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"Instilling Wisdom, Building Character"

A Study of Segregation, Politics, and Public Education in Sumter County, Georgia, 1930s–1970s







D. Jason Berggren and Adrienne M. Petty

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Presented to Interior Region 2 (Legacy Southeast Region)

Prepared under a cooperative agreement between
The Organization of American Historians and The National Park Service
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Cover Images:
Top left: Spring Creek Baptist Church in Cobb, Georgia, Photo by D. Jason Berggren; Top right: The building that served as Americus Junior High School: Rees Park, now the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce, Photo by D. Jason Berggren; Bottom: A. S. Staley High School, Georgia State Archives, Image c. 1943–1945.

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“The school is not so much a place to instill wisdom as it is a place to build men and women. The boy may fail in one or many studies do not discourage him; if he comes out with the character of a man he has won. The girl may not lead her class, but if she comes out pure and true for life that is success.”

Ms. Annie B. Floyd, Principal
Plains Rosenwald Jr. High School
1952

In Loving Memory of Phyllis M. Berggren, LaSalle Petty Jr., and Aidan J. Smith

Contents

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction xvii

CHAPTER ONE

Post–Civil War Education in Sumter County, Georgia: The Emergence of Schools for Freedpeople and More Schools for White Children 1

Codification of Separate and Unequal Schools in Georgia and Sumter County 3

The US Supreme Court Upholds "Separate but Equal" 4

Separate and Unequal Public Education 5

The Central Role of African American Churches 9

The Emergence of Black Educational Institutions 10

Chapter One Supplemental Materials 17

Figure Gallery 17

CHAPTER TWO

Plains High School: Model School, Segregated School 23

Public Education in a Rural Community 25

Miss Julia 26

The School Days of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter 29

Plains High School during and after World War II 32

Jim Crow 101 34

Tom Sheffield: No Special Treatment 37

Jimmy Melvin: Catch Them Doing Good 39

Chris English: Work Hard, Play Hard 40

Chapter Two Supplemental Materials 43

Figure Gallery 43

CHAPTER THREE

When Jimmy Carter Graduated: Sumter County's Schools in 1940–1941 69

Sumter County System—White Schools 69

Americus City System—White Schools 76

Sumter County System—"Colored" Schools 79

Americus City System—McCay Hill and Staley 100

Chapter Three Supplemental Materials 107
Excerpts from an Interview with Kay Bell and Amy Wise 107
Excerpts from an Interview with Eugene Edge 120
Profiles of White Sumter County Public Schools, 1940–1941 138
Profiles of White Americus City Public Schools, 1940–1941 168
Profiles of Black Sumter County Public Schools, 1940–1941 175
Profiles of Black Americus City Public Schools, 1940–1941 235
Documents, Images, and Artifacts 240
Obituaries and Grave Images 276

CHAPTER FOUR

Carter's First Political Experience: Selection and Service on the Sumter County Board of Education 281
Method of School Board Selection—The Grand Jury 283
Jimmy Carter, the Eldest Son of a Talmadge Man 285
Following in the Political Footsteps of Earl Carter 290
Jimmy Carter Takes His Seat 293
Carter Finding His Place on the Sumter County School Board 293
Regular Attendance at Board Meetings 301
Making Motions and Offering a Second 305
Building a Political Resume 310
Chapter Four Supplemental Materials 313
Document: Resolution of the Sumter County Board of Education on the Death of Earl Carter, August 4, 1953 313
Documents: Governor Herman Talmadge and the 1953 Graduation Commencement at Plains High School 314
Document: The Nomination of Jimmy Carter for the Sumter County Board of Education 317
Documents: The Selection of Jimmy Carter for the Sumter County Board of Education 318
Select Profiles of Black Sumter County Public Schools, 1955–1956 322
Document: Sumter County Board of Education Letterhead with the Name of J. E. Carter, Jr. 326
Documents: The Retirement of Miss Julia Coleman, 1958 327
Document: Jimmy Carter Gubernatorial Campaign Brochure, 1966 330

CHAPTER FIVE

Jimmy Carter, School Equalization, and Post-*Brown* Challenges for the Sumter County School Board 331
May 1954—The Supreme Court Strikes Down School Segregation 332
Georgia and Sumter County React to *Brown* 336
Classifying Post-*Brown* Segregationist Political Leaders 338
The Reemergence of Southern Hardliners 341
School Equalization in Sumter County, Georgia 344
An Attempt to Delay the Construction of Leslie-DeSoto School 351
Equalization Schools Open 353
Equalization and Continued Inequality 356
Carter and the Koinonia Farm 365
Carter as a Moderate Segregationist 371
Chapter Five Supplemental Materials 375
Documents: Reactions of Southern Members of the US Congress to the *Brown* Decision 375
Document: Sumter County Board of Education Resolution on Proposed Location of Leslie-DeSoto Elementary Negro School (Southeast), September 24, 1956 382
Document: Sumter County Board of Education Resolution on the Equalization of White Schools, October 1, 1957 383
Document: Sumter County Board of Education Resolution on the Elimination of the Older Black Schools, February 4, 1958 384
Documents and Images: Reactions from Sumter County and Southwest Georgia to the US Supreme Court Ruling on Racial Segregation in Public Schools 385
Documents: 1957 Crisis in Little Rock: *Time* Magazine Covers 389
Figure Gallery 390

CHAPTER SIX

1961: Jimmy Carter's First Political Defeat 429
Modernization through School Consolidation 430
Like Father, Like Son 433
Leading the "Yes" Campaign 434
The Referendum Results 438
Understanding the Referendum Loss 440
1962: The Turning Point 443
Chapter Six Supplemental Materials 447
Figure Gallery 447

CHAPTER SEVEN

Desegregation and Integration at Plains High School and in Sumter County 457
"If They Want to Go, Let Them Go" 460
The First Day 463
Unwelcome Reception 463
Back to *Our* School 475
A Whole New World 476
"A Forced Embrace" 481
"Deplorable Conditions" 484
Chapter Seven Supplemental Materials 487
Excerpts from an Interview with Josephine Thomas 487
Amy Wise: Shattering the Glass Ceiling 504
Bernstine Hollis: Her Own Boss 506
Bobby Fuse: A Daily Fight for Dignity 508
Claude Frazier: Developing All Students 510
Kay Bell: Life with a Disabled Brother 511
Lillie Heard: More like Parents than Teachers 512
Lonnie Wise: Vietnam as the Test of a Lifetime 514
William Powell: Learn What You Can Wherever You Go 516
Figure Gallery and Tables 518

Conclusion 559

Bibliography 563

Acknowledgments

This special history study started when Barbara Judy, a former superintendent at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, approached the two of us about conducting research on public school segregation and desegregation in Sumter County after we served on a historian's roundtable to discuss ways to tell a fuller story of Plains High School, the Carters, and the local community. We are indebted to Ms. Judy for responding to people in the community who wanted the site to acknowledge and commemorate the role of African Americans in Plains and Sumter County, along with notable civil rights stories involving education.

When Superintendent Judy departed for a position at Harpers Ferry, Beth Wright, the Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management at the now named Jimmy Carter National Historic Park, continued to provide us with invaluable support and encouragement. Her leadership, guidance, and calm demeanor have made our work a pleasure. We also thank Sarah Heald, a Park Service historian who helped facilitate the roundtable and consulted with us numerous times over the past five years.

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Our research took us to the files at the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park in Plains, the Lake Blackshear Regional Library in Americus, the Georgia State Archives in Morrow, the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, and the library at Georgia Southwestern State University, where we received enthusiastic assistance from many librarians and archivists, including Amy Wise at Georgia Southwestern and Tamika Strong at Georgia State Archives. It took us to the Special Collections Center of the University of Chicago to review some materials in the Julius Rosenwald Papers. In addition, Jeanne Cyriaque, who worked with the Georgia Division of Natural Resources, shared her vast knowledge of Rosenwald Schools in Georgia with us. As a lead investigator, she produced a comprehensive study of all of the Rosenwald Schools established in Georgia. She spoke with us by phone and helped us identify most of the locations of Rosenwald Schools in Sumter and Webster counties. Melissa Jest, African American Programs Coordinator with the Georgia Historic Preservation Division, also kindly answered our research questions.

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We also dedicate this study in loving memory of two parents whom we lost over the course of completing this project. LaSalle Petty Jr., Dr. Petty's father, first ignited her curiosity about the past with his stories of attending segregated Harrison School and Lucy Addison High School in Roanoke, Virginia. He passed away in October 2019. Phyllis M. Berggren, Dr. Berggren's mother, passed away in May 2021. She was a loving mother and was always supportive of her son's education and his desire to make a career in academia. During his school years, she provided him, along with his father, Loren A. Berggren, crucial financial assistance through her many years of assembly-line work. She will be truly missed. Last but not least, we each thank our families for being patient and giving us the time and encouragement to do this important work.

Introduction

Great teachers prepare their students for the world as it is and for the world as it could be. That's the great gift that Julia Coleman, beloved teacher, principal, and superintendent of Plains High School, gave Jimmy Carter. She told him and the other students at Plains High School that they could one day be president of the United States at a time when rural Georgia was most known for producing cotton and peanuts, not presidents. She played such a striking role in Carter's formative development that as of the 2021 inauguration, Carter remains the only president of the United States and, most likely, the only president anywhere in the world to quote his school principal in his inaugural address.

Since 1987, Plains High School has been the centerpiece of the National Park Service's Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. Generations of visitors have had the rare opportunity to visit the alma mater of the former president and former First Lady, Rosalynn Carter, where they received all of their primary and secondary schooling. What gets glossed over, however, is that Plains High School served white students only for most of its history. Carter has written movingly about his mostly African American boyhood friends and caretakers. Jack and Rachel Clark taught him life lessons, and A. D. and other friends shaped his sense of loyalty and adventure. But while we know a lot about the education of Jimmy Carter, we know little about the schooling of his African American playmates and their children, and how it shaped their prospects. What was school like for the black children who attended segregated schools in Plains and throughout Sumter County? What impact did their educations have on their lives?

Nearby in Americus, a generation after Carter graduated, there was a whole cadre of great teachers working in segregated, all-black schools. They prepared their students for their way of life in southwest Georgia, and for how their lives might change for the better. In a state that used a variety of mechanisms to bar most black people and many white people from voting, the teachers most likely didn't promise their students that they could one day be president. But they certainly gave them the tools to become the best American citizens. At all-black A. S. Staley High School in Americus, Robert Hollis recalled that his teachers "so strongly believed in the importance of a good education, I suspect, because they felt the South would not always be segregated. They knew there was going to be change, and that influenced the way they taught us."[1]

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[1] Craig Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black High Schools: The Secondary School Study, 1940–1946* (Columbia: Museum of Education of the University of South Carolina, 2015), 105.

For the first time, this book brings together the stories of Sumter County's black and white schools during the Jim Crow era through the years of desegregation. Separated by law, black children and white children nevertheless were being educated to live and work in the same society, so it's critically important that we consider their stories side by side. The book begins with the county system of schools for white students and the parallel creation of church schools and home schools for black children during the Reconstruction and early Jim Crow period. It continues with an exploration of the state's Progressive-era push to consolidate rural schools that contributed to the building of Plains High School in 1921. At the same time that the state of Georgia was consolidating rural white schools, local black communities were pooling private funds from the community and from Northern philanthropists to build new schools. The Julius Rosenwald Fund provided matching grants to help local communities establish elementary schools. At least six such schools opened in Sumter County, including one in Plains, and the Shiloh-Webster School in Webster County.

We argue that separate schools were inherently unequal and created disparities that put all students, black and white, at a disadvantage. The lack of equal resources for black schools is well-known. During this era, the state of Georgia spent eight times as much per white student as it did per black student. For years, black students' school terms were shorter than white students' terms so that they could be available to work during harvest time. Black parents had to pool their own resources or put pressure on the school board to get buses for their children. Black teachers had to give their students lessons out of old, hand-me-down books. Salaries for white teachers always exceeded those of black teachers.

Yet segregated education also shortchanged Jimmy Carter and generations of white students in ways that people seldom appreciate. For the most part, segregation deprived them of teachers who could have encouraged them to imagine a world with no Jim Crow. Leroy Williams was teaching at Staley High School around the time that Carter was going to the Naval Academy, and he taught his students lessons that inspired them to change the world for the better. He taught the students in his classes about the US Constitution, especially the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. "And I believe it caused students to begin questioning their civil rights," Williams said. "I couldn't say too much. I could only listen, knowing that they were right."[2]

The lessons of teachers like Williams contributed directly to black students' role in bringing about school desegregation in Sumter County and Americus, another prominent story told in this book. The courage of black students in entering once all-white schools, first on a token basis and then on a more complete basis, changed Sumter County for the better by undermining the antidemocratic practices that had sustained segregation and disfranchisement for so long.

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[2] Kridel, 82.

In addition to telling the story of school segregation and desegregation, this book highlights how Jimmy Carter's experience on the Sumter County School Board contributed to his development as a politician and a public servant. He served during the years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and had to tackle difficult questions over school consolidation and school desegregation. It took him a while to recognize the need to attack segregation head-on. Once he did, the recognition molded him into a better governor and a better president.

This book rests on archival research, newspapers, and oral history interviews with remarkable men and women who attended schools in Webster County, Sumter County, and Americus. Although black and white students were separated by unjust laws and short-sighted customs, they all benefited from teachers who pushed them to do their best. Jimmy Carter captured the spirit of what these teachers taught their students during a commencement address at Union High School in Leslie, most likely delivered in 1964: "It doesn't matter that one of you is capable of earning a degree in nuclear physics, while another will become a good mechanic, or that one will be a farmer while another becomes a research scientist in plant pathology. But it is important, and a direct responsibility on you, to develop your ability to the fullest."[3]

This special history study is the product of four years of research conducted by D. Jason Berggren of Georgia Southwestern State University and Adrienne Monteith Petty of the College of William & Mary. They collaborated in conducting oral history interviews with men and women in Americus, Sumter County, Durham, North Carolina, and suburban Atlanta, while doing research at the Georgia State Archives and the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park. Jason conducted research independently at the Lake Blackshear Regional Library in Americus; Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta; Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama; the University of Chicago; the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona; the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California; and the *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. Adrienne did research at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Robert Russa Moton Museum in Farmville, Virginia.

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[3] Jimmy Carter, Carter, "Commencement Address at Union High School in Leslie, Georgia," n.d., Carter Family Papers, Jimmy Carter's Speech File, Box 62, Folder #1: "Graduation Speech—Leslie High School," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

CHAPTER ONE

Post–Civil War Education in Sumter County, Georgia

The Emergence of Schools for Freedpeople and More Schools for White Children

During the first years of freedom, after the American Civil War ended in 1865, newly freed men and women in Sumter County threw themselves into the task of building new lives on new terms. In addition to establishing homes and churches, they built schools. Like churches, schools were visible symbols of independence and self-sufficiency for newly freed people.[1] The flourishing of schools throughout the South ranks as the most significant and enduring achievement of the postwar Reconstruction. Freedpeople were simultaneously pooling their own resources to set up schools and pushing lawmakers to include them in the state's emerging public system of education. In Sumter County, as in many other communities, freedpeople agitated for a school system that would be universally available to all children, regardless of race, in Georgia.

Hand in hand with establishing schools was freedpeople's determination to fight for voting rights and political power because they understood that politics and education were interdependent. Having political rights would give them the leverage to gain state support for their schools and other public services, and having an education would shore up their claims to political participation and civic engagement. In May of 1867, black men representing forty-five counties throughout Georgia gathered in Athens to hold the Georgia Colored Educational Convention. At the convention, representatives of each county shared information about schools in their communities. Representing Sumter County, Elbert Had and Frank Newsom of Americus reported that the county had seven schools, nine teachers, and five hundred pupils. The American Missionary Association supported two of these schools and five teachers. The rest seems to have been funded and built by the freedpeople themselves. It is difficult to find information about what

[1] While many freedpeople who had once been enslaved in Sumter County migrated to cities in Georgia, or outside of the state, a surprising number stayed put. See Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 142.

day-to-day life was like at these schools, but a news article in the *Tri-Weekly Sumter Republican* reported on a May Day festival by black "scholars" attending a school run by a woman named Mrs. Christian, along with her two daughters.[2]

The main goal of the educational convention was to establish goals for a truly equitable system of education in Georgia and to fire up freedpeople to advocate for it. Speaker after speaker preached the importance of education. One speaker in particular explained what was at stake in the fight for the education of freedpeople: "[Y]ou, as a part of the great body politic, are soon to be clothed with all the prerogatives—all the rights and immunities—of citizens of a free Government: and, unless you are educated, some of those rights may prove rather, a curse than a blessing; they may, by designing men, be turned to your own destruction."[3] In one of the resolutions passed at the convention, the delegates "resolved, that a free school system is the great need of our State, and that we will do all in our power by voice and vote to secure the adoption of such a system."[4]

Freedpeople in Sumter County heeded this call to exercise their voting rights and push for education. In 1867, 1,390 voters in Sumter County took part in the election to determine the delegates who would serve in the constitutional convention of 1867, which kicked off the period of Radical Reconstruction in the state. These voters were "all blacks; not a single white vote cast." Most poor white citizens of Sumter County and many surrounding counties sat out the election out of fear of being branded as "radical."[5] During the 1870s, Reconstruction-era Georgia lawmakers affirmed the importance of education for all children in the state by including provisions for taxes to support public schools. Their actions brought significant growth in the number of schools across the state for both black and white children. By 1874, there were 29 schools for white children and 13 schools for black children in Sumter County. During the school year, 762 white students were admitted into the schools, along with 777 black children. The schools in the county were

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2 "Freedmen's School in Georgia," *Tri-Weekly Republican*, May 7, 1867, 2, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn90052023/1867-05-07/ed-1/seq-2/, accessed, October 9, 2021; "Colored School Celebration—Yesterday," *Tri-Weekly Sumter Republican*, May 18, 1867, 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn90052023/1867-05-18/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 9, 2021.

3 "Colored Educational Convention," *Weekly Georgia Telegraph*, May 10, 1867, 5, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn86077235/1867-05-10/ed-1/seq-5/, accessed October 9, 2021.

4 "Negro Educational Convention," *Newnan Herald*, May 11, 1867, 2, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn85034085/1867-05-11/ed-1/seq-2/, accessed October 9, 2021.

5 O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 248–49. Delegates of the 1867 constitutional convention met to create a new constitution after the establishment of congressional Reconstruction and military occupation of the state. The new constitution made the Constitution of 1865 null and void. The three hundred legislators who passed the 1865 constitution had met the terms the federal government set for readmission into the Union, including the abolition of enslavement and repeal of the Ordinance of Secession. However, they refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, which established citizenship rights for freedpeople and all Americans. They also refused to waive their claims to compensation for the loss of their enslaved "property." See *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, January 1866, 259–60.

open in August, September, and October. A year later, in 1875, the number of schools for white children in Sumter County had fallen slightly, to twenty-one, but there were seven more schools for black children.[6]

In Americus, the first public school for black children was McCay Hill.[7] Construction began in July 1884. Over time, it would become the largest black school in both the city system and the county system. In 1885, led by George W. F. Philips and Lee Jones, this school also provided the first public library in the county for black patrons.[8]

Codification of Separate and Unequal Schools in Georgia and Sumter County

Less than fifteen years after many primary schools were established, the federal government withdrew its support for Reconstruction. The end of Reconstruction spelled the demise of an equitable school system. Replacing the more progressive state constitution of 1867, the 1877 Georgia State Constitution restricted the use of tax money to support education and enshrined the practice of segregation in Georgians' daily life.

The new constitution, explicitly designed to roll back the policies enacted during Reconstruction, provided a state-supported school system for the people of Georgia but mandated two sets of schools—one for white children and another for black children.[9] Anticipating the later use of educational requirements to limit suffrage, the so-called Redeemers, legislators who came to power in Georgia and throughout the South after Reconstruction, reckoned that providing inadequate public schools for black children would help accomplish the political and social domination they sought to achieve. The 1877 constitution also restricted funding for education. This change had the most drastic consequences for rural counties.

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6 "Report of the County School Commissioner," *Weekly Sumter Republican*, March 26, 1875, 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn85033988/1875-03-26/ed-1/seq-3/, accessed October 9, 2021; Report of the Sumter County Board of Education for 1875, *Weekly Sumter Republican*, April 7, 1876, 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn85033988/1876-04-07/ed-1/seq-3/, accessed October 9, 2021.

7 McCay is pronounced "McCoy." See Alan Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/BlackHx.htm.

8 Alan Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/BlackHx.htm.

9 Article VIII, Section I, of the Constitution states that "there shall be a thorough system of common schools for the education of children in the elementary branches of an English education only, as nearly uniform as practicable, the expenses of which shall be provided for by taxation, or otherwise. The schools shall be free to all children of the State, but separate schools shall be provided for the white and colored races." *Constitution of the State of Georgia, 1877* (Atlanta: J. P. Harrison and Co., 1877), 45, in Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/constitutionofst00geor/page/16/mode/2up, accessed May 25, 2021.

