

CHAPTER 1

Richmond, Its School System, and the Origins of Thomas Jefferson High School

Gazing at the imposing edifice of Thomas Jefferson High School on opening day, September 11, 1930, an observer might have understood why education sometimes is considered to be the secular religion of the United States. A block long, three stories high, crowned with a central pyramidal tower, and highlighted by a massive set of stone steps flanked on each side by bas relief pylons, the gleaming finished concrete building resembled an art deco temple. Eyes could not help being drawn up the external stairway and heavenward to the tower, flanked on either side by busts of Thomas Jefferson and containing a large clock. Even the clock seemed appropriate—the educational equivalent of the cross that capped many houses of worship. Instead of scripture, the left pylon contained the following Jeffersonian inscription: “To enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom.”¹ What better patron saint to invoke than Thomas Jefferson, the father of the University of Virginia and the individual who, more than half a century before Horace Mann’s initiatives in Massachusetts, called for a comprehensive system of public schools?

What kind of community would have commissioned and paid for such an impressive facility? What kind of community would have celebrated the opening of such an expensive school less than a year after Black Friday and the collapse of the U.S. stock market? What kind of community would have supported the placement of its second high school—a school ostensibly created to relieve severe overcrowding—at a bucolic site far removed from the areas of greatest population density?

The Tee-Jay story cannot be appreciated fully without some awareness of the city of Richmond and its school system. Only by

knowing the background of this proud southern city is it possible to understand the evolution of the high school that for over half a century symbolized Richmond's commitment to public education. The chapter opens with a brief overview of Richmond's early history. The next part begins with efforts after the Civil War to create a system of public education in Richmond and continues through the late 1920s, when construction of Tee-Jay was authorized. The conclusion covers Tee-Jay's first days, a time when pride in the new school helped offset, however briefly, the distressing onset of the Great Depression.

RICHMOND—A SENSE OF PLACE

The history of Richmond, Virginia, reflects a certain ambivalence, symbolized by its location at the fall line of the Piedmont plateau. The oldest part of the city lies east of the first series of rapids on the James River, the place beyond which commercial boat traffic in the early years was impossible. The newer part of the city lies west of the rapids, which once marked the gateway to the frontier and the end of the genteel colonial plantations scattered along the lower James. The river also bisects the city along its north-south axis. The seats of government, banking, and culture are located north of the James, while much of the city's industrial and commercial activity occupies the flatlands south of the river.

Richmond's ambivalence extends beyond geography to its very identity—or identities. A patrician realm of Anglophiles and magnificent estates, Richmond also is home to working-class residents with little use for foreign culture or aristocratic tastes. A city closely identified with the South's struggle to preserve slavery, Richmond boasts an old and powerful community of black middle-class residents. Richmond's black population mirrors the complexity of the city as a whole. The city's young black professionals in many ways have more in common with white Yuppies than with fourth- and fifth-generation black gentry. A city of enormous wealth, Richmond sometimes appears a bit shoddy and down-at-the-heels, like a proud but impoverished spinster. Some claim that the reason Richmond has so much money is that Richmonders do not like to spend it. Southern cities such as Charlotte and Atlanta have eclipsed Richmond in influence and growth. While recent urban development schemes such as Project I testify to Rich-

mond's commitment to the future, novelist Tom Robbins is guilty of only modest overstatement when he writes in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* that Richmond is "not a city at all but the world's largest Confederate museum." Cradle of the New South or last bastion of the Old South? The only answer for Richmond is "Yes!"

Richmond was founded in 1733 by William Byrd II and named for Richmond, England. Nine years later it was incorporated by the General Assembly, but the settlement's place in history was insecure until 1780, when it replaced Williamsburg as Virginia's capital. For the next eighty years, Richmond grew as a center of government, commerce, and manufacturing. By the 1850s the city had become, in local historian Virginius Dabney's words, "the industrial center of the South and the region's wealthiest city, based on per capita property valuation."² In fact, the claim was made that Richmond was "the wealthiest city of its size in America and perhaps the world."³ On the eve of the Civil War, approximately 38,000 people lived in the city—a figure that represented a 37 percent increase from 1850. Tobacco was the leading, but by no means the only, source of Richmond's wealth. Flour, coal, iron, and transportation contributed to the city's diverse and prosperous economy.

