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THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE  
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of Local Architecture and Preservation



# THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY

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Can you name this street and these buildings? (See page 3).

## *from the Editor . . .*

The articles in this issue are reprinted, with permission, from **A Document of Historical Resources**, researched and written by members of the 1975 Centennial History Committee of the Huntsville City Schools. The resulting vast amount of material was compiled into two large volumes by Toni Reynolds, Historic Huntsville Foundation board member.

In the photograph on page 2, West Clinton Avenue is visible at top right of picture. At top center is the 1916 Huntsville High School (West Clinton School), which in later years was used as a temporary Civic Arts Center until its demolition. The middle building was a commercial laundry, and the house at photo center is the Jeremiah Clemens House which has been restored and is used by Huntsville Utilities. A parking lot and a portion of the Parking Garage for the Von Braun Civic Center are now on the site of the school and laundry. This undated photograph was taken from atop the Russel Erskine Hotel.



### **COVER:**

A 1910 photograph, taken by Miriam Wellman, of Huntsville's first public school building, built in 1882 on East Clinton Avenue. From left: Neida Humphrey, Birdie Lamburt, Jennie V. Yeatman, Helen Petty, and Lena House.

### **PHOTOGRAPHS:**

Courtesy of the Huntsville Public Library, Zeitler Room:  
Cover; pages 2, 4, 8, 9, 12, 16-21, 24, 26, 28-30.

By Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A.: pages 11, 22, 23.

# A Brief History of Huntsville Schools

by Dr. Frances Roberts and Dr. H. D. Nelson



(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article, originally published in the *Commemorative Album - Sesquicentennial, Huntsville, Alabama*, was written in 1955 by Dr. Frances Roberts of the University of Alabama in Huntsville and Dr. H. D. Nelson, who was then Superintendent of Huntsville City Schools; Dr. Roberts updated the information in 1986.)



One of Huntsville's earliest and most enduring interests has been a deep concern for the education of its children and youth. According to tradition, there was a school established in the community by Wyatt Bishop as early as 1807. Col. and Mrs. J. L. Posey also tutored a number of pupils in the early period when the town was known as Hunt's Spring. On November 25, 1812, Green Academy was chartered by the Mississippi Territorial Legislature, the second of its kind, in what is now Alabama. Little is known of its early sessions, but by 1822 it was established in its permanent brick quarters on what is now the site of East Clinton Avenue School. This institution for boys, the most highly recognized of its type in antebellum North Alabama, was reduced to ashes by the Federal Forces during the War Between the States.

Following the pattern of most southern towns of the Old South, Huntsville's schools were private and segregated according to sex. Among the outstanding of these institutions were Mrs. Sara McKay's School, organized in 1819; the Monte Sano Female Academy, opened on February 18, 1830 by the Rev. and Mrs. Rowe; the Huntsville Female Seminary on Randolph Avenue, opened on January 5, 1831; and the Huntsville Female College, chartered and opened by the Methodist Church in 1851. Under the guidance of the Presbyterian Church, a boy's school was built on what is now Longwood Drive in South Huntsville, but it never opened because of the beginning of the War between the States.

In 1854, the state legislature provided the necessary acts for creating the first public school system in Alabama. There is some evidence that public funds were used to support the school under the terms of this general act in the City of Huntsville prior to the War Between the States. This early beginning in the field of public education was interrupted by the war, but during the Reconstruction period, a public school was established under the jurisdiction of the County Superintendent of Instruction.

**Left:** An unidentified early photograph taken on the steps of the 1882 East Clinton Avenue School, Huntsville's first public school building.

In January of 1873, the City Council made an appropriation of \$1,200 to the public schools for whites and Negroes. On January 21, 1873, this body also moved to prepare the necessary memorials to the state legislature. "To have enacted such laws as may be necessary to have public schools of this district transferred to the city authorities and to provide for the support of the schools and to build school houses for the same." By 1875, the City Council achieved this authority; for in that year the principals and teachers were named by this body and appropriations were made, as they had been since 1873, to supplement state funds. Councilmen John T. Patterson, John Reed, and George Warwick were appointed as members of a school committee whose function it was to report on school matters.

From this time forward until 1905, the public schools of Huntsville remained under the direct supervision of the City Council. At first, rented buildings were used for school sessions. These included a house near the Catholic Church on Jefferson; the Russell home on Madison Street, where the parking garage is now located at the corner of Madison and Fountain Row; and the Calhoun home, which was located on the northeast corner of Eustis and Green streets.

Principals and teachers rendering service at this formative period of public education were Matt McClung Robinson, C. D. Watkins, Daniel B. Young, J. J. Pleasant, Mrs. V. A. Wallace, Mrs. Kate Farris, Mrs. Mary Newman, Mrs. Marie Pleasant, and Miss Sally Ready.