The US Supreme Court Upholds "Separate but Equal"

With the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, which established the doctrine of separate but equal, the US Supreme Court legitimized and sanctioned the unequal system of segregation. Although the case was technically a matter involving racial segregation and railway travel in Louisiana, the Court broadly addressed the matter of segregation in other matters, including public education.[10]

In upholding the 1890 Louisiana Separate Car Act, the Court's majority contended that the state law violated neither the Thirteenth Amendment's prohibition on "involuntary servitude" nor the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. Associate Justice Henry Brown (1890–1906), a Michigan Republican appointed by President Benjamin Harrison, compared segregation in transportation with segregation in public schooling. He determined that racial segregation was customary and normal at the time in the United States. He contended that separate was in fact equal. As such, the Court was unable to assert that "a law which authorizes or even requires the separation of the two races in public conveyances is unreasonable."

To show that Louisiana had not acted imprudently or unconstitutionally, Justice Brown cited examples of segregation or racial distinction from other states. In terms of education, Brown wrote that "the most common instance of [segregation] is connected with the establishment of separate schools for white and colored children." Following what other state courts had done, the Court cited the 1849 case, *Roberts v. City of Boston*, where the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the city's racially separate school system. Furthermore, Brown observed, the US Congress mandated segregation in the public schools of the District of Columbia without questioning its constitutionality.[11]

Justice Brown rejected the contention that segregation created a hierarchy of race. Indeed, whatever sense of hierarchy that existed was only to be found in the minds of African Americans. Racism, therefore, was not an objective reality. Consequently, Louisiana's law was reasonable and quite mainstream for the day. Justice Brown asserted: "We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because

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[10] Harold W. Chase and Craig R. Ducat, *Constitutional Interpretation: Cases, Essays, Materials* (St. Paul: West Publishing, 1974), 635–38.

[11] Prior to the *Plessy* decision, for fifty years, several states, northern and southern, had used *Roberts* as legal precedent. According to one account, the states of Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Nevada, New York, and West Virginia had employed Roberts to sanction "separate but equal" education. See Douglas J. Ficker, "From Roberts to Plessy: Educational Segregation and the 'Separate but Equal' Doctrine," *Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 301–14.

the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it."[12] For the Court's majority, Brown concluded that it was not the business of government to equalize the social condition between white and black people. Rather, equality could only come as "the result of natural affinities" and "a mutual appreciation of each other's merits." Until such a time, government is "powerless to eradicate racial instincts, or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences." Brown wrote, "If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them on the same plane."[13]

Justice John Marshall Harlan offered the lone dissent in the case. However, three years later in 1899, in *Cumming v. Board of Education of Richmond County, Ga*., Harlan wrote a 9-0 unanimous opinion that in effect reaffirmed *Plessy*. It was the first test case of "separate but equal," and the Court defended the Georgia county school board's decision to close a black high school due to financial constraints while it kept a white high school open. Local school boards possessed discretionary power in appropriations and that they, not the courts, were the proper decision makers in the distribution of public education dollars. The Court, including Harlan, was content in that states and school districts provided at least some schooling for every white and black child.

Separate and Unequal Public Education

Despite the pretense of equality suggested in the doctrine, schools for black children provided inadequate and unequal facilities, educational materials, supplies, teacher salaries, and course offerings. An article on a Sumter County School Board meeting suggests that reduced time for instruction at schools serving black children was a consequence of separate but equal gaining the sanction of the Supreme Court. It read, "Patrons of Springhill colored school asked that they be allowed to have their fall term taught in July and August, which was granted."[14]

A closer look at Sumter County schools shows that access to education varied for white children as well. While most white children in the county had access to better resources than their black peers, white children from rural families, especially the sons and daughters of farm workers and other working-class people, attended schools that provided them fewer grade levels, fewer days of school, and less opportunity for intellectual achievement than white children living in towns and cities. A news item about Professor Black's school in Plains of Dura urged "all who expect to send [their children to school] should go

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[12] *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Judgement, Decided May 18, 1896; Records of the Supreme Court of the United States; Record Group 267; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163, #15248, National Archives.

[13] *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Judgement, Decided May 18, 1896.

[14] "Meeting of School Board," *Americus Times-Recorder*, March 9, 1898, 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053204/1898-03-09/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 9, 2021.

in the first day, as it is discouraging to the teacher to see his patrons negligent about this matter, and it also retards the progress of the children to be sent in after school has been opened sometime." This article suggests that something was interfering with parents sending their children to school, whether it was the need for children to be available to work or the lack of understanding among parents about the importance of regular attendance.[15] Leaders of state educational associations—"the ablest representatives of the profession"—realized the disparity between Georgia's rural and urban schools, and worked to improve rural schools.[16]

Despite the assault on their access to education, dedicated teachers made the absolute most of their time with the county's black schoolchildren. Viola Mitchell, who ran a school near Plains of Dura, caused a sensation, both in and out of the classroom. Reporting on a brief vacation Mitchell took in 1885, an article in the *Americus Daily Recorder* said that "people in that section are well pleased with her, and will give her a greater number of pupils next term." Another article announced the "romantic marriage" of Mitchell to Charlie Prather.[17]

Over time, underfunding schools eventually had significant political consequences for all Georgians, as the state of Georgia became among the last in a wave of southern states that disfranchised most black men and many white men. By 1890, after a decade or more of diverting funds away from universal public education, Mississippi led the charge among former Confederate states to enact educational requirements such as literacy tests and understanding clauses, which required would-be voters to demonstrate an understanding of a passage from a law. Mississippi passed a law in 1890, followed by South Carolina in 1895, Tennessee and Louisiana in 1898, and Alabama in 1901. These measures were part of a national movement to restrict voting rights.[18]

In 1908, Georgia restricted access to the right to vote. Although it did not explicitly ban black voters, an amendment to the Georgia Constitution required voters to be male, to be at least twenty-one years old, to reside in Georgia for a year, and to pass a literacy test. A

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[15] "From the Plains," *Americus Recorder*, July 12, 1889, 1, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053205/1889-07-12/ed-1/seq-1/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[16] "To Meet at Warm Spring," *Americus Times-Recorder*, April 3, 1897, 1, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053204/1897-04-03/ed-1/seq-1/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[17] "School Closed," *Americus Daily Recorder*, January 11, 1885, 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053201/1885-01-11/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 9, 2021; "A Romantic Marriage," *Americus Weekly Recorder*, October 23, 1885, 5, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053201/1885-10-23/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[18] J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 118. For a discussion of the national movement for suffrage restriction, see Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Views of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

loophole in the amendment, known as the Grandfather Clause, gave prospective voters a way to exercise their franchise rights even if they failed the literacy test. Any Union or Confederate veteran or their descendants could vote.[19]

In addition to restricting access to voting, there was strong opposition to compulsory education when the Georgia legislature first took up a bill proposed by Dr. J. R. Littleton of Augusta that would have made school attendance in the state mandatory. The bill did not become law when Littleton first proposed it in 1909, in part because of the money it would cost to build schools to accommodate all of Georgia's school-age children.[20] Another concern focused on the reaction of parents who contributed to their children's truancy and were "perhaps heavily punished. Will they get their desserts? They will, but there will be more hell raised than cotton in Georgia for a while."[21] Critics of the bill also cited the devastating impact it would have for drawing farm children away from farm work. Thomas Hardeman, president of the Board of Education of Jefferson County, wrote a widely circulated editorial expressing his opposition to compulsory education in Georgia. He asked, "Would it be wise and good policy to take one thousand more hands from the farms in the rural districts and put them in the schools three months?" He then went on to explore this question by proposing a hypothetical situation:

> Let us take an example: On my farm is a negro woman without a husband, but with seven children. Three of these are under six years and four between 6 and 18. Three of these, of school age, go to school, one to the field to make a living and bread for his family of eight. Compel this one boy to go to school and there will be no bread nor crop for that family. What is true of this family is true of hundreds of families in this county, and what is true of Jefferson county I assume to be true in many other cotton producing counties in this state. But it is suggested the rural schools open in December so as to avoid the difficulty. Admit it: it would then be in March before the three months could be completed. Christmas holidays intervening. Every farmer knows his plows must start in January, and it is a rush to be ready to plant corn in March. Is there a banker or merchant or landlord who would advance to this woman with the knowledge that her farm is not to start before time to plant and no previous preparation? Let those who have had farming experience answer.[22]

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[19] The Disfranchisement Act of 1908 amended the Georgia Constitution to include a literacy test requiring that voters be able to read and explain a portion of the federal or state constitution. It also required that voters own forty acres of land assessed at five hundred dollars, and enfranchised men who had served in the US or Confederate military forces and their descendants. See Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 280.

[20] "Georgia Education Law," *Journal of Education*, September 23, 1909, 295.

[21] "Current Comment," *The Atlantian*, September 1, 1911, 22, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/gua3072345/1911-09-01/ed-1/seq-22/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[22] "Opposed to Compulsory Education in Georgia," *Americus Times-Recorder*, September 22, 1910, 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053204/1910-09-22/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 9, 2021.

While Hardeman emphasized the dire consequence to the woman and her family if they could not get a merchant or landlord to hire them, it is clear that his concern stemmed from the prospect of losing the labor of able-bodied children, especially male teenagers. In 1916, right before Georgia passed its first compulsory education law, Georgia and Mississippi were the only states in the nation that did not compel children to attend school.[23] When Georgia finally passed a law, it required children between the ages of eight and fourteen to attend school for at least four months each year. Ending the requirement at age fourteen addressed the concerns of Hardeman and others, who sought to exploit the strength and relative maturity of older teenage boys. Other loopholes in the law included exemptions for children who had completed the fourth grade, who needed to work to help support their family, whose parents lacked the money to buy books and clothing, and who lived more than three miles from a school. Local school boards also had the discretion to exempt children from attending school.[24] Segregation, voting restrictions, and lack of compulsory education were all part of the system of Jim Crow.

The emergence of the rigid system of Jim Crow did not cause African Americans in Sumter County to waver in their commitment to schooling their children. If anything, it made them more determined. African American families appear to have been especially devoted to educating their children. In 1906, a total of 61 public schools existed in the 492-square mile county of 26,212 residents. According to the 1900 census, 70 percent of residents, a total of 18,538 individuals, lived in rural areas of the county.[25] Black children outnumbered white children three to one. While the schools shared a total enrollment of more than 3,500 students, 1,007 were white children and the remainder were black children. In the town of Americus, there were a total of 1,500 students, half of them white and half of them black.[26]

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[23] "The Compulsory Education Law," *Walker County Messenger*, August 4, 1916, 2, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053488/1916-08-04/ed-1/seq-2/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[24] "Give the Child Its Opportunity," *Athens Daily Herald*, July 29, 1916, 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn88054118/1916-07-29/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[25] "Three Colored to One White," *Savannah Tribune*, June 16, 1906, 2, African American Newspapers, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.wm.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANAAA&docref=image/v2%3A11C-CCBEC43F62EDE%40EANAAA-11D7771CD2BA3080%402417378-11D7771CDDEA3FB8%401; US Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Decennial Census of the United States, 1900, Volume 1, Population, Part 1*, Minor Civil Divisions, Table 5 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 108.

[26] "Three Colored to One White," *Savannah Tribune*, June 16, 1906, 2.

The Central Role of African American Churches

In the history of the United States, African Americans have controlled few institutions. The one key exception can be found in African American churches. These churches, sometimes collectively known as the "Black Church," played (and continue to play) a central role in the lives of many African Americans. Some scholars have even claimed that they are historically the most significant and perhaps indispensable institutions in the African American community.[27] The American experience necessitated their creation and their centrality.[28]

While these churches were and are obviously places of faith and worship, throughout history they have also served various social and community functions, uplifting the community through both faith and action. Salvation pertains to redeeming the body and the soul. Thus, historically, churches often concerned themselves with matters on "this side of eternity." African American churches were often centers of political activity, socialization, and mobilization. This was on full display during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Churches were places of hope and revival. They possessed financial resources for political and social causes.

Clergy used the pulpit to inform and energize their congregations about things spiritual and political. Sermons often contained subtle and not-so-subtle political messages. Stories and passages from the Bible held clear and poignant meaning for present times and conditions. Here, God was a God of the oppressed and the powerless and not of the privileged and powerful. God was the God of the formerly enslaved and not of the slaveholder or Jim Crow. As one scholar observed about religion in the United States: "[B]lack religion has not been identical with white religion."[29] The clergy also became spokespersons on behalf of the community and served as intermediaries with white politicians and leading white families. Sometimes they became politicians and candidates for elected office.[30] A few of the preacher-politicians, like Adam Clayton Powell Jr., of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, even won.

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[27] Richard I. McKinney, "The Black Church: Its Development and Present Impact," *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (1971): 452–81; Allison Calhoun-Brown, "Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33, no. 2 (June 2000): 168–74.

[28] Winthrop S. Hudson, "The American Context as an Area of Research in Black Church Studies," *Church History* 52, no. 2 (June 1983): 157–71.

[29] Hudson, "The American Context," 171.

[30] As an example, Reverend Al Sharpton was a candidate for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2004. For his explanation of the connection between his Christian faith and political involvement, see Reverend Al Sharpton, *The Rejected Stone: Al Sharpton and the Path to American Leadership* (Cash Money Content Books, 2013), 135. Reverend Sharpton explained: "My social activism is my religion in practice. It is the daily embodiment of my lifelong service to God. As a Christian, as a man of the cloth, I am required to fight on behalf of those who have been wronged, on behalf of the downtrodden, on behalf of those facing injustice. That is my ministry."

The Emergence of Black Educational Institutions

Given the inadequacies of the public school system and the harsh realities of racial segregation, African American churches, out of necessity, either became places of learning or sponsored the establishment of educational institutions to provide them. The Americus Institute and the Johnson Home Industrial College are prime examples of this.

Americus Institute (1897–1932)

In 1897, in the county seat and Sumter County's largest city, the Americus Institute was established by the Southwestern Georgia Baptist Association. The school was located on North Lee Street, the future site of A. S. Staley High School and the Americus-Sumter Ninth Grade Academy. The school opened with nine students. Its first graduating class was in 1901.[31]

Church leaders believed that their mission was not merely a religious one. Rather, it was to encourage African Americans "to rear highly respectable families," and the church as a whole "thought their people should be able to play their part in the development and welfare of the communities in which they lived."[32] To accomplish this, more than a basic education was needed. The Americus Institute was the first institution to offer high school–level education to African American students in the region.

Dr. Major W. Reddick, a graduate of the Atlanta Baptist College (later renamed Morehouse College), was the principal of the school and one of the founders, along with other "enterprising colored citizens."[33] Reddick was the driving force behind the school and promoted a curriculum that combined academics with practical learning.

The Americus Institute provided secondary education for African Americans. At the time, no other upper-level educational opportunities existed in the area. The school curriculum was designed first to develop practical skills. For boys, agriculture was emphasized. This involved learning "dairying, poultry raising, fruit growing, and to become skilled in activities that belong to successful farming." For girls, domestic science was the focus. This meant they were to become proficient in "the art of cooking, basketry, sewing and housekeeping in general."[34] But students were also to study the so-called higher or ideal subjects, such as literature, music, and the classic languages of Latin and Greek. This type of curriculum prepared graduates of the school to attend college.

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[31] James Edward Brown, *History of the Americus Institute* (Americus, GA: n.p., 1957), 1–2.

[32] Brown, *History of the Americus Institute*, 1–2.

[33] "Climax Reached: The Negro Controls Half the Business Transacted in Americus, GA.," *Freeman*, January 4, 1902, 3, African American Newspapers, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.wm.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANAAA&docref=image/v2%3A12B28495A8DAB1C8%40EANAAA-12C8A2CFF8EAB590%402415754-12C8A2D009A08210%400.

[34] Brown, *History of the Americus Institute*, 8.

Participation in athletics was encouraged. It was viewed to be "conducive to good health and self-control and perseverance."[35] For a period, the school had a college football team. James E. Brown was the coach. Initially, players only scrimmaged against each other Later, the team played games against Tuskegee, Morehouse, Alabama State, Florida State, and Georgia State. Tuskegee was a regular football foe. There was baseball and basketball at the Americus Institute, too. Players competed against other Georgia high school and college teams and teams from the neighboring states of Alabama, Florida, and South Carolina.[36]

Dr. George Sale, a one-time president of Atlanta Baptist College and then superintendent for the American Baptist Home Mission Society, praised the efforts of the Americus Institute. He said, "No institution I know of bids so fair to become a great academy as Americus." He believed it represented "one of the most significant and promising movements for Negro education."[37]

Teachers were also trained at the Americus Institute. It was not uncommon for teachers in African American schools to lack formal training, and they often possessed no more than an elementary education. The school aimed to remedy this deficiency. It offered a six-week session for teachers during the summer. The Americus and Sumter County boards of education supported this effort. Many students who attended the school went on to teach at primary and secondary schools throughout Georgia and beyond.[38]

The Americus Institute got off to a rocky start. A white agent cheated its founders, defrauding them out of $1,000 and 11 acres of land. In addition, a clerk working with the group stole $275. Reddick managed to shepherd the school past these early setbacks. Four years after opening, the Americus Institute had 177 students and 4 teachers. Seven years after opening, Reddick was overseeing a school with property valued at $7,000.[39] The school had four buildings: the main building, a dormitory for boys, a dormitory for girls, and a dining hall. The main building was used for classrooms and chapel.

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[35] Brown, *History of the Americus Institute*, 10.

[36] Brown, *History of the Americus Institute*, 10–11; "Americus Institute, Americus, Georgia, 1897–1932," America's Lost Colleges, https://www.lostcolleges.com/americus-institute.

[37] *See An Era of Progress and Promise, 1863–1910: The Religious, Moral, and Educational Development of the American Negro since His Emancipation* (Priscilla Publishing, 1910), 122. Book made available by the North Carolina Digital Collections, http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll37/id/4276.

[38] Brown, *History of the Americus Institute*, 7.

[39] W. E. B. DuBois, *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1907), 89.

Within a decade of its founding, the Americus Institute caught the attention of the leading educators of the day. In 1908, Booker T. Washington, nationally renowned educator and president of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (now Tuskegee University), delivered an address at the school.[40] He viewed it as a prime example of the type of progress and achievement possible.

W. E. B. DuBois, then a professor at Atlanta University, also saw the Americus Institute as an example of what African Americans could accomplish through self-help. In *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans*, DuBois marveled that the Americus Institute had grown and was thriving "practically all. . .through the small contributions of the Negroes themselves."[41] The congregations of seventy black Baptist churches contributed the funds that made the school possible. When the Americus Institute first opened, it had an annual income of $154 from the congregations that sent money to sustain it. By 1907, the school received about $1,000 for the year. Fifteen years later, it received an $8,000 donation from the same churches in the Baptist convention.[42]

How did these churches in the southwest Georgia countryside contribute the money they collected? They didn't send it in. Rather, Reddick and teachers at the institute visited many of the churches and collected monthly contributions. "Thus," DuBois wrote, "the school and the idea of education are kept in the minds of the people, who are being educated to habits of giving and to a feeling of ownership and pride in their local institutions."[43]

In 1912, Reddick and a group of educators from Atlanta's six black colleges organized the Atlanta Federation of Schools for the Improvement of Negro Country Life." Their goal was to help people in rural Georgia "increase their efficiency, raise their standards of living, and become more largely interested in community life." Professor J. W. Reddick, principal of the Americus Institute, was honored as an alumnus of a college in Atlanta who had gone on to provide "educational advantages" to a rural community.[44]

Reddick eventually expanded the base of support for the Americus Institute through fundraising efforts. He succeeded in attracting funding from the Anna T. Jeanes Rural School Foundation that not only benefitted the Americus Institute but also benefitted

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[40] Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1540–1914," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1540_1914.htm.

[41] DuBois, *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans*, 89.

[42] "Afro-American Cullings," *Savannah Tribune*, October 19, 1912, African American Newspapers, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.wm.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANAAA&docref=image/v2%3A11C-CCBEC43F62EDE%40EANAAA-11D648261F2A64C0%402423340-11D648262B8B4338%400, accessed October 9, 2021.

[43] DuBois, *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans*, 89.

