

**(Grace) Arents School**

600 South Pine Street  
(Corner Pine & China Streets)

This school was named for Grace Arents, a public-spirited citizen and philanthropist who donated the site and \$5,000 toward the cost of the building. Additional land adjoining the school was purchased in the 1929-30 session. Renovations were made to the library and office area in 1985.

When Grace Arents opened in September 1911, it housed Madison students until their new building was ready for occupancy in December 1912. Arents operated with kindergarten-grade 5. Beginning in 1928, it was a demonstration and observation school for the kindergarten primary department of the school system. Later, as the school became crowded, the fifth grade was transferred to Madison.

Arents was discontinued as an elementary school in 1970. It became a learning center in 1970-71, and thereafter was a special education school until 1989, when the L.D. students were transferred to Robert E. Lee School.

Since 1989, the building has housed the Open High School program.

Enrollment:	1912-1913	423
	1969-1970	193 (final elementary)

Architect:		Charles M. Robinson
	(1985)	DePasquale & Associates

Cost:		\$34,175
	(1985)	87,905

Principals:	1912-1913	Charles A. Taylor
	1913-1917	George E. Bennett
	1917-1940	Lucille Harrison (Acting 1917-19)
	1940-1947	Jessie P. Haynes
	1947-1949	George Warren Morris
	1949-1969	Nellie Celeste Jones
	1969-1971	Ellen Frye Curry
	1971-1973	Barbara P. Guyer
1973-1989	Patrick Leo Gendron (Acting 1973-74)	

**Armstrong High School**  
**Armstrong Professional Development Teacher Academy**

21 East Leigh Street  
(1909-1923)

119 West Leigh Street  
(1923-1952)

1611 North 31st Street  
(1952-)

Before the City appropriated funds for the secondary education of colored children, high school instruction was given at the Colored Normal School. This school was in operation as early as 1873, with Rabza Morse Manly as principal. (*Rabza*, Armstrong's student yearbook, is named for him.) City-financed secondary education for colored children began when the Richmond Colored Normal School became a part of the public school system in June 1876.

After the Normal School's building at 12th & Leigh Streets was condemned for school purposes in the 1908-09 session, the high and normal programs were relocated to the former Leigh School at the corner of First & Leigh Streets. At this time (1909), the name of Richmond's first colored high school was changed to Armstrong to honor General Samuel C. Armstrong (1839-93), the noted educator and founder of Hampton Institute.

Several annual reports include this statement about Armstrong: "The first class graduated at the close of the session 1872-1873. Up to September, 1908, there had been 821 graduates." Many of the early commencements were held at First Baptist Church at the corner of College & Broad Streets; later, these exercises took place at the City Auditorium on West Cary Street.

In 1915, the all-white faculty was replaced with colored teachers, reportedly five men and ten women. One Armstrong historian has written: "In 1917, the high and normal schools were separated in name as well as in course of study...From 1915 to 1920, the school grew so rapidly that it was impossible to house the children who were applying for admittance...In 1912, Armstrong became an accredited high school..." The July 1920 annual report states: "A five-room annex will be completed this summer." This was used for shop work, domestic science, and sewing classes.

In 1923, Armstrong High School moved to a new, all-above-ground, three-story building at the corner of Prentis & Leigh Streets. It was described as modern, sanitary, and well equipped with 21 classrooms, three laboratories, a library, a 930-seat auditorium, and the first lunch room in a colored school. The 1922-23 annual report includes picture and floor plan of Armstrong by School Architect Charles M. Robinson. (The school on East Leigh Street was then reopened as Booker T. Washington.)

The new building was immediately crowded. Additional land was purchased in 1925-26 and again in 1929-30. By the 1926-27 session, Armstrong had outgrown its new building, necessitating part-time classes. This situation was relieved in 1928 by the completion of a 21-room addition at the rear which housed domestic science, art, wood shop, and other classes. The auto mechanics shop was enlarged in 1935-36, partially funded by a P.W.A. grant.

(continued)

## ***Armstrong High School (continued)***

In 1936, it was reported that Armstrong was on double shift for the fifth year. The facilities continued to be taxed, even after the City opened a second colored high school in 1938 (Maggie L. Walker). For 41 years, the Armstrong-Walker Football Classic was an annual event on the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

After 1940, Armstrong also used Monroe Center, across Leigh Street, and (following World War II) the Monroe gymnasium.

In September 1952, Armstrong High School moved to its present location on Church Hill, adjacent to Oakwood Cemetery. The new building (42 classrooms, shops, homemaking and commercial education rooms, auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, and library) made it possible to offer an expanded and more comprehensive curriculum to the students in grades 7-12. (Graves Junior High School was then organized at the West Leigh Street site.)

