



# The Eastman Legacy

## *Carrying the Light Forward*

# The Dedication

For many, Eastman was more than a place of learning. It was a symbol of pride, opportunity, connection, and hope. It represented the strength of a community that believed deeply in its children and in the power of education to transform lives. The halls of Eastman once carried the sounds of laughter, learning, celebration, and tradition — moments that continue to shape the memories of alumni, families, educators, and community members today.

Though the original school closed its doors years ago, the Eastman spirit never faded. Its legacy remained alive through stories shared across generations, through community pride, and through the unwavering belief that Eastman's impact would never be forgotten.

Today, Eastman Leadership Academy stands as the continuation of that story. This new chapter honors the rich history of Eastman while creating new opportunities for future generations of students to learn, lead, and thrive.

This booklet serves as a tribute to the journey of Eastman — celebrating its history, recognizing its impact, and honoring the people who helped build its legacy. As you turn these pages, we invite you to reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and look ahead with excitement for the future of Eastman. The legacy lives on, and the story continues to shine brightly for generations to come.





# The Roots of Eastman

Eastman's roots stretch back to 1894, when the first school — known as Johnson Hill School — opened its doors. It was a small, 18×20-foot wooden structure with tiny windows and a single room. The building sat on a rural branch road, surrounded by farmland and forest.

Inside, children sat at wooden desks, warmed by a pot-belly stove, learning from teachers who believed education was liberation.

The school's first principal, Miss Frankie B. Myrick, became the cornerstone of Eastman's early identity. Her leadership was marked by grit, faith, and a relentless belief in the children of Halifax County.

When asked how she built the school, she famously replied: "We simply worked it up from the ground and prayed it down from the skies."

Her work would soon attract the attention of a man whose name would change the school forever.





# A Community Investment

At a time when educational opportunities for Black children were limited, local families, leaders, and supporters came together with a shared belief that the children of Eastman deserved access to quality education.

Nearby landowner, George Eastman helped make that vision possible by donating land, funding, and equipment for the school. Philanthropist Julius Rosenwald also contributed funding, while members of the Black community raised money of their own to support the effort. Public funds and additional community contributions completed the project, reflecting a collective commitment to investing in the lives and futures of local children.

A Rosenwald construction card from the period documents:

Total cost: \$15,180

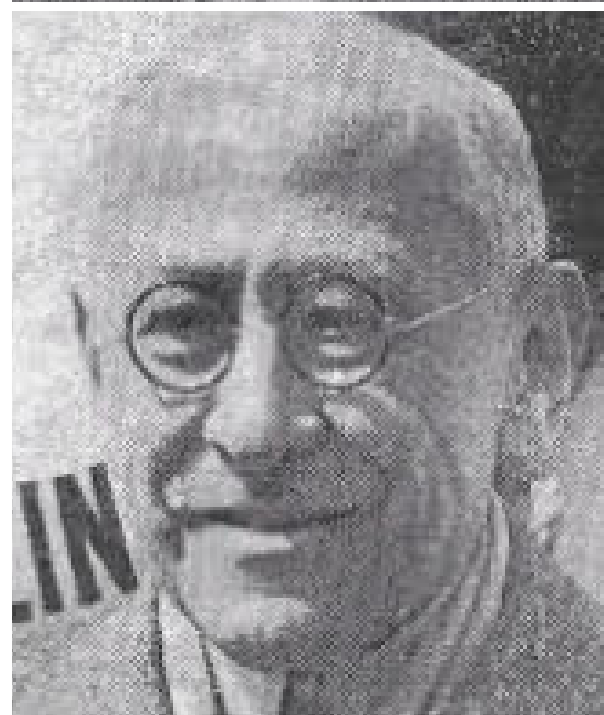
Black community: \$1,400

White community: \$6,500

Public funds: \$6,180

Rosenwald Fund: \$1,100

Completed in 1920, Eastman School became a symbol of progress and community pride. Between 1923 and 1924, two additional classrooms were added, making Eastman a six-teacher school and one of the largest rural Black schools in the region.