[44] "United Effort for Rural Betterment Being Made by Negro Colleges of Atlanta," *Cleveland Gazette*, July 13, 1912, 4, African American Newspapers, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.wm.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANAAA&docref=image/v2%3A12B716FE88B82998%40EANAAA-12BC0FC1860C7E10%402419597-12BA05FB06425350%400, accessed October 9, 2021.

rural schools for black children throughout the county. In 1912, Bobbie E. Battle, a teacher at the Americus Institute, supervised industrial work in rural schools and ran an annual teachers' fair. According to the president of the Sumter Board of Education, "we have employed several of the graduates of the Americus Institute as teachers in the rural schools, and we find that the training there received admirably fits them for the work assigned. We heartily endorse Americus Institute and the industrial work which it not only fosters within the institution, but also extends to the rural schools of the county."[45]

In 1917, Reddick wrote a letter addressed "to the white citizens of Americus and Sumter County," appealing to them to support his campaign to raise $10,000 for the school in honor of its twentieth anniversary. He began the letter by cataloging the achievements of the institute: graduating more than one hundred students in its twenty-year history, providing the only high school education in the county, offering farm demonstration and a boll weevil eradication campaign, and training teachers who teach in the rural schools. Then he explained that "the responsibility for the maintenance of the institution has ever rested squarely upon the shoulders of the black people." Reddick explained that he had earmarked half of the funds for "a farm on which to teach practical agriculture."[46]

Even though the Americus Institute and other schools for black children could not rely on the state of Georgia or Sumter County for the bulk of their funding, the schools' administrators still had to show their worth to local officials. In the eyes of their white supervisors, their worth derived from the degree to which they emphasized the "domestic arts" and practical work rather than academic knowledge. In April 1912, for example, the superintendent of the Sumter County schools, along with the chairman of the County Board of Education, visited the Americus Institute and expressed "gratification at the showing made." Among the exhibits they observed at the school were "specimens of basket making, chair caning and numerous evidence of what the children can do in the making of useful and ornamental sewing. Aprons, blouses, shirtwaists, underwear, bags of various kinds, bedspreads, table covers and numerous other articles furnished ample evidence of the good work that has been done with the children in preparing them for the work of life." Mr. W. P. Wallis, a local power broker and tile manufacturer, spoke about the "necessity of the colored race developing a higher ideal in life and endeavoring to educate themselves along the lines of purity, sobriety, and industry."[47]

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[45] "Additional Praise for Institute," *Americus Weekly Times*, September 19, 1912, 8, Newspaper Archive, https://newspaperarchive.com/americus-weekly-times-recorder-sep-19-1912-p-1/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[46] "Appeal to White Citizens to Help Colored School," *Americus Times-Recorder*, August 16, 1917, 7, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053204/1917-08-16/ed-1/seq-1/, accessed October 9, 2021.

[47] *Young & Co.'s Business and Professional Directory of the Cities and Towns of Georgia, 1909-1910* (Atlanta: Young & Co., 1910), 30; "Practical Work in the County Negro Schools," *Americus Weekly Times-Recorder,* April 25, 1912, 5, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053204/1912-04-25/ed-1/seq-5/, accessed October 9, 2021.

The commitment of Reddick and educators throughout Sumter County and Georgia improved rates of literacy for African Americans. Only one in twenty African Americans could read and write at the time of emancipation. By 1920, more than two-thirds of black Georgians were literate. Literacy rates likewise increased for white Georgians. In 1870, 20 percent of white people over ten years old could not read and write. By 1920, the rate of illiteracy among white Georgians had dropped to one in twenty.

In 1932, the Americus Institute graduated its last class. Due to financial insolvency, the school permanently closed in June of that year. The end had been in sight for some time, as the school had sold off its farmland in 1926 and 1927.[48] However, within four years, a new center of learning for Sumter County African Americans was established: A. S. Staley High School.

Johnson Home Industrial College (1912–1936)

Located to the west of Plains, just off Old Plains Highway and across the county line into Webster County, was the Johnson Home Industrial College. The school was founded in 1912 by William Decker Johnson, a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, in the mostly African American, rural community of Archery. Financially, the school was supported by a denominational relief organization known as the Sublime Order of Archery in order to address the unequal, inadequate schooling black children received in the South.[49] Like schools for African Americans across the South, the school emphasized practical subjects. According to an advertisement, the school offered "primary, public and normal" schooling, as well as instruction in sewing, cooking, music, art, needlework, and Bible and missionary training.

The Johnson Home Industrial College consisted of three frame buildings, containing classrooms and boarding rooms, on two hundred acres, south of the Seacoast Line Railroad. Bishop Johnson's home was not far from the school. Originally, the school offered an elementary program. According to one report, in 1914, the school had seventy-two students at the elementary level. Later, the curriculum was expanded to cover multiple levels of education: elementary, secondary, collegiate, and vocational. The school

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[48] Brown, *History of the Americus Institute*, 69; Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1915–1961," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1915_1961.htm.

[49] Milton A. Raven Sr., *Archery: A Historic African American Community Southwest of Plains, Georgia* (Americus, GA: A Raven Story, 2012), 61–67; Antoinette Jackson, "Archery, Georgia: A Thriving Community," USF Heritage Research Lab, https://heritagelab.org/?page_id=1782, accessed February 17, 2019; Antoinette Jackson, "Johnson Home Industrial College: A Center for Education in Archery, Georgia," USF Heritage Research Lab, https://heritagelab.org/?page_id=1782, accessed February 17, 2019.

was open for male and female students. Most of them came from poor families. Bishop Johnson's daughter, Fannie Johnson; his son, W. D. Johnson Jr.; and his daughter-in-law, Beatrice Johnson, were among the school's first teachers.[50]

In 1921, with the opening of the new Plains High School, the old Plains school building was moved to Archery and became part of the Johnson Home Industrial College. One former student, Milton A. Raven Sr., said he attended grammar school in that building in 1936.[51] He remembered students learning "reading, writing, English, spelling, mathematics and social studies." There was recess once or twice a day, when students played basketball or softball; others jumped rope. The school promoted discipline and encouraged parental involvement. Raven finished his elementary schooling at the St. Mark AME Church, and then he attended the Rosenwald school in Plains. Because Sumter County did not have a high school for black children at the time, Milton attended A. S. Staley in Americus.

For his part, Bishop Johnson was one of the most important figures in Archery. In addition to overseeing AME churches in five states and founding his school, Johnson also ran an insurance company. But he also made an impression on the few whites in the area. Bishop Johnson figures prominently in Jimmy Carter's childhood memories because of his stature within the community. In fact, he was a role model for young Jimmy,[52] with the president stating, "Even before I was an adult and able to understand the difficulty of overcoming racial barriers, I looked on Bishop Johnson as an extraordinary example of success in life."[53] He was one of the most important people in Jimmy's youth, when the Carters lived on their family farm in Archery. Carter said Bishop Johnson was a dynamic, impressive figure. He was a church and community leader, and he traveled in style: "Bishop William Decker Johnson owned and operated what was considered to be an excellent school for black children across the railroad track from St. Mark AME Church, and I remember at Christmastime he always had a nice gift for every child who attended the church or school. . . . For me and many others he was the epitome of prestige and success.[54]

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[50] Raven, *Archery: A Historic African American Community Southwest of Plains, Georgia*, 61–67; Antoinette Jackson, "Archery, Georgia: History and Heritage of a Community," USF Heritage Research Lab, https://heritagelab.org/?page_id=1782, accessed February 17, 2019.

[51] Raven, *Archery: A Historic African American Community Southwest of Plains, Georgia*, 69–72.

[52] Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976; originally published by Broadman Press in 1975), 32–33; Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 23, 38, 270; Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 52.

[53] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 24.

[54] Jimmy Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 23.

Jimmy's parents, Earl and Lillian Carter, also respected the AME official, and when he visited the Carter home, they accommodated him in ways that acknowledged his leadership status without violating the code of segregation. In *An Hour before Daylight*, Jimmy recalled that Johnson would sit in his car and have a conversation with his father, Earl Carter, rather than come to the back door of Carters' home.[55]

Bishop Johnson's son, Alvan, was also close to the Carters. He visited them when he was on school break from Harvard University and was even received in the family's living room. Carter said he was "the only black man who habitually came to our front door."[56]

With the death of Bishop Johnson in 1936, the Johnson Home Industrial College closed. Johnson is buried in the St. Mark AME Church cemetery.[57] Carter noted that the largest funeral he remembered from his youth was that for Bishop Johnson. He wrote, "The procession of automobiles, mostly large and black, extended for more than a mile."[58]

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[55] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 23.

[56] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 33.

[57] Antoinette Jackson, "St. Mark A.M.E. Church Cemetery: Archery's Legacy in Stone," USF Heritage Research Lab, https://heritagelab.org/?page_id=1782, accessed February 17, 2019.

[58] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 193.

Figure Gallery

Figure 1.1. *Lifting the Veil of Ignorance* (1922). Statue of Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee University

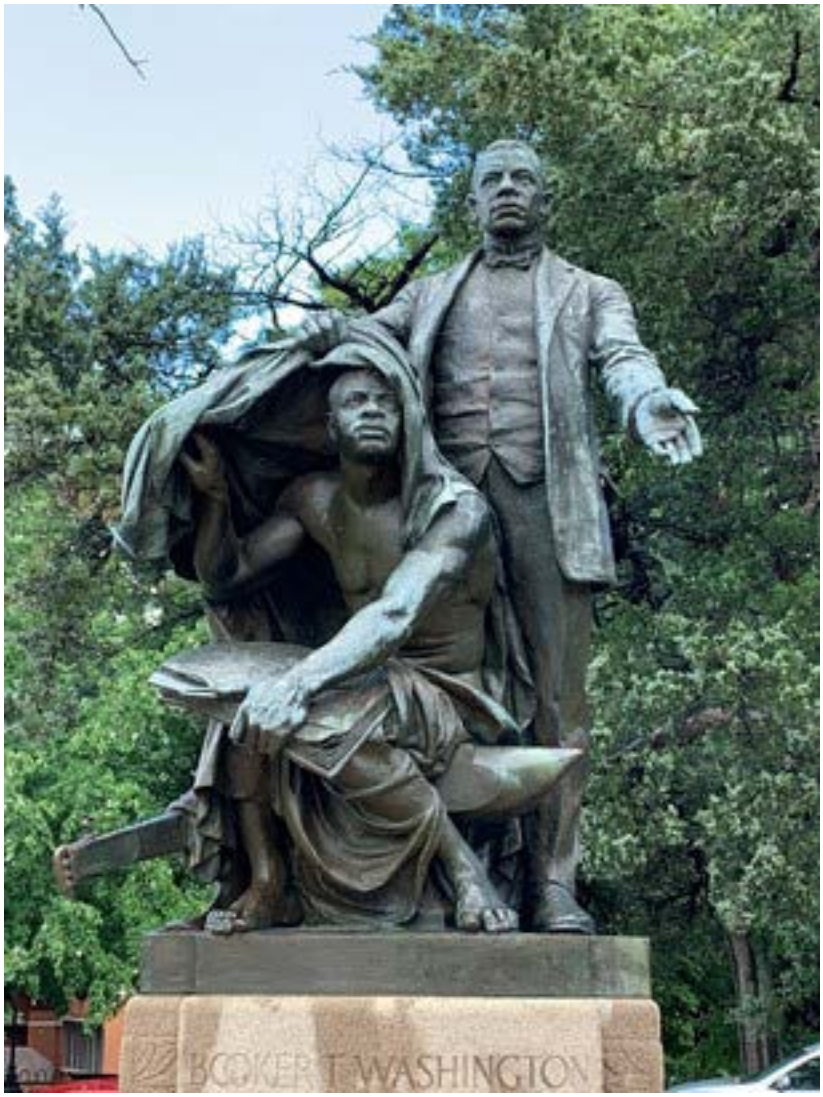


Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 1.2. Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 1.3. Site of the Americus Institute in Americus, Georgia



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 1.4. A. S. Staley Middle School—former site of the Americus Institute in Americus, Georgia



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 1.5. The main building of the Americus Institute



Photo from *Era of Progress and Promise, 1863–1910: The Religious, Moral, and Educational Development of the American Negro since His Emancipation*, North Carolina Digital Collections, http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll37/id/4276, accessed September 18, 2018. Courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

Figure 1.6. Dr. Major W. Reddick



Photo from *The History of the Americus Institute*

Figure 1.7. Americus Institute graduates



READY TO GRADUATE

Photo from *Baptist Home Mission Weekly* (May 1907)

Figure 1.8. Studies in agriculture, Americus Institute



Photo from *Era of Progress and Promise, 1863–1910: The Religious, Moral, and Educational Development of the American Negro Since His Emancipation*, North Carolina Digital Collections, http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll37/id/4276, accessed July 12, 2019. Courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

Figure 1.9. Bishop William Decker Johnson



Photo courtesy of the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 1.10. The grave of Bishop William Decker Johnson, St. Mark AME Church Cemetery in Archery, Georgia



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

CHAPTER TWO

Plains High School

Model School, Segregated School

During the spring of 1954, the future of the smallest schools in Sumter County and other rural Georgia communities was in jeopardy once again. The state was proposing yet another school consolidation plan that called for increasing the daily attendance requirement at Georgia schools from sixty to one hundred students. Speaking on behalf of school consolidation opponents, Y. T. Sheffield, principal of Plains High School at the time, eloquently defended rural schools and praised their advantages: "Opportunities for leadership are greater," Sheffield argued. "And time and time again these boys and girls demonstrate in later life the values derived from these rural schools." Objecting to plans for school consolidation, Sheffield lamented that "these things are about to be thrown on the altar of bigness—somewhere we've gotten the idea that bigness means better opportunities."[1]

Of course, Sheffield's most compelling evidence for rural schools' capacity to produce strong leaders came twenty-two years later, when a Plains High School alumnus would be elected president of the United States. Yet his remarks underscore the special qualities of Plains and similar rural schools. Sheffield's fight against consolidation also holds significance because it came as the nation was in suspense, awaiting the fate of segregated schools for black and white children. His remarks preceded the US Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by less than two months, thus highlighting another possible change on the horizon for all southern schools. The next chapter details the tangled histories of school consolidation and school desegregation in Sumter County. Focusing on the history of Plains High School through the immediate post–World War II era, this chapter argues that the teachers and community members collaborated in making Plains High School a model school. As one of the most imposing and visible buildings in Plains, the high school also offered its most striking manifestation and prominent symbol of segregation.

Plains High School was, at once, extraordinary and typical. Built in 1921 and recognized in 1937 as one of three "model schools" in Georgia, it had a winning record of launching young people into positions of trust and lives as contributing members of

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[1] "Keep Attendance Gauge Down, Ask Rural School Consolidation Foes," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 27, 1954, 1, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/397936892/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

society. Like other rural schools, it was the "backbone of the small community," as Sheffield called it.[2] At the same time, it was representative of many southern schools in offering unique educational opportunities and a community gathering place to only the white residents of Plains.

While Sheffield was fighting to protect Plains High School from consolidation efforts during the 1950s, it was ironically an earlier flurry of school consolidation throughout the state that had created an expanded Plains High School in the first place. Before the creation of a new and improved Plains High School, Sumter County, like fifty other counties in the state, lacked a four-year high school, and only offered five to seven months of instruction.[3] Those families who wanted a better education for their children moved to Americus, which had a school offering eleven grades that drew well-off farm families who wanted a better education for their children. "Whenever a farmer was prosperous in Sumter County he generally moved to the city where a fine school could be patronized," J. E. D. Shipp, chairman of the Sumter County Board of Education, wrote.[4] Sumter County was not alone. As late as 1920, several counties in Georgia lacked any senior high schools.[5] Moreover, a severe gap existed in the per-pupil expenditures in rural counties like Sumter compared with major southern cities. While the state of Georgia spent $12 a year per pupil in rural counties in 1922, it spent $51.74 a year per pupil in Atlanta.[6] Yet, compared to other states, Georgia stood "at the foot of the ladder" when it came to making educational appropriations.[7]

Starting in 1919, the dismal gap in school spending between rural and urban districts began to change, at least for schools serving white students. (Rural schools serving black students remained underfunded, and they often had to rely on private philanthropy). Hundreds of one-teacher schools throughout the state of Georgia closed their doors. Some of the students at schools that closed in Sumter County transferred to Plains High School. When the Plains school began its fall session in 1920, the existing wood-frame building

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2 "133 Schools Seen Facing Rating Loss," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 13, 1954, 18, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398012117/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

3 "Minutes of the State Board of Education," January 17, 1920, Education—State Board of Education—Minutes and Correspondence, 1870–1923, Vol 2-7014, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

4 J. E. D. Shipp, "What Consolidation Has Done for Sumter County Schools," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3, 1925, 2, Newspapers.com, https://www.newspapers.com/image/398143976/?terms=Thalean, accessed July 26, 2019.

5 Georgia Department of Education, *Sixtieth and Sixty-First Annual Reports of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia for the Biennium, Ending June 30, 1932*, 10.

6 M. M. Parks, *Annual report of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education, 1923), 16, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015076569253&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021&q1=expenditure, accessed October 7, 2021.

7 Shipp, "What Consolidation Has Done for Sumter County Schools," 2.

could not accommodate the 195 students in attendance. Designed for a maximum of 175 students, the school had to provide "emergency quarters" to deal with the overflow. Schools in other communities started to face similar space constraints.[8]

In response to the strain placed on Plains High School and schools throughout the state, Georgia went on a building spree, especially in rural sections of the state. Between September 1921 and June 1922, the state spent almost ten million dollars on the construction of forty-one new school buildings and ranked fourth among southern states in the amount it invested in new schools.[9] Sumter County's forty schools for white children gave way to "ten splendid consolidated schools," Superintendent Shipp reported.[10]

Public Education in a Rural Community

With consolidation, white families in Sumter County had schools that, at least from outside appearances, could equip their children for bright futures. For black families, the school represented one more major institution of community life that barred them. Adorned with Classical Revival details such as grand white columns, the red brick school building of Plains High School boasted an architectural style that rivaled the highly regarded schools of larger towns and cities such as Albany, Americus, Atlanta, Columbus, and Savannah. It had the appearance of a school that was at once thoroughly modern but also steeped in tradition. The main floor included an auditorium, or "chapel," the superintendent's office, a library, and ten classrooms that accommodated eleven grades.[11]

As a brand-new, state-of-the-art building, Plains High School drew teachers with better educational credentials than earlier schools. Between 1922 and 1924, the Georgia Department of Education listed Plains among accredited schools in the state in which at least one of the three teachers had earned a college degree, where the other two had at least earned normal or college certificates.[12] Its rating only improved in subsequent years. Starting in 1930, the department ranked Plains High School among "Group I" schools, meaning that Plains was one of the best schools in the state based on criteria that included having three-fourths of the academic teachers holding degrees, laboratory equipment, a

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[8] "Plains High School Is Crowded," *Macon Telegraph*, September 1, 1920, 4

[9] "Remarkable School Programs," *Southern Architect and Building News*, November 1922, 30.

[10] Shipp, "What Consolidation Has Done for Sumter County Schools," 2. Americus was similar to other up-and-coming southern cities of the early twentieth century in being a magnet for parents wishing to secure the best educational advantages.

[11] Jimmy Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 209.

[12] Georgia Department of Education, *Annual Report of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta: Department of Education, 1923), 284; Joseph S. Stewart and E. A. Pound, "The University Accrediting System," *Bulletin of the University of Georgia* 25, no. 1 (September 1924): 5, 9.

library, and a solid infrastructure. In addition to more highly trained teachers and a modern facility, students at Plains High School were exposed to all of the extracurricular activities that the country schools it was replacing lacked, from regular sports competitions, to oratorical contests, to concerts.[13] Taking advantage of funding from the federal Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917, Plains High School also hired an agriculture instructor for $1,500 a year in 1922—a position that endured throughout the school's history. The act provided federal funding to states to promote precollege vocational education.[14] As J. E. Shipp observed, "Consolidated rural schools in Sumter county are implanting higher ideals in the minds of the people. More boys and girls are going off to college from Sumter county than ever before, and the results from these schools will bring that education which will produce diversification, and diversification always breeds glorification."[15] The investment in a new and improved Plains High School started to bear fruit. During the 1925–26 school year, Plains graduates attended State Normal College in Athens, Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, Bessie Tift College in Forsyth, and Georgia School of Technology in Atlanta.[16]

Beyond preparing many of its graduates for college, Plains High School emerged as an anchor of the community for white families in and around Plains. Unlike the dozens of church schools and one-room schoolhouses that previously dotted the county, Plains High School offered an auditorium for large gatherings, a library, and two floors of classroom space. More than just a schoolhouse, the new building served other purposes, offering a meeting place for parent-teacher associations, community clubs, guest lectures, musical performances, and demonstrations by county farm agents. According to the superintendent, consolidated schools even helped increase the value of land in Sumter County.[17]

Miss Julia

A driving force in making a high-quality, well-rounded education available to Plains High School students was Julia L. Coleman, affectionately known as Miss Julia by her students. The daughter of a Baptist minister and a teacher, Miss Julia was educated in Plains schools

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[13] Georgia Department of Education, *Annual Report* (Atlanta: Department of Education, 1930), 98; Georgia Department of Education, *Sixtieth and Sixty-First Annual Reports of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia for the Biennium Ending June 30, 1932* (Atlanta: Department of Education, 1932), 84.

[14] "To Employ Ag. Teacher: Plains High School Goes After New Instructor," *Macon Telegraph*, August 22, 1922, 3.

[15] Shipp, "What Consolidation Has Done for Sumter County Schools," 2.

[16] Joseph S. Stewart, ed., "Records of Students Entering Georgia Colleges and Normal Schools, 1925–1926," *Bulletin of the University of Georgia* 27, no. 2 (January 1927): 8–41.

[17] Shipp, "What Consolidation Has Done for Sumter County Schools," 2.

and graduated from Bessie Tift College in Forsyth. She began to teach at Plains School in 1912 and became principal the following year, in 1913. In the classroom, she worked to give her students a world-class education, using religious instruction, literature, and lessons in history to broaden their horizons.