Richmond's formative years were not without problems, of course. In 1800, a plot by Gabriel Prosser, a slave from a Henrico County plantation, nearly led to the wholesale massacre of Richmond residents and the burning of the city. The abortive insurrection, betrayed by two slaves loyal to their master, dramatized the agonies of slavery and the inescapable insecurity that must characterize any society that relies on keeping humans in bondage. Nat Turner's Southampton County revolt in 1831 again filled white Richmonders with alarm, though the initial location of the uprising was more distant than Gabriel's Insurrection. Fears of slave revolts actually prompted Virginia's General Assembly during its 1831–32 session to debate the merits of repatriating blacks to Africa and abolishing slavery altogether.⁴ No substantive action, however, was taken by the legislators.

The Civil War brought Richmond increased fame and eventual destruction. On April 27, 1861, fifteen days after rebel cannons fired on Fort Sumter, the Virginia Secession Convention invited Jefferson Davis to move the capital of the Confederacy from Montgomery, Alabama, to Richmond. Given Virginia's

location and importance to the war effort and Richmond's strong economy, Davis accepted the offer. From that point virtually until the Civil War's end, Richmond served as the primary target for Union forces. Several campaigns to take the city were repulsed, but eventually Richmond was compelled to surrender. Before evacuating, Confederate troops torched the city's supply of tobacco, lest it fall into enemy hands. The fire spread to nearby warehouses, and together with other fires deliberately set by looters and escaped prisoners reduced much of the once prosperous downtown area to ashes.

In the aftermath of the war, Richmond, along with other southern cities, attracted large numbers of ex-slaves seeking employment and safety. Approximately 15,000 blacks flocked to Richmond, nearly doubling its black population.⁵ Unlike their counterparts elsewhere, however, Richmond's blacks dispersed throughout the central city. In the words of urbanologist Christopher Silver, "Although blacks concentrated most heavily in the Jackson Ward area, virtually the entire city possessed at least some black representation."⁶ Jackson Ward, located north of Broad Street, served as the commercial center of Richmond's black community. This neighborhood, in fact, was home to Maggie Walker, who founded one of the country's first black-owned and black-operated banks in 1903. Next to Durham, North Carolina, Richmond constituted the "most progressive Negro business center in the nation."⁷

Despite the growth of Richmond's black community, the overall percentage of blacks in the city actually declined as the twentieth century approached. By 1900 the nonwhite percentage declined to 38 from 44 percent two decades before.⁸ Richmond's diversified economy made the city a mecca for those in search of employment. As well-to-do residents of the city moved to outlying areas, the central city filled with working-class whites and blacks. Between 1906 and 1914, annexation efforts resulted in Richmond more than doubling its size and reclaiming many one-time residents who had sought refuge in the suburbs.

The pattern and process of Richmond's growth has been explained in terms of a combination of urban boosterism and the politics of race.⁹ Annexation, for example, was used not only to expand the tax base, but also to ensure a preponderance of white voters. Committed to efficiency in government and economic growth, Richmond's progressive elite did not support other

planks in the platform of America's urban boosters in the years following Reconstruction. Reforms in race relations and the status of organized labor were all but ignored. It is understandable why a visitor to Richmond in 1919 described the city as embodying the "heart of a modern city" and "the very heart of the Old South."¹⁰

THE EARLY YEARS OF RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Although a statewide public system of schools had been proposed in Virginia just prior to the Civil War, no action toward this end was taken until after the war. A condition of Virginia's readmission to statehood was the drafting of a new constitution, one providing for, among other things, free public schools supported by taxes. A constitutional convention was convened on December 3, 1867, in Richmond.¹¹ The president of the convention was New Yorker John C. Underwood, whose name is forever linked to the constitution. Because many of the commonwealth's leading citizens were yet to be reenfranchised, convention delegates included a large number of out-of-staters and ex-slaves. Some delegates pressed for a provision requiring racially integrated public schools, but disagreement among radicals led to its defeat.

