawyer, Doris Scott, to write a letter in response to Dearing’s impending lawsuit stating the board would not take action until they received word from the Supreme Court and Attorney General Rollins. He went on to state that the board would be more than happy to grant a special hearing for him in front of them to discuss the matter.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Fight is Hinted on Segregation." *Baltimore Sun* 17 Sept. 1954: 23. Print.

⁵⁸ "School Integration Program Awaits Supreme Court Decree." *Cecil Whig* [Elkton] 16 Sept. 1954. Print.

⁵⁹ "Integration Talk Delayed." *Baltimore Sun* 22 Sept. 1954: 19. Print.

Tucker Dearing stated that court action was being planned not only to help African American children at the Bainbridge Naval Training Center, but children all over the county. He also pointed out the inconsistency of the Cecil County Board of Education's actions, telling the *Baltimore Sun* about the board's promise to the Navy to desegregate the new elementary school only to deny the African American students entry and telling them to attend the inadequate facilities in Port Deposit. When asked by the paper who would be the defendant in the case, Dearing announced that it would be the Board of Education.⁶⁰

On defending the school district's actions to the *Cecil Whig* two days later, Rannels stated that "adherence to segregation is not one of local policy or one of local feeling. But one of law."⁶¹ He also went on to say that the course of action was taken upon advice of Doris Scott, who advised the board that segregation had to be a continued in order to be in compliance with Maryland laws and Attorney General Rollins advisement to wait for further action. At this time, Maryland's laws for the governance of public schools still required a segregated school for African-Americans in each election districts. It was basically the same law discussed in chapter one, only with a few minor changes. In addition, Rannels pointed out the other county boards of education were operating on a segregated basis as well and that one exception could not be made for one certain school in the county.⁶²

In November, Attorney General Rollins submitted his opinion to the United States Supreme Court. He was against the immediate integration of schools, and urged the Supreme Court to gradually integrate schools and that local school officials should have the power to

⁶⁰ "Integration Talk Delayed." *Baltimore Sun* 22 Sept. 1954: 19. Print.

⁶¹ "County Segregation Draws Objections." *Cecil Whig* [Elkton, MD] 23 Sept. 1954: 0. Print.

⁶² "County Segregation Draws Objections." *Cecil Whig* [Elkton] 23 Sept. 1954. Print.

implement their own schedules for the desegregation process.⁶³ The following is an excerpt from Rollins' opinion:

Under no circumstances should little children of any race be used as guinea pigs in experiments to support or destroy anyone's social theories. The purpose of an educational system is to educate, and there can be no sound reason in an educational system like that of Maryland to operate so as to arbitrarily create integration any more than to create segregation.⁶⁴

With the New Year came the lawsuit filed January 4, 1955 by five mothers of African American children at the base, with backing from the NAACP. Their suit cited three bodies, the Cecil County Board of Education, Superintendent Rannels, Bainbridge United States Naval Training Center Commander, Hamilton Howe, and Bainbridge Elementary School Principal, Mildred K. Balling, for denying "educational facilities without due processes of the law due to color and race."⁶⁵ The NAACP pointed out that the Cecil County Board of Education was in violation of the Executive Order signed by President Harry S. Truman in 1948 which declared the armed forces integrated. All parties cited in the case were ordered by Federal Judge Rozel C. Thompson to answer to the suit by January 24th.⁶⁶

For the period between January and April 1955, little documentation can be found as to action taken by the Cecil County Board of Education, or the other parties involved. If any action was taken, media outlets did not cover it. Once again, the institutional record falls silent during

⁶³ "Integration Brief Submitted By Attorney General Rollins." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 18 Nov. 1954. Print.

⁶⁴ "Integration Brief Submitted By Attorney General Rollins." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 18 Nov. 1954. Print.

⁶⁵ "Suit Follows School's Ban." Baltimore Sun 8 Jan. 1955: 9. Print.

⁶⁶ "Segregation at New Bainbridge School Results in Suit Against County Board." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 13 Jan. 1955: Print.

this period. The first mention of the case came at the April 12th Board of Education meeting where it states:

Mrs. Doris P. Scott, Attorney for the Board of Education reported to the board on the Status of the complaint filed on behalf of several children requesting entrance in the Bainbridge Elementary School. It was indicated that a hearing on the merit of the case will be delayed until August 15, 1955.⁶⁷

Data is uncertain, but at some point between April and June of 1955, the Board of Education decided not to build the school on base property, but instead build it on land nearby, away from federal government property. This was likely an attempt by the board to avoid the mandatory integration of schools that would have to occur if the school were to remain on the base.

