

Shady Grove School



“Shady Grove School was built around 1925 and was used by the surrounding African American community until the spring, 1954. The building was purchased by the Shady Grove Baptist Church and was dedicated as the Shady Grove Baptist Church Sunday School Building on June 9, 1957. It was also used for wedding receptions and church dining hall. In January 2006, Rev. Joseph A. Moore, pastor, and the members of the Shady Grove Baptist Church decided to restore the Shady Grove School. The Shady Grove School still has its original chalkboard. Several school desks that were used around the late 1920s or early 1930s have been donated.”

--from the announcement of Shady Grove School
Restoration Celebration held on Saturday, September 1,
2007

From the *Orange Review* Thursday, September 6, 2007 by Hannah Weaver:

“Members of Shady Grove Baptist Church and the Orange County Historical Society restored a small, plain structure to mark an important period for educators and students in American history and to commemorate the dedicated teachers and neighbors who rose above adversity for the sake of education.

Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, president of Orange County’s African-American Historical Society said the Shady Grove School is part of the county’s history.

‘It played a very important role in the education of African-Americans before integration. It’s so much a part of where we are today,’ Coleman explained.

Only a few decades ago, small children sat shoulder-to-shoulder with teenagers, huddled during winter around a wood-burning stove for warmth, in the one-room building that served as Kindergarten, elementary and middle school for the Shady Grove area’s African American community. These students, from a curriculum based not only on mathematics, reading and language, learned responsibility and respect.

‘At Shady Grove, most of the teachers were a part of the community--they knew their students’ families,’ Coleman said. Children, under the instruction of their own neighbors, learned ‘a combination of community and family spirit back then,’ Coleman said.

From the time it was constructed in 1925, until 1954, when Orange County Schools integrated, the Shady Grove School was the only place African American children from the Shady Grove neighborhood could go to learn the same lessons taught to their contemporaries of European descent at better-equipped school buildings. But despite the disparity of facilities, the students at Shady Grove School achieved academic excellence.

Dedicated teachers fought their own battles against segregation and discrimination to become respected educators, gained credentials and wisdom that they carried back to the Shady Grove neighborhood and its children.

‘Not only did they learn, they learned responsibility,’ Coleman said.

There was no custodial staff at Shady Grove, Coleman said. And no running water. It was the students and their parents who maintained the building, who cleaned it, chopped the firewood and kept the stove burning.

‘It’s a commentary on how African-Americans were educated’, Coleman said. ‘We need to go back and review.’

The Shady Grove School building served residents in other ways, too. At times, it was a reception hall for weddings and celebrations. In 1957, the building became part of the Shady Grove Baptist Church, and was used for Sunday school.

In January 2006, members of the Shady Grove Baptist Church began a campaign to restore the building.

'We're so delighted that the church bought the building. It's exciting for the community as a whole. It's a treasure to be able to look back on how children attended school,' Coleman said.

Donations of school desks--similar to those used at Shady Grove School in the late 1920s, and the facility's original chalkboard help recreate the school's original conditions. Visitors can tour the old school by appointment, Coleman said.

'Hopefully the church will turn it into a museum,' she added.

A restoration celebration and ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Sept. 1 [2007]. The ceremony, Coleman said, was an excellent opportunity for the public to learn more about the Shady Grove School and to offer support for ongoing restoration projects."



Former teacher, **Thelma A. Lane**, writes her name on the original chalkboard at the Shady Grove School Restoration Celebration.

Shady Grove Church History

From an *Orange County Review* article entitled “Shady Grove Baptist Church celebrates a 150-year ministry” by Morgan Edwards:

“Shady Grove Baptist Church recently passed its 150th anniversary in early May [2021]. However, the church’s current pastor, the Rev. Joseph Moore, said that all celebratory events have been put on hold because of the pandemic.

“According to a church history compiled and updated by Deaconess Sylvia Tyree, Deaconess Linda Lewis and Sisters Phyllis Reed and Phyllis Highland, Shady Grove was established in 1871 by members of North Pamunkey Church and Macedonia Christian Church. The founders were former slaves. This occurred roughly six years after the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments.

“In the early days, Shady Grove’s congregation held worship services under the shade of a black oak tree. They used bales of hay and straw as pews arranged in a semi-circle around the natural chancel.

“For the price of \$75, the church founders were able to purchase a plot of land from Thomas and Sallie Woolfork. While the church building was being constructed, worship services continued to be held in the bush harbor. Shady Grove’s ballooning membership provided the financial support for the project. By 1872, the church was completed, and the Rev. Coleman Gillum began leading the first services in the space. After some time, the church was torn down and replaced with a new building.

“The Rev. Edward White, the great, great, grandson of one of Shady Grove’s founders became the pastor of the church in 1995. He focused on church ministries and community outreach. Together with church leadership, Rev. White developed the theme or motto: ‘Shady Grove is a church where Everybody is Somebody and Jesus Christ is Lord....’ “¹

¹ Edwards, Morgan. “Shady Grove Baptist Church celebrates a 150-year ministry: Pandemic delays celebration services.” *Orange County Review*, May 20, 2021.