

# Welcome

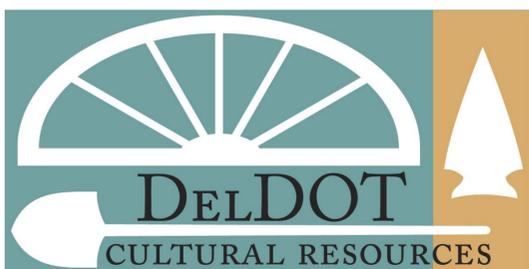
On behalf of the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT), we welcome you to the Nassau School Public Workshop. DelDOT acquired the parcel on which the Nassau School is located in 2019. The Nassau School is historically significant and eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The purpose of this workshop is to provide information and answer any questions about the recently purchased Nassau School property, discuss recent maintenance efforts, and obtain input from the community about the building's future. Coordination about the property is ongoing with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Public input will be used by DelDOT to formulate a plan of management and future disposition. Comments can be submitted electronically to [dotpr@delaware.gov](mailto:dotpr@delaware.gov) or by mail: DelDOT Community Relations P.O. Box 778, Dover, DE 19903. Comments will be accepted through March 24, 2020.

The displays that follow include information about the history and significance of the Nassau School, as well as details about current and future plans for the property. DelDOT representatives are available to answer questions and provide information.

Thank you for your time!



The Nassau School

# Nassau School – History and Significance

The Nassau School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The two-room school building was constructed in 1922 as part of the du Pont Schools program and served the African American students of Belltown and the surrounding area from 1922 until 1965. Belltown, a historically African American community, was established by free African Americans in the mid-19th century.



Interior shot of the original fanlight window over the front door



A view of the front porch of the Nassau School.

Decades of institutionalized racial segregation in Delaware resulted in a lack of funding and inadequate school facilities for African American children. While free schools for white children were established in 1829 and funded by taxation, free African Americans were responsible for raising their own funds to support their children's schools. In the 1880s, legislation to tax African Americans for schools and provide state support was passed, but this did little to ease the funding burden or racist segregation policies. Despite these challenges, African American communities constructed schools throughout the state, including in Belltown.



An earlier school building, constructed in Belltown ca. 1911, would eventually be replaced by the Nassau School (Delaware Board of Education, ca. 1920, courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives)

The du Pont Schools program was a statewide initiative funded by Pierre S. du Pont to rebuild African American schools during the early 20th century. By 1910, many began to acknowledge the state of public education in Delaware and the need for reform. du Pont was an avid supporter of reform and joined the state board of education in 1919. Surveys undertaken in 1917 and 1919 found that compared to white schools, African American schools were found to be severely underfunded and in worse condition. du Pont, whose family was known for their philanthropy, was committed to correcting this inequity and donated the necessary funds (more than \$2,000,000) to improve 89 African American schools during the 1920s.

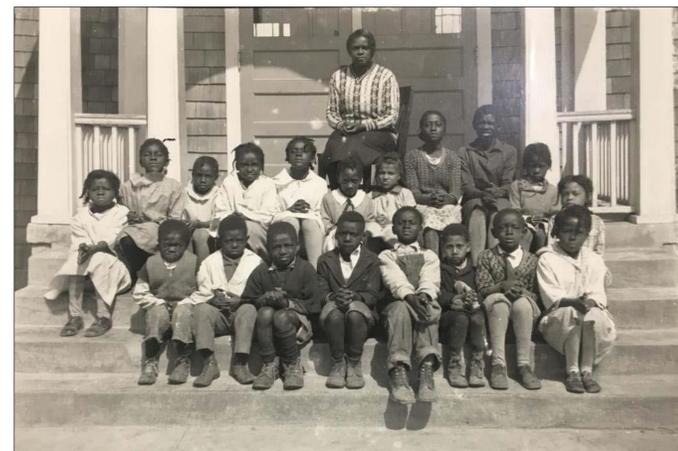
While some existing school buildings were renovated, most projects involved new construction of freestanding school buildings, like the Nassau School. The buildings were constructed using standardized designs by well-known school architect James O. Betelle, and typically featured modest Colonial Revival details. Rural schools were small, wood-framed buildings with shingle siding, often with only one or two classrooms. The Nassau School is an exemplary example of this type and is historically significant for its association with the du Pont School program and African American education in Delaware.



The Nassau School today. It is nearly unaltered from its original construction



The Nassau School in 1922. Note the original central fanlight, windows, and porch (Delaware Board of Education, ca. 1922, courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives).



Nassau School students and their teacher on front steps, 1930. Everett Bryan photo, Brittingham Collection, Lewes Historical Society



Rear of the Nassau School in 1922. The banks of windows were a distinctive feature of du Pont Schools (Delaware Board of Education, ca. 1922, courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives).

# Recent Improvements

The Nassau School and surrounding property were previously owned and maintained by the Best family. Most recently, the building was used for storage purposes. Since the acquisition of the Nassau School, DelDOT has taken steps to maintain the structure in good condition.

Improvements include:

- September 2019: Building was cleaned out by the Best family
- Fall 2019: Vegetation removed from the southwest corner of the building
- Winter 2019: A small portion of the roof was patched after a leak was discovered
- Spring 2020: Work scheduled to safely remove a honeybee colony from the west elevation of the building. This work is being completed in consultation with the Sussex County Chapter of the Delaware Beekeepers Association and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).



View of the building before vegetation removal



View of the building after vegetation removal and roof patch



View of the west elevation of the building and the location of the honeybee colony



Honeybees are entering the structure through a hole in the siding

# Future of the Nassau School

DeIDOT understands the historic and cultural significance of the Nassau School and is interested in working with the local community to ensure its preservation. There are several options to long-term management and preservation including partnering with another party or transfer of ownership. DeIDOT will consider your comments when developing a plan of future use for the Nassau School. Please consider the points below when commenting. We welcome and appreciate your input and suggestions on this topic.

- Potential future uses for the Nassau School building:
  - Museum
  - Welcome/Visitor's Center
  - Community Center
  - Other ideas?
- Location
  - Currently, the building is located in a rapidly developing and congested area along US 9 near Five Points. Depending on the future use, would it be preferable to move the building to another location for ease of access?
  - Given the significance of the Nassau School to the Belltown community, would you be opposed to its relocation outside of Belltown?



Above: Aerial view of Nassau School and surrounding area, looking northwest from US 9 (Lewes Georgetown Hwy).



Below: Aerial view of Nassau School, looking south towards US 9 (Lewes Georgetown Hwy).

# Nassau School



Sussex County Parcel Map  
Nassau School located denoted by the blue star