On May 31st, the Supreme Court upheld their ruling on Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka during the previous year, and ordered the integration of schools. Maryland's new Attorney General, C. Ferdinand Sybert, of Howard County, supported the high court's decision and declared that the ban on segregation of schools applied to Maryland.⁶⁸

At the June monthly meeting of the Cecil County Board of Education, Jeanne Bruno, President of the Bainbridge Parent Teachers Association shared an open letter saying the organization favors "integration in Cecil County Public Schools as rapidly as possible, school by school. At that same meeting, Superintendent Rannels outlined a plan for Cecil County to start the process of desegregation during the fall term of the 1955-1956 school year."⁶⁹ Rannels

⁶⁷ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, April 6, 1955

⁶⁸ "Maryland's Attorney General Gives Desegregation Opinion." Cecil Whig [Elkton] 23 June 1955. Print

⁶⁹ "County to Delay on Integration." Cecil Democrat [Elkton, MD] 16 June 1955. Print.

announced that the board would integrate at a pace that would “recognize the realities of the situation and the rights of all individuals concerned” and that while “[immediate integration might] sound nice to some...it’s not nearly as easy as it might appear.” Rannels mentioned to a *Cecil Whig* reporter later that he did not want to break up the fine work being done at George Washington Carver School.⁷⁰

In late July, Superintendent Rannels told the *Baltimore Sun* that Cecil County commenced a “prompt and reasonable start” by guaranteeing the full integration of Bainbridge Elementary School. He also assured them that “Any entry into schools next year will not be based on race.” In addition, he announced to the press that the separate academic calendars for the African American and white schools would be eliminated. It was promised that the board would start reviewing applications for students who wished to transfer schools based on race. However, Peyton Patterson, Everett Connelee’s successor to the presidency of the school board warned that the board’s final decision on applicants for transfers would be “controlled by available school facilities, available transportation, and other local and geographic conditions pertinent to the transition from segregation to integration.”⁷¹

That summer, the Cecil County Classroom Teachers Association announced that it would open membership to their African American colleagues.⁷² The 1955-1956 school was turning out to be the start of a new beginning for Cecil County Public Schools where race relations were concerned. Not only would the county become home to the first racially integrated public school on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, but it would also abolish the long-time practice of segregated

⁷⁰ "County to Delay on Integration." *Cecil Democrat* [Elkton, MD] 16 June 1955. Print.

⁷¹ "School Integration Program Awaits Supreme Court Decree." *Cecil Whig* [Elkton, MD] 16 Sept. 1954. Print.

⁷² "School Integration Program Awaits Supreme Court Decree." *Cecil Whig* [Elkton, MD] 16 Sept. 1954. Print

academic calendars and allow the admittance of African American educators into the teachers union.

While these accommodations were made, the court case did not disappear. As mentioned earlier, a request was made by Tucker Dearing and granted for a special hearing in front of the school board scheduled for August 15, 1955. If this August 15th hearing was held, there is no record of it. If any applications for transfers were brought up in front of the school board, there is no mention of it in the minutes either. However, at the October 4th school board meeting, the following statement appeared in the minutes: “The Board of Education authorized the Attorney to take steps in closing out the segregation case involving to the Board of Education as well as to participate one-half in the costs involved which would amount to \$22.30.”⁷³ This request was followed up four months later at the February 14, 1956 meeting of the Board of Education which stated: “A letter was read from Mrs. Doris P. Scott indicating that the segregation case of the Board of Education was dismissed as of December, 1955.”

While this might have marked the end of this lawsuit for the Cecil County Board of Education, it did not mark an end to the battle for integration of public schools in the county. It would be another ten years before all of the county schools would be fully integrated. At the September 11, 1956 Board of Education meeting, the board approved Morris Rannels’ request that a deadline of August 1, 1957 be set for African American students to request transfer to closer schools.⁷⁴ On August 6, 1957, five students made history for the Cecil County Public Schools. The board approved the transfers of Diane Elizabeth Hobday and Janie Mae Myers from George Washington Carver High School, to Perryville High School; Robert Thomas and