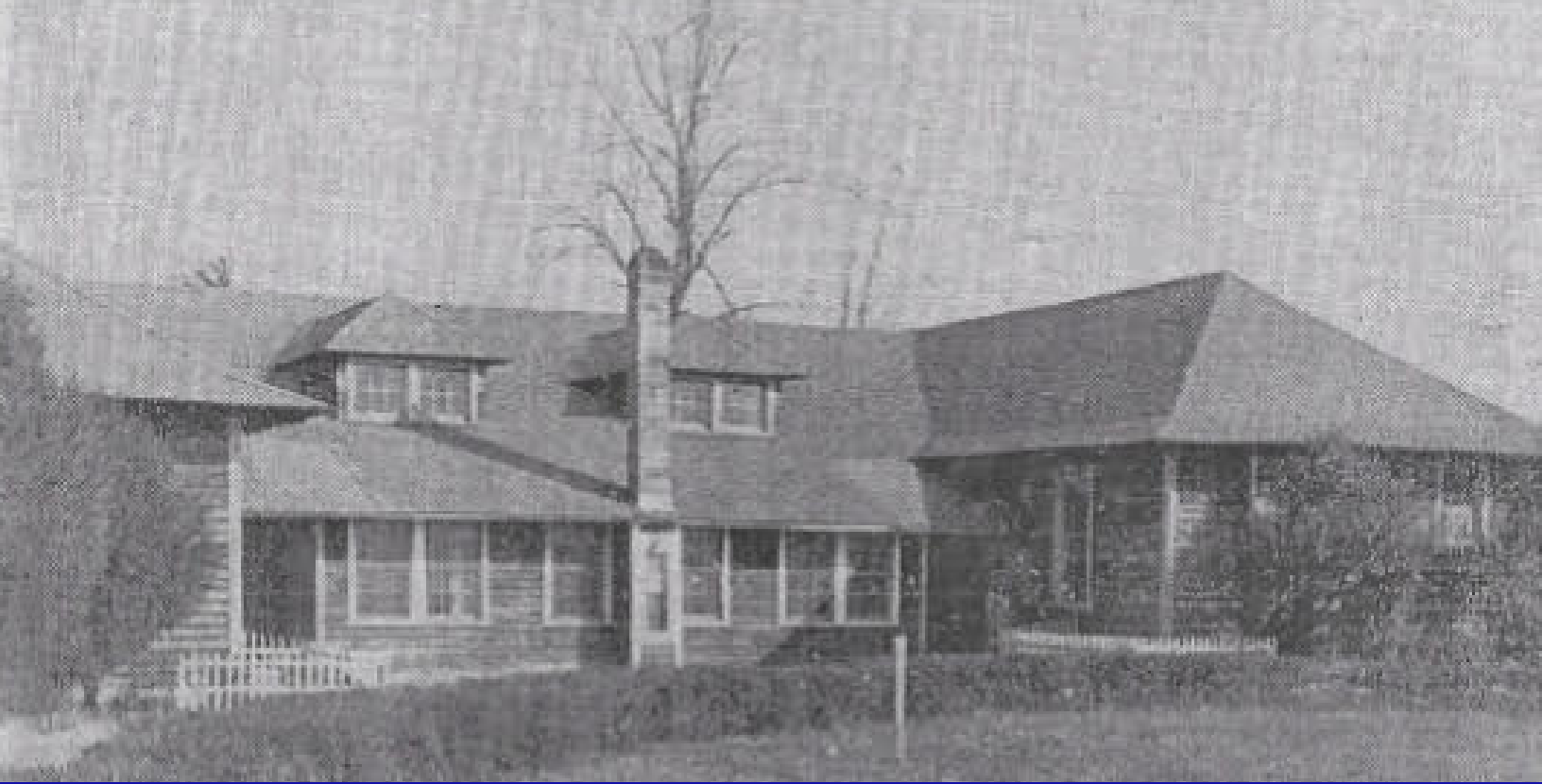


|                                                        |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Eastman (Medoc) school                                 | N.C.  |
| Halifax County                                         | (114) |
| Three-teacher + 1 = 4 teacher + 2 Rooms = 6 teacher    |       |
| Built C. U. B. 1923-24 (60-C) 1925-26 (15-E)           | (115) |
| Total cost \$11,280 + 1500 = 12,780 + 2,400 = \$15,180 |       |
| Negroes \$500 + 0 = 500 + 900 = \$1,400                | (116) |
| Whites 6,200 + 0 = 6,200 + 300 = 6,500                 | (454) |
| Public 4,080 + 1,300 = 5,380 + 800 = 6,180             |       |
| Rosenwald 500 + 200 = 700 + 400 = 1,100                |       |

FISK UNIVERSITY







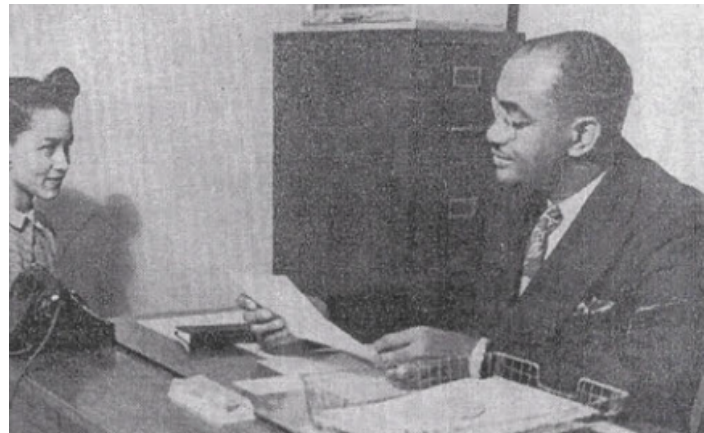
# Building the Legacy

In 1934, W.A. Holmes became principal of Eastman School, ushering in what many remember as the school's golden era. Under his visionary leadership, Eastman experienced remarkable growth and transformation.