Once again, Armstrong's new quarters were immediately crowded, subsequently leading to the use of modular classrooms and a system of staggered openings/closings. The area elementary schools were soon forced to retain the seventh grade, and the eighth grade was diverted to the East End Building when it became available.

Renovations in 1966 enlarged Armstrong's kitchen and cafeteria; a two-phase air conditioning program was carried out in 1969 and 1982.

In October 1980, the School Board granted the request of the Eastend Think Action Committee to name the Armstrong gymnasium for an Armstrong graduate and long-time coach, the late Maxie Cleveland Robinson.

Under "Plan G" (1979), Armstrong-Kennedy comprised one of three high school complexes with a coordinating principal (Fred Cooper in 1979-80; Joe Louis Simmons, 1980-86). "Plan G" was dismantled in 1986 with the return to a system of comprehensive high schools.

Franklin Military School has been housed at Armstrong since 1989.

As one of the high school magnet programs initiated in 1991, Armstrong adopted the theme of "professional development teacher academy."

Enrollment:	1909-1910	370 (included Normal School)
	1926-1927	2,486 + 75 Normal School
	1952-1953	1,428
	1962-1963	2,227
	1991-1992	606

(continued)

## Armstrong High School (continued)

In 1936, it was reported that Armstrong was on double shift for the fifth year. The utilities continued to be taxed, even after the City opened a second colored high school in 1938 (Maggie L. Walker). For 41 years, the Armstrong-Walker Football Classic was an annual event on the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

After 1940, Armstrong also used Monroe Center, across Leigh Street, and following World War II) the Monroe gymnasium.

In September 1952, Armstrong High School moved to its present location on Church Hill, adjacent to Oakwood Cemetery. The new building (42 classrooms, shops, homemaking and commercial education rooms, auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, and library) made it possible to offer an expanded and more comprehensive curriculum to the students in grades 7-12. (Graves Junior High School was then organized at the West Leigh Street site.)

Once again, Armstrong's new quarters were immediately crowded, subsequently leading to the use of modular classrooms and a system of staggered openings/closings. The area elementary schools were soon forced to retain the seventh grade, and the eighth grade was diverted to the East End Building when it became available.

Renovations in 1966 enlarged Armstrong's kitchen and cafeteria; a two-phase air conditioning program was carried out in 1969 and 1982.

In October 1980, the School Board granted the request of the Eastend Think Action Committee to name the Armstrong gymnasium for an Armstrong graduate and long-time coach, the late Maxie Cleveland Robinson.

Under "Plan G" (1979), Armstrong-Kennedy comprised one of three high school complexes with a coordinating principal (Fred Cooper in 1979-80; Joe Louis Simmons, 1980-86). "Plan G" was dismantled in 1986 with the return to a system of comprehensive high schools.

Franklin Military School has been housed at Armstrong since 1989.

As one of the high school magnet programs initiated in 1991, Armstrong adopted the theme of "professional development teacher academy."

Enrollment:	1909-1910	370 (included Normal School)
	1926-1927	2,486 + 75 Normal School
	1952-1953	1,428
	1962-1963	2,227
	1991-1992	606

(continued)

## Armstrong High School (continued)

Architect:	(1952)	Carneal & Johnston
	(1966)	Carneal & Johnston
	(1969/1982)	MacIlroy & Parris
Cost:	(1952)	\$1,921,000
	(1966)	163,183
	(1969/1982)	1,800,807

Principals:	Prior to 1909	(Richmond Colored High & Normal School)
	1909-1917	Samuel D. Turner*
	1917-1925	William M. Adams
	1925-1947	Wortley Warren Townsend
	1947-1974	George Peterson, Jr.**
	1974-1980	Lucille Murray Brown (Superintendent 1991-)
	1980-1984	Fred Adolphus Cooper
	1984-1988	William H. Joyner
	1988-1989	Jonathan L. Lewis
	1989-	George William Bowser

\*Upon his death in 1917, Assistant Superintendent Hill wrote: "Mr. Turner put his heart and soul into the work, and he was enabled to see the good results himself...his taking-away is a great loss to the school...He fully measured up to all that we expected of him, and the pupils, patrons and teachers appreciated the many sacrifices that he made to bring the school up to the highest standard possible."

\*\*Armstrong's first colored principal.

see: Graves Middle School  
Monroe School  
Richmond Colored (High &) Normal School  
Booker T. Washington School