⁷³ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, October 4, 1955

⁷⁴ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, September 11, 1955

David Tipton Hobday from Port Deposit Colored Elementary School to Bainbridge Elementary; and Marie Dante Sewell from George Washington Carver Elementary School to Chesapeake City Elementary School. These are the first documented transfers in optional integration.⁷⁵

In June 1960, another student would make history. Bernard Purdie, of Elkton, would graduate from Elkton High School that year and become the first African American to graduate from an all-white high school.⁷⁶ Purdie has recounted his experience in interviews and speaking engagements. He was encouraged to apply to attend Elkton High School by his teachers, only to meet resistance from George Washington Carver High School's Principal, Charles Caldwell. However, Purdie was allowed to attend after all of his teachers provided positive recommendations in addition to Elkton High School's Guidance Counselor, Ada Rebecca Smith.⁷⁷ After graduating, Purdie moved to New York City, where he began a career as a musician and now claims to be the world's most recorded drummer.⁷⁸

In June of 1960, Morris Rannels resigned as Superintendent of Cecil County Public Schools to accept a position as Supervisor of Transportation for the Maryland State Department of Education.⁷⁹ He was replaced by Robert Gibson, Principal of Rockville High School in Montgomery County, Maryland. For Gibson, accepting the position was a homecoming, for he was a native of Cecil County, growing up in North East.⁸⁰ The process of integration would be continued and completed during Gibson's term.

⁷⁵ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, August 6, 1957

⁷⁶ "The Antler". Elkton High School. 1960

⁷⁷ Bernard Purdie, "Journey Stories: Bernard Purdie." (Talk, Elkton, MD. July 16, 2012)

⁷⁸ "Bernard "Pretty" Purdie - The World's Most Recorded Drummer." Bernard "Pretty" Purdie - The World's Most Recorded Drummer. <<http://www.bernardpurdie.com/>>.

⁷⁹ "M. Rannels Will Leave Cecil Post." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 30 June 1960. Print.

⁸⁰ "Montgomery County, Md Principal to Head Cecil Schools." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 30 August 1960. Print.

From 1956 to 1964, Cecil County would operate under a plan of optional integration. However, the beginning of the end for this plan could be noted two years earlier. On May 8, 1962, the school system's Supervisor of Pupil Personnel, Edwin H. Barnes, presented to the Board of Education a plan for redistricting of Elkton's schools. Students living on Booth, Milburn, Collins, Bethel, and Clinton Streets would attend the George Washington Carver School, regardless of their race. Exceptions would be made to this rule if students were enrolled in special education, or if they were a secondary level student who desired to take a course at Elkton Junior High School or Elkton High School that was not available at George Washington Carver. Elementary students living on Bell's Lane and High Street were given the option of either attending Elkton Elementary or George Washington Carver. This plan received unanimous approval by the board.⁸¹ Statistics as to the number of white students impacted by this change are unavailable. Optional integration continued throughout the remainder of the county.

With the graduation of George Washington Carver High School's Class of 1964, the high school at George Washington Carver School was no more. At this time, all African American high school students in Cecil County attended their home high schools. This was also the final graduation for Principal Charles Caldwell, who had been the leading educator at the school and a prominent figure in the county's African American community since 1929. Caldwell retired with the closure of the high school. Mr. Caldwell would be recognized for his dedication by being named the 1965 Elkton Citizen of the Year.⁸² Caldwell passed away in 1970.⁸³

⁸¹ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, May 8, 1962.

⁸² "C.W. Caldwell Honored as Citizen of the Year." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 1 Aug. 1965. Print.

⁸³

At the July 14, 1964 Board of Education meeting, the following statement appears in the minutes:

Mr. Samuel Dixon, Supervisor of Transportation, appeared before the board and discussed the status of Port Deposit Elementary School for the 1964-1965 school year. After discussion with the Board, Mr. Gibson recommended that the Port Deposit Elementary School be closed and the two teachers be assigned to Bainbridge Elementary School. The children will be placed in schools according to their residence under the new boundary lines as approved by the Board of Education. Mr. Lynch moved, seconded by Mrs. Yerkes and this recommendation was unanimously approved by the board.⁸⁴

The final act which led to Cecil County Public Schools' full racial integration was noted at the May 11, 1965 Board of Education meeting with the following statement:

Mr. Gibson read a statement, to be signed by the President and Secretary-Treasurer of the Cecil County Board of Education, and mailed to Dr. Sensenbaugh, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, stating that the Cecil County Board of Education, as a governing body of the Cecil County Public School System, directs the preparation of a plan by June 15, 1965, to offer to the United States Office of Education to meet the General Statement Policy of Title 6 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with reference to the desegregation of elementary and secondary schools. The Board unanimously agreed to have Mr. Dennison,

⁸⁴ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, May 11, 1965

President, and Mr. Gibson, Secretary-Treasurer, sign this statement to be delivered to Dr. Sensenbaugh.⁸⁵

The following resolution was also passed by board at the meeting: “Effective June 30, 1965, Coppin Elementary School, located in Cecilton, Maryland and Carver Elementary School, located in Elkton, Maryland, will be closed. Students currently attending these two schools will be reassigned to the integrated school located in the area in which they reside.”⁸⁶ The public schools of Cecil County were fully integrated.

⁸⁵ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, May 11, 1965

⁸⁶ Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, May 11, 1965

Conclusion

On May 30, 1979, *Cecil Whig* Managing Editor, Neil Thomas, published an article with the title of “Integration in County Went Peacefully.” The article recounts the incident with the Bainbridge Elementary School lawsuit and discusses how it was the starting point for a smooth desegregation of Cecil County Public Schools.⁸⁷ While the article does not go on to recount the story of optional integration and the ultimate result of racial desegregation in 1965, it is accurate in its headline about the fact that integration went smoothly in Cecil County compared to other places.

The neighboring county to the south, Kent County, would not fully integrate until 1967.⁸⁸ Kent County took a similar path as their neighbor to the north, by using a plan of optional integration. The way the plan was implemented invited a backlash from the community as well as from civil rights leaders.⁸⁹ Four years later, the county’s Board of Education voted to close the three high schools and consolidate into one comprehensive high school for the county, which was an attempt to make everything equal for all citizens of the county, however, many felt uneasy about this decision.⁹⁰ Kent County was not only a community where distinct boundaries between whites and African Americans existed, but there were also strong social boundaries between communities as well. Bringing together groups of people who were segregated from each other—and in the case of communities—considered rivals and forcing them to all get along and attend the same school was the result of backlash and tension.

⁸⁷ Thomas, Neil. "Integration in County Went Peacefully." *Cecil Whig* [Elkton, MD] 30 May 1979. Print.

⁸⁸"KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND." Kent County, Maryland.
<<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/36loc/ke/chron/html/kechron.html>>.

⁸⁹ Maryland State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. “Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties.” February 1966. Print

⁹⁰ Historical Society of Kent County. “Schools of Kent County Exhibit.”

Queen Anne's County was the next school system to achieve integration during the 1966-1967 school year. All of the county's high schools were consolidated into one and the Kennard School, which was the only school for African American students at that point, was closed.⁹¹ Throughout the late-1960's and even the early-1970's, other counties on the Eastern Shore struggled with the issue and resulted in backlash from members of their communities. As late as 1977, government agencies were releasing reports about the progress of school integration in Dorchester County.⁹² Across the Susquehanna River from Cecil County, Harford County was beginning the fight towards integration about the time the Bainbridge Elementary School lawsuit was being settled. On November 27, 1955, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that Tucker Dearing was tackling a lawsuit involving the Harford County Board of Education and the unequal treatment of African American students and the denial of their entry into all-white schools.⁹³

With all of the examples mentioned in neighboring counties above, it is amazing to note how quickly Cecil County acted and implemented desegregation. This is particularly fascinating in a county which has a reputation for racial tensions, politically conservative ideology, and Ku-Klux-Klan activity. There were two major factors which impacted the county's reaction to integration: pressure from the federal government and influence from non-locals who were relocated to the county due to Bainbridge USNTC. It is reasonable to imply that without these dynamics, Cecil County would have followed a path similar to neighboring counties and the region.

⁹¹ Thompson, Shauna . "LWV: Desegregation 57 Years Later." *The Record Observer* [Centreville, MD] 7 Mar. 2012. Print.

⁹²School desegregation in Dorchester County, Maryland. Washington/D. C.: Gov. Print. Off., 1977. Print.

⁹³ "Suit Asking Integration to be Filed: N.A.A.C.P Maps Action Against Harford School Heads." *Baltimore Sun* 27 Nov. 1955: 40. Print.

