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*Merrimack School built 1914.
Photo from Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives.*

Mill Village Memories: Merrimack School

by Ann Maulsby

In September, 1915, just before she was six years old, Hester Smith began attending Merrimack School. Built in 1914, the school was beside the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, on what was then called the Pike, now named Triana Boulevard, on the western outskirts of Huntsville. The school was owned by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. The company built a larger school in front of and adjoining the original structure in 1920.

Set back from the rock-covered road the school faced west. About six steps led up from the street, and a dirt path led to the front door of the school. A hallway, perhaps twelve feet wide, divided the building in half. On each side of the hall were two doors. These opened into the classrooms. At the end of the hall was the principal's office. There was a set of five windows on each side of the door at the front

of the building. The windows were bare of curtains or window shades. The wooden floors were stained and varnished. A black-board was on one wall of each room. On the wall of the hall were hooks on which the students hung their coats. Heat was supplied by the steam plant that provided power for the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. The outhouses were behind the school.

The principal was Miss May Crutcher. Teachers were Miss Emma Dill, Miss Laughinhouse, and Miss Allison. At times there were seventy-five children in each class, but the attendance varied. The pupils sat in desks in rows. Seating was assigned by the teachers. When a child misbehaved, the small legs were switched by the teacher with a thin branch from a local bush. The children went to their homes for lunch, as did the parents who worked in the mill.

*Hester
&
Alfred Smith
attended
Merrimack School.*



Hester's dresses were made by her mother, who saw to it that the hem was always below the knees. Cotton stockings and high-top shoes completed the outer wardrobe. The boys usually wore overalls. In the winter most of the children wore union suits. Though these one-piece undergarments were uncomfortable, they were believed to help the children stay healthy.

Pencils and tablets of paper Hester bought from Cheney's, the general merchandise store across the street from the school. She believes that the school books were bought for the children by their parents. Hester does not recall any money-making programs taking place in the school.

School was a happy place for Hester, for she was an eager student. The Merrimack School was a good beginning for her, for she has continued to learn since she left the school.

Interview with Mrs. Hester Smith Collie, 3511 Dubose Street, Huntsville, Alabama, May 11, 1988.

