

School Choice in Jamestown and Washington, September 1933

*John Q. Barrett**

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As summer began in 1933, William Eldred Jackson, the 13-year-old son of Jamestown, New York, lawyer Robert H. Jackson, completed ninth grade and graduated from Jamestown's Lincoln Junior High School. His next school was to be Jamestown High School, his father's *alma mater* of sorts. Robert Jackson had attended JHS, beginning at age 17 in September 1909, as a post-graduate commuter student for one year. Jackson came to JHS following his graduation from smaller, less challenging Frewsburg High School in that New York village, six miles from Jamestown, where his family resided.

In September 1933, Jamestown High School offered its students education, opportunities ... and a problem. As the city and its school enrollments had grown, JHS had become overcrowded. In response, Jamestown began to expand its high school building. The construction that was ongoing that fall meant that only half of JHS was available for school use. The Jamestown Board of Education thus adopted a plan to educate the 10th, 11th and 12th graders in split shifts—half the students would attend JHS every morning, and the other half of the student body would attend JHS every afternoon.

Robert and Irene Jackson, Bill's parents, believed that this situation was undesirable. Robert, remembering himself during his somewhat checkered high school years in Frewsburg, knew that he would not have studied if he had been given a half day off each high school day.

So Robert and Irene began to look for alternatives. They visited St. Albans School, a private school for boys located on the grounds of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and operated under the auspices of its Episcopal Bishop.

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The Jacksons were impressed with St. Albans. Justice Jackson recalled later that he in 1933

liked the idea of a church school. I liked its relative simplicity. I thought that some private schools really unfitted a boy for life by teaching him to live on a scale and in social surroundings that he wouldn't be likely to live up to, at least not for some time. I did not want the society type of school, which a lot of them had become, particularly in that gaudy era. We had just passed out of the 1920's era of gaudiness. I picked the church school not because I'm particularly religious myself—I'm not—but because I thought it was a good, wholesome influence on a boy's perspective on life to attend a relatively simple school. St. Albans was such a place with a wholesome, comfortable environment, but not extravagant.

Bill Jackson applied to St. Albans, was admitted and took classification examinations that September. He soon entered St. Albans's 9th grade—the grade that he had just completed in Jamestown—as a boarding student.

In 1933, Robert H. Jackson was not, despite his friend and candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration as president, eager to leave Jamestown for Washington. In Jamestown, Chautauqua County and its region, Jackson's full and happy life included immediate and extended family, many close friends, a law firm he headed, a diverse, profitable, very successful law practice, involvements in many community organizations and activities, a large home, a boat on Chautauqua Lake, a newly-acquired horse farm, and a landscape of great beauty. He was the newly-elected chairman of the American Bar Association's national Conference of Bar Association Delegates (predecessor to today's ABA House of Delegates). Robert Jackson also had never, in Jamestown or Albany, held a full-time government job—he was a lawyer of great ability, successes and national reputation, but there was not a New Deal position that obviously fit him or one that strongly attracted him.

By early 1934, however, a number of interlocutors and friends persuaded Robert H. Jackson to accept FDR's nomination to serve as Assistant General Counsel in the Treasury Department's Bureau of Internal Revenue (today's Chief Counsel of the Internal Revenue Service). For

Jackson, his son Bill's presence in Washington was "one of the incentives for coming down..."

Robert Jackson moved to Washington and began to work at the Treasury Department in February 1934 as a special counsel. The Senate soon confirmed his appointment. When Irene and their daughter Mary joined him, the family took an apartment at Washington's Wardman Park hotel. Mary Jackson, then 13, became a student at the National Cathedral School, St. Albans's sister school. Bill Jackson, then 14, left the St. Albans dormitory to live in the Wardman with his reunited family.

Robert Jackson thought that his 1934 government service and absence from Jamestown law practice would be brief. He later recalled thinking that the family would only "finish out the term" in Washington with Bill.

That turned out to be the case, but the term was Roosevelt's first term in the White House (and more), not St. Albans's 1933-34 academic year. Following their move to Washington, the Jacksons returned to Jamestown regularly to visit, but they were still living in Washington when Bill graduated from St. Albans, first in his class, in June 1937. And of course they never left, moving only to Hickory Hill in McLean, Virginia, when Robert Jackson was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States in summer 1941.

It is interesting to contemplate whether, if there had been a regular, full-day Jamestown High School program available to Bill Jackson in September 1933, his father's career path would have turned toward Washington, then or ever.