

A NEW CENTURY DAWNS

The turn of the twentieth century led to many changes. Lunenburg County had evolved into a different place with the arrival of the Virginian Railway. The schools became more standardized, better managed, and far more numerous. In 1900, a *Uniform Examination for Teachers' Certificates* was created at the state level for white and colored teachers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 1905, Claude August Swanson was elected to the governorship in Virginia. He expanded Montague's efforts in education and road building with the appropriation of state funds to match local contributions. This was revolutionary and thus, the passage of the Mann High School Act in 1906. By 1909, the state had 345 high schools. Some students elected to go on to high school, but there was no strict requirement to do so.

There were significant increases in teachers' salaries, length of school term, and per pupil expenditures under the aggressive administration of Joseph D. Eggleston, Jr. The state took control of the College of William and Mary and established three new normal or teacher education schools for women. School consolidation and school privy requirements were instituted as well.



Isham Trotter Wilkinson was born (circa 1884) on a farm between Kenbridge and South Hill known as "The Wilkinson Place." He, his parents, and five siblings attended Antioch Church south of Kenbridge, Virginia.

Wilkinson became the second superintendent of Lunenburg County Public Schools in 1906. At age twenty-two, he was youngest of the superintendents in Virginia at the time.

In spring 1908, Superintendent Wilkinson created "*Our Schools*" on behalf of the School Board. This publication contains a note from the superintendent to teachers and students, 37 letters from school children, a history of the rural schools, and a description of the conditions of schools. Student enrollment and daily average attendance was getting much larger. Lunenburg County had three frame school buildings at the time. All others were constructed of logs. There was a two-room school, four grade schools, and one high school. School officials developed plans to erect a high and grade school in the districts of Lochleven, Rehoboth and Pleasant Grove, and a joint school between the districts of Lewiston, Brown's Store and Columbian Grove. Wilkinson wrote, "*Our school system is recognized as being far behind those of surrounding counties, but meritorious work that is now being done by our energetic trustees warrants a bright future in the educational work of the county. We are glad to note the deep interest that many of the patrons are taking in the schools. The financial conditions will be greatly aided by the revenue from the Virginian Railway.*"

**LEDBETTER SCHOOL
1907**



(left to right) seated: Hardy Gaulding; Nannie Johns; Betha Powell; Lena Gaulding; Grady Hart; standing: Dudley Digger; Temmie Arvin; Armpie Fowlkes; Neblet Crymes; Simmie Arvin; Guy Bruce; Professor Paul S. Blandford, teacher. These students may have been members of the graduating class.

The *Virginia Daily Attendance Register and Monthly Grade Records* (1918-1925), and Virginia Department of Education *Survey of Public Plants* (1943-'44) archived by the Lunenburg County School Board list other small schools in operation. These schools include Asbury, Bethany, Camp, Cheatham, Cherry Hill, Cool Spring, Davis, Dillard's Siding, Dundas, Fletcher's Chapel, Fort Mitchell, Friendship, Gary, Gill Hill, Holbeth, Kenbridge High, Kenilworth, Lanes Mill, Lochleven High, Lone Oak, Love's Mill, Lunenburg Courthouse, Lunenburg Training, Macedonia, Marshalltown, Memorial, Mosses, Mount Bethel, Mount Level, Mount Olive, Mount Olivet, New Grove, Nonintervention, Nutbush, Oak Grove, Oral Oaks, Plantersville, Pleasant Grove, Pleasant Oak, Reedy, Rosebud, Roysdale, Rubermont, Russell, St. James, Traffic, Trinity, Union Central, Union Ridge, Unity, Varick, Victoria Grade, Victoria High, Wattsboro, Williams, West End, West Hill, Wilkes, and Woodrow.

Isham T. Wilkinson ended his tenure as school superintendent in the spring of 1919. However, he continued working with his friend, Thomas W. Ozlin. Together, they were co-owners and publishers of "*The Free State News*," the county's weekly newspaper. The Spoke and Handle Factory, renamed Railway Handle Corporation, was purchased by Wilkinson in the early 1920s and later sold to six long-time employees. He also served as mayor of Kenbridge for a while. Wilkinson became a member of the Virginia House of Delegates in 1934, remained for two terms until 1937, but declined a third term due to health reasons. In 1953, Isham T. Wilkinson was identified as a "Weaver of Yarns" by Hamilton Crockford, *Richmond Times-Dispatch* Staff Writer, because of Wilkinson's previous experiences as a school chief, weekly publisher, mayor, legislator, and a handle manufacturer.

Selected sources: *Our School*, South Hill Enterprise (1908); Virginia Daily Attendance Register and Monthly Grade Record (1918-1924); *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 21, 1953; *Kenbridge-Victoria Dispatch*, December 3, 1937; State Department of Education, *Survey of Public Plants*, Virginia State Planning Board (1943-1944); Kenbridge Chamber of Commerce, *Our Town*, October 1983; Gay W. Neale, *The Lunenburg Legacy*, Brunswick Publishing Company, Lawrenceville, Virginia (2005); Ronald L. Heinemann, John G. Kolp, Anthony S. Parent, Jr., and William G. Shade, *Old Dominion ~ New Commonwealth*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press (2007); Stephen S. Israel. *Kenbridge, The First Hundred Years 1908-2008* (2008); Isham T. Wilkinson photo courtesy of the Wilkinson Family; Ledbetter School photo courtesy of Amy McClure. NOTE: This review is based on available information and may not include all facts related to public education in Lunenburg County from 1870-1970.