The Freedman's Bureau helped to establish a Negro school on Townsend Street at the close of the War Between the States. Later in 1873, the City Council began its active support of the school which at that time was under state jurisdiction. Thomas Townsend, Daniel Brandon, S. L. Carter, William Council, Charles Hendley, and Henry Binford were among the early teachers in this school. Other locations of the Negro school were in the basement of the Lakeside Methodist Church and the Negro Masonic Temple. The Rev. W. H. Gaston also operated a Negro school in a one-room structure behind St. Bartley's Primitive Baptist Church.

In 1882, while the Rev. J. L. Lovett was principal, the first white public school building was erected on the former site of Green Academy by the City Council. The trustees of this institution, which had not been rebuilt after the war, leased their property to the City officials for twenty years, with the provision that the instrument could be renewed at the end of that time. J. W. Hutchens contracted with the City Council to build the frame structure for \$4,000.

Of the more than 800 white children listed in the school census for the year 1882, only 133 enrolled in the public school, thus indicating that private education in Huntsville was still the order of the day.

Following the Rev. J. L. Lovett's administration, A. N. Esham served as principal of the public school until 1894 when Professor Sam R. Butler was elected to that position. So rapidly did the enrollment grow under his guidance that in 1902, the City Council contracted with A. M. Booth to construct a three story brick building to house the school. Some of the classroom teachers during this period who performed outstanding service and who were long remembered by their pupils were Miss Fannis Taliaferro, Miss Florence Hardie, Miss Mamie Mastin, Miss Laura Bassett, and Miss Annie Merts.

In 1905, due to a controversy in the school system, two public schools were conducted: one under the City Council with W. J. Humphrey as principal, and the other under a newly created superintendent of City Schools, headed by James Pride with S. R. Butler as principal. By 1907, the matter was resolved, and from that date until the present, the public schools have remained under the direct jurisdiction of a five-member board of education appointed by the City Council until 1972, when these positions became subject to election by the people. Members of this first board appointed in 1907 included J. D. Humphrey, President; W. T. Hutchens; Lawrence Cooper; David Grayson; and Oliver Goldsmith. After Professor Butler declined the appointment as principal offered to him by this group, George Goddard was employed to head the school for the year 1907-08.

Meanwhile many private schools for boys and girls continued to flourish in the City. Some of the institutions of note during the period from 1865-1920 were the Carlos D. Smith School on Adams Street, the Charles O. Shepherd School for Boys on Holmes Street, the S. R. Butler School on Eustis Street, and the Williams School on McCullough Avenue. The Huntsville Female Seminary continued until 1874 when it was forced to close due to financial difficulties. Later others operated private schools in this building from time to time. The Huntsville Female College continued until 1895 when the main building burned.

As the public schools came to be more popular, the private schools were discontinued one by one. Under the administration of R. E. Sessions, who became superintendent of the city schools in 1908, a separate four-year high school was organized. In 1911 the Williams Building on McCullough Avenue was rented to house the new school and R. C. Johnson became its first principal. When this structure was destroyed by fire in 1914, the high school grades were returned to the East Clinton building where the elementary grades were still located.

After the resignation of Mr. Sessions in 1913, Mr. Johnson was elevated to the superintendency, a position which he held until 1920. In 1916, a new three-story brick high school was completed on West Clinton Avenue.



Council High School, 609 Pelham Street, now serves as the Council Center for the city school system. The two-story portion of the brick building at left (now demolished) was completed in 1927 for the city's Negro students, the same year as the old Huntsville High School on Randolph Avenue was completed for the white students.

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As the Negro enrollment grew, the City Council made provision for the construction of a new frame building in 1896 on a Pelham Street site donated by the Nicholas Davis family. The State of Alabama, through legislative enactment, made provision in 1873 for a Negro normal school to be located in Huntsville. This institution graduated its first class in 1878, and in 1891, its site was changed from West Clinton Avenue to its present location at Normal, Alabama. In 1895, the Seventh Day Adventists also organized Oakwood Junior College for the training of Negroes. Later this school, located four miles northwest of Huntsville, was converted into a four year college in 1945. In 1950, the University of Alabama opened an Extension Center in what was then West Huntsville

High School (now Stone Middle School). From this meager beginning has grown the present University of Alabama in Huntsville, now located on a 335 acre campus in the western part of the city.

In 1920, Frank W. Williams was employed by the Board of Education as superintendent. Under his leadership, the school facilities were expanded to take care of rapid increases in enrollment occasioned by the almost universal acceptance of public education by the community. In 1927, two new brick schools were completed, a white high school on Randolph Avenue and a Negro school now known as Councill High. At this time, the West Clinton Avenue building became an elementary school to serve the needs of that area of the city.