The residents of Richmond did not wait for the details of a state system of schools to be worked out by the convention. In 1866, the city fathers appropriated four thousand dollars to continue operation of the Lancasterian School and various ward schools.¹² Dating from 1816, Richmond's Lancasterian School had been created through a city council donation and private pledges. Originally an elementary school with free tuition for white students lacking adequate means, the Lancasterian School was converted to a high school shortly before the Civil War. As a consequence, an elementary school was opened in each ward. Several private schools served Richmond's more affluent residents.

In 1869, after the Underwood Constitution had been adopted but prior to its full implementation, a system of free schools was organized in Richmond. The action followed a petition from a number of citizens, many of whom could no longer afford to educate their children privately. Ten thousand dollars was appropriated by the city council to operate separate schools for white and black students beginning in October. A matching sum of money was awarded by the Peabody Fund and the Freedmen's Bureau.

Andrew Washburn, an educator from Massachusetts, was selected as the superintendent.

October 1869 found 1,008 white students and 1,769 black students enrolled in Richmond's public schools. Initial reluctance to accept "charity" on the part of some of Richmond's white majority diminished in succeeding years, and universal free schooling was fully embraced. Richmond took entire control of the system of free schools in 1870, thereby creating Richmond Public Schools. James H. Binford, a graduate of the University of Virginia, was chosen as the school district's first superintendent. In 1870 the state school system was formed under William Ruffner's leadership, and Richmond Public Schools became a part of it. The only substantive change which resulted from this shift in authority was the replacement of black teachers with white teachers in Richmond's "colored" schools.

The idea of publicly funded high schools was not universally accepted in the 1870s. Not until the landmark Kalamazoo case in 1874, in fact, did a court extend the principle of tax-supported public education to secondary schools.¹³ As late as 1880, the Richmond *Standard* questioned the need for free public schooling beyond the elementary level.¹⁴ Despite such feelings, Richmonders in the early 1870s generally supported construction of a high school facility to replace the rented quarters being used at the time. Located at 805 East Marshall Street, Richmond High School opened its doors on October 1, 1873. Built to accommodate 222 students, the school initially failed to attract a full complement and so had to share space with district administrative offices. William F. Fox served as the first high school principal, supervising two teachers and 49 students.

The course of study for the three years of high school, which ended at the eleventh grade, consisted of mathematics, natural science, English, foreign language, and miscellaneous other courses.¹⁵ In the first year of high school, students learned arithmetic and algebra; physical geography, map drawing, and physiology; grammar, composition, etymology, reading and elocution, and orthography; ancient history; and penmanship. In addition, they could elect to study Latin, German, or French. Subjects offered to second-year students included algebra, geometry, and commercial arithmetic; natural philosophy (listed as a natural science) and descriptive astronomy; composition, rhetoric, reading and elocution, and orthography; modern history; bookkeeping;

and foreign language. The final year of high school found students studying geometry and trigonometry; chemistry, geology, and botany; English literature, composition, reading and elocution, and orthography; civil government; mental science; political economy; and foreign language.

News of Richmond High School's first graduating class was carried in the *Richmond Dispatch* on July 1, 1874. Despite the oppressive heat, every seat in the school's third-floor assembly hall was filled three hours prior to the graduation ceremony. In the presence of the mayor, the school board, and leading citizens, Superintendent Binford conferred diplomas. Awards in recognition of individual academic achievement, including a medal to a student who spelled correctly all 1440 words dictated by her teacher, were presented by the Reverend J. E. Edward. In light of current demands for more rigorous student assessment and accountability, it is worth noting that in the early years of the Richmond Public Schools the examinations upon which high school promotions and graduation were based were personally developed and graded by the superintendent. Copies of the examinations were printed, bound, and made available to the public.

