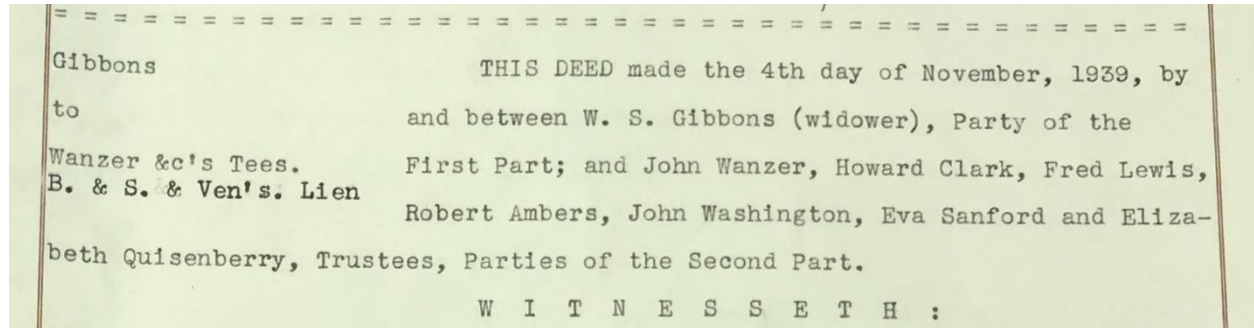


Elizabeth Johnson Quisenbury (1898-1998)

Elizabeth was born in Loudoun County to George and Nancy Johnson and raised by her grandparents, Hiram and Elizabeth Buchanan Valentine, in Gleedsville after her parents died. She married Allen Quisenbury in 1921. They started a family and lived in Washington, D.C., until Allen's death. Elizabeth and her children moved back to Loudoun County, and by 1940, they were living on North Street in Leesburg.¹

Her children attended the Union Street School, which had been built about 1884 as the first school for Black children in the county that had high school level grades.² As with most of the schools in Loudoun that Black students attended, conditions and materials were far below those of the White schools. Elizabeth became a champion for education and a "tireless fighter" for improving educational opportunities for Black children. (The Essence of a People, p. 48) She became active in the County-Wide League that was formed to advocate for better schools in Loudoun, particularly the construction of an accredited high school. She served as vice-president.³

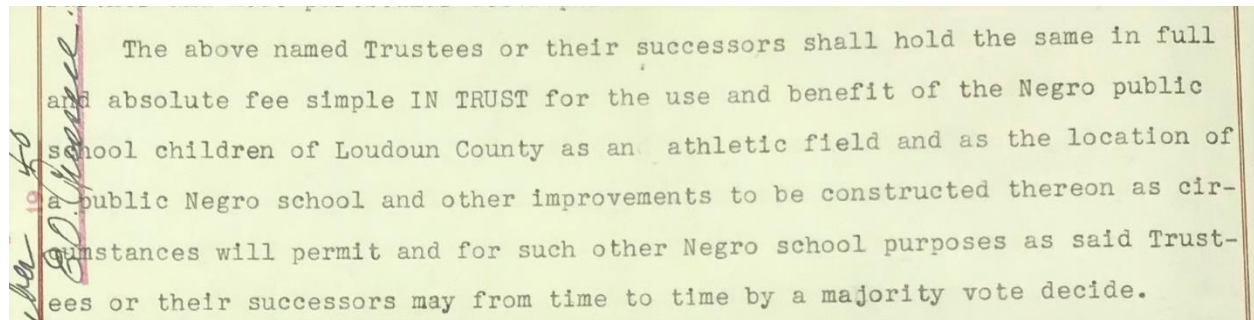
When the school board continued to resist making improvements, Elizabeth joined others in the Parent-Teacher Association to increase advocacy and prove their case to the board. They enlisted the aid of renowned lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston, with whom Elizabeth and others worked to build their case about inequities in the segregated school system. The school board eventually agreed to construct a new high school if the Black community bought the land. The League found land near Leesburg, raised money, and purchased the 8-acre property in 1939. Elizabeth was one of the trustees on the deed (shown below).⁴



Gibbons
to
Wanzer &c's Tees.
B. & S. & Ven's. Lien

THIS DEED made the 4th day of November, 1939, by
and between W. S. Gibbons (widower), Party of the
First Part; and John Wanzer, Howard Clark, Fred Lewis,
Robert Ambers, John Washington, Eva Sanford and Eliza-
beth Quisenberry, Trustees, Parties of the Second Part.

W I T N E S S E T H :



The above named Trustees or their successors shall hold the same in full
and absolute fee simple IN TRUST for the use and benefit of the Negro public
school children of Loudoun County as an athletic field and as the location of
a public Negro school and other improvements to be constructed thereon as cir-
cumstances will permit and for such other Negro school purposes as said Trust-
ees or their successors may from time to time by a majority vote decide.

Douglass High School opened in 1941 and was accredited a year later. It was the only high school for Black students in Loudoun County until schools were desegregated in 1968.⁵



Image courtesy of Wikipedia.org

Elizabeth was a charter member of the Loudoun branch of the NAACP and served as its first secretary. She was a member of Mt. Olive Methodist Church in Gleedsville. Elizabeth eventually moved back to Washington. She lived to be 100 years old and left a legacy of advocating for fairness and equality. Douglass High School at 408 East Market Street in Leesburg still stands as a physical representation of her commitment to education and community.

To learn more about Elizabeth Johnson Quisenbury and her contributions to the Loudoun community, see the *Essence of a People: Portraits of African Americans Who Made a Difference in Loudoun County, Virginia*, published by the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library.

¹ *Essence of a People: Portraits of African Americans Who Made a Difference in Loudoun County, Virginia*, p. 48.
1940 Federal Census for Loudoun County, Virginia, on Ancestry.com

² <https://edwinwashingtonproject.org/>

³ <https://edwinwashingtonproject.org/>. *Essence of a People*.

⁴ Loudoun County Deed Book 11F:227.

⁵ <https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/151802/Heritage-Commission-Report-Final?bidId=>