Upon the death of Mr. Williams in 1928, Mr. W. G. Hamm became superintendent of the public schools and remained in this capacity until 1948. The Wills Taylor building on Eustis Avenue was purchased in 1929 by the Board of Education to house part of the junior high school grades, and in 1938 the old East Clinton School was replaced by the present structure. In that same year a Negro elementary school was built on Winston Street.

With the coming of two arsenals to Huntsville during World War II, the Fifth Avenue Elementary School (corner of



Located at the southwest corner of Governors Drive (formerly Fifth Avenue) and Gallatin Street, Fifth Avenue Elementary School has been remodeled since this c. 1955 view. The building is now part of the Ambulatory Care Center of the School of Primary Medical Care, University of Alabama at Huntsville.

Governors Drive and Gallatin Street) was constructed in 1944 to take care of the city's expansions to the south.

Dr. Harvey D. Nelson became superintendent of the City Schools in 1948 and remained in that post until he resigned to take the job of superintendent at Tuscaloosa. Because of the rapid expansion of the city's population during this period, additions were made to the existing elementary schools, two new elementary schools were built, and a new Huntsville High School, located on Billie Watkins Avenue, was dedicated on August 22, 1954. A modern annex also was added to Councill High School. When the city limits were expanded in 1956 to encompass all of the mill villages, the schools in these areas were transferred from county jurisdiction to the city system, thus bringing the total number of schools to thirteen.

The most rapid expansion of the city schools to date came during the administrations of Dr. Raymond Christian (1956-1965), Dr. Alton Crews (1966-1967), and Dr. Joseph Stowers (1967-1970). Between 1956 and 1970, the size of Huntsville jumped from four and one half square miles to more than 114 square miles, and its population rose from 72,365 to 139,282. Because of the expanded activities at Redstone Arsenal and the space effort carried on at Marshall Space Flight Center, Huntsville began to expand in all directions and new schools were built in all parts of the city. By 1972, five senior high schools, nine junior high schools (now called middle schools), and twenty-six elementary schools were in operation with a total enrollment of 34,937 students.

With the aid of federal, state, and local funds, the school system expanded its academic offerings and services to regular, special, and adult students. Desegregation of the schools, which began in 1963, was accomplished with a minimum of disruption by 1974. The fact that Sonnie Hereford (a black student), who entered the first grade at Fifth Avenue Elementary School in 1963, became president of the student body at Butler High School during his senior year illustrates the progress made in race relations during the intervening time span.

Even though Huntsville's growth had slowed after man was landed on the moon successfully in 1969, the city continued to thrive because it took steps to diversify its economic base.

After the sudden death of Dr. Joseph Stowers in 1970, Dr. V. M. Burkett became superintendent, a post he held during the next six years. In 1974, the school system became the first in Alabama to achieve accreditation for all of its elementary schools from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Huntsville High had become one of the first high schools in the South to receive this status as early as 1912. During 1974-1975, the centennial of the city schools was celebrated by a variety of activities.

In 1976, Dr. Shelby Counts became superintendent and remained in this position until illness forced his retirement in 1983. Currently Dr. Mary Jane Caylor began her third year as superintendent in June of 1986. Over the past ten years, the city schools have managed to meet the challenges of changing times and to keep abreast of the trends in education.



Huntsville Middle School on Adams Street is the last city school building to be constructed. Completed in 1977, the building's design was influenced by the requirements for team-teaching "pod" areas plus individual classrooms. The many huge trees on the building site were also a factor in the school's design, with only five or six trees having to be removed for construction.



The 1930 Football Team of Huntsville High School. A notation with the picture states that the names were obtained by James Record from six different people. **Front Row from left:** C. D. Howard, "Bonehead" Cartch, Walton Fleming, "Sonny" McCaleb, Bill Hopper, Charles Crute, Joe Fleming, Jeff Darwin, Dorsey Uptain. **Middle Row from left:** Dudley Smith, Carl Walker, William Thomas, C. M. McClure, John McCord, Ogden McAnally, Charles O'Reilly, Dickey Walker, Bruce Hovis, Joe Whitt. **Back Row from left:** Robert Hopper, John McDonald, Merle Earl, Tracey Priest, Country Bailey, Bradley Baker, Coach Jess Keene, Anderson Douglass, Tom Earl, Doug Martinson, Alex Mitchell.

# Summary of the 16th - Section Land History

by James Record

Time and again, any study of education in Alabama encounters references to the sixteenth section in every township. Townships in every county are six miles square, containing thirty-six sections, each of which is one mile square, or 640 acres. Congress, in 1819, provided the first federal grant to Alabama with these sections of land - number 16 in every township.