Between 1870 and 1900 Richmond's population burgeoned from 50,000 to 85,000.¹⁶ As the city grew, the ability of Richmond High School to serve the educational needs of white adolescents diminished. By 1908 the school strained to accommodate a faculty of 33 and student body of 950. Realizing that a larger facility was required, the school board authorized the construction of John Marshall High School. The half-million dollar, three-story granite building opened in the fall of 1909 on a site adjacent to the one-time home of its namesake.¹⁷ Located in the very center of Richmond on a full city block, John Marshall contained fifty-five rooms for general instruction, four laboratories, and a library.¹⁸ Little more than a decade after opening, John Marshall found itself so crowded that it could no longer accept first-year students. By this time, the length of high school had increased from three to four years. Freshmen were required to remain in their junior high schools until they were prepared to commence the second year of high school. Despite this stopgap measure, the high school still was forced to hold some classes in corridors and initiate double shifts. Seniors and juniors attended school from 8:20 a.m. until noon with no recess, while sophomores arrived at 12:30 p.m. and stayed until 4:10 p.m. With nearly 100 faculty and

over 2600 students, John Marshall clearly was outgrowing quarters once thought to be spacious. George Wythe Junior High School was built in 1923 across the street from John Marshall, but by the time the facility opened, it had to be utilized as an annex by the overcrowded high school.

Richmond's population continued to grow during the twenties, but increasing numbers of white residents opted to settle in the city's newer and less commercial West End. While the westward exodus sometimes has been attributed to overcrowding in the downtown area by blacks migrating from other areas, the more likely cause seems to have been commercial expansion.¹⁹ Richmond's black population actually grew relatively slowly between 1910 and 1940. In fact, while Richmond's black community actually dropped by 2 percent between 1920 and 1930 (from 54,041 to 53,055), the white population climbed from 117,626 to 129,874.²⁰ As the white population grew and located further from the central city, the need for a second high school became more apparent. Each year from 1919 through 1928, in fact, Richmond's director of high and junior high schools included in his section of the superintendent's annual report a recommendation for a second high school.

By the late twenties, when the nation unknowingly stood on the brink of economic disaster, Richmond found itself in the midst of a renaissance. The uncertain days of Reconstruction had given way to vigorous programs of economic expansion and development. In 1914 Richmond beat out Baltimore for the site of the Fifth Federal Reserve Bank. During the years following World War I, Richmond boasted the world's largest cigarette factory, cigar factory, woodworking plant, mica mills, baking powder factory, and plant for reproducing antique furniture.²¹ Annexation in 1914 added 12.21 square miles and thousands of residents. The cultural life of the city thrived with the growing popularity of local writers such as Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell, and Douglas Southall Freeman. Interestingly, however, Richmond, for all its wealth and culture, was the last city of its size in the country to establish a free public library, waiting until 1924 to do so.²²

Not all of Richmond's citizens shared equally in the city's prosperity. Virginius Dabney cites a 1927 study of blacks in Richmond that indicated widespread discrimination.²³ Perhaps nowhere were inequities more obvious or harmful than education. Restricted to a separate system of schools under the supervision of

Richmond's superintendent, black students attended inferior schools staffed by poorly trained and poorly paid teachers. Illiteracy among blacks was reported to be fourteen times that of whites.²⁴ In the area of labor, blacks earned far less (on average) than whites, worked longer hours, and lacked access to more desirable jobs. Blacks frequently lived in substandard housing located on unpaved streets. Circumstances for Richmond's black residents did not begin to improve until after World War II, and even then progress was measured in inches, not feet.

On November 15, 1928, less than a year before the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange, the Richmond City Council approved an \$850,000 bond issue to finance construction of a "western" high school. If council members argued over whether or not to construct the school or where to locate it, there is no record of such debate. At the time, John Marshall was operating on a double shift and straining to accommodate over 3,000 students in its main building and annex. Approximately 900 of these students lived in the area known as the West End.²⁵

While it is impossible to reconstruct the negotiations and political bargaining that may have preceded the decision to locate a new high school in Richmond's far West End, the school district's architect, Charles M. Robinson, had stressed the need for a West End high school as early as 1925.²⁶ In a survey of building needs, Robinson noted Richmond's shifting demographics:

A new high school in either the north, south, or east cannot well serve any other location, while by means of the Boulevard a West End High School will not only serve all portions of the "fan Belt" but can also reach the North Side or the South Side by bus along the Boulevard. Here it is practical to build a much larger building than in the center of the city as the traffic can be better handled and future traffic routing can be arranged to provide for the school needs. City planning is comparatively new, but can be made by the means of such as that of making no provisions for bypassing traffic around schools.

