Nina Honemond Clarke
(1917- )

Author, community activist, educator, historian, principal and teacher,
Montgomery County Public School system

First African-American supervisory resource teacher in the integrated county
school system

Nina Clarke was born in Poolesville, Maryland in 1917. She was the seventh of ten
surviving brothers and sisters. Granddaughter of slaves, Clarke grew up on a farm where
the family raised its own food. Clarke’s family has lived in Montgomery County for seven
generations. Her father was a farm hand and her mother was a maid. Clarke was
educated in a segregated county public school system. She remembers walking with her
sisters four to ten miles to attend a two-room school house, while white children were
transported by the county bus, a horse drawn wagon. The county did not provide school
transportation for African-American children until the 1940s.

After graduating from Rockville Colored High School in 1934, Clarke attended Bowie State
College and received an advanced first grade teaching certificate in 1937. She was one of
only two children in her family to attend college. She returned to the county at age 19
and began teaching in several of the local schools for black children. Later, Clarke
finished her B.A. degree in elementary education at Hampton Institute in Hampton,
Virginia. In 1952, she earned a Master of Education degree from Boston University. She
served as the first African American delegate to the Teachers Association in Montgomery
County prior to integration.

Clarke became one of the first African American teachers to teach white children. County
schools began to desegregate after the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision that segregation
in public schools was unconstitutional. Referring to other African American teachers,
Clarke recalled that they knew that “we had to be twice as good to be even thought of as
average.” In the first year of teaching at a white school, Clarke recalled that one of her
first-grade students told her, “Mrs. Clarke, you’re exactly like my mother. The only difference is you have black hair and she has red hair.”

In 1962, she was selected by the Board of Education as the first African-American teacher specialist in Reading/Language Arts in Montgomery County. In 1967, she was selected by the principal of Brookhaven Elementary School to be Assistant Principal. In October 1968, Clarke was appointed principal of Aspen Hill Elementary School in Rockville, becoming the second African American woman principal of an integrated school. Clarke remained principal of Aspen Hill until her retirement in 1973, completing 36 years in the Montgomery County Public School system.


About her interest and passion about researching local African-American history, Clarke told a Montgomery County newspaper, “I want to do it. I want to leave this legacy for blacks to pick up something I wrote. If I can do that, then I know that it’s worthwhile.”