A Congressional Act of March 2, 1819 gave the sixteenth section in every township "to the inhabitants of such townships for the use of schools." This was provided once the inhabitants of the territory of Alabama formed the State of Alabama and adopted its constitution.

The Alabama Constitutional Convention was held in the City of Huntsville in 1819 and the adopted constitution was sent to Congress. The State of Alabama was then admitted to the Union on December 14, 1819.

The fledgling state of Alabama, as had Congress, took action to aid education. The 1819 constitution stated in part: "the general assembly (legislature) shall take measures to preserve from unnecessary waste or damage, such lands as are or hereafter may be granted by the United States for the use

of schools within each township in this state, and apply the funds which may be raised from such lands . . ."

According to Albert Burton Moore's **History of Alabama**, provisions of a state legislative act of January 1, 1823 included: "Two administrative units, the township and the school district, were established and incorporated. At the head of the township organization was a board of three school commissioners, whose duty it was to administer school lands, establish schools, and disburse money to them in proportion to the number of students enrolled, and to examine and certify teachers. Each school was to be governed by three trustees elected by the people of the district. It was their duty to cause a schoolhouse to be built, to employ teachers, to purchase books and stationery for the use of the school, and to regulate the admission of students, designating specifically, after a thorough examination, those who should be admitted without tuition fees. . . The law required that a complete report on school lands and school activities should be made to the legislature each year." - (THE EDITOR).

Subsequent laws authorized various means of utilizing the sixteenth-section lands, including sale, particularly as authorized by Alabama law, as shown on page 31 of the 1827-1828 Acts of the Alabama Legislature.

Various ways were offered legislatively and administratively over the years to manage and utilize the so-called sixteenth-section school fund. . . Many funds were invested and lost in an ill-fated State Bank.

The state tried in various ways through different agencies to manage sixteenth sections and money, but never too successfully. The sixteenth section, however, as intended by Congress and by the Alabama Constitution, did serve a very useful purpose in the never-ending attempt to provide adequate money for public schools, including those in Huntsville.



# A Brief Sketch of Huntsville's School Architecture : 1882-1975

by Harvie P. Jones, F.A.I.A.

Prior to 1882, Huntsville's school buildings were all private. In the early 19th century, it was widely felt that "taxing one man's property to educate another man's child" was not proper, according to Lawrence A. Cremlin's "Transformation of the School." Others, such as Horace Mann and Catherine Beecher, viewed education as a public enterprise (Andrew Guilliford, *America's Country Schools*). By 1873, efforts were under way in Huntsville to establish a public school system. In 1875, the system was formally established and the first public school building was completed in 1882.

This first public school building was located on a site which has been used continuously for educational facilities since the first quarter of the nineteenth century - the block bounded by East Clinton Avenue, White Street, Calhoun Street, and East Holmes Avenue. This site has successively accommodated Green Academy, a private school of considerable reputation, built in 1822 and burned in the Civil War; the first public school building, built in 1882; a large twelve-grade public school built about 1902; and East Clinton Elementary School, built in 1938.

The 1882 building, based on an extant sketch and description, contained two large classrooms, two small classrooms, and a "chapel" (assembly room). The cubically-proportioned two-story building was a curious mixture of stylistic influences: Italianate form and proportions, a Colonial Revival belfry reminiscent of a New England 18th century church (minus



Huntsville's first public school building was built in 1882 on the site of the present East Clinton Elementary School.

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the spire), and Victorian "stick-style" spandrel decorations between the upper and lower windows. The windows were tall and closely spaced in the Italianate manner to provide plenty of light and ventilation for the interior. What appears to be metal stove-flues penetrate the roof at each room location. The building bears a strong family-resemblance to several of the 1880-1900 period schools shown in Andrew Guilliford's **America's Country Schools**.

In 1882, the school census indicates only 133 of 800 Huntsville students attended this public school. Apparently there were several private schools in operation at this time.

An indication of how rapidly the public school system was growing in the late 19th century was that this first small school building was demolished in just twenty short years to make way for a much larger building in about 1902. A photograph appears to indicate that this 1902 building contained at least twelve classrooms for the twelve grades it housed, and had an auditorium at the center. This was a two-story red-brick Romanesque-Revival influenced design, with rounded-arch openings at the belfry tower and entry, and

castellated parapets at the tower top and end-towers. A tall pyramidal spire topped the castellated belfry tower. A new and modern feature was the grouping of six windows directly together to form large continuous window-walls at the classrooms, maximizing light and ventilation. Many classrooms had windows on two walls, further improving lighting and ventilation. The solid, monumental air of the building served to communicate the perceived importance of public education to the community and to visitors.

