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# Recent \$150,000 Bond Issue Will Permit Early Erection Of New School Buildings

by F. W. WILLIAMS

As far as can be recalled, the public school system of Huntsville dates from some time in the seventies. In the absence of official records, it is difficult to be exact as to the correct date. For some years following the Civil War and during the South's reconstruction, the only schools in Huntsville were private institutions with small enrollments. It is stated that the first public school of the city was conducted upstairs in the Erwin Block, corner of Holmes and Jefferson streets with Prof. Matt McClung Robinson as principal. However, others say that the first public school was at the old Fleming place on Holmes Street, now St. Mary's Catholic School with Mrs. V. Ann Wallace as principal.

From time to time the school was taught in several parts of the town since there was no public school building. There are some citizens of Huntsville who recall that the public school was taught in various places as follows: near the Catholic Church on Jefferson Street; the [illegible] house on Madison Street about the site of the present city hall; in the building at the corner of Holmes and Washington streets; in the Calhoun building located at the corner of Eustis and Greene streets. Some of the principals during that time were Mr. Ben D. Young, Mr. Watkins, Mrs. Marie Pleasants, and others.

In the early seventies the town of

Huntsville built a two story frame school house on the present site of the present city grammar school, this property having been formerly known as Green Academy, which institution was destroyed during the Civil War. In this building, the principals were Rev. J. A. B. Lovett, Prof. Eshman, Prof. S. R. Butler and Prof. W. J. Humphrey.

During Prof. Eshman's principalship the enrollment so increased that a new and larger building was planned. A contract was then awarded to A. M. Booth to construct the new building which was completed and occupied in 1903. The old frame building was then razed.

Before the completion of the new building, Prof. S. R. Butler succeeded Prof. Eshman and was the first principal in the new brick building, holding this position until he established the Butler School, a well known private institution, which is now the Huntsville College. Prof. Humphrey succeeded Prof. Butler as principal of the city school, and after serving for a number of years, he was in turn succeeded by Prof. George D. Godard who continued in office until 1908. The Board of Education was then composed as follows: Dr. J. D. Humphrey, president, W. T. Hutchens, Lawrence Cooper, D. A. Grayson, and Oscar Goldsmith. At this time, Prof. Robert E. Sessions was elected principal, his administration continuing till 1913, when he was



Huntsville's first public school building located on the site of the present East Clinton Street School.

succeeded by Superintendent R. C. Johnston.

It was in 1911 that the Board of Education found most cogent reasons for organizing a four year high school in a separate building. Consequently, the Board leased the Williams School property on McCullough Avenue where the high school was then conducted until 1914. Following this date, the high school grades were taught in the grammar school building until 1917.

Owing to the congested condition of the city school in 1915, the Board of Education realized the outstanding need of a modern high school building, centrally located and adequately equipped. Fortunately, for the children of Huntsville as well as the entire community, the present high school was erected on West Clinton Street, the corner stone being laid by the Masonic fraternity in the summer of 1916. The occupancy of this new high school building in 1917 marked most distinctly a forward step in the development of the school system.

Pursuant to these improved facilities, all grades of the city schools made more satisfactory progress, the enrollments increasing more rapidly than in the years preceding. At this time, the Board of Education was composed as follows: W. T. Hutchens, president, Lawrence Cooper, H. C. Pollard, E. T. Terry and Oscar Goldsmith. Others who served on the Board prior to 1920 were Rev. Francis Tappey and R. E. Pettus.

Following the acquirement of these modern improvements, it became necessary to employ a larger number of teachers in the high school as well as in the grade school. This facilitated the operation of the semi-annual promotion system through all the grades and resulted in the organization of special courses in the high school. Under these conditions, teachers were selected for special subjects. A system of electives became more popular; in fact, the curriculum was expanded so as to meet the long-felt wish of many patrons. Pupils could then, for the first time, have the opportunity of selecting

subjects other than purely academic. This new situation proved to be a real stimulus to the life of the school. With the increased flexibility in the curriculum, courses were organized to include chemistry laboratory, commercial subjects, and domestic science, all of which departments show a most satisfactory growth. In addition to penmanship and public school music, which are taught through all grades, the pupils have the opportunity of electing private courses in the following subjects: art, expression and piano.

In 1920 Prof. R. C. Johnston was succeeded by the present superintendent F. W. Williams, and the Board of Education was then composed as follows: Judge Paul Speake, president, Mrs. C. S. Boswell, vice president, Mrs. S. O. Holmes, A. M. Booth and John T. Jones who was succeeded by Will M. Yarbrough in 1925.

Until the passage of a special three mill tax in 1922, the schools of Huntsville were handicapped by insufficient revenues. This condition not only rendered it impossible to increase the salaries of teachers in service but also prevented the Board from increasing the number of teachers in proportion to the enlarged enrollments. Nevertheless, through the aid of the special three mill tax, the teaching force was increased and the salary schedule materially improved.

It is the pride of the school management that so many of the Huntsville teachers pursue professional courses offered in various summer schools; in fact, within recent years this school system has been represented in the summer schools of the following institutions: Alabama College, University of Alabama, Florence State Normal School, University of Chicago, Columbia University, Peabody College for Teachers, University of Virginia, and others. Attendance at these institutions has not been due to compulsion of any kind but on the other hand it denotes

the high purpose of the teachers.

The Huntsville Grammar School comprising eight grades gives thorough preparation for entrance to the four year high school. The improved instruction of these grades is the result derived not only from better equipment but also from teachers who have had more intensive training in their profession.

Since more than seventy-five percent of the high school faculty is composed of graduates from standard colleges and since compliance has been made with many other uniform requirements, the Huntsville High School is a member of the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, thereby being privileged to have its graduates enter the leading colleges without further examination. In addition to this standard accreditation, the high school also enjoys a special affiliation with some of the larger universities. This recognition was attained through the college records made by former students of the high school. Many graduates of the Huntsville High School will be found doing most satisfactory work in college, and the following are some of the institutions in which Huntsville High School is represented: University of Alabama, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Alabama College, University of Tennessee, University of Virginia, Woman's College, Agnes Scott College, Maryville College, Randolph-Macon, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, and others.

Huntsville has recently authorized and sold school bonds to the amount of \$150,000, this with the immediate purpose of erecting additional buildings to accommodate the increasing enrollments. With more opportunity afforded through this new investment in school properties, a deeper interest is resulting and the city is manifesting greater pride in its educational system.