

HISTORIC VIRGINIA HALL

DESIGN ♦ CONSTRUCTION ♦ RENOVATION

Bio of Ida Thornton

Ida Alsop Thornton was born in Spotsylvania County in 1875. She and her six siblings attended segregated schools in Fredericksburg, where she was recognized as an honor-roll student for four consecutive years. Despite her success, Ida did not attend school past the 5th grade. At the age of 23, she married William Thornton and started a family. By the early 1910s the Thorntons lived in Washington, DC, but by 1922, the family moved back to Fredericksburg and Ida Thornton began her career at the segregated, southern women's school then called Fredericksburg Teachers College.

Working closely with Dean Bushnell, Mrs. Thornton was the primary housekeeper for Virginia Hall. Much of what is known about her time at Mary Washington comes from an article in the student newspaper *The Bullet* in December 1946, a rare acknowledgement of the work within the mostly African American staff of the college. Ida Thornton is described as enjoying her work, dedicated to spending time with her granddaughter Norma, and saving money for her education. Because MWC was not desegregated until 1964, Norma Burress attended the historically black Virginia Union University in Richmond, later teaching in Fredericksburg and Liberia. Mrs. Thornton continued to work at the college until 1953 and died in Fredericksburg in 1969 at the age of 94.



*Portrait of Ida Alsop Thornton
which appeared in The Bullet,
December 1946.*

Image: UMW Special Collections



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