By 1916, public education in Huntsville had grown to the point that a separate high school was needed. It was built on West Clinton Avenue two blocks west of Jefferson Street. This school was a handsome Classical Revival brick two-story-plus-basement structure with a Tuscan-columned portico, heavy roof-cornice, roof-parapets, and a rusticated wall-base. It contained at least fifteen classrooms, plus more rooms in the basement, and a good-sized auditorium with a sloped floor and proscenium-arch stage. Unlike the previous schools, this high school had a central heating system consisting of a boiler and radiators served by distribution pipes.



This larger brick building was erected only twenty years later (1902) on the same East Clinton Avenue site as the first frame building.



In 1916 another brick building was constructed as a separate high school on West Clinton Avenue two blocks west of Jefferson Street. (See pp. 2-3.)

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This 1916 building has a fond place in the hearts of many Huntsvillians who never attended school there. From about 1962 until 1974, it served as the temporary Civic Arts Center and as offices for the recently formed Arts Council. The building saw hundreds of plays, art exhibits, dance and painting classes, rehearsals, and arts activities of every description. Huntsville's greatest period of growth and maturity in the arts was accommodated in this building.

Only ten years later it was necessary to expand Huntsville's high school capacity. By this time, the private schools were a minor factor in education, and the town was growing rapidly in the 1920's boom. Thus in 1927, a new Huntsville High School was built near the corner of Randolph Avenue and White Street. This was a full three-story building containing about eighteen classrooms. The stylistic influence, like that of the 1916 high school, was the Renaissance. A trio of rounded arches and Tuscan colonettes graced the raised entry, atop a flight of monumental steps. On the

parapet above the entry was a double baroque scroll and urn ornament, later lost to lightning. The ornamentation at the entry, which appears to be cut limestone, is in fact "cast stone," or cement and sand cast into elaborate moulds to resemble cut limestone. The classroom windows were wood, divided-light, double-hung sashes in banks of five. These windows in the 1960's were replaced with inappropriate aluminum ranch-style windows which the School Board presently hopes to remove in a restoration of this handsome building. The various wings were also added in the 1960's.

There was rapid growth in cotton-goods manufacturing in Huntsville from the late 19th century through the 1920's. The various "mill villages" built just outside the city limits included not only the mills, but housing, commercial buildings, and schools. Rison School (1920), Lincoln School (1929), and Joe Bradley School were three of these. Joe Bradley is gone, Rison will be demolished shortly for I-565, but Lincoln is still in excellent condition and is being used as Lincoln Elementary School. The monolithic reinforced concrete structure is so sound that (in the words of the School



The 1927 high school at the corner of Randolph Avenue and White Street. It will soon be renovated to serve as administrative offices for the city schools.



Lincoln School, still in use as an elementary school, was built by Lincoln Mills in 1929 at 1110 Meridian Street.

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Maintenance Department) "it could probably be rolled end-over-end without hurting it much." Lincoln School's stylistic category could be termed "stripped Renaissance Classical." It has the pilasters, stepped parapets, high central block flanked by lower wings, Tuscan colonettes, and cove-corner spandrels that can be seen in more elaborate buildings of Renaissance Revival design.

Rison School (1920) reflects the Spanish Colonial Revival in a simplified form. It is low and rambling, stucco with brick archways, has a steep pitched roof, and is U-shaped around a central courtyard.

By 1938, the 1902 school on East Clinton Avenue (described earlier) had been demolished and replaced with the present East Clinton Elementary School. Its style is Art Deco, one of the first of the so-called "modern" 20th century styles which made a conscious effort to avoid borrowing from ancient styles. This style is exemplified in the chevrons, flutes, and circles at the entry. The light-colored one-story

brick building is in an "E" shape (but not because it is "E. Clinton School") with the assembly room in the center leg of the "E". Thus, this is the fourth building on this site which has been used only for educational buildings since the Green Academy first occupied it in 1822, a period of 164 years.

Blossomwood and Westlawn Elementary Schools (1956) were the first Huntsville schools influenced by the modern International Style, wherein walls are treated as rectangular panels and modulation of surfaces is minimized. Variety of form is achieved by pushing and pulling the panels (walls) in and out, up and down. Planes rather than masses are emphasized. The window walls at Blossomwood consist of "curtain walls" of prefabricated window-plus-spandrel units bolted or welded into place to entirely fill the wall opening. Inside lighting is balanced by using skylights in the corridors and clerestories to "borrow" daylight from the corridors.