Was Robinson's reasoning really designed to serve the interests of well-to-do Richmond residents whose vision of the city's future followed the setting sun? The possibility of collusion between the school district's architect and city power brokers is conceivable, but unlikely. At the time a new high school was planned, Richmond's largest center of residential affluence was in

Northside, not the West End.²⁷ Christopher Silver, a student of Richmond's urban growth, concluded, furthermore, that Richmond lacked a true comprehensive planning process—either overt or covert—during the twenties and early thirties.²⁸ What public planning did occur focused primarily on engineering issues such as street improvements and sewer lines. Silver notes that planning “only abetted the insatiable urge of the private sector to develop as rapidly as possible the suburbs surrounding Richmond.”²⁹ By doing nothing to moderate the expansion of suburban areas, Richmond officials, of course, were actually sowing the seeds of eventual deterioration of the city's central core.

Robinson clearly was aware of Richmond's suburban expansion, and his 1925 survey and recommendation of a West End high school reflected this awareness. In the following passage, he anticipated future annexation of part of Henrico County and the westward movement of city residents. Whether Robinson's prescience derived from insider information or keen predictive skills is unknown, but whatever the source, his awareness led to the recommendation that a new high school be placed well beyond the existing center of western settlement.

Due to the approach of time when Westhampton [a Henrico County high school] will be annexed with a consequent shift of the population center of the West, this building should be placed well beyond the present center of the West End population. You already have a lot on Grove Avenue of sufficient size and admirably located. It possesses the advantage of by-passing the main thoroughfares lying north and south of it, yet being centrally located between them.

At first glance, it might appear that this location is too far out. The theoretical proportion of the school population which should be in the high school is approximately 25 percent of the total school population. As better education is being demanded throughout the commercial world, pupils are staying in school longer. The extremely rapid growth of this higher grade proves that a fairly close approximation of this theoretical figure is no idle dream, but an approaching reality which must be faced by all city administrators. In figures, this would mean, at present, over 6,000 white high school pupils, on whom less than 1/4 can be housed in your present building. The next building must, therefore, be so arranged that at no distant future, it will handle the pupils from Lombardy Street to Richmond College, and

unless it is to be limited to a local area in its use, should be near the center of its district.

The Richmond City Council and School Board would take four years to act on Robinson's recommendation. While agreeing that the new high school should be located well beyond the center of western settlement, officials eventually opted for a site on West Grace Street rather than the Grove Avenue property mentioned by Robinson. On May 31, 1929, a committee of the school board recommended that the new school be named for the nation's third President, native son Thomas Jefferson.³⁰ Completed a year later, the high school cost \$811,695, somewhat less than the projected cost of \$850,000, but a substantial sum for the times nonetheless.

A profile of Richmond Public Schools on the eve of Tee-Jay's completion reveals a complex and growing educational enterprise. Besides segregated programs for K-5 students (19,571), junior high students (8,406), and high school students (4,597), the district operated its own normal school (187) to prepare elementary teachers (numbers in parentheses represent total numbers of white and black students).³¹ The K-5 enrollment had risen by 240 students from the previous year, while the junior high and senior high enrollments had jumped by 54 and 217 students respectively. The district also ran an open air program (437), special programs for "subnormal" students (360), delinquent classes (112), a class for deaf students (8), and a night-school program (3,730). Students were distributed among thirty-eight elementary, four junior high, and two high schools. The per pupil cost of operating all-white John Marshall High School was \$89.17, compared to \$54.80 for all-black Armstrong High School.³² No junior high schools existed for black students. The cost of operating the white junior highs was \$87.48 per pupil. Elementary schools for white students cost \$68.07 per pupil, compared to \$41.29 per pupil for black schools.

A SCHOOL IS BORN

On a late summer day in 1930, when the League of Nations convened its eleventh annual session in Geneva and agricultural reports indicated that the U.S. corn crop would be the smallest in two decades, Richmond Public Schools began its sixty-first year of operation. Nearly 30,000 students traded queues at the Virginia

State Fair and John Barrymore's "Moby Dick" for registration and cafeteria lines at forty-five city schools. The newest of those schools was Thomas Jefferson High School.