After the establishment of Plains High School, Miss Julia was tireless in equipping it with all of the trappings of a modern school. Less than a month after the new building opened, she mobilized parents to raise money for playground equipment. Described in a news article as "the efficient president" of the Parent-Teacher Association, Miss Julia undoubtedly was able to convey the benefits that outdoor play would hold for their children.[18] Of course, a playground also would offer a place for recreation even when school was not in session.[19] Within two weeks, the Parent-Teacher Association had collected enough money to order the equipment.[20] The speed with which Miss Julia motivated parents to raise these funds speaks to the respect she commanded among students and parents alike. In addition to their efforts with the playground, which cost two hundred dollars, the PTA held a "book shower" that yielded two hundred books. Their goal was to equip the library with a thousand books so that Plains High School could "get on the accredited list."[21] Not only did the school make the list, but its students also started drawing statewide notice. For instance, in 1925, senior Hugh Gibson won an oratorical contest sponsored by the *Atlanta Constitution*. The subject of his speech was "Jefferson and the Constitution."[22] In 1938, senior Pauline Lewis became one of three girls to submit the best essays in the *Atlanta Constitution's* prize essay contest to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the US Constitution.[23]

Beyond fundraising, Miss Julia encouraged parents' active involvement in their children's education. At one PTA meeting, for example, Miss Julia gave an award to "the grade having the largest number of visitors."[24] During the same meeting when the association announced that they had raised sufficient funds, Miss Julia sang "Mother O' Mine," a song with lyrics written by English poet Rudyard Kipling. Perhaps she chose this song to

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[18] "Plains," *Americus Times-Recorder*, October 15, 1921, 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053451/1921-10-15/ed-1/seq-6/, accessed October 8, 2021.

[19] "Plains," *Americus Times-Recorder*, October 15, 1921, 4.

[20] "Plains Social Set Is Active," *Americus Times-Recorder*, October 29, 1921, 5, Georgia Historic Newspapers, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053451/1921-10-29/ed-1/seq-5/, accessed October 8, 2021.

[21] "Hen Party," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1922, 7, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/26924976/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[22] "Eleven Districts Announce Their Winners for Prizes Offered by Constitution," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 11, 1925, 5, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398195665, accessed October 8, 2021.

[23] "Girl Essayists Win Constitution Cash," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1938, 2, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/384705854/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[24] Mrs. J. C. Logan, "Events of Plains, Ga.," *Americus Times-Recorder*, January 25, 1922, 4, https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053204/1922-01-25/ed-1/seq-4/, accessed October 8, 2021.

thank the mothers present for their devotion to their children, or to provide them with inspiration and encouragement. In many ways, however, the lyrics of the song capture the unwavering love and dedication Miss Julia had for her students:

> If I were hanged on the highest hill,
> Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
> I know whose love would follow me still,
> Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
>
> If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
> Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
> I know whose tears would come down to me,
> Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
>
> If I were damned of body and soul,
> I know whose prayers would make me whole,
> Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine![25]

Miss Julia treated all students like her own, but "she was particularly fond of boys," according to Lilloise Sheffield, a Sumter County teacher and the wife of Y. T. Sheffield. "She could see beyond what other people could see in them and could bring out the best in them, just like she did in Jimmy."[26]

Miss Julia remained at Plains High School for decades, only leaving temporarily in 1927 to work in the Newnan, Georgia, school system.[27] In 1928, she returned to Plains and became one of the first women to serve as a school superintendent in Georgia. She was visually impaired, but she kept an eagle eye on students and pushed them to be their best. Amy Wise, a 1975 graduate of Plains High School, never had Miss Julia as a teacher, but remembered her father, Morgan Wise, telling her that Miss Julia "memorized every child's footsteps because before they got to her office, she'd say, 'Okay, Jim,' or whatever, 'Come on in.'"[28]

Mr. Y. T. Sheffield, who served as principal at Plains High School, joined Miss Julia in steering the school through the grueling years of the Great Depression. Sheffield, who hailed from Pinehurst, in nearby Dooly County, was a graduate of Carson-Newman College, a Baptist institution in Jefferson City, Tennessee. He saw to it that students had the very best in science and mathematics instruction, vocational education, and athletics. C. L.

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[25] Rudyard Kipling, "Mother o' Mine," Poets.com, https://poets.org/poem/mother-o-mine, accessed April 15, 2020.

[26] Emma Edmunds, "His Miss Julia Saw 'Beyond,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, January 21, 1977, 15-A, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398614522/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[27] "Miss Julia Coleman Leaves Plains High," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1927, 8, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398184731/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[28] Amy Wise and Kay Bell, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Walters remembered him as a dynamic teacher: "I never will forget in geometry one day, he was going to describe dividing a rectangle to make two triangles, and he went to one corner of the room and said, 'OK, pretend like I've got a ball of twine here. I'm going to tie a knot in this corner. I'm going to string it to the other corner.' He came and said, 'Excuse me, excuse me,' and he'd step over people. 'Now, what does this room look like?' He was that kind of teacher, not one of these droney-type, put-you-to-sleep teachers."[29]

Donnie Tyler, a 1961 graduate of Plains High School, didn't fully appreciate how well Mr. Sheffield and Miss Julia had prepared him and his classmates until his first semester at Georgia Southwestern College, now Georgia Southwestern State University: "The college professor came in one day, and. . .he said, 'You people from Plains, if you all want to come to class you can. Because I'm going to have to go back and teach this course as high school chemistry.' And this was the case in math club from here, and the English club for sure. We obviously had some of the best teachers in the world."[30]

The School Days of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter

Born in 1924, Jimmy Carter entered first grade at Plains High School at the age of six. Carter remembered the school as a vibrant place of learning. Through Miss Julia's robust curriculum, students not only learned reading, writing, and arithmetic, but they also got a world-class education that expanded their horizons. They learned to identify the styles and histories of famous artists and their paintings, they listened to opera and symphony music, and they read great books. "Miz Julia would set up a record player in the auditorium, and we learned to recognize the work of Rachmaninoff and Brahms," he said. In addition, in one of their memoirs, the Carters rattled off other enrichment activities offered by the school: "[W]e had spelling bees, debates, elocution, and 'ready writing' contests, acted in plays, judged cows and hogs, cut rafters, learned cooking, sewing, and secretarial skills."[31]

She didn't realize it at the time, but Rosalynn Smith entered Plains High School in 1933, a particularly trying time for the school. It struggled to remain open for a full term. The *Atlanta Constitution* reported that "teachers have largely gone without salary long past the regular pay days and in many instances have voluntarily taken heavy cuts in their pay."[32] It is a testament to the teachers that their students did not register any discontent or stress. Rosalynn Smith Carter's memory about that school year was running home to show her

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[29] C. L. Walters, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan, May 10, 2007, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[30] Chris English et al. interview.

[31] Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, *Everything to Gain: Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 63.

[32] "Talmadge to Deliver Plains High Address," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1933, 4, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398078942/, accessed October 8, 2021.

parents that she'd made all A's on her report card. "Mother said, 'I knew you could do it,' and Daddy gave me a dollar!" she recalled.[33] To cap off this difficult year, Governor Eugene Talmadge spoke at the graduation.[34]

During the Depression, Plains High School also provided equipment and supplies that the students and their families could use for canning fruits and vegetables. Ralph McGill, an *Atlanta Constitution* columnist who delivered the commencement address in 1935, praised the school for having canning facilities to promote the preservation of food among families. "The board has seen to it that the school teaches things which will make for a better community and better farms," McGill wrote. He described Plains High School as "the center of the community interest."[35]

In May 1936, at the height of the Depression, Miss Julia embarked on a beautification effort at the school that had a lasting impact. She decided that Plains High School needed a garden. Initially, she enlisted the help of a dozen or so local men to break the land and plant trees and shrubs on the school grounds. For example, she paid Luther Wise a dime an hour to plant trees around the school "because she knew that they didn't have a lot," Lonnie Wise recalled his father telling him.[36] The project continued into the next school year, and eventually developed into what became known as the Friendship Garden. Local white residents could plant flowers to pay tribute to their wives or husbands along what was known as Citizen's Row. As with many aspects of life in the Jim Crow South, the garden was at once a beautiful symbol for white residents but also a bittersweet reminder to black residents that only certain citizens counted. Every time a new baby was born in town, the community members gathered to plant an arborvitae, or "tree of life," in the baby's honor. In 1940, the fourth-grade class wrote a poem celebrating the garden:

> Pansies, lilies, roses, flowers of
> every hue,
> Take each one as coming
> straight from heaven to you.
> Telling wondrous secrets of a
> power and love,
> Wearing still the brightness of
> the home above.[37]

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[33] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 6.

[34] "Talmadge to Deliver Plains High Address," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1933, 4.

[35] Ralph McGill, "Break O' Day!," "At Plains, Georgia," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1935, 10, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/397831689/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[36] Lonnie Wise, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, July 17, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[37] Bill Boring, "Newborns Feted in Citizens' Row," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 13, 1948, 11, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/397808777/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

The poem captured the meaning the garden held for not only students but also all members of the school community, who could donate benches in memory of loved ones. Two gates, one silver and one gold, served as backdrops for countless wedding processions, anniversary celebrations, and Easter celebrations.

Plains High School also had a vibrant athletic program, including basketball and baseball. By far the most popular events at the school were the basketball games. "Everybody came to the basketball games," Sherrill Murray House said. "Oh yeah. It was big. That was a social event."[38] Both Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter played on the school's basketball teams during their years at Plains High School, as did their son Jack, who graduated in 1965.[39] For years, Mr. Sheffield coached both the boys' and girls' teams, and then he switched to coaching only the girls' team. Sherrill Murray House recalled one of the moments when Mr. Sheffield taught her about sportsmanship while playing a "mean team" who always had their own referees: "We were playing, and I got called for something.... And I took the ball and threw it back to the referee. And [Mr. Sheffield] called time-out, and called us over to the side, and he looked at me and said, 'Do you want to play basketball, or do you want to sit on the bench?' And I said, 'Well I want to play, coach.' And he said, 'Don't ever let me see you throw the ball at the referee again. He calls you, you hand him the ball.'"[40]

Mr. Sheffield's other, unofficial title was school disciplinarian. At Plains High School and other southern schools, at least, there were no prohibitions on corporal punishment as there are today. Mr. Sheffield often combined paddling with denial of privileges to teach his students lessons about honesty and responsibility that lasted throughout their lives. After catching Carter skipping school, Mr. Sheffield ordered him to bend over with his hands on the wall and get seven licks. The infraction also cost Carter the title of valedictorian of his class.[41]

By the time Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter graduated in 1941 and 1944 respectively, Plains High School had the Friendship Garden and other traditions that would endure until it closed. Every year, Miss Julia and Mr. Sheffield kicked off the school year with a convocation that set the tone for the entire year, and introduced new students to the rituals that would mark their entire time at the school: reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, singing Christian songs like "Little Brown Church in the Prairie," and singing patriotic songs like "America the Beautiful." They held chapel every morning in the auditorium, a room that

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[38] Chris English, Sherrill Murray House, Beverly Wise Bond, and Donnie Tyler, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, Plains, Georgia.

[39] Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 12, 44.

[40] Chris English et al. interview.

[41] Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight*, 212, 219.

they simply called the "chapel." Sherrill House, who learned to play piano entirely in the third and fourth grade, and continues to play at church services, weddings, and funerals, remembered playing the piano as all of the students and teachers marched into the room.[42]

Students marked special holidays throughout the year. At Christmastime, each class had a party. The students would draw names and give their classmates a small token. They also bought bags of food from home for the school custodian, Ed Mathis, during the earlier years, then John Ross, and then John Lunsford. On May Day, students would dance around the Maypole. Members of the school community also came together for "Garden days," when they pruned shrubs, trimmed trees, and cleaned and improved the garden.[43]

The school's curriculum included the core academic subjects of reading, writing, English, math, chemistry, biology, and physics. The school also offered agriculture, home economics, and typing. Students could participate in regional and state events such as literary contests, declamation, essay contests, and even driving contests.

Plains High School during and after World War II

It was the era of World War II, a time when teachers throughout the state and nation were quickly figuring out how their schools could respond to wartime needs and preparing for postwar life. They also were responding to changes in the economy. Many of the kids they were teaching came from farm backgrounds and had lots of work to do in addition to attending school. Before and after school, they performed tasks such as sweeping the yard, fertilizing crops, poisoning boll weevils, shaking peanuts, harvesting pecans, and picking cotton. A member of the class of 1961, Donnie Tyler and his twin brother, Ronnie, had to wrap their work on their family dairy farm around school. He recalled:

> It was tough. He and I milked the cows in the morning. Not five days a week, but seven. . . days a week, milking about fifty cows back in those days. Then we'd finish in time, of course, to go to school. Then the afternoons, we had to feed those cows. Back in those days, we fed them what we call sillage, which is corn that's in-ground, stalk and all, put in a pit and it goes through a pickling and stays fermented like alcohol. Smells like it. By the time we get digging that stuff out of that pit, we were about drunk. So that made it a lot easier. He and I had the chore of feeding them in the afternoon.[44]

Somehow, the brothers managed to play baseball throughout high school.

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[42] Chris English et al. interview.

[43] Chris English et al. interview.

[44] Chris English et al. interview.

Yet the Tyler twins and other farm kids were graduating from Plains High School amid a monumental economic shift: the transformation of agriculture from a labor-intensive to a capital-intensive endeavor. As these changes started transforming the way people in southwest Georgia made a living, educators started making changes to state attendance requirements and curricula to prepare students for a changing society. In addition, the post–World War II expansion of higher education encouraged them to pay particular attention to making sure that they were preparing students for college and requiring minimum standards for attendance. In 1949, Georgia passed the Minimum Foundation Program, which required that all state schools adhere to a uniform nine-month school term.[45] Miss Julia, who stepped down as principal in 1950, nevertheless kept teaching English and remained at the forefront of Georgia's efforts to enhance the curriculum of state schools through her work on the state textbook committee. Her particular focus was on finding textbooks that would best support English teachers in their classes.[46] She also was part of a committee charged with deciding whether to add a twelfth grade to schools. In 1958, Miss Julia retired after more than fifty years of teaching.

At the same time that Miss Julia was still active in state educational committees, Mr. Sheffield also was becoming increasingly involved in helping to influence educational policy on the state level. From 1950 to 1951, he served as a district representative on the State Executive Committee for the Georgia High School Association. He also served on the basketball committee.[47] As part of his leadership on the state level, Mr. Sheffield became involved in the question of school consolidation. "My dad was outspoken against that," Mr. Sheffield's son, Tom, said in an interview.[48] Sheffield debated the issue of schools losing their accreditation with Dr. Zach Henderson, chairman of the Georgia Accrediting Commission, on WSB-TV, presented by the *Atlanta Journal*.[49] Tom further recalled his father's involvement in the political debate over school consolidation: "The one thing I do remember was my dad debated the college president of Abraham Baldwin, I think it was Abraham Baldwin College.… We went up to Hugh Carter's house, I think. Weren't many televisions in town in those days. We didn't have one. We went up there and watched the

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45 Denise S. Mewborn, "Public Education (PreK-12)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, October 23, 2017, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/education/public-education-prek-12/, accessed May 20, 2020.

46 "Julia L. Coleman. Educator," Georgia Women of Achievement, https://www.georgiawomen.org/julia-coleman, accessed March 22, 2020; "Educators Meet to Examine Textbooks Published since 1937," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1940, 7, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398036339/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

47 "Constitution and By-Laws, District and State Meets, 1949–1950," *Georgia High School Association* 43, no. 1, (September 1949): 5, 12. https://www.ghsa.net/sites/default/files/documents/Constitution/GHSA_CBL_1949–1950.pdf.

48 Tom Sheffield, interview with Adrienne Petty, June 26, 2018, Durham, North Carolina.

49 "133 Schools Seen Facing Rating Loss," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 13, 1954, 18, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398012117/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

debate on some statewide TV, and we thought Dad did a pretty good job in the debate."[50] Mr. Sheffield advocated leaving the average daily attendance at sixty in order to head off efforts to consolidate. As the next chapter explores, the issues of school consolidation and school desegregation were connected in the minds of the public and hotly contested. While Y. T. Sheffield resisted making any public statements about his views regarding school desegregation, rumors and speculation have always swirled around where he stood on the matter. One thing seems to be sure: Mr. Sheffield genuinely believed in Plains High School and the students he taught there. "I think because he was a country boy himself, he really enjoyed seeing a kid that went to his school, a country boy, who enjoyed the school and it helped that boy, you know," Tom Sheffield said. "I think that's what he was in it for. He really wanted to enrich this kid, the lives of the kids that he taught."[51]

Jim Crow 101

Until 1966, Ed Mathis and John Ross were perhaps the only African Americans to set foot in Plains High School. They worked as custodians at the school, keeping the school clean and warming it up for students and teachers each morning during the winter months. In accordance with the rules of the Jim Crow South, students called these grown men Ed and John, not Mr. Mathis and Mr. Ross. Not even Mr. Ed and Mr. John. Outside of Plains High School, both men were respected members of the black community. To members of his church congregation, for example, John Ross was Reverend Ross.

What did the boys and girls at Plains High School learn about the place black people occupied in their town? Did they wonder why there were separate schools for black children? How did they make sense of the fact that they could call black adults by their first names but not white adults? How did they learn the rules of how they were supposed to relate to black people, and how black people were required to act around them? Of course, Miss Julia, Mr. Sheffield, and the other teachers didn't plan a special curriculum or even single out the topic of black people for discussion. Learning to apply different standards to black people and to expect to see them occupy only certain jobs and roles in their lives was something white children learned by observing the world around them. The names students called Mathis and Ross were just one small part of a larger lesson they learned about the place that black people were supposed to occupy in the Jim Crow South.

Many Plains High School students grew up in the country, and their education about the color line started through daily interactions with black people who lived and worked on their families' farms. Their day-to-day lives were intertwined with the lives of African Americans, though with marked distinctions. Jimmy Carter discussed this common

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[50] Tom Sheffield interview.

[51] Tom Sheffield interview.

dynamic in moving ways in his memoir *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*. He also shared the memory of his closest childhood playmate, A. D., who was the son of one of the tenant-farmer families on the Carters' land. In private, the two boys would share meals together at Carter's family kitchen table. In public, on trips to the movies in Americus, however, A. D. would have to ride in a separate train car and sit in the balcony of the theater.[52] While Carter didn't hold earnest feelings of superiority toward A. D., he learned that the train conductor, the theater proprietor, and other adults expected them to abide by the rules of segregation.

As the two boys grew older, the semblance of parity and the strong affection Carter had for his friend faded, and Carter started to feel more strongly connected to his white schoolmates. A poignant interaction between Carter, A. D., and a third friend, Edmund, marked the shift: "One day about this time, A. D., Edmund and I approached the gate leading to our pasture. To my surprise, they opened it and stepped back to let me go through first.... It was a small act, but a deeply symbolic one. After that, they often treated me with some deference.... A precious sense of equality had gone out of our personal relationship, and things were never again the same between them and me."[53]

Growing up one generation later, Tom Sheffield, Donnie Tyler, and Chris English had similarly close interactions with African American children. Sheffield remembered playing in the alleyway just past the grocery store. "It was black and white, we played marbles together," he said. According to Tyler, "I grew up on a farm, dairy farm, and they were part of us," he said. "They ate at our table, we played together, we were friends." Likewise, English recalled playing with his black neighbors: "[I]f we were playing in their yard...everybody came in for a sandwich and milk at lunch. If they [his black playmates] were at my house, we would all run in for milk and lunch. It was just the way it was back then. Then it suddenly changed."[54]

As they moved into adolescence, they came to the same realization that Carter came to: they had to uphold social norms governing interactions between black and white people. Even if they didn't demand it or found it embarrassing, they learned to consent to it. Tom Sheffield learned about the position he was meant to occupy in society not by someone sitting him down and telling him, but from African Americans, who couldn't afford *not* to understand the rules of the color line. "People would call me Mr. Tommy, and we were the same age or they're older than me," Sheffield recalled. It embarrasses him that

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[52] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight*, 95.

[53] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight*, 230.

[54] Interview with Tom Sheffield; Interview with Chris English et al.

he went along with it. "I didn't correct them," he said. "I didn't say, 'Hey, you know, you don't have to do that.' And maybe I should have, but I don't think that would have made any difference. I think they would have still gone on and done it."[55]

The lesson came for Sherrill Murray House in the seventh grade, when she witnessed the stark reality of segregation at the funeral of her classmate, Robert Joel Thomas, who was tragically killed at the age of twelve while riding a horse. He pulled the "reins back and a horse fell over on him and crushed him," House recalled. What she remembers from this tragedy was not just the death of her classmate Robert Joel, but also the way that the minister and church elders seem to have expected African Americans to abide by the rules of segregation and deference even on such a solemn occasion. "All of the blacks that worked on his farm sat in the back of the church," she said. "I remember saying, 'Why can't they just sit in other places?'"[56]

Whether they grew up on farms or in town, many Plains High School students came into regular contact with their black neighbors. Black women cared for them, cleaned their houses, washed their clothing and linen, and worked alongside them in the fields and in other jobs. They also encountered black men playing countless roles, including performing field labor, repairing things around the farm, running errands for their parents, and working at stores in town. While as children they often admired and even adored these men and women, as they grew older they learned that they were meant to enforce a code of superiority and to keep a certain amount of distance between them and black people. At the same time, there were black and white people in the community who genuinely cared for each other. Tom Sheffield recalls being a fifth or sixth grader, and riding with his father to visit Ed Mathis, the school custodian, who was in the hospital at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute. Sheffield also recalled that his mother, who liked to garden, especially camellias and day lilies, made corsages for the children who were graduating from the all-black Westside Elementary School, which was just down the street from his house.[57] There also were exceptions. In Carter's generation, he noticed the unusual respect his parents paid to Bishop William Decker Johnson. For later generations, educators like Annie B. Floyd, principal of Westside Elementary, garnered respect from white people in Plains, who took veiled pride in the fact that she'd earned a master's degree from Columbia University.