The space-boom years of 1954-1968 saw the construction of an amazing thirty-plus schools and school additions. This is about three-fourths of all school buildings existing in the City of Huntsville school system. In the late fifties, the honest boast was made that Huntsville was building schools at



By 1938 the East Clinton Avenue site had yet another school, this Art Deco style building which is still in use as East Clinton Elementary School.



Blossomwood Elementary, built in 1956, was one of Huntsville's first school buildings influenced by the International Style.

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the average rate of "one classroom per week" to meet the huge influx of students. This large number of new schools, up until 1966, shared a number of characteristics. They were nearly all one-story, and as a consequence, rambled over their sites in a loose arrangement of low, flat-roofed wings. Many used curtain walls and all had a full wall of windows at one side of each classroom. Many had skylights in the classrooms and other spaces. An awkward hybrid word - "cafetorium" - was devised by some planner to describe the combination cafeteria-auditoriums used in the smaller schools. These "cafetorium" usually were considerably taller than the rest of the building and sometimes had irregular-profile roofs, as well, to give a visual accent to the sprawling building.

In design, the 1954-66 buildings were deliberately non-monumental, in contrast to the earlier buildings. They were strongly influenced by the International Style and also by the research and design of such nationally-known architects as Caudill, Rowlett, Scott, and Perkins and Will. An influential book of 1958 was *Schoolhouse*, edited by Walter McQuade and published by Simon and Schuster. This book went far beyond style and attempted to analyse the human factors in the educational process with the hoped-for result of more humane educational spaces. These buildings did achieve an informality, but "humaneness" is more than mere informality. The search

continues, as it always will, for the best way to create a physical environment conducive to learning.

In the mid-1960's an organization, funded by Foundation grants, called Educational Facilities Laboratories (EFL) had a strong and almost revolutionary impact on school design and methods of teaching here and nationally. The concept of "team teaching" was in the experimental stages, and EFL devised ways of reshaping the typical school of straight rows and self-contained thirty-student, one-teacher classrooms to work with the idea of team-teaching. EFL grouped the classrooms so that a team of three to six teachers could work with varying groups of students in a large flexible space that sometimes could be subdivided into smaller spaces. A teachers' planning room was adjacent so that teachers could indeed plan as a team. Windows, with the common advent of air conditioning and fluorescent lighting, were reduced or eliminated since uncontrolled daylight interfered with audio-visual aids such as films, television, and overhead projectors. One of the most visually startling aspects of this design revolution was that the boxy, planar International Style buildings of the 1950's were replaced by schools of many shapes. Huntsville's first elementary school of this type was McDonnell Elementary (1967), whose "pods" of classrooms were a cluster of five hexagons, each accommodating 120 students, four teachers and an assistant, restrooms, and a teachers' planning room. Butler High School (1967), Chaffee (1969), Grissom (1969), and Ed White (1969) were similarly more free in geometric form than the pre-1967 schools.

Huntsville's first school which was a result of an extensive programming study was J. O. Johnson High School (1972). An educational consultant was engaged. A large study commit-



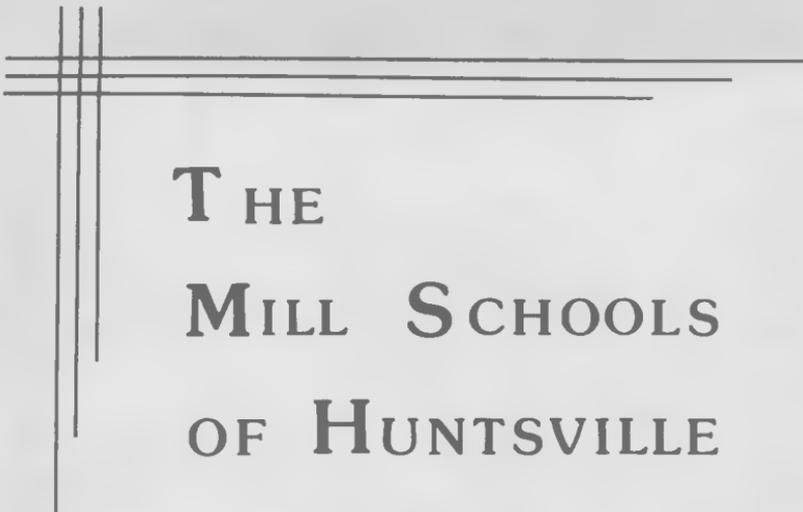
Chaffee School (1969) was arranged in "pods" to facilitate team teaching.

tee was formed from staff and faculty members. A year's effort resulted in a highly detailed program whose philosophy was to encourage initiative in students, then to aid the student in highly flexible ways in achieving his goals. While "pods" and team-teaching were involved, it was in a more flexible arrangement than in the latter 1960's plans. It contained both pods and individual classrooms where they were appropriate.

