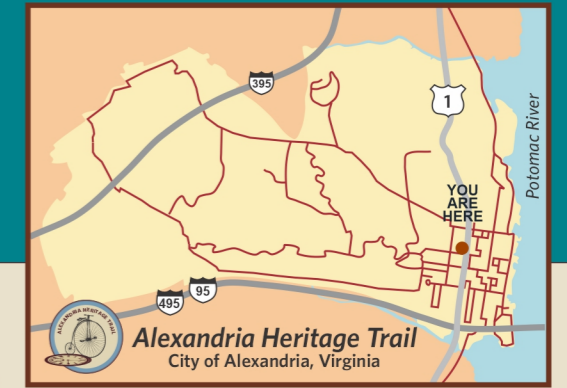


The Student-Athletes of Parker-Gray High School



Parker-Gray High School served Alexandria's African American students—first on Wythe Street and later on Madison Street—during the City's years of enforced school segregation. With little support from the City, the school's faculty and coaches created an environment for students where they could excel in academics and athletics.

Athletics at Parker-Gray High School

No funds were provided by the City or the state for athletics at Parker-Gray High School. For the school's student-athletes, "separate but equal" meant a makeshift gymnasium, no regulation football or baseball field, and no track. Despite the challenges they had to endure, their achievements bear witness that these young student-athletes maintained a deep sense of integrity and strength. They excelled far beyond the limitations imposed on them by segregation—academically, socially, and athletically.

Ferris Holland started the Parker-Gray football team in 1935. The first year of the football program, games were played on a simulated field that had no grass. The non-regulation field was a combination of cinders and plain dirt. Since the field was 25 yards short of 100 yards, teams had to back up 25 yards in order to score a touchdown. Louis R. Johnson took over as coach of boys' athletics in 1939. Over the next 20 years, he produced some of the best teams and athletes in Virginia, despite a continued lack of resources. There were no locker rooms. The school used the industrial arts shop as the dressing room for football and basketball games. There was no budget for athletic uniforms, so they were paid for by profits from food concessions. Despite the difficulties, student athletes excelled. Many of them became outstanding collegiate and professional athletes.

In 1946, the football team had to travel to Roanoke, Petersburg, and Charlottesville, Virginia, in an open bed truck. The truck had no roof, only a canvas cover on top like a cattle car, and filled with hay. The team used their football gear as pillows for a minimum of a two-to three-hour trip to each city. The team did not have the luxury of rest stops or places to eat because of segregation and lack of economic resources.

Despite inadequate facilities and resources, the 1946 Parker-Gray boys' basketball team became known as the "Dream Team" after they defeated a select All-Star team from Washington, D.C.'s inter-high league. The inter-high school league was considered one of the bastions of boys' basketball in the nation during that time. The Parker-Gray girls' basketball team also had success that year. They were narrowly defeated by Storer College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, by one point.

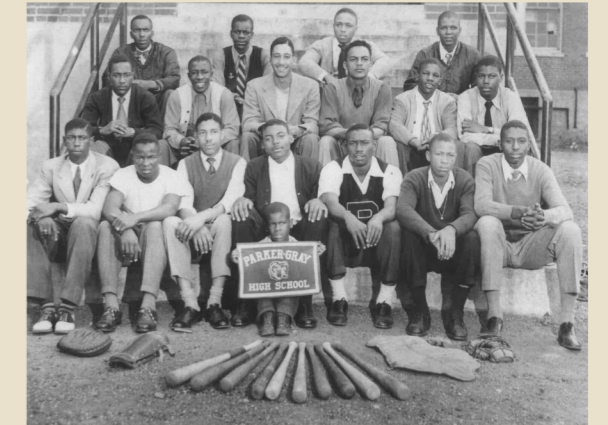
In 1949, Parker-Gray produced three black collegiate All-Americans: Earl Frances Lloyd (West Virginia State, Basketball), Oliver Ellis (West Virginia State, Football), and William "Red" Jackson (North Carolina A&T, Football).



Mr. Ferris Holland, top left, a Parker-Gray science teacher started Parker-Gray's football team. Mr. Wesley D. Elam, top right, was instrumental in gaining Parker-Gray High School educational accreditation. Photo 1937-1938
Courtesy Estate of Helen Day



Parker-Gray boys' basketball team, 1946.
Coach Louis Johnson is at left in tie and jacket.
Earl Lloyd is center behind basketball.
Courtesy Bernice Lee



Parker-Gray boys' baseball team, ca. 1947
Alexandria Black History Museum, Office of Historic Alexandria



Football team practice on makeshift field, mid -1940s
Alexandria Black History Museum,
Office of Historic Alexandria



Parker-Gray girls' basketball team, 1947-1948
Alexandria Black History Museum, Office of Historic Alexandria



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