The *Richmond Times Dispatch* reported that 715 students enrolled at Tee-Jay on September 11, while John Marshall welcomed 2,715 students.³³ The combined total of 3,430 represented an increase of 481 from the previous year, when John Marshall was forced to accommodate 2,949 students—294 over capacity. The newspaper article noted that, citywide, nearly a thousand students in the fall of 1929 had waited to register until the second and third days of school. Hence, it was anticipated that the two white high schools would enroll additional students.³⁴ Of Richmond's 29,156 total students, 20,408 were white. Black enrollment reached 8,848, an increase of 407 over 1929 and more than double the percentage increase for white schools. Still, only 87.9 percent of the black school-age population was enrolled for the 1930-31 school year, compared to 92 percent of the white school-age group. The official school-leaving age at the time in Virginia was fifteen.

On Monday, September 8, 1930, the principal of Tee-Jay, Ernest Shawen, met for the first time with his faculty and briefed them on the impending school opening. In the audience were thirty-two teachers, a librarian, and an assistant principal.

The man who presided over Tee-Jay's first faculty meeting was fifty-six years old and a veteran school administrator. Shawen grew up on a farm in rural Loudoun County and attended the one-room school at Wheatland.³⁵ Credit for his academic development and eventual matriculation at William and Mary was given to William B. Carr, principal of the three-room school in Waterford to which Shawen transferred after Wheatland. A retired professor of ancient languages at Randolph Macon College, Carr had the ability to illustrate his lessons with fascinating stories. Shawen was one of three boys coached by Carr "at odd times and after school in Latin, algebra and geometry" to prepare them for college.

Shawen's professional path to the Tee-Jay principalship began at the one-room school in Clark's Gap, Virginia, where he served as teacher and janitor. Since he had studied only two years at William and Mary in order to earn his licentiate of instruction, Shawen desired eventually to return for a bachelor's degree. In 1897 he reentered William and Mary, eventually graduating with an

outstanding academic record and election to the nation's first Phi Beta Kappa chapter.

After completing college, Shawen taught high school for four years before becoming an elementary principal in Norfolk, Virginia. For three summers he also headed Seaside Normal, a coaching school for teachers intending to take the state examination for a teaching certificate. Shawen served as an elementary principal in Norfolk for eight years prior to accepting a comparable position in Richmond in 1911. Thus began thirty-one years of administrative service to the youth of Virginia's capital city.

Shawen's early years in Richmond were spent under the direction of Superintendent Dr. Julian Alvin Carroll Chandler, who later became president of William and Mary College. Shawen regarded Chandler as the best supervisor he ever had. Principals who desired promotion at the time were expected to earn a master's degree in educational supervision. Shawen, along with many of his peers, wound up heading north to Teachers' College, Columbia University, to complete their graduate studies. Reflecting on the experience, Shawen concluded, "While I may not have gained much from Columbia, except atmosphere, I learned a great deal in exploring the great city. . . ."

During Chandler's tenure, monthly meetings were held with all Richmond principals. Reports were heard and future plans discussed. Shawen recalled one meeting where the superintendent asked whether there were any problems to discuss. When no problems were offered, he responded that "the principal who had no problems was not making progress." Chandler initiated many improvements in Richmond's school system, including a building campaign, curriculum changes, a more selective process for hiring teachers, the replacement of white principals of black schools with black principals, and a plan for the distribution of free textbooks.

Chandler was succeeded in 1919 by Albert H. Hill, who Shawen remembered as "another progressive educator," though a man "of less ability" than his predecessor. Hill promoted Shawen from principal of Binford Junior High to principal of Tee-Jay. The superintendent originally felt that the new high school should be devoted primarily to college preparatory studies, given the aspirations of West End residents and the existence at John Marshall of a wide range of vocational offerings.³⁶ Shop facilities therefore were not provided in the architectural plans for Tee-Jay. By the time the school opened, however, economic uncertainty con-

vinced district officials that Tee-Jay should offer a relatively comprehensive course of study, accommodating the needs of both college-bound students and those concluding their formal education upon graduation.

The initial course offerings at Tee-Jay included all the same courses available at John Marshall except for German, vocational trades, home economics, and military. In addition, Tee-Jay students were offered the first high school physical education classes in the Richmond area. All students were required to take two periods of physical education a week during the first semester. In the second semester, the requirement was dropped for upperclassmen. The new school's curriculum will be described in the next chapter.