Overall, though, white children in Plains learned to treat black people in ways that let them know their place in the social hierarchy. For example, a woman named Rosalie Scott took care of Lilloise Sheffield when she was a baby, and also took care of her daughter, Charlene, and son, Tom. Tom Sheffield remembers Rosalie as someone he "looked up

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[55] Interview with Tom Sheffield.

[56] Chris English, Sherrill Murray House, Beverly Wise Bond, and Donnie Tyler, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, Plains, Georgia. Note that Robert Joel Thomas died on November 22, 1954.

[57] Interview with Tom Sheffield.

to." During his teenage years, when his mother returned to teaching, Scott would cook and clean for the family. It was Sheffield's responsibility to drive her to and from his house and her home in Americus. No one ever directly instructed him, but he remembers learning about the rule governing rides for household workers: "They might say, 'Well, so and so. They're not from here and they let the black people ride in the front seat and we had to tell her, "You don't do that."' So I heard conversations like that." Even though he learned this rule, he could not bring himself to enforce it with a woman who'd changed his and his mother's diapers. Sheffield explained, "The first time I drove her, she sat in the front seat. Well that is not—I mean, I didn't say anything, you know, and I never did. She always sat in the front. I never mentioned it to her."[58]

The impact of this and other racist rules convinced Sheffield that growing up and being trained in these rules, whether directly or indirectly, made him accept the idea that there were different rules for white people than for black people. "So I'm embarrassed to even say this," Sheffield said, "because I don't think I'm a racist. But I know I'm tinged with racism because I—we all were, you know, we all were. But you try to get over it. Most of the people were good people, but they were following customs too." While attending college at Mercer University, Sheffield started to change his mind about civil rights and integration: "When I was in school [at Mercer], I changed my mind about race and everything, about integration and all that stuff. But when I was in the fifth and sixth grade, I absorbed. I was just like my buddies."[59]

Tom Sheffield: No Special Treatment

Tom Sheffield was a "PK"—a *principal's* kid. His father, Y. T. Sheffield, was a long-time teacher, principal, and superintendent at Plains High School. Like preacher's kids, Tom worked hard to blend in with his peers. "I tried to not be conspicuous," Sheffield said. "I went out of my way to get along with people." Having a father who also was his principal could have stifled his development or caused him to rebel. Instead, Sheffield thrived at Plains High, graduating in the class of 1958. He credits the school with making a difference for all of its graduates.

Even before he became a student there, Plains High School loomed large in Sheffield's childhood. His family, which included his parents and older sister, Charlene, lived in a house that was a stone's throw from the school. Ever since he can remember, his father worked there. He recalled: "My earliest memory was, it's summertime, and I'm standing out in front of the house there on Bond Street [his childhood home]. There was a

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[58] Interview with Tom Sheffield.

[59] Interview with Tom Sheffield.

great big oak tree then. It was this huge oak tree, I mean *huge* oak tree. I remember standing under that oak tree waiting for Daddy to come home." He also recalled being at the Friendship Garden at the school: "I remember my mother telling me, 'That's your tree.'"

His parents met at Plains High School. His mother, Lilloise Lunsford Sheffield, was in high school when his father first started teaching there—around 1929, he thinks. His mother's childhood home stood on Bond Street, right at the edge of the school's campus. He recalled the story his mother told him: "She said, 'When Nama [his grandmother]and I were standing there in the yard, we saw Mr. Sheffield come to school the first day.'" Sheffield does not know all of the details of their courtship, but his mother showed him a "long letter" Miss Julia wrote her about the marriage. Sheffield said, "I remember one of the things she told my mother is, 'The man's a schoolteacher. He's not going to be rich. But that's OK.'" After graduating from Plains High School, Lilloise Sheffield went on to get a degree from the University of Georgia.

Sheffield's first day of school, when he entered the first grade in 1945, is a blur. He remembers his teacher, Eleanor Forrest, very well because she was a long-time first-grade teacher and the mother of one of his friends. But one incident stands out from that year. He was starting school in the wake of World War II, trying to make sense of the confusing things going on around him. Like all children growing up during that era, he saw all of the negative propaganda about the Japanese. "I do remember I drew a picture in Miss Eleanor's class of a Japanese person. We were fighting. This is a war. So it was not a pretty picture. It was a bad picture. So I got punished for that." Having a father who worked at the school did not keep Sheffield from having to accept the consequences of his actions.

Sheffield never received special treatment from his father, either. "Just like I was trying not to be a nerd," Sheffield said, "I think he was a little rougher on me than he was on the other kids. But I understand that it was probably good for both of us, because if he had not been that way, then maybe they would have said what you said, 'Oh, you can get away with anything because he's your dad.'" The lack of special favors for the principal's son extended to athletics. Sheffield's dad coached both the girls' and boys' basketball teams during Sheffield's school years. While his sister played on the girls' team, Sheffield never succeeded in making the cut for any of the school's sports teams. "I'm not an athlete," Sheffield said. "I was more of a bookworm. I was more of a nerd, as they call it today." What Sheffield appreciates is that both of his parents accepted him for who he was. Instead of playing on the basketball team, Sheffield served as the team scorekeeper for a few years. "Then, after the game, I'd call into the newspapers, and I made a couple of bucks because I'd give them all the scores," he recalls.

Like many other kids at Plains High School and throughout rural America, Sheffield had chores and jobs that extended beyond his school activities. He would help on a farm that had belonged to his paternal great-grandfather, where his father kept a herd of cattle. Sheffield recalled that a man by the name of Clarence Jackson ran the farm, and one

day, he told Sheffield to "pick out one of those heifers and all of the calves she has—that's yours." His heifer had a bunch of calves that Sheffield and his father took to the market and sold. "That was a nice little bit of cash for me," he said. He also stacked peanuts for "I think might be twenty-five cents a stack or something like that." These farm experiences piqued Sheffield's interest in farming, and he participated in Future Farmers of America at school, as well as the Beta Club, a national academic achievement group.

When Sheffield graduated from Plains High School, he entered a pre-engineering program at North Georgia College at Dahlonega, a military school. With his good foundation from Plains, and a lack of distraction because in the military school setting "you're locked in your room," he made all A's there. Then he transferred to Georgia Tech with plans to study chemical engineering, but had difficulty with chemistry. He eventually landed on his feet and thrived as a math major at Mercer University. Although his father encouraged him to go into teaching, he wasn't interested. Instead, his first job was selling insurance. He worked as an underwriter for a number of years, then worked at an agency, then started working for the state, then eventually moved to North Carolina, where he worked for the state and has lived for the past thirty years.

Jimmy Melvin: Catch Them Doing Good

These days, Jimmy Melvin, a member of the Plains High School Class of 1957, fronts a band known as Jimmy and the Shades. He lives in his native southwest Georgia after years as a high school and college basketball coach, teacher, and principal in other parts of Georgia and in southwest Florida. From his early school years through his high school graduation, Melvin encountered teachers who developed his mind, nourished his athletic ability, and inspired his lifelong love of music.

Melvin will never forget the first time he stepped off the school bus to enter Plains High School. He can still hear the gravel as it "crunched" under the bus tires, hear the "squish" of the bus driver opening the door, and envision the sea of children, "more children than I ever knew existed." It was a rude awakening after attending his community school for the first four years of schooling. Melvin recalled, "To me it was New York City. Plains, Georgia, with 150 kids—and by that time it was twelve grades. They'd moved from eleven to twelve."

Up to this point in his childhood, Melvin had been a "big fish in a small pond, thinking I was smart." As the baby of his family, he grew up hearing his mother say, "'Jimmy, you're going to do good.' And I believed her," Melvin said. He spent his first four years of school attending the Thompson School, which offered grades one through seven. It was a modern, five-room brick school with an auditorium, but it seemed like a one-room school in comparison to Plains High School. The school only had twelve students and two

teachers. Melvin had "the privilege" of having Melba Chambliss as his teacher for first, second, and third grade. "She was a famous music teacher. At that time, she was the principal of the school, the janitor of the school, and the teacher of the school," Melvin recalled.

Miss Melba, his favorite teacher of all, taught him lessons that he carried with him into his own classroom and on the basketball court. "She caught me doing good, and reinforced the behavior she wanted me to repeat," he said. Melvin carried this approach into his work as a basketball coach. "Some people can pass, some can rebound, some can shoot, some can bark out," he said. "You reinforce behavior you want them to repeat and you win the majority of your games, and we did.... A lot of that came from her."

Once he adjusted to Plains High School, he found teachers there who touched him almost as much as Miss Melba. Mr. Sheffield coached him in the ninth grade, and saw his potential as both a student and a basketball player. "I was his boy and he was like another father to me," Melvin said. After his ninth-grade year, Murray Smith, the brother of Rosalynn Carter, took over as the boys' basketball coach. In addition to coaching, Smith taught math and science. He became a role model to Melvin and so many other students of his generation—someone who excelled as a teacher and a coach. Melvin emulated Smith's commitment to academics and athletics in his own professional career, including his work as a coach at Valdosta State University and various high schools, and his work as an elementary school principal. "I went into education mainly because I kind of wanted to be like [Smith]," Melvin said. "He always put academics first, and if you didn't do well in school, you wouldn't get to play."

Chris English: Work Hard, Play Hard

If the Plains High School class of 1960 had a class clown, it was Chris English. English was a bright, fun-loving, and slightly mischievous boy. He has kept his classmates in stitches for decades, from first grade to the annual gatherings he organizes for his class that endure to this day. Sitting around the room at the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park, English and several other alumni reminisced about their school days and laughed just as hard about stories they'd recalled dozens of times before. For English, Plains High School was—and remains—all about camaraderie.

A precocious child, English was an avid reader by the time he entered Plains High School. He learned to read when he was four, thanks to the patient instruction of his mother. "When I was five I could read the headlines and pictures, and she'd read the article, and I'd have to let her know if I thought the article and the headline tied together," he recalled. As he grew older, she would ask him if he could detect any bias or determine the reporters' opinions based on how the article was written. Once he entered school, his

parents would allow him to keep his light on at night to read "as long as I bounced out of bed when they called me in the morning to get ready for school." By the time he was in fifth grade, he had read all of the books in the school library.

One purpose that kindergarten and first grade have always served is teaching children how to interact in a social setting, and to stop viewing themselves as the center of the universe. "Until you started school, every child is self-centered," English said. "First grade is when you learn to share stuff and feel what other people are feeling, and all." He and the other kids jokingly called their "height-challenged" classmate Beverly Wise Buchanan the "runt" of the class, but they also helped her out. English and Beverly Wise Buchanan laughed as English recalled lifting her up so that she could reach the water fountain. Of course, he remembered sneaking in a prank. "She couldn't lean over the faucet, so I gave her a lift, and reached under and squeezed the handles," spraying water in her face. "So after that, she knew she had to work the handles!"

School also taught English and his classmates how to share, take turns, and reciprocate. As the oldest of four boys, English had never been around kids who were old enough to do the same things he could do. At school, his class had six girls and thirteen boys who all learned and played together, and the experience taught all of them how to make concessions to one another. "If we wanted to set up two baseball teams, we had to entice the girls to join in with the game and play with us," English remembered. "So, in return, we had to fling the rope the next time they wanted to play skip rope."

Over time, Plains High School became a home away from home for English and the other students. They could depend on the comforting and predictable schedule that most schoolchildren thrive on, and many of those familiar patterns have stayed with them—even the sights and smells from their school days. Sherrill Murray House recalled, "When I smell vegetable soup now, or when it's raining and I smell vegetable soup, I think about the lunchroom, because they always had a pimento cheese sandwich and vegetable soup on days that it rained. Even the sting of a splinter might send their mind down memory lane." English and his friends became so accustomed to the environment that they even walked around school in their bare feet as the weather got warmer. "The floor was not sanded like it is now," Buchanan recalled. "And every spring when the boys took their shoes off, they would get splinters."

As English and his classmates talked about their junior high years, they snickered at the memories and seemed like awkward twelve- and thirteen-year-olds all over again. The rules changed as they started to hit puberty. "Remember our seventh-grade big lecture?" English asked the other alumni. "We were grown-up now, so boys, no more shorts. You wear long trousers; girls wear skirts, blouses, and dresses; and everybody wears shoes. And that was a killer." They giggled as they remembered sex education class. Just like today, the

teacher split up the boys and the girls to teach them about the birds and the bees. English had a crush on a girl named Millie in the seventh grade, so they would walk around the school before class started. “But you couldn’t hold hands,” he recalled.

In addition to excelling in school, English kept his classmates entertained—and the teachers busy bringing him back in line. His first paddling in school was at the hands of Miss Eleanor. He and a friend found a can of green paint in the basement of the school. They took a stick and painted the water fountain. There also was the time he and some classmates made a makeshift playhouse under kudzu vines: “Mr. Sheffield came out, and five or six of us had moved some of the concrete blocks so you could have a little fort,” English recalled. “He sent us all scurrying back to the school, and I was one of the slow ones, so I got a slap on the rear.” To make matters worse, one of his friends, Courtney, said, “‘Mr. Sheffield, Chris said it didn’t hurt.’” English recalled. “He asked me, ‘Do you want another one?’ No sir, I didn’t say I liked it.”

English’s most flagrant act of mischief was when he smoked a cigarette in Miss Julia’s class. English picked up the habit when he was thirteen, working during the summer on a construction site. For the rest of his school days, he’d find ways to sneak in a cigarette. He and other boys smoked in the Friendship Garden, amid the tall trees. Another spot where he smoked was in the boiler room, sitting alongside the custodian, Ed Mathis, who “didn’t rat me out for smoking,” English remembered fondly. Lunchtime presented another occasion for a cigarette break. English and other kids who lived within walking distance of school would go home for lunch, rather than eating in the lunchroom with the kids who took the school bus. On his way back, he’d have a cigarette or stop at the store to buy another pack. “The biggest vice, I guess, in high school was smoking,” Buchanan said.

After graduating from Plains High School, English went to college in North Florida and became an engineer. He returned to Plains to work, and then joined the US Navy. After four years, he went to work at Lockheed in California for ten years, and then moved back to Georgia. When he returned to Plains, he started getting his classmates together more frequently to have fun and reminisce. Then and now, it’s all about camaraderie—and a little friendly ribbing.

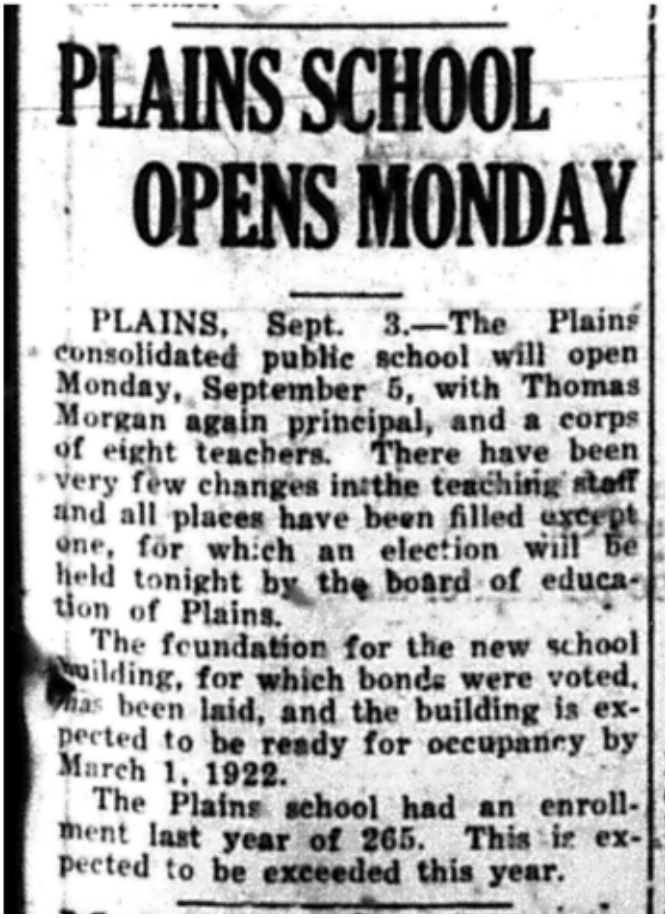
Figure Gallery

Figure 2.1. The original Plains School, 1900–1921



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.2. Plains High School opening, 1921



PLAINS SCHOOL OPENS MONDAY

PLAINS, Sept. 3.—The Plains consolidated public school will open Monday, September 5, with Thomas Morgan again principal, and a corps of eight teachers. There have been very few changes in the teaching staff and all places have been filled except one, for which an election will be held tonight by the board of education of Plains.

The foundation for the new school building, for which bonds were voted, has been laid, and the building is expected to be ready for occupancy by March 1, 1922.

The Plains school had an enrollment last year of 265. This is expected to be exceeded this year.

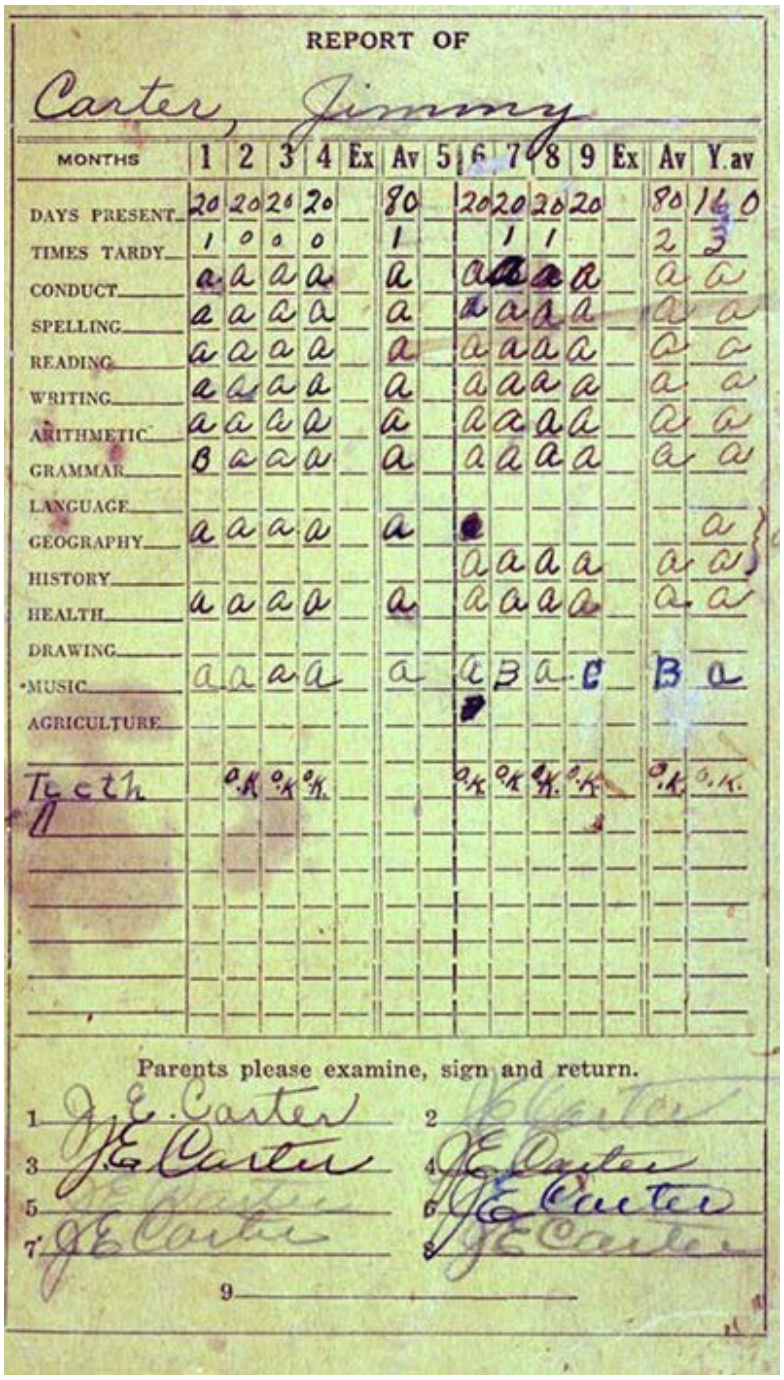
Americus Times-Recorder, September 3, 1921

Figure 2.3. Plains High School, 1922



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.4. Plains High School report card for Jimmy Carter



REPORT OF

Carter, Jimmy

MONTHS	1	2	3	4	Ex	Av	5	6	7	8	9	Ex	Av	Y.av
DAYS PRESENT	20	20	20	20		80		20	20	20	20		80	160
TIMES TARDY	1	0	0	0		1			1	1			2	3
CONDUCT	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
SPELLING	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
READING	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
WRITING	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
ARITHMETIC	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
GRAMMAR	B	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
LANGUAGE														
GEOGRAPHY	a	a	a	a		a								a
HISTORY								a	a	a	a		a	a
HEALTH	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
DRAWING														
MUSIC	a	a	a	a		a		a	B	a	C		B	a
AGRICULTURE														
Teeth		O.K.	O.K.	O.K.				O.K.	O.K.	O.K.	O.K.		O.K.	O.K.