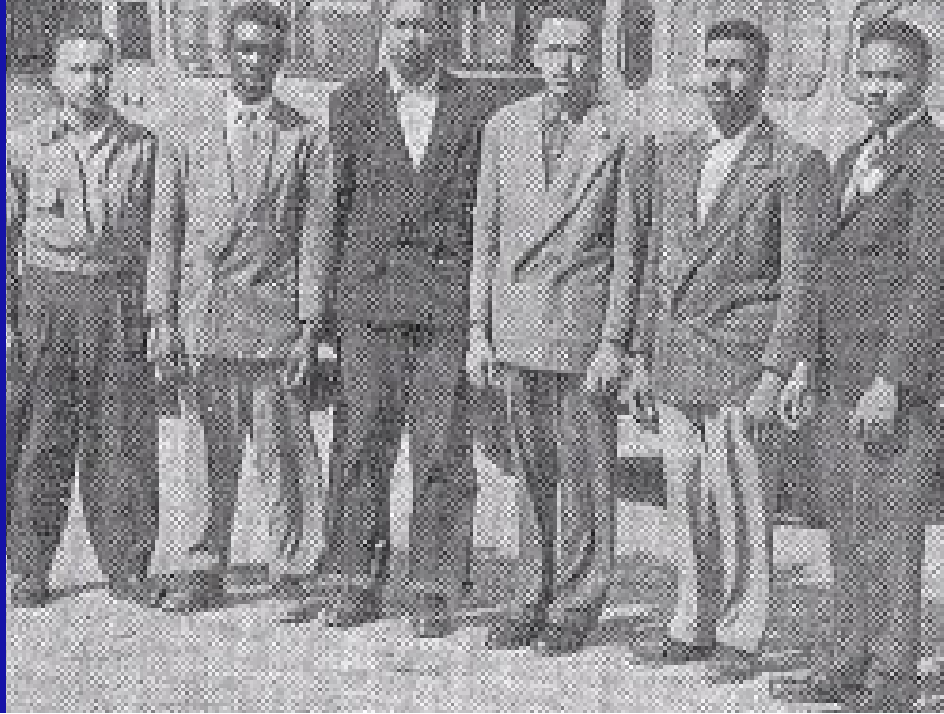
With the generous donation of two acres of land from Mr. and Mrs. George B. Dryden, the campus continued to expand both in size and in purpose. The grounds were beautified with flowers, hedges, and shrubs, creating an environment that reflected the pride the community held for its school.

Holmes believed deeply in discipline, order, and creating opportunities for students to thrive. During his leadership, a bus shed was transformed into a classroom to meet growing educational needs, a 14-room teachers' home was built to support educators, and new facilities including a vocational agriculture building, beauty parlor, barber shop, and cannery were added.

Enrollment grew to nearly 600 students, while the faculty expanded to 14 teachers.



# The Spirit of Eastman



Eastman became a model of rural Black education in North Carolina, shaping generations of students through leadership, culture, pride, and community.

As one reflection shared, “When students leave school they carry with them the things that have impressed them most. The lasting impressions, however, are not always as teachers would have — an algebra problem or a quotation from English Literature. Many, many times, it is the peppy singing of the school song after a basketball game, or a remark written in the column of the school paper.”

Those moments of connection, school spirit, and belonging became lasting memories that defined the Eastman experience.

Beginning in 1936, student government helped cultivate leadership among students, producing young leaders who would help shape the culture and traditions of the school for decades to come. Athletics, clubs, performances, assemblies, school publications, and community events all contributed to a vibrant student experience rooted in pride and purpose.

In the early 1980s, Eastman underwent consolidation. On June 30, 2009, the historic Eastman School closed its doors.



Charles Belfield 36 - 37    Jesse Francis 37 - 39    David Johnson 39 - 40    Edward Frances 40 - 41



Horace Copeland 41 - 42    Matthew Silver 42 - 43    Orlin Boone 43 - 44    Charles Lynch 44 - 45



Bernard Brinkley 45 - 47    Charles Arrington 47 - 48    Jeanette Arrington 48 - 49



# A Letter from the Superintendent



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**THE PROGRESS OF THE  
WORLD DEPENDS ALMOST  
ENTIRELY UPON EDUCATION  
- GEORGE EASTMAN**

## *The Legacy Lives On*

For many in this community, Eastman was more than a school. It was a source of pride. It was a gathering place. It was where lifelong friendships were formed, lessons were learned, and dreams began. Generations of students walked its halls carrying with them the hopes of their families and a belief that education could open doors to a brighter future.