The best that any school building can do is to interfere as little as possible with the learning process. Buildings cannot educate anyone - they can only make the process a little more pleasant. Future architects, School Boards, faculties/staffs will continue efforts to make the buildings work as well as possible as one element in aiding learning.



The 1972 J. O. Johnson High School design utilizes both the "pod" and individual classrooms in its arrangement.



# THE MILL SCHOOLS OF HUNTSVILLE

by Aida Reinbolt

The mill schools, sometimes called the village or suburban schools, were originally built for the benefit of the Huntsville textile workers. Located outside the city limits, these schools came under the jurisdiction of the Madison County School System.<sup>1</sup> They became city schools after 1955 when the Huntsville city limits were extended.

The textile mills built and maintained the schools while the County provided and paid the teachers. This partnership worked fairly well until the mills began to close or changed ownership. The result was that the schools were sold (or just given) to the County.

In the early 1900's, the mill schools were simple dwelling houses accomodating a few children. The majority of school-age children worked in the mills. Gradually, as child labor legislation and compulsory education laws freed more and more children from the mills, larger and more permanent school buildings were constructed.

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<sup>1</sup>The textile mills were located outside the city limits in order to obtain tax advantages.



Rison School was built by Dallas Mills as a mill village school in 1920 at 509 Oakwood Avenue. The building is scheduled for demolition, being in the right-of-way for the I-65 highway.



An early Dallas Mill Grammar School (predating the Rison School and approximately on the same site) was housed in the old Moore home. This newspaper photograph was copied from **The Huntsville Mercury**, Century Edition, July 23, 1916.

There were four such schools in the vicinity of Huntsville. Three large mills each supported a school of its own. The fourth school, near three small mills, was dependent on philanthropic donations and the county for its subsistence.

Northeast of the city, one mile from the center of town, were the Dallas Manufacturing Company and Rison School. Built in 1921 at a cost of \$80,000, it was named for William R. Rison, former vice-president, treasurer, and general manager of the mill. This handsome green stucco building served as an elementary school and high school until it was sold to the county in 1942 for the nominal sum of \$10,000. Incorporated into the city school system in 1955, the building continued to be used as an elementary and junior high school until it was closed in 1967. After serving as a daycare center and temporary arts center, the building was abandoned. The land it occupies at 509 Oakwood Avenue is destined soon to become part of a new highway.

Adjacent to the Dallas Mill was the Lincoln Mill of Alabama. Its school was named for the owner, William Lincoln Barrell. Lincoln School, located at 1110 Meridian Street, was completed in 1929. (See picture, page 20.) The mill paid \$60,000 for the building and equipment. After fifty-six years, having served as an elementary school, a high school, and every other combination of grade school, this attractive, pale green and white painted concrete and steel building continues to serve the children in its vicinity. In 1982 this unique building was placed on the National Register of Historic Buildings.

Southwest of the city was the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. Its school, known simply as Joe Bradley, was named for the agent and general manager of the mill, Joseph J. Bradley, Sr. This school, located at 3405 Triana Boulevard, was opened in 1919, but it was enlarged in 1925 when several classrooms and an auditorium were added. The Merrimack Mill became the Huntsville Manufacturing Company in 1946 when it was purchased by the M. Lowenstein Corporation. The school, valued at \$300,000 by the County Board of Education and the mill officials, was presented to the county as a gift in 1951. The area was annexed to the city in 1956, and although the original building has been removed, an annex added in recent years continues to provide administrative office space for the Huntsville Board of Education.

A short distance from the Merrimack Mill was another mill village, or rather, a cluster of three villages known collectively as West Huntsville. Three small textile mills provided the livelihood for the residents of these villages. None of the mills was willing to undertake the responsibility for providing a school for its children. However, through the efforts of a Presbyterian missionary, Jessie House, and a young teacher, William P. Fanning, the mills were persuaded to donate a dwelling house for the first school. When this



This picture was identified (on back of photo) as an early school built by Lincoln Mill; when this building was outgrown, the mill built the present Lincoln School in 1929 on Meridian Street (see picture, page 20).

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building was outgrown, a small amount of money was raised among the parents; the rest - \$3,000 - was given by philanthropist Virginia McCormick to build an eight room wooden building.<sup>2</sup> This structure sufficed until the county built a more substantial schoolhouse. Today an attractive red brick building constructed by the city school system is situated at 3001 Ninth Avenue, the site of the original wooden building. Children attending this school today play in the shade of three large trees planted by Mr. Fanning for the comfort of the mill children.