Parents please examine, sign and return.

1 J. E. Carter 2 [illegible]

3 J. E. Carter 4 J. E. Carter

5 [illegible] 6 J. E. Carter

7 J. E. Carter 8 J. E. Carter

9 _____

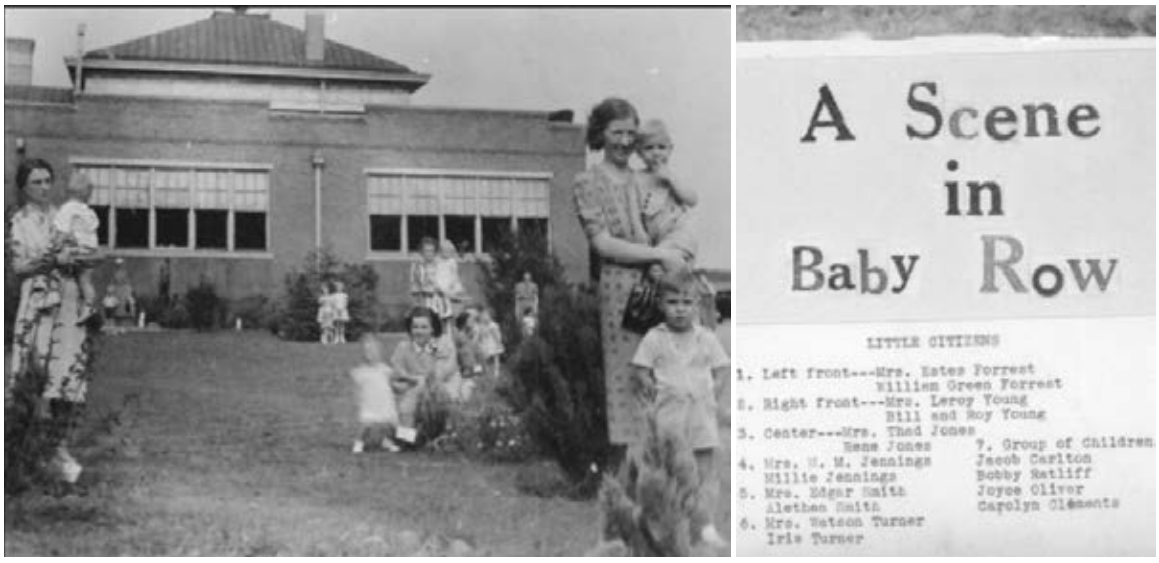
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.5. Women and children in the garden beside Plains High School



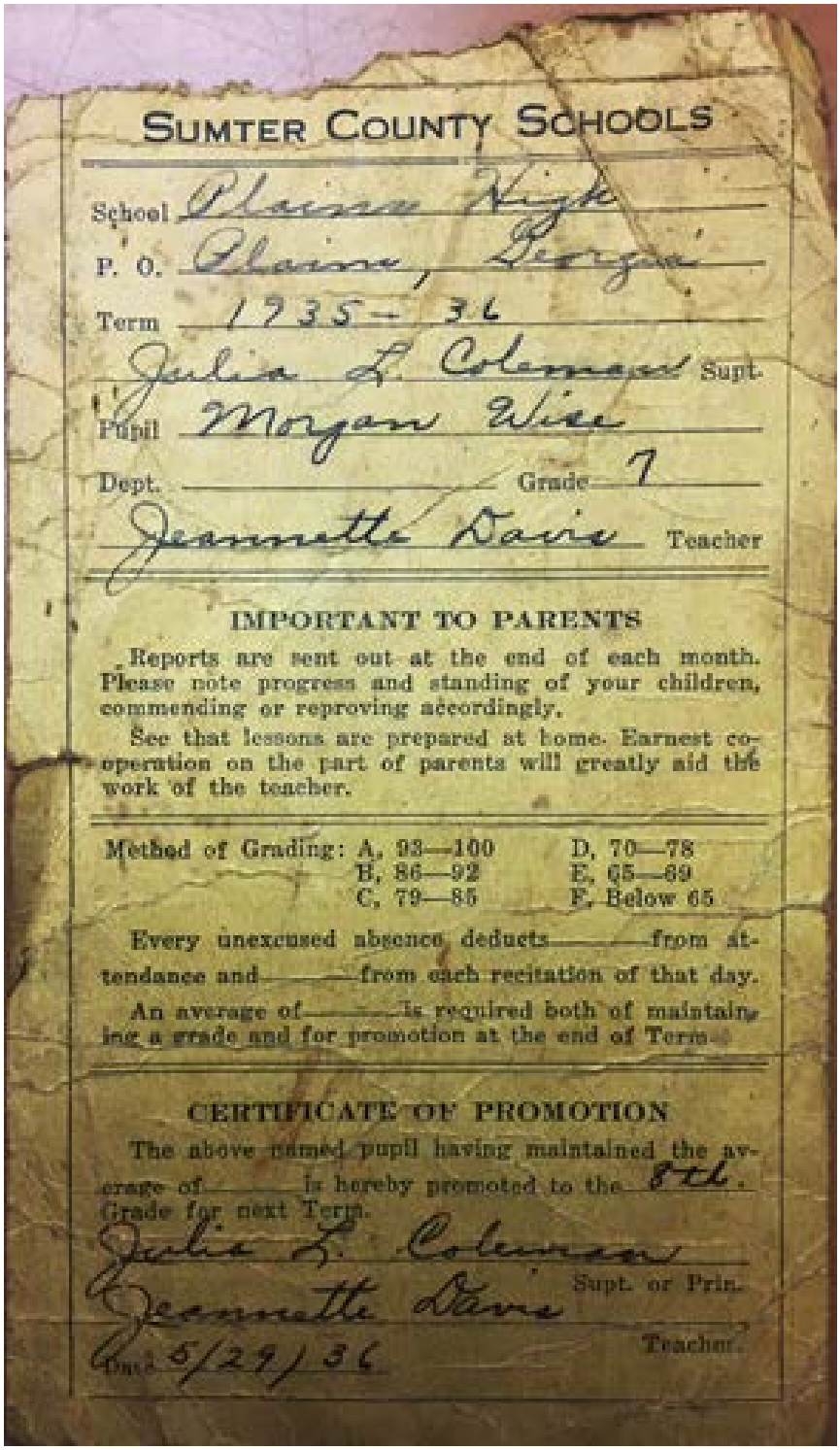
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.6. Mothers and their children in the Friendship Garden



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.7. 1935–1936 Plains High School report card for Morgan Wise



SUMTER COUNTY SCHOOLS

School Plains High

P. O. Plains, Georgia

Term 1935 – 36

Julia L. Coleman Supt.

Pupil Morgan Wise

Dept. _____ Grade 7

Jeannette Davis Teacher

IMPORTANT TO PARENTS

Reports are sent out at the end of each month. Please note progress and standing of your children, commending or reproving accordingly.

See that lessons are prepared at home. Earnest co-operation on the part of parents will greatly aid the work of the teacher.

Method of Grading: A, 93—100 D, 70—78
B, 86—92 E, 65—69
C, 79—85 F, Below 65

Every unexcused absence deducts _____ from attendance and _____ from each recitation of that day.

An average of _____ is required both of maintaining a grade and for promotion at the end of Term.

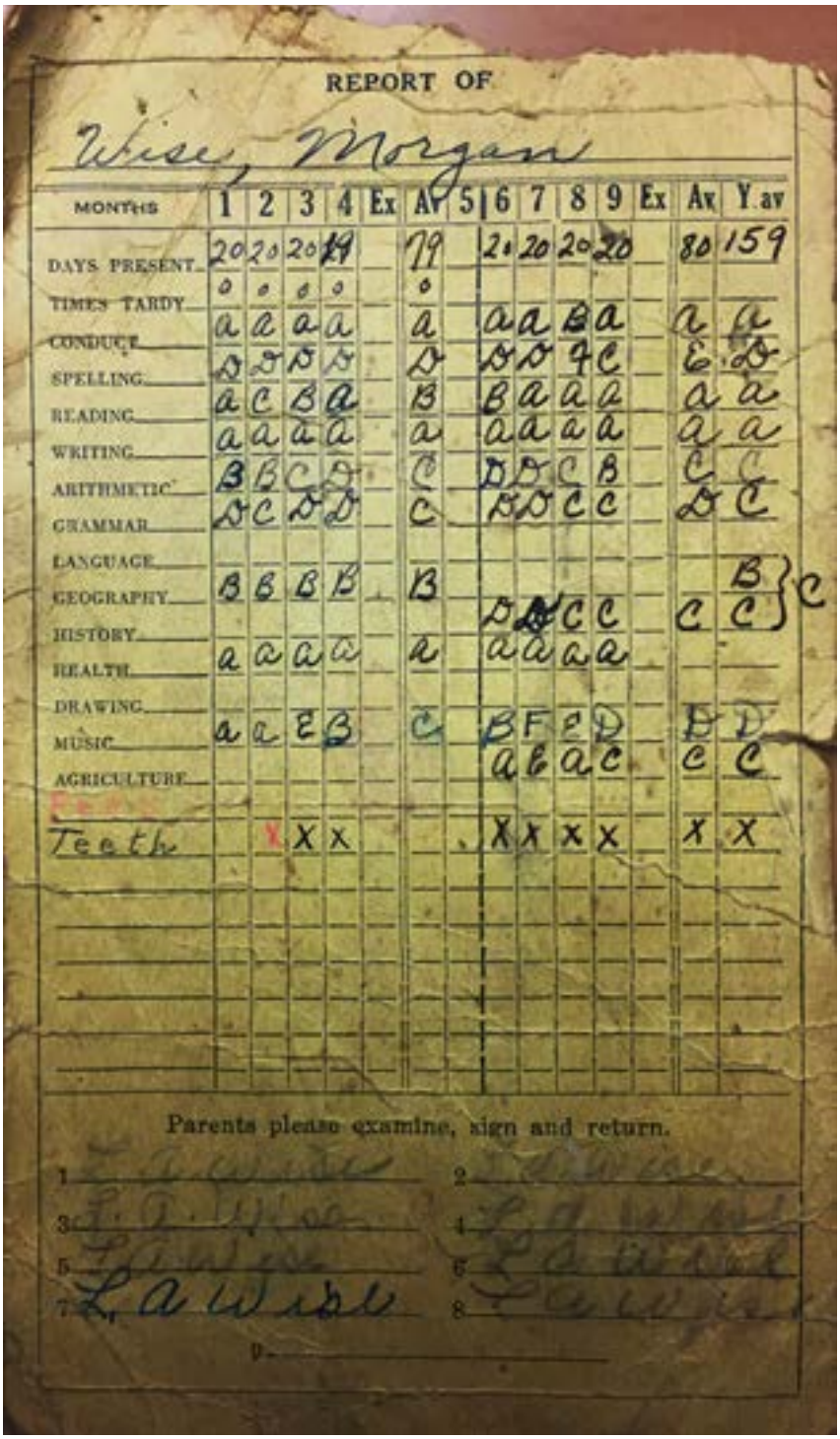
CERTIFICATE OF PROMOTION

The above named pupil having maintained the average of _____ is hereby promoted to the 8th. Grade for next Term.

Julia L. Coleman Supt. or Prin.

Jeannette Davis Teacher.

Date 5/29/36



REPORT OF

Wise, Morgan

MONTHS	1	2	3	4	Ex	Av	5	6	7	8	9	Ex	Av	Y.av
DAYS PRESENT	20	20	20	19		79		20	20	20	20		80	159
TIMES TARDY	0	0	0	0		0								
CONDUCT	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	B	a		a	a
SPELLING	D	D	D	D		D		D	D	C	C		C	D
READING	a	C	B	a		B		B	a	a	a		a	a
WRITING	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a		a	a
ARITHMETIC	B	B	C	D		C		D	D	C	B		C	C
GRAMMAR	D	C	D	D		C		B	D	C	C		D	C
LANGUAGE														B
GEOGRAPHY	B	B	B	B		B								C
HISTORY								D	D	C	C		C	C
HEALTH	a	a	a	a		a		a	a	a	a			
DRAWING														
MUSIC	a	a	E	B		C		B	F	E	D		D	D
AGRICULTURE								a	b	a	C		C	C
Teeth		X	X	X				X	X	X	X		X	X

Parents please examine, sign and return.

1 L. Wise 2 L. Wise

3 L. Wise 4 L. Wise

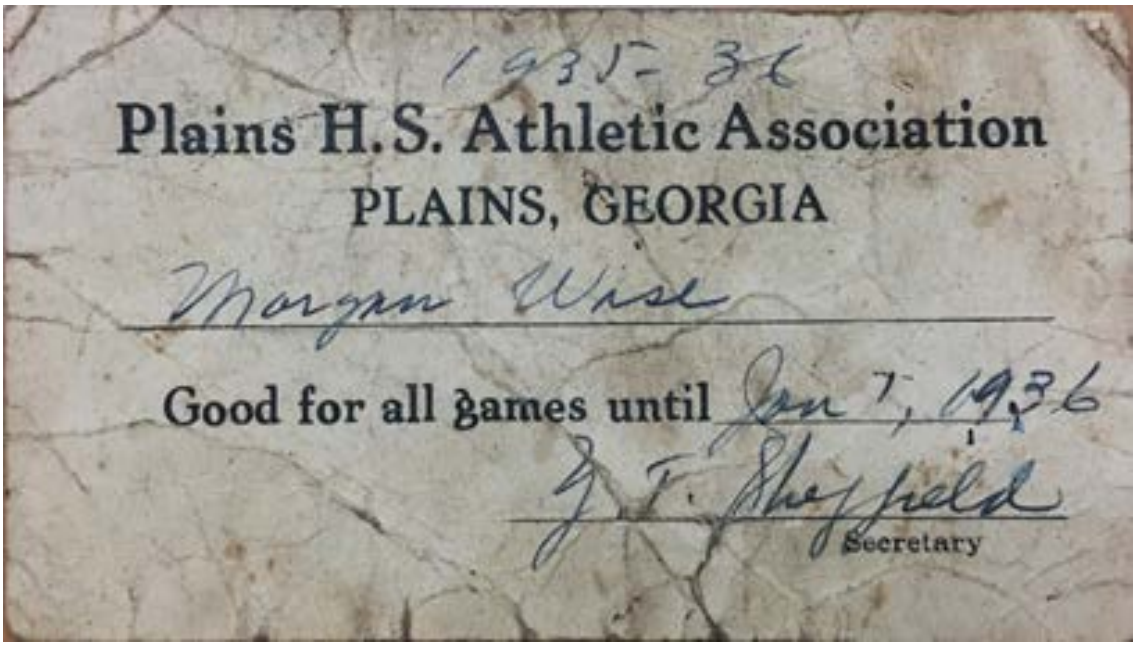
5 L. Wise 6 L. Wise

7 L. Wise 8 L. Wise

9

Courtesy of Amy Wise

Figure 2.8. 1935–1936 Plains High School Athletic Association card for Morgan Wise



Courtesy of Amy Wise

Figure 2.9. Plains High School is designated a model rural school, 1937



Plains Is Chosen to Try New Course

Georgia Will Make Example of Rural School

PLAINS, Ga., June 8.—The Plains High school has been selected as a laboratory school for the State Board of Education's revised curriculum program, M. E. Thompson revealed in his commencement address last night.

Mr. Thompson, head of the Teacher-Training and Certification of the State board, said that the Plains school would serve as an example for other schools of the State in this new program.

The new curriculum is designed to train high school students for vocational life, and prepare the graduates to take part in their community life. Under the new set-up, the schools will work closer with their communities.

In his talk, Mr. Thompson listed a five-point program that the new curriculum will be built around. They are Health, Citizenship, Earning a Living, Preserving and Restoring Our National Resources, and Expression of Aesthetic and Religious Impluses.

Mr. Thompson traced the development of the high schools from a handful of students thirty years ago who attended private academys to the present accredited high schools in every Georgia county.

The increase in number of students and schools has not been followed by an advance in manner of training, however, he said. High schools today, like the academys of old, continue to prepare students for college.

"Today, with only 20 per cent of the graduates going to college, we are beginning to think of high school not as preparation for college, but as preparation for life," he declared.

Supt. Julia L. Coleman pledged the cooperation of her school to the new curriculum program.

"We shall enter into this new program vigorously and sincerely. We are proud of our rural school, proud of our faculty and our students. We are glad to offer our skill and our lives to the interest of our community, and we hope to serve our community more widely next year."

YOUTH JAILED ON BROTHER'S PLEA

Roy Jones, a young white man, was locked in the county jail this afternoon by Sheriff McArthur at the request of the youth's brother who expressed the belief that his brother was temporarily demented. Jones was found by his brother in the water at McMath's Mill, in a greatly weakened condition shortly afternoon and was brought to this city. He was unable to walk to the jail.

SANITAT'N LAW TO BE ENFORCED

2 Merchants Fined And Sentenced

Strict enforcement of the city's sanitation law was underway today, following the sentencing of two merchants to 90 days in jail and fines of $5 at the weekly Recorder's court.

Sentences on both merchants were suspended on condition that they keep their premises clean. Police Chief J. N. Worthy warned that all violators of this ordinance will be arrested.

Recorder Hollis Fort Jr. in a special court last night sentenced T. J. Battle, negro, to 60 days in jail or to pay a fine of $15.35 for disorderly conduct.

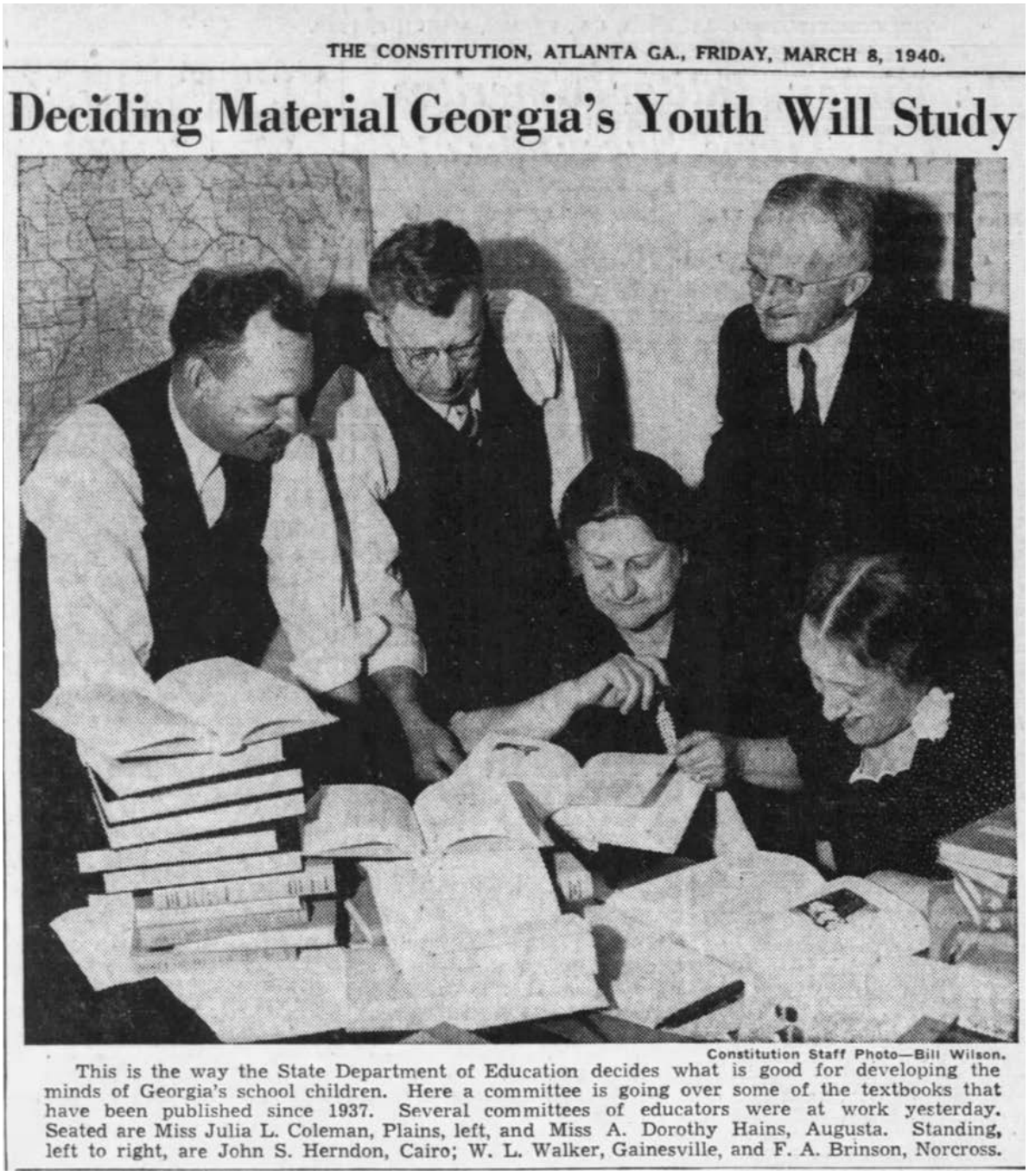
The recorder imposed several fines for violation of the dog tag ordinance, and sentenced several negroes for disorderly conduct.