A Richmond high school education in 1930 officially ended at the conclusion of the eleventh grade. High school consisted of four years, though most students completed their first year of high school in a junior high school building. Junior high school, available only to white students, housed grades six and seven, plus levels II and III of high school. Many students remained in high school past graduation in order to earn additional credits.³⁷ Students were allowed to conclude their studies either in February or June, but commencement was held only once a year, in June.

Tee-Jay opened without a senior class, so it was not until February, 1932, that the first students completed their studies. Diplomas reflected six possible areas of concentration: Latin, modern language, history, science, commerce, and electives. Diplomas for "special students" and students majoring in vocational education and home economics were only available from John Marshall.

The school day in 1930–31 consisted of six fifty-minute periods and a twenty-five-minute period for assemblies and other student activities. A wide range of extracurricular activities were offered to Tee-Jay students from the very outset. Athletics, publications, service clubs, social clubs, and academic groups competed with classwork for students' attention. An editorial in the first issue of the *Jeffersonian*, which appeared on February 13, 1931, at the beginning of the second semester, captured the enthusiasm and optimism of the school's first months of operation:³⁸

January 31 closed the first half session of Thomas Jefferson. It has, perhaps, been as successful a semester as there has ever been in a new school. A record was established in September, when classes were organized and schedules straightened in two days.

A Sophomore and a Junior class were organized later on and both have enjoyed many social activities. Very successful athletic teams were formed, considering the shortage of time and material. A show was given, the proceeds of which amounted to almost two hundred dollars.

In the first of what would become a rich array of rituals of recognition, “honors certificates” were awarded to seventeen students at the end of the first semester. Each student had to have earned a grade-point average of 90 percent or better in every course, accumulated no more than one demerit, and possess no tardies or unexcused absences. Room 224 was lauded in the school newspaper as the homeroom providing the largest number of honorees—four. So began the encouragement of academic competition which was to become a hallmark of Tee-Jay. Homerooms even competed for the best average daily attendance each month, with winning rooms receiving monthly recognition in the *Jeffersonian*.

Second semester found the student body enlarged by two hundred students. Growth, too, would become a hallmark of the new high school. Among the newcomers were eighty-six Binford Junior High students, seventeen from Northside Junior High, thirty from Lee, and fifteen from private schools and out of town.³⁹ Six new teachers were hired to accommodate the increased enrollment. A double lunch period was inaugurated to relieve crowding in the cafeteria, but excessive noise and disorder during lunch persisted throughout the second semester.

On February 20, 1931, the high school was officially dedicated in a ceremony held in the auditorium. Dr. Roshier Miller, chairman of the school board, presided and delivered the opening address. A representative of the Daughters of the American Revolution presented Ernest Shawen with an American flag and a Bible. Later in the year Tee-Jay again opened its doors to the general public, this time for its first Visitors’ Day. Patrons were invited to spend May 26 at the school, observing classes and inspecting the building and exhibits of student work. These events marked the beginning of a longstanding close relationship between Tee-Jay and its community.

As the 1930–31 school year came to a close, all who had been involved in launching Tee-Jay—faculty, administrators, students, and patrons—could take justifiable pride in a job well done. Not only had the establishment of routines and the scheduling of classes been handled with remarkable efficiency, but there were

even some demonstrable academic successes about which to boast. Tee-Jay acquired its first silver trophy when a contingent of math scholars defeated counterparts from John Marshall in a trigonometry competition.⁴⁰ In addition, a Tee-Jay student took second place in the Randolph-Macon College Latin Tournament, missing first place by a single point.⁴¹

The general success of Tee-Jay's first year was hardly a matter of luck. While fledgling organizations often feel their way through the early months of operation, an ethos of determination and intentionality characterized Tee-Jay's infancy. Teachers and administrators alike *expected* success. So did students. When these high expectations occasionally encountered disappointment, as occurred in late winter when a series of locker thefts were reported, an editorial in the *Jeffersonian* reminded students:

We have a new school without a reputation as yet. Make it good.⁴²