The mill managers were very proud of their schools and were sympathetic to the needs of the children of their employees. One of the most commendable actions taken by the mills

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<sup>2</sup>Virginia McCormick, part-time resident of Huntsville and daughter of Cyrus McCormick, contributed generously towards the welfare of the mill workers, with the help of Grace Walker, her secretary.



Merrimack School predated the Joe Bradley School which was completed in 1919.

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was the addition of the high school grades to each of their elementary schools. This action was suggested by the four mill school principals and had the support and approval of the county school system. First the parents, and then the mill management, had to be convinced, but finally all four schools became accredited high schools by the process of adding one new grade a year.

From 1929 to 1950, these high schools provided the children of the mill villages the opportunity of obtaining a high school diploma and the possibility of going on to college if they so desired, and many did. In 1951 West Huntsville High School was replaced by a new consolidated school, the S. R. Butler High School, and all high school-age children from all the mill villages went there.

Except for the Lincoln School, the mill schools of old are no more, but the legacy of the schools lives on in the roster of alumni who have profited from the privilege of attending these schools. They were especially fortunate to have had the exemplary leadership of many devoted teachers and the four stalwart principals - Cecil Vincent Fain of Rison, Edward Anderson of Lincoln, Edward F. DuBose of Joe Bradley, and John Homer Crim of West Huntsville. Mr. Crim became



This photograph of Joe Bradley School on Triana Boulevard was taken before additions were made to the building in 1925.



The old West Huntsville School on Ninth Avenue has been replaced by a modern brick school building on the same site.

principal of the new Butler High School. Mr. DuBose continued teaching at Joe Bradley, and later at Ridgecrest Elementary, until he retired. He recalls having taught three generations of children of one family.

Among the graduates of the mill schools are professionals, statesmen, and successful business people who do not hesitate to give credit to the mill schools for the start they were given on the road to success.

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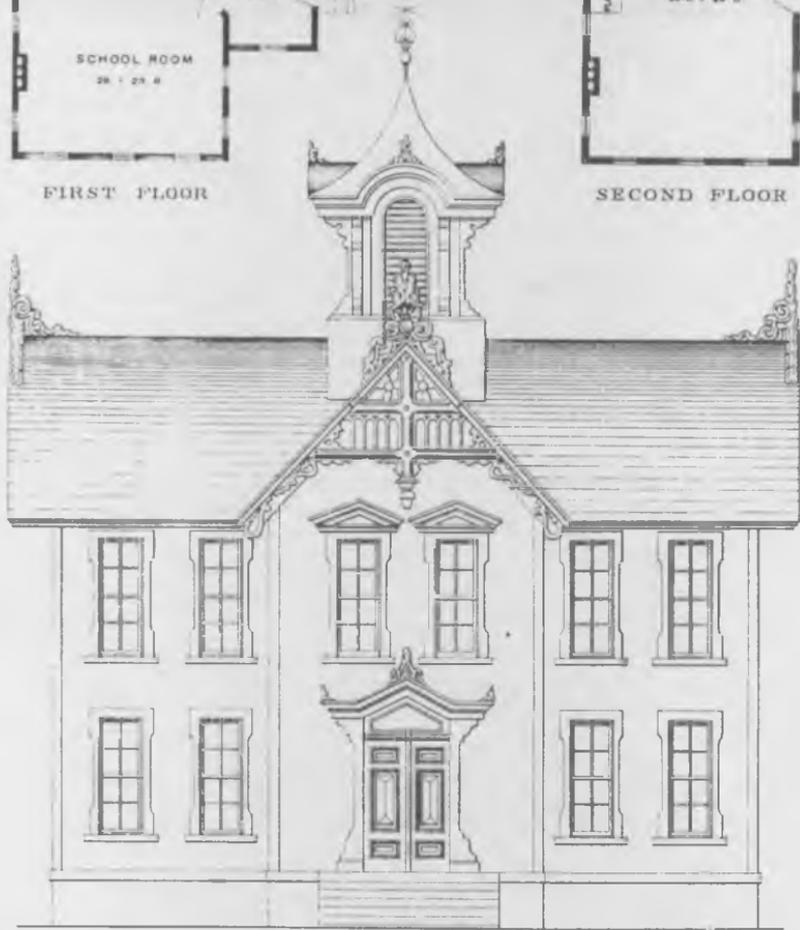


FIRST FLOOR

SCALE 3/8 INCH



SECOND FLOOR



FRONT ELEVATION

SCALE 1/8 INCH TO FOOT

DESIGN FOR A FRAME SCHOOL-HOUSE

E. E. MYERS, Architect. Springfield, Ill.

Illustration from an 1878 pattern book, **Bicknell's Village Builder and Supplement**, published by A. J. Bicknell and Co., New York.



*from*

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