Ed Lee Coley, negro, was given 60 days or fined $15 for disorderly conduct, and Lillie Bell Lear, negro, was given 15 days or a $5 fine in the same case.

Charles Carter, negro, was sentenced to 40 days for loitering and 15 days for disorderly conduct. Dallas Powell, negro, got 15 days for disorderly conduct. Luke Milliner, negro, is serving 30 days for disorderly conduct, while

Americus Times-Recorder, June 8, 1937

Figure 2.10. State Textbook Committee



THE CONSTITUTION, ATLANTA GA., FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 1940.

Deciding Material Georgia's Youth Will Study

Constitution Staff Photo—Bill Wilson.

This is the way the State Department of Education decides what is good for developing the minds of Georgia's school children. Here a committee is going over some of the textbooks that have been published since 1937. Several committees of educators were at work yesterday. Seated are Miss Julia L. Coleman, Plains, left, and Miss A. Dorothy Hains, Augusta. Standing, left to right, are John S. Herndon, Cairo; W. L. Walker, Gainesville, and F. A. Brinson, Norcross.

The Atlanta Constitution, March 8, 1940

Figure 2.11. Plains High School graduation announcement, 1944



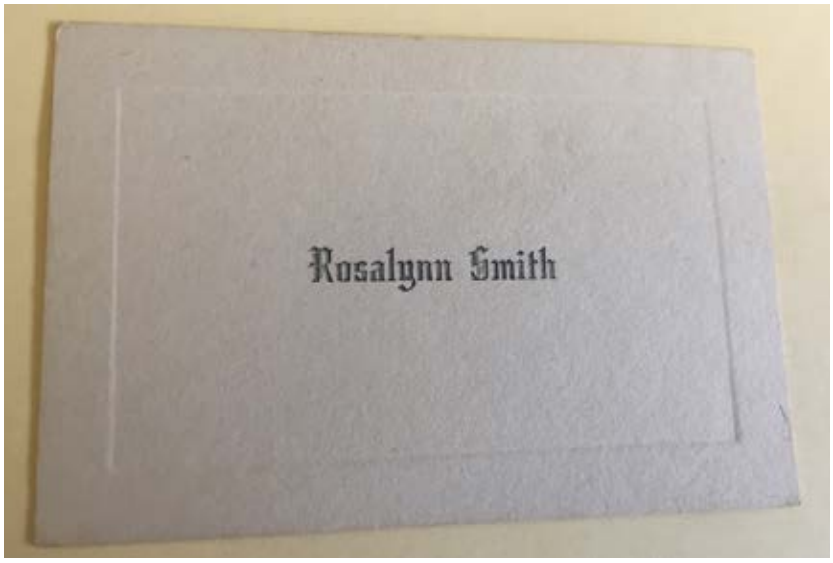
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Figure 2.12. Commencement announcement, Eunice Anderson, 1944



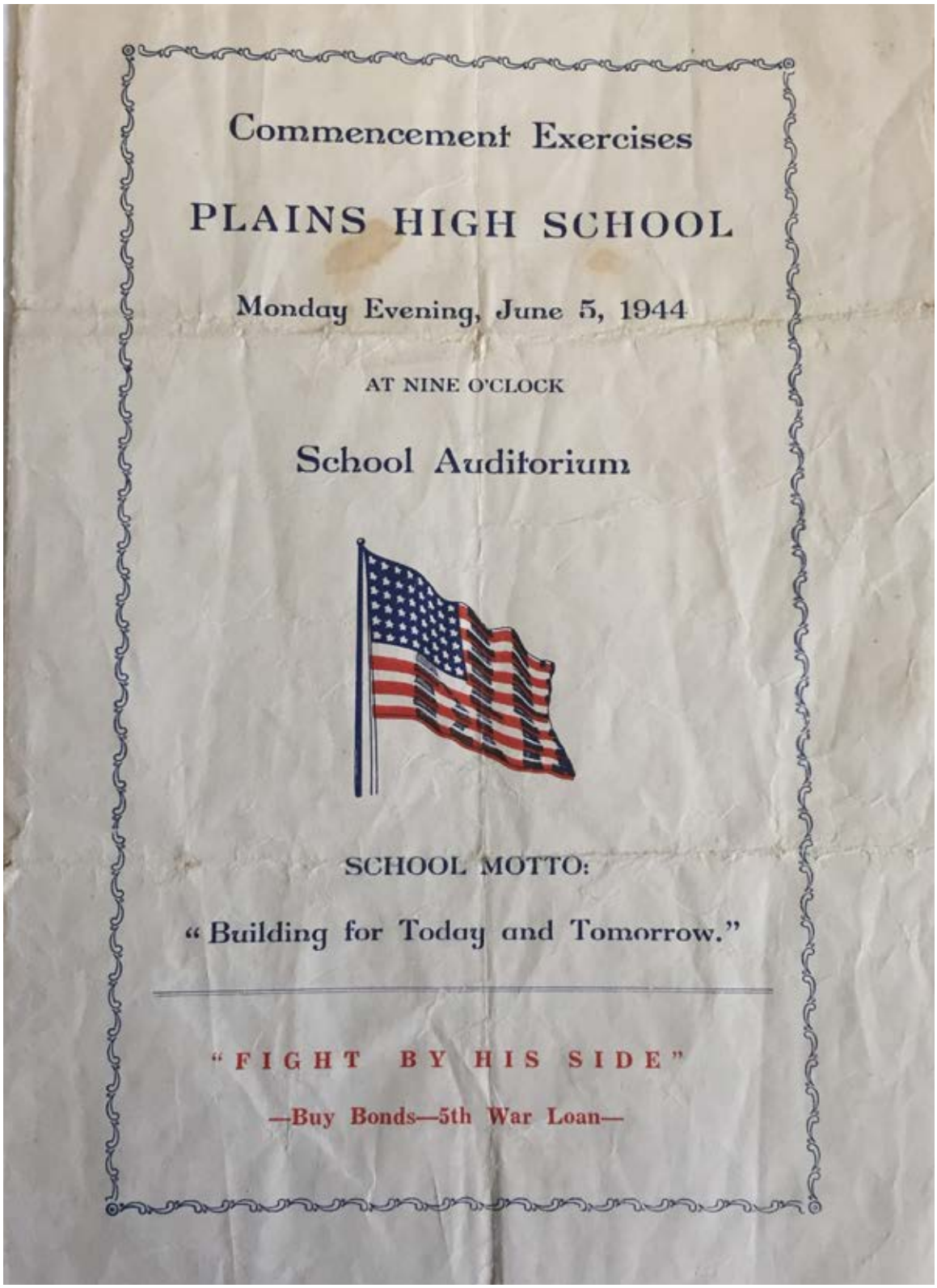
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Figure 2.13. Plains High School graduation name card, Rosalynn Smith, 1944



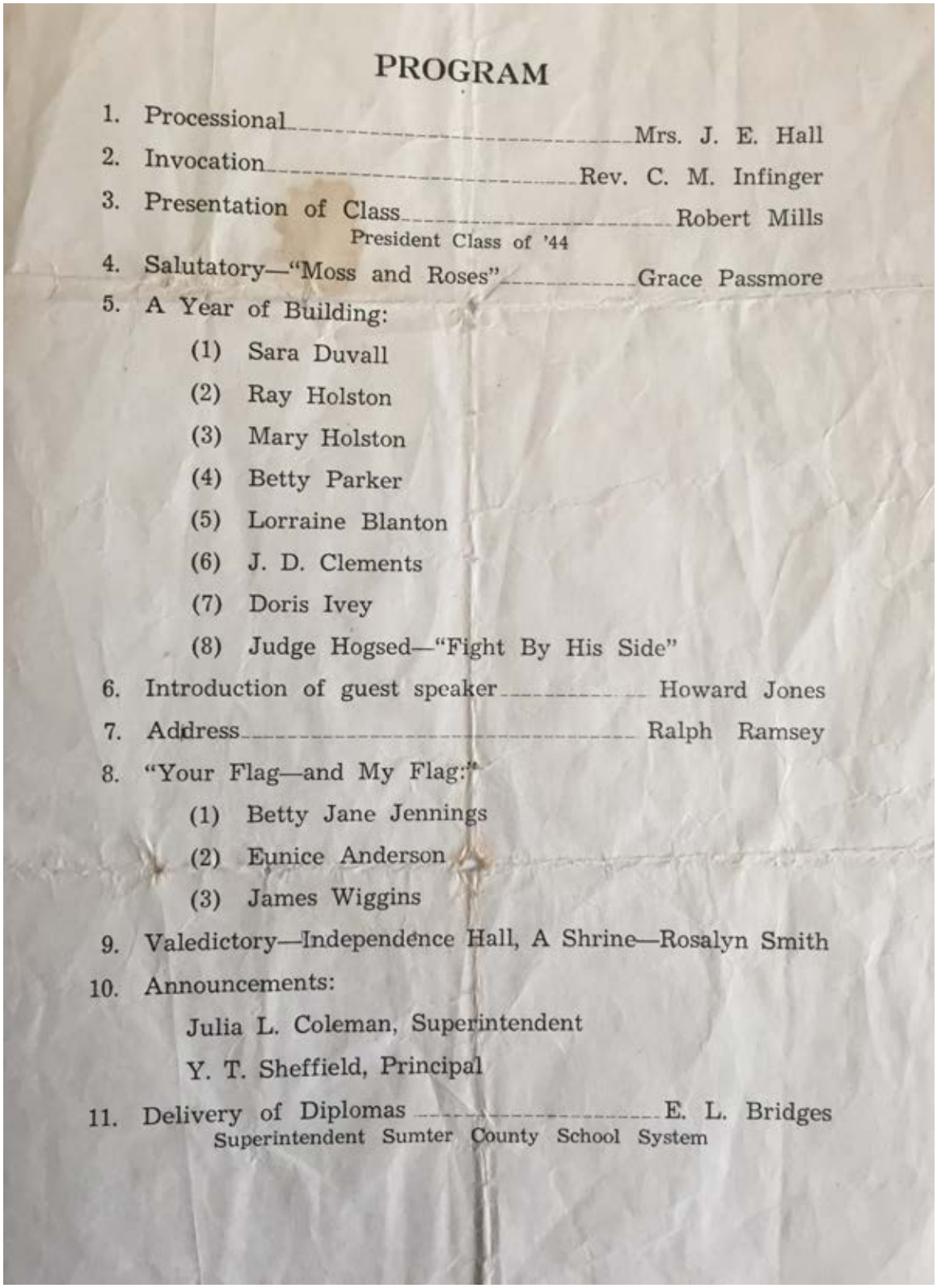
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Figure 2.14. Plains High School commencement program, 1944



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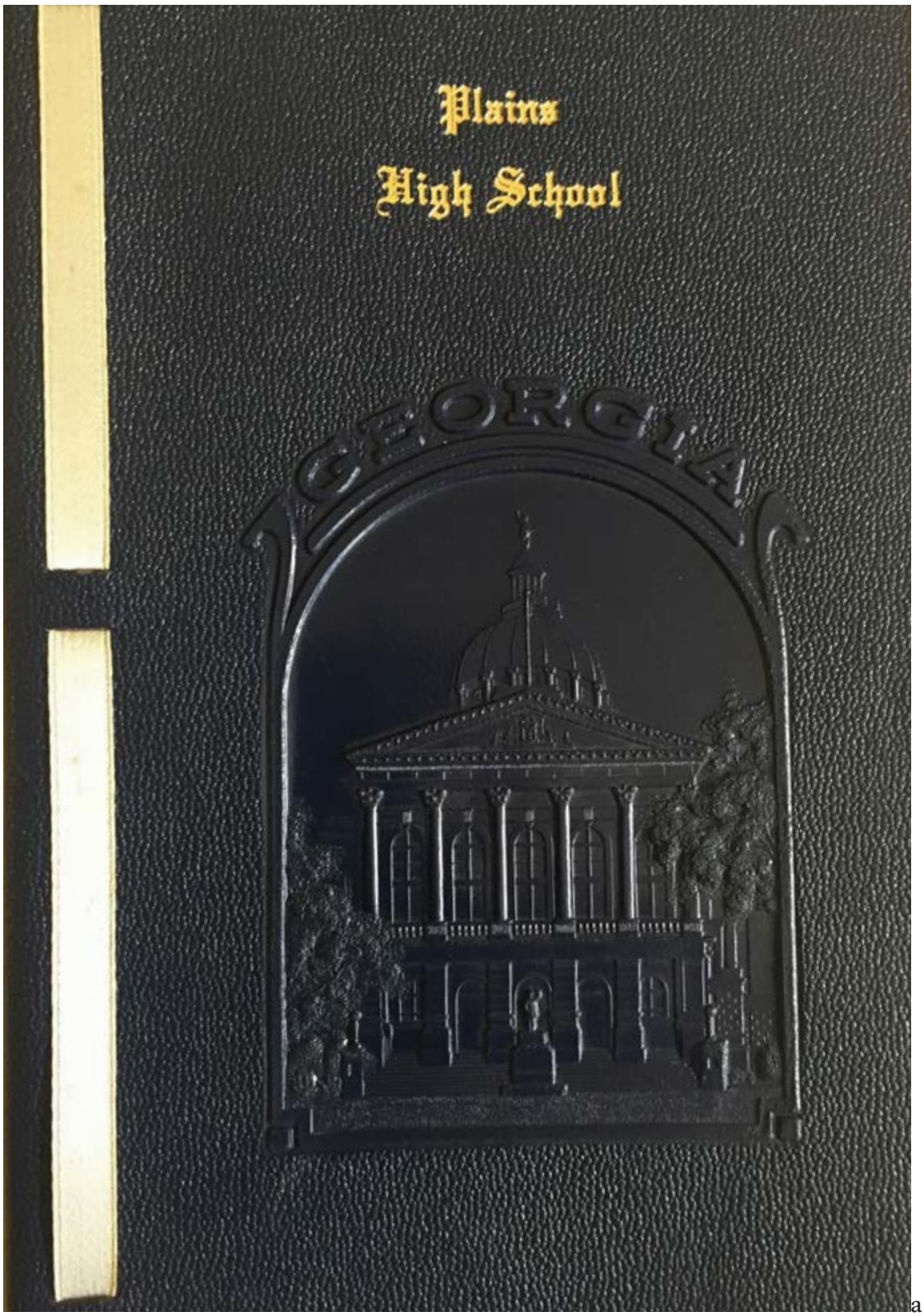
Figure 2.14. (cont'd)



PROGRAM

1. Processional ..... Mrs. J. E. Hall
2. Invocation ..... Rev. C. M. Infinger
3. Presentation of Class ..... Robert Mills
   President Class of '44
4. Salutatory—"Moss and Roses" ..... Grace Passmore
5. A Year of Building:
   (1) Sara Duvall
   (2) Ray Holston
   (3) Mary Holston
   (4) Betty Parker
   (5) Lorraine Blanton
   (6) J. D. Clements
   (7) Doris Ivey
   (8) Judge Hogsed—"Fight By His Side"
6. Introduction of guest speaker ..... Howard Jones
7. Address ..... Ralph Ramsey
8. "Your Flag—and My Flag:"
   (1) Betty Jane Jennings
   (2) Eunice Anderson
   (3) James Wiggins
9. Valedictory—Independence Hall, A Shrine—Rosalyn Smith
10. Announcements:
    Julia L. Coleman, Superintendent
    Y. T. Sheffield, Principal
11. Delivery of Diplomas ..... E. L. Bridges
    Superintendent Sumter County School System

Figure 2.15. Plains High School diploma cover, 1944



a

Figure 2.16. Plains High School first grade class, 1948



Courtesy of Chris English

Figure 2.17. Miss Julia Coleman as "Teacher of the Year," 1955



Miss Coleman Is 'Teacher of Year'

Honor Accorded By Sumter Group

Miss Julia Coleman, principal and teacher in the Plains high school, has been selected as Teacher of the Year in Sumter County for 1955. The selection was made by the Sumter County Teachers Association. Miss Coleman was a unanimous choice.

A teacher is chosen from each county and independent system in the state to go to Atlanta at a later date and from this group the Georgia teacher of the year will be chosen. The program is sponsored by the Georgia State Chamber of Commerce.

Miss Coleman has been teaching in the Sumter county schools since 1912, when she began in the Friendship school, with the exception of one year spent in the New nan [illegible]. She has taught at Plains [illegible] 1914. She was born in To[illegible] daughter of a Baptist [illegible] came to Sumter county when a small child.

From 1928 to 1949, Miss Coleman served as superintendent of the Plains schools. She taught the mother of one of her present pupils, Murray Smith. In 1949, when she retired as superintendent, she was honored by the Plains community which staged a "Julia Coleman Day," under the sponsor-

(Continued On Page 8A)

MISS COLEMAN

FIVE FORMER RED LEADERS ARE EXECUTED

LONDON (AP)—The Tiflis Tbilisi radio announced today five former security officials in the Soviet Georgian Republic have been executed for high treason and oth-

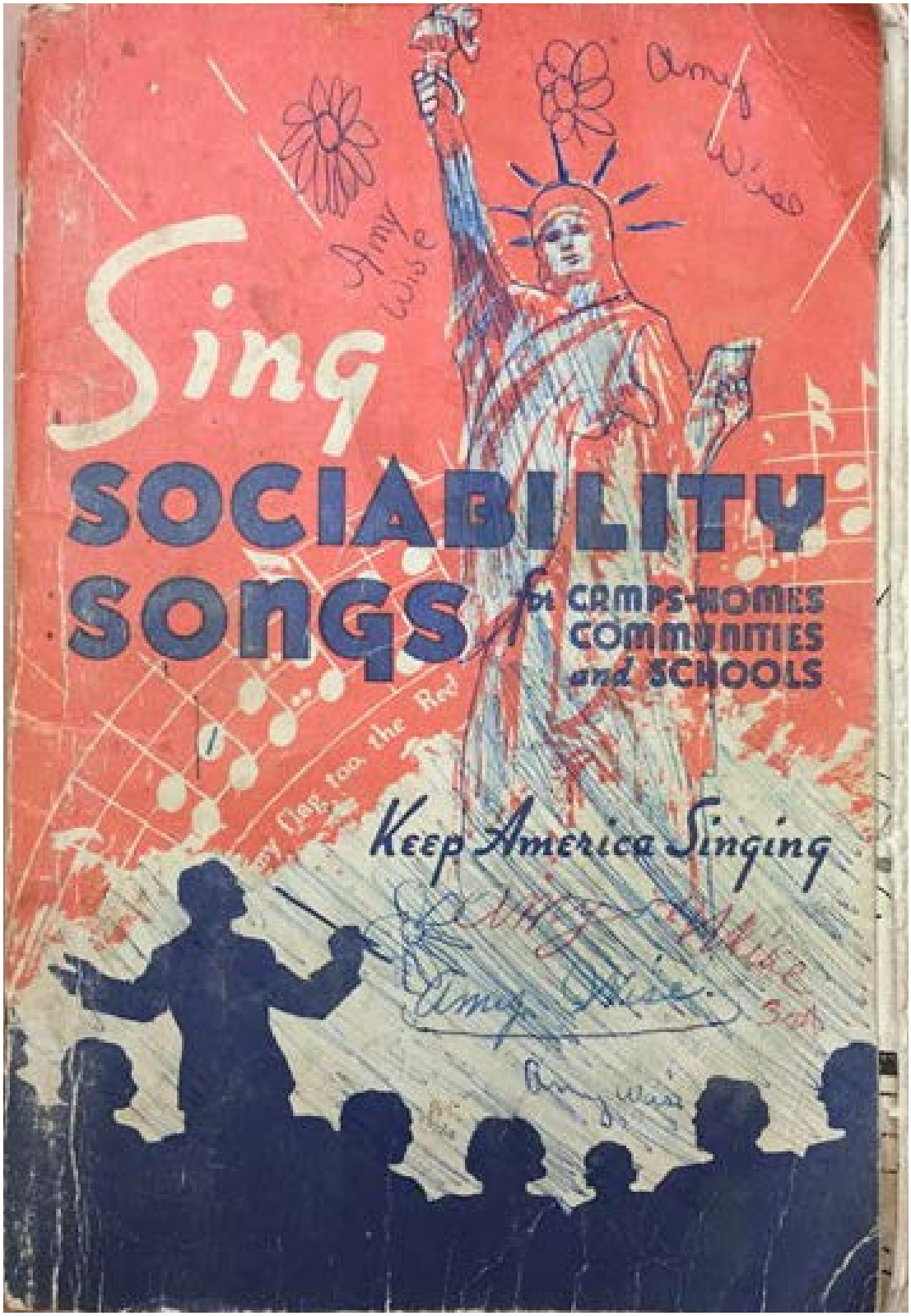
Americus Times-Recorder, November 22, 1955

