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## History of William Hoop Council High School (1867-1970)

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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## HISTORY OF WILLIAM HOOPER COUNCIL HIGH SCHOOL (1867 - 1970)

Compiled by Mrs. Marguerite Lacey  
(former teacher, Council High School)  
and Mr. Perry O. Ward

(former attendance supervisor, Huntsville City Schools)

The school, "Dear Ole Council," as it was affectionately called, has been known as the City School, Huntsville High School, Council High School, and William Hooper Council High School. The school was named for the founder of Alabama A&M University, William Hooper Council, who was born of slave parents in Fayette, North Carolina.

In the year 1867, the first public school for the African-Americans of Huntsville, Alabama, was opened in the basement of the Lakeside Methodist Episcopal Church, then located on North Jefferson Street. The first principal was H. C. Binford, Sr. who served from 1867 until 1879. Mr. Binford was succeeded by Charles Hendley, Sr., who served from 1879 to 1890. His assistant teachers were Thomas S. Cooper, Miss Susie Martin, and the pastor of Lakeside Church. Mr. Hendley was succeeded by Thomas S. Cooper; the assistants to Mr. Hendley were retained under Mr. Cooper. Thomas Cooper's wife, Mrs. Annie England Cooper, taught during this period.

In June 1891 there was a committee of seven, with the Reverend W. H. Gaston serving as chairman of the meeting, to select men to find a suitable place for a school. The Reverend J. F. Humphrey moved that there be a representative from the city-at-large. The following were chosen: Dr. B. E. Scruggs of the Lakeside Methodist Episcopal Church, the Reverend W. H. Gaston of St. Bartley Primitive Baptist Church, the Reverend N. W. Wilkerson of the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Robert Jones of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, Arch Roberts of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, J. W. Betts of the Missionary Baptist Church, and Henderson Brandon, representative-at-large. William Harris later replaced Arch Roberts. The group selected the tract of land between Pump and Pearl Streets. This tract of land was given to the City of Huntsville by the Davis-Lowe family (a white family) for the purpose of building a school for African-American children.

The Reverend J. F. Humphrey, pastor of the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Church Street, North, became principal in 1892. While waiting for the new school to be completed, the temporary school was moved to the first floor of the Masonic Hall of Evening Star Lodge, Number 6, located then on Barnett Street, in a section known as Davis Grove. The new school was completed in 1892. Both the new building and the first floor of the Masonic Hall were used until six more classrooms were added to the school building.



Children who attended school in 1892 at the Masonic Hall of Evening Star, Number 6.  
*(Photograph by Ann Maulsby, courtesy of Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)*

The Reverend Humphrey served as principal from 1892 until 1898. His assistants were Miss Gertie McGill and Miss Julia Turner. In later years the following persons were added to the faculty: Miss Lila Rankins (Mrs. Lila Penny), Miss Madge Terrell, Mrs. Dan Jones, Miss Susie Rankins, Miss Hattie Beasley, and Laura Ross. Mrs. Maria Clay Clinton, one of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers, was music director.

H. C. Binford, Jr. assumed principalship after receiving the A.B. Degree from Howard University in the spring of 1898. He remained principal until 1905, at which time he resigned to accept a position as mathematics teacher in the Frederick Douglas High School in Baltimore, Maryland. He was succeeded by Mrs. Sophie Scruggs, who headed the school under the superintendency of Attorney James Pride. The school at this time had eight grades. Mrs. Scruggs served from 1905 to 1908.

In 1908 upon repeated requests from local citizens of both races, H. C. Binford, Jr. resigned from the faculty of the Frederick Douglas High School and returned to Huntsville once again to take over the principalship of the Huntsville school. His curriculum and schedules followed closely those of Frederick Douglas High School and the preparatory department of Howard University.

The first ninth grade diploma was awarded about 1912; the first tenth grade diploma in 1913; the first eleventh grade diploma in 1914, and the first twelfth grade diploma was awarded in 1915 to Miss Minnie Scruggs, who later became Mrs. Minnie Scruggs Gaston. This made the school truly a high school.

Because of ill health, H. C. Binford, Jr. retired in 1918. At the request of the Board of Education and the retiring principal, Charles V. Hendley became principal in the spring of 1918. After serving as principal, Hendley resigned to give full time to his practice of law. Some nineteen teachers served under his principalship. He left the school of May 21, 1921, and was succeeded by P. C. Parks, who served one year, September 1921 - May 1922. His faculty members were the same teachers who had served under Principal Hendley with one or two additions.

In the fall of 1922, P. C. Parks was succeeded by C. E. Powell, who served for eight years, until May 1930. The old frame building was replaced by a brick building in 1927 during the Powell administration.

In the fall of 1930, Powell was succeeded by J. F. Campbell, who had been assistant principal. Campbell served from September 1930 to May 1940. E. Z. Matthews became principal in the fall of 1940 and served about eighteen months, leaving sometime during the spring of 1942. He received his call to go



Students of William H. Council High School, circa 1915  
*(Photograph by Ann Maulsby, courtesy of Huntsville–Madison County Public Library)*



William H. Council High School building built in 1927  
*(Photograph by Ann Maulsby, courtesy of Huntsville–Madison County Public Library)*

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into the armed forces in 1943. Mrs. Susie P. Gandy and Mrs. Helen P. Fearn took over the reins as co-principals in 1943 and retained the positions until 1948.

In the fall of 1948, F. E. James became principal and served in that capacity until the spring of 1953. During his tenure in office, two additional wings were added, providing a gymnasium, dining room, kitchen, library, and other rooms.

H. G. Fields became principal in the fall of 1953, and served for 16 years. During his administration, the school was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A marching and concert band was organized under the direction of Mr. Edwin S. Hill. Adam Kellam was coach at Council for 19 years. During this time his teams attained a record of 110-53-7, chalking up eight North Alabama High School Athletic Association Championships. He was inducted into the Huntsville Athletic Booster Club's Hall of Fame in April 1965. Coach Kellam's last team, the 1965 team, had a 9-0 record for that season. Council's football teams held the championship title in the conference more than the teams of any other school.

Integration in 1965-66 warranted a decline in enrollment at the school. The last high school graduation exercise to be held at Council was in the spring of 1966. In 1967, Council was reduced from grades one through twelve to grades one through nine. In 1968 it became a school for eight grades. In 1969, the school became an elementary school for grades one through six. Mr. Jerry Davis, a teacher and former basketball coach, became principal at that time. He was the last principal of William Hooper Council High School.



William H. Council High School building in 1994  
used by Arts Council groups

*(Photograph by Ernest C. Smartt, courtesy of Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)*