Since Cecil County had a major military base, it was affected immediately by national policies. Where racial segregation was the norm locally, the base and military were operating on a fully-integrated basis due to the policy enacted by President Harry Truman with his Executive Order, and the Eisenhower administration policies which reinforced the previous administration's actions to end racial discrimination in the military and educational facilities located on military bases. The local reactions show the tendency of officials to resist integration. It is obvious through the actions of the Cecil County Board of Education that they were determined not to integrate Bainbridge Elementary School. At the state level, Attorney General Edward Rollins, a Cecil Countian, encouraged school boards and superintendents to withhold action on the Supreme Court decision until a final verdict was given. It was not until the succeeding Attorney General took office that school officials were encouraged by state authorities to act on the Supreme Court ruling.

Because these two dynamics came together as a result of this situation—federal military policies and local norms—some sort of settlement had to be reached. At first the political leadership of the school board was resistant to integration. They instructed professional and legal staff to resist in many ways. As time went on and they encountered mounting pressures which would involve facing the Eisenhower Administration, Department of the Navy, the NAACP, the press, and the five families involved in the lawsuit. Although the institutional record remains mostly silent and vague on the situation, we know that the Cecil County Board of Education decided to integrate one school, Bainbridge Elementary, and reluctantly begin the process of opening all county schools to African American students in the optional integration plan.

While schools in Cecil County achieved racial integration by 1965, this was by no means the end to the struggle for equality in local schools. In 1971, Irene Nutter, a local African American educator, testified against Cecil County Public Schools in front of the Maryland State Board of Education claiming racial discrimination. Mrs. Nutter had previously served as Principal of Port Deposit Colored Elementary School following the death of her predecessor in 1963. One year later when the school was closed, she was demoted to a classroom teacher and reassigned to Bainbridge Elementary School. Mrs. Nutter had applied for many administrative positions following her demotion, only to be denied. While the school system claimed lack of confidence in her abilities as an administrator, she claimed it was due to racism.⁹⁴ Dr. Delbert Jackson, another African American educator who served as Principal of Bohemia Manor High School from 1988 to 1997, was the target of a backlash from the community due to his race, and even received threats from local members of the Ku-Klux-Klan.⁹⁵ These could be the subjects for additional investigations by future scholars or something that I will take on someday to expand my knowledge beyond the scope of this paper.

In the thirty year period following the historic Supreme Court ruling of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka*, school districts and government officials throughout the United States struggled with the implementation of desegregation. This is just one example of how a county in Maryland handled the issue. Some school districts—such as Baltimore City—took immediate action. Other school districts—such as Dorchester County—attempted to hold off as long as possible. Cecil County's experience with integration was by no means exceptional, but

⁹⁴ "Cecil Teacher Charges Bias." Baltimore Sun 26 Mar. 1971: C26. Print.

this case study demonstrates how one county wedged along the Mason-Dixon Line implemented integration.

Works Cited

- Baltimore Sun, "Cecil Teacher Charges Bias." 26 Mar. 1971: C26. Print.
- Baltimore Sun, "Fight is Hinted on Segregation." 17 Sept. 1954: 23. Print.
- Baltimore Sun "Integration Talk Delayed." 22 Sept. 1954: 19. Print.
- Baltimore Sun, "Suit Asking Integration to be Filed: N.A.A.C.P Maps Action Against Harford School Heads." 27 Nov. 1955: 40. Print.
- Baltimore Sun "Suit Follows School's Ban." 8 Jan. 1955: 9. Print.
- Beilakowski, Alexander. Ethnic and Racial Minorities in the U.S. Military: An Encyclopedia. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013.
- Bulletin of the Historical Society of Cecil County, "*Briefs*." November 19, 1970: 5. Print
- Cecil County Board of Education, Board Meeting Minutes, May 9, 1954
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting, August 10, 1954
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, April 6, 1955
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, September 11, 1955
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, October 4, 1955
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, August 6, 1957
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, May 8, 1962.
- Cecil County Board of Education Meeting Minutes, May 11, 1965
- Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Board Allocates Eight Room School to Bainbridge, Six Rooms to Perryville Site," April 8, 1954.
- Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD) "County to Delay on Integration." 16 June 1955. Print.
- Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Federal Funds Reserved for New Elementary School," March 4, 1954.
- Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "Rollins Hears Warren's Address on Segregation," May 20, 1954.
- Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD) "School Opens Everywhere, But At Bainbridge." 9 Sept. 1954. Print.