As Superintendent of Halifax County Schools, I have often spoken about our identity as the Lighthouse District. A lighthouse stands firm through storms, darkness, and uncertainty. Its purpose is to guide, inspire, and illuminate the path ahead. When I think about Eastman, I see that same spirit. Even during the years when the building stood silent, the light of Eastman continued to shine through its alumni, former staff, families, and community members who carried its legacy forward and refused to let its story be forgotten.

This new school stands as a testament to perseverance, partnership, and the enduring power of community. It is proof that when a community refuses to let its light fade, remarkable things can happen.

Dr. Eric Cunningham  
Superintendent

# The Return of Eastman



With a vision rooted in honoring community history while creating new opportunities for students, Dr. Eric Cunningham helped reignite a dream that many believed had been lost — the return of Eastman. What once existed only in the hearts and memories of alumni and community members slowly began to take shape as a renewed vision for the future.

In 2016, conversations surrounding the rebuilding of Eastman began to emerge. By 2018, that vision was refined during a Board Retreat, laying the groundwork.

In 2019, Moseley Architects was selected, and community design workshops began, ensuring that the voices, memories, and hopes of the Eastman community helped shape the future of the school.

That same year, Dr. Cunningham addressed alumni during the Eastman Reunion, reaffirming the district's commitment to preserving the Eastman legacy while building something new for future generations.





# EASTMAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

## The Journey

### FUNDING



Momentum continued to grow, and in 2022, Halifax County Schools achieved a major milestone by securing the Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant. Later that year, Representative Michael Wray formally presented the grant check, marking a transformative moment for the community and bringing the vision one step closer to reality.

### GROUND BREAKING



Before a new chapter could begin, a difficult but necessary step had to take place. The demolition of the former Eastman building marked the end of a physical structure that had served generations of students, families, and educators.



## DEMOLITION

## UNDERGROUND & FOUNDATION

## VERTICAL

## FINISHES

## LANDSCAPING



### DEMOLITION

As the walls came down, a renewed vision began to rise in their place, paving the way for a state-of-the-art school that would honor Eastman's rich history while preparing future generations for success. It was a bittersweet moment, but one filled with hope, symbolizing that the Eastman legacy was not ending—it was being rebuilt.



### UNDERGROUND & FOUNDATION

As the physical foundation took shape, so did an opportunity to inspire future generations. Through the Junior Contractors Program, fifth-grade students visited the site and participated in hands-on STEM activities that introduced them to the worlds of engineering and construction. Standing where their future school would soon rise, students witnessed firsthand how vision, planning, and hard work come together to create something lasting.



### VERTICAL

The completion of the vertical construction phase marked a powerful turning point in the journey of Eastman Leadership Academy. What had once existed as a vision on paper and a foundation beneath the ground now began to rise visibly before the community's eyes. This milestone was celebrated with a topping-out ceremony, where the final structural beam was signed by students and staff before being placed atop the building.



### FINISHES

The finishes phase transformed Eastman Leadership Academy from a construction site into a school. During this stage, interior walls, ceilings, flooring, lighting, cabinetry, fixtures, and final coats of paint were completed, bringing both function and character to the building. Classrooms were equipped with technology, furniture, and instructional resources, allowing learning spaces to take shape. With each finishing touch, the vision became reality.



### LANDSCAPING

The landscaping phase marked the final step in bringing Eastman Leadership Academy to life. Trees were planted, sod was laid, walkways were completed, and outdoor spaces were carefully designed. These final touches reflected the investment that went into every aspect of the project.



# To Eastman

## Solitude of Eastman

Over an open country road,  
I gazed at every tree.  
I could not help but think,  
What a swell world this could be,  
If every man could love a cloud,  
Could want a drop of rain,  
Could love a harvest and want  
to plant again;  
Could breathe fresh air and press  
his foot upon the ground,  
Grateful for this place to stand,  
And filled with love of such,  
Would want the same for every man.

In the cities the farmers came to town.  
Merchants bargained with them to sell,  
To relieve them of their gotten gains,  
And send them home once more,  
With little of their remains.  
I listened to them argue and smiled,  
As I heard them talk,  
And found again the country road and  
continued on my walk.  
The things they bought, the things  
they sold,  
Were not the greatest pleasures;  
Perishable things they would not last,  
The smallest of our treasures.

The sun sank low; I came to my nook  
of the woods.  
The birds had gone to sleep.  
A light in my window across the field,  
Guided me through the trees so deep.  
Underneath a sheltering sky,  
The world was bigger than you or I;  
I opened the door and went up to bed,  
With one hope that my joy would spread!