Cecil Democrat (Elkton, MD), "William James Jones." 4 Feb. 1894. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Bainbridge, Perryville Both to Get Schools; 'Tentative' Decision Made Tuesday Night," April 8, 1954.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "C.W. Caldwell Honored as Citizen of the Year." 1 Aug. 1965. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Cecil County Schools Opening Today. Record Enrollment Estimated 7600." 9 Sept. 1954. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Cecil County to Share in Survey on Integration," June 24, 1954.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "County Segregation Draws Objections." 23 Sept. 1954. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Dedication of Carver School Planned for Sunday Afternoon." 16 Jan. 1955. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Integration Brief Submitted By Attorney General Rollins." 18 Nov. 1954. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Maryland's Attorney General Gives Desegregation Opinion." 23 June 1955. Print

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "M. Rannels Will Leave Cecil Post." 30 June 1960. Print

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Meeting of the Colored People in Elkton." 20 Apr. 1867. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Montgomery County, Md Principal to Head Cecil Schools." 30 August 1960. Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD), "Mrs. Mildred K. Balling Named Head of New Bainbridge Center School," August 19, 1954.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Navy Commanders Issue Statements on Schools," May 6, 1954.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "Segregation at New Bainbridge School Results in Suit Against County Board." 13 Jan. 1955: Print.

Cecil Whig (Elkton, MD) "School Integration Program Awaits Supreme Court Decree." 16 Sept. 1954. Print.

Coppin, Levi Jenkins. *"Levi Jenkins Coppin, 1848-1923 Unwritten History."* Philadelphia PA: A.M.E Book Concern, 1919. Print.

Elkton High School. "The Antler". 1960

Executive Order 9981, Harry S. Truman, July 26, 1948.

- Fairclough, Adam. "A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South". Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. Print
- Fisk University "*Rosenwald Database*." Rosenwald Database, Web.
<http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MTU1OQ
- Gov. Print. Off., School desegregation in Dorchester County, Maryland. Washington D. C.: 1977. Print.
- Hergesheimer, E., Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population of the Southern States of the United States. Map. Washington D.C, September 1861. Library of Congress Maps Division.
- Historical Society of Kent County. "Schools of Kent County Exhibit."
- Howard County Times (Ellicott City, MD) "Morris Wolfe Rannels." 11 Oct. 2007. Print.
- Jet Magazine, "Ban Jim Crow Schools at MD Naval Base." August 26, 1954.
- Library of Congress. "Plessy v. Ferguson Supports Segregation - Exhibitions - myLOC.gov (Library of Congress)." myLOC.gov (Library of Congress).
- Library of Congress, "With All Deliberate Speed (Reason): American Treasures of the Library of Congress." Library of Congress Home.. <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr007>
<<http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/naacp/prelude/exhibitobjects>
- Maryland State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. "Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties." February 1966. Print
- Maryland State Archives, "A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland". Annapolis, MD: 2007. Print
- Maryland State Archives, "KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND." Kent County, Maryland.
<<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/36loc/ke/chron/html/kechron.html>>.
- Myers, William Starr. "The Maryland Constitution of 1864". Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 1901. Print.
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission "Gradual Abolition of Slavery, March 1, 1780." Black History in Pennsylvania.. Web.
- Perryville News (Perryville, MD), "Perryville Citizens and Bainbridge Personnel at Odds Over Use of Federal School Construction Funds," April 8, 1954.
<<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community>

Phillips, Watson, 1939. "The History of Public Education in Cecil County, Maryland Before 1876". Master of Arts Thesis, University of Maryland

Purdie, Bernard, "Bernard "Pretty" Purdie - The World's Most Recorded Drummer." - The World's Most Recorded Drummer. <<http://www.bernardpurdie.com/>>.

Purdie, Bernard, "Journey Stories: Bernard Purdie." (Talk, Elkton, MD. July 16, 2012)

Thomas, Neil. "Integration in County Went Peacefully." Cecil Whig [Elkton, MD] 30 May 1979. Print

Thompson, Shauna . "LWV: Desegregation 57 Years Later." The Record Observer (Centreville, MD) 7 Mar. 2012. Print.

United States Census Bureau: *1860 U.S Census*

United States Office of Education, "School Building Survey of Cecil County, Maryland". Washington D.C: 1948. Print.

University of Virginia Library. "Historical Census Browser." Web.
<<http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>>.

WPA Today. "Port Deposit School." Web. <http://wpatoday.org/Port_Deposit_School