Figure 2.18. Plains High School renovated classroom



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 2.19. "Sociability Songs" for school assemblies, 1964

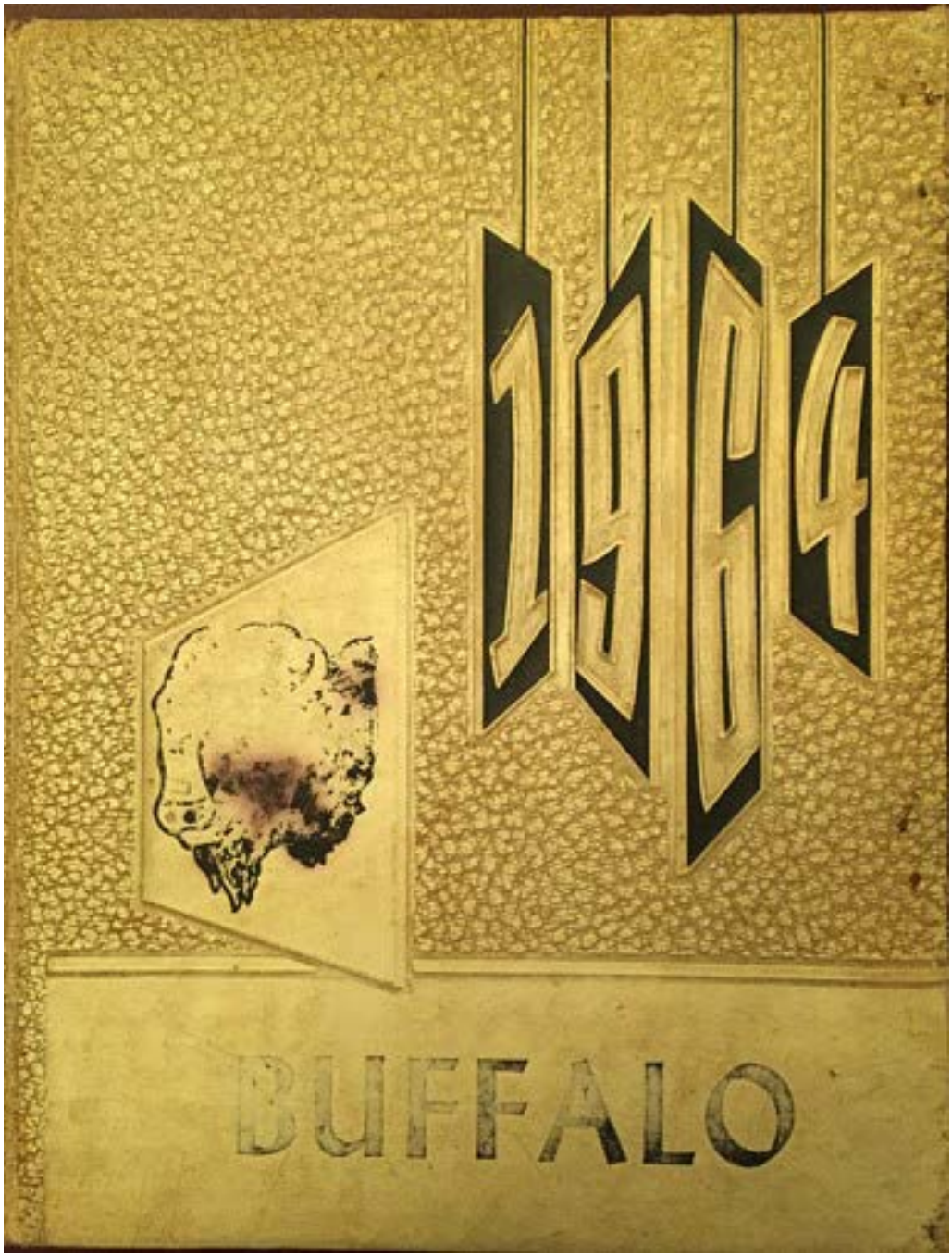


Courtesy of Amy Wise

Figure 2.19. (cont'd)
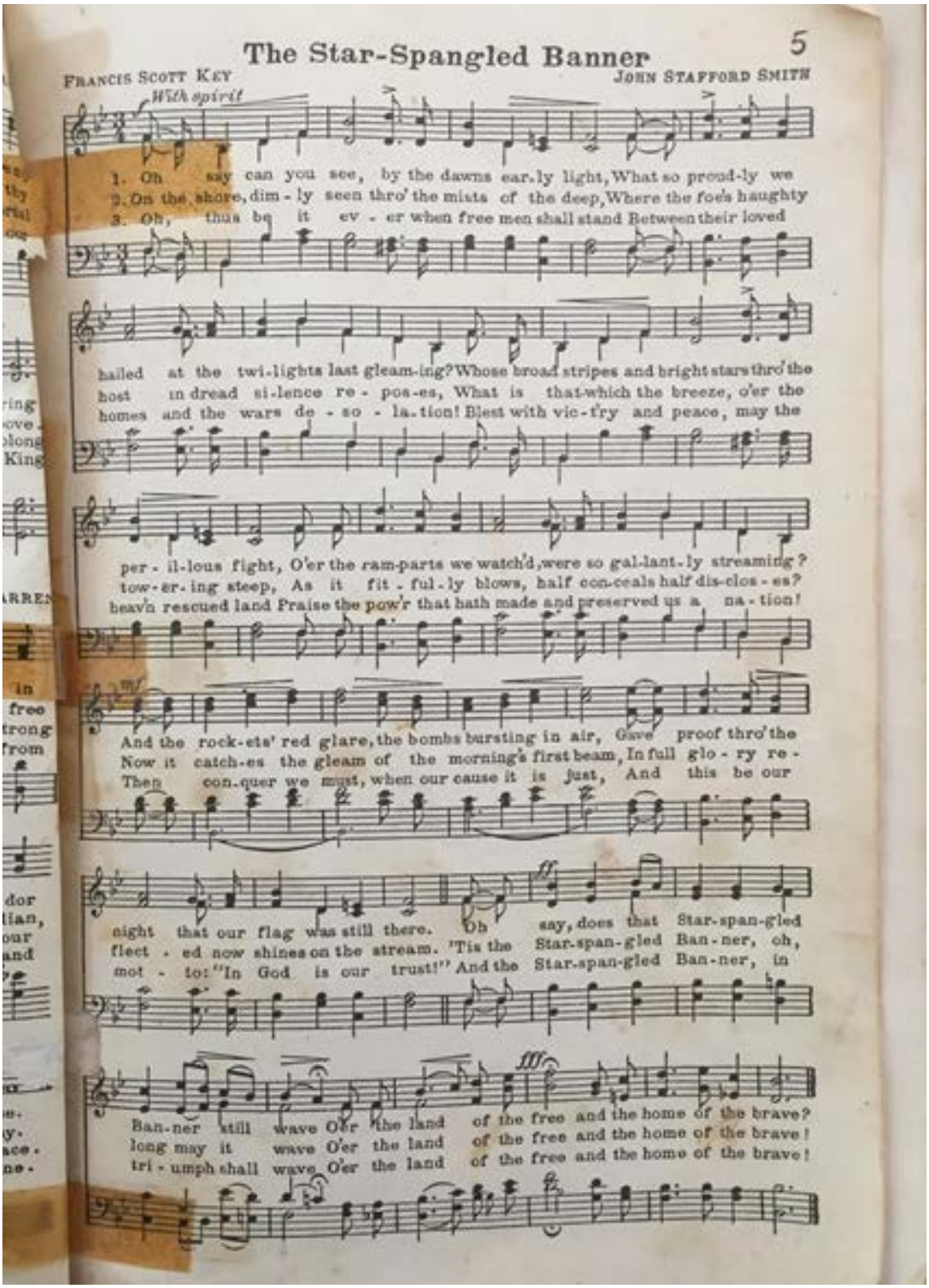
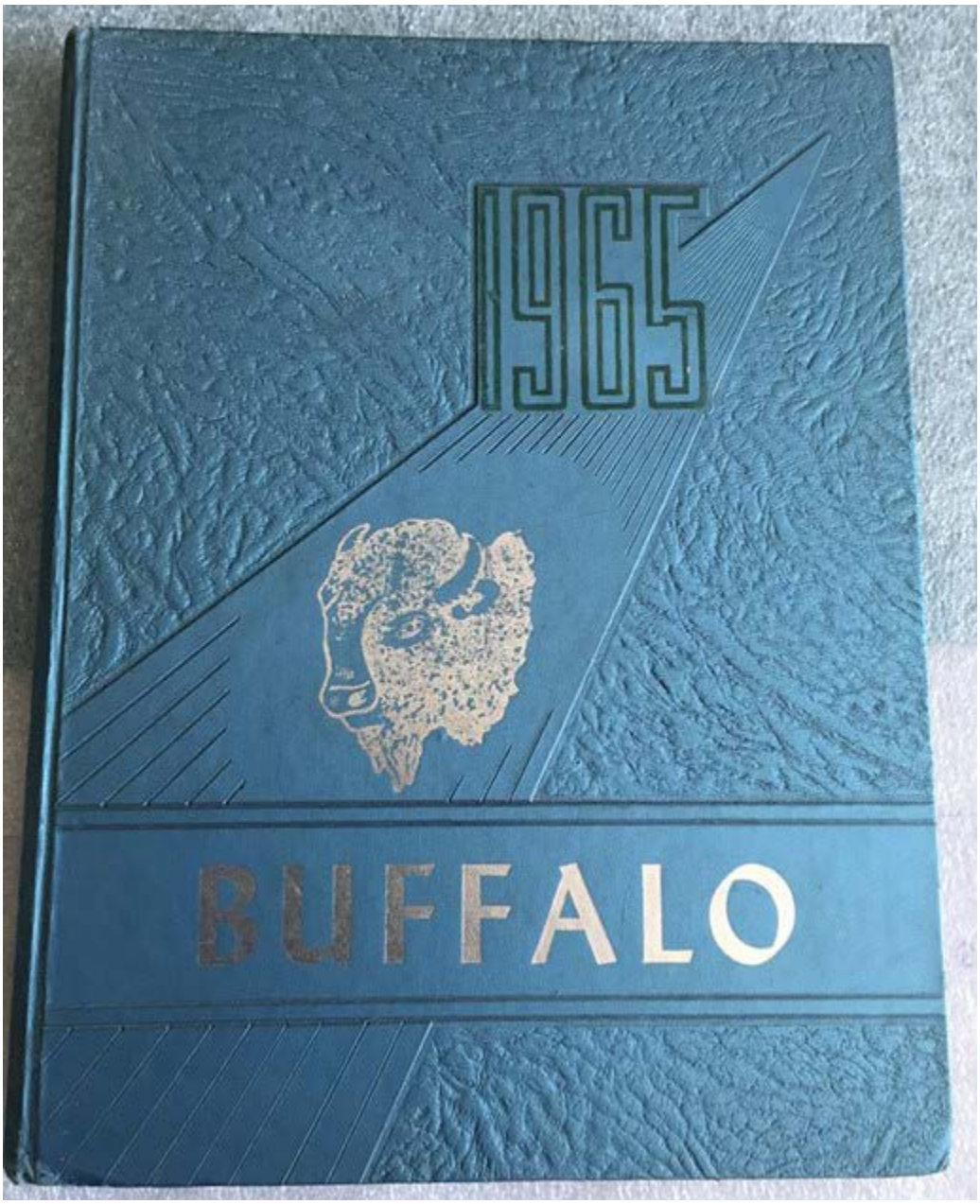


Figure 2.20. Plains High School yearbook, 1963–1964



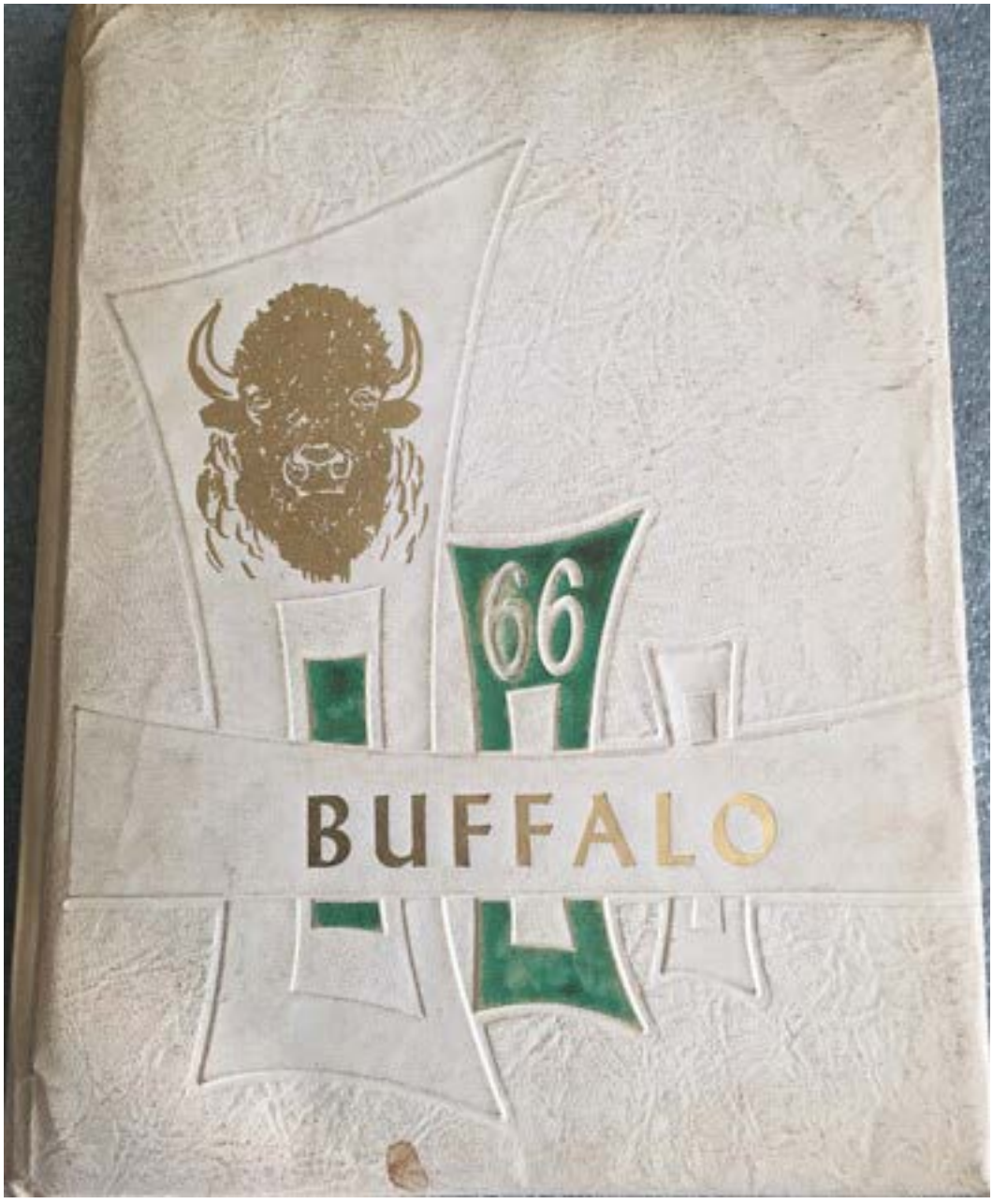
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.21. Plains High School yearbook, 1964–1965



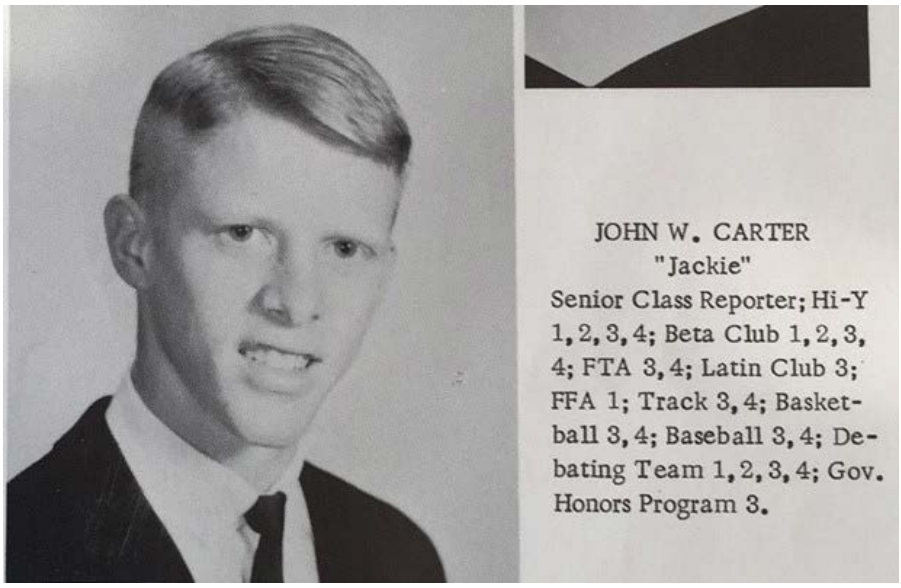
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.22. Plains High School yearbook, 1965–1966



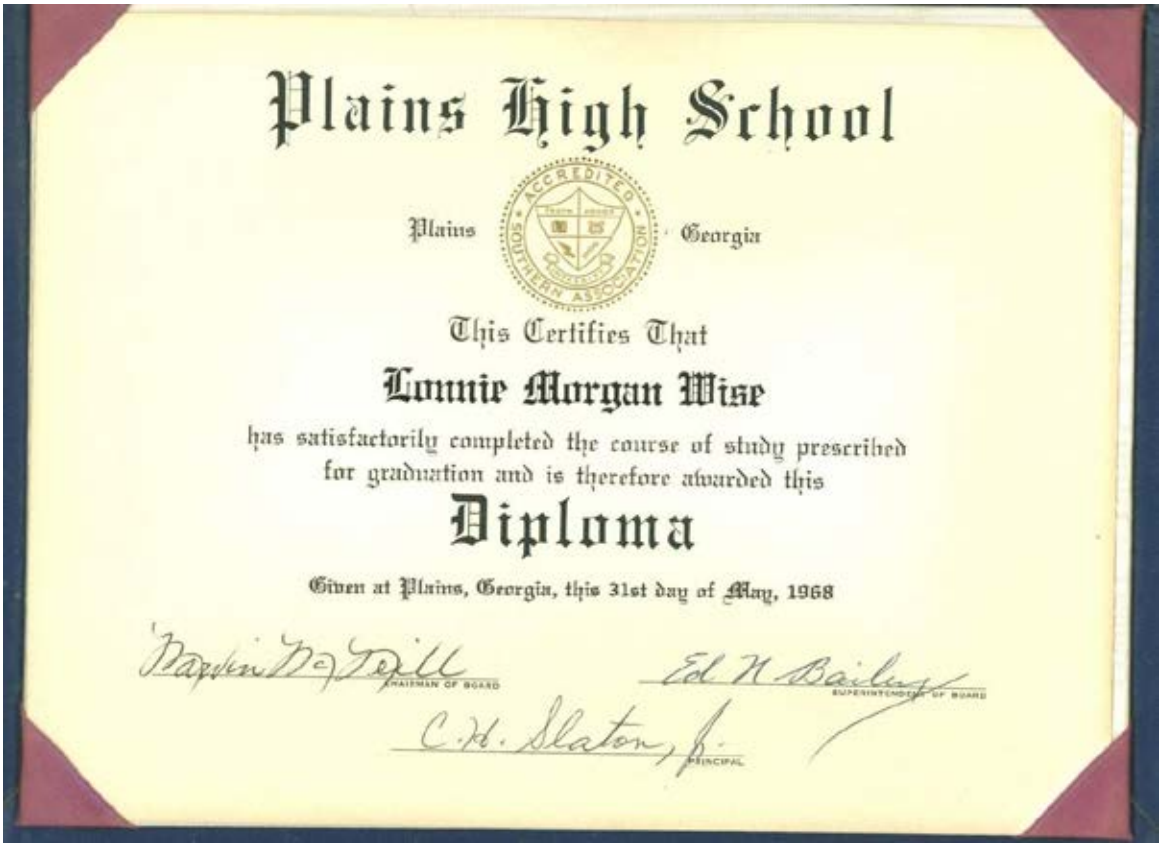
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.23. Jack Carter, Plains High School senior photo, 1965



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.24. Lonnie Wise, Plains High School diploma, 1968



Courtesy of Lonnie Wise

Figure 2.25. Plains High School Class of 1941 Reunion, 1996



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 2.26. Plains High School auditorium



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

CHAPTER THREE

When Jimmy Carter Graduated

Sumter County's Schools in 1940–1941

When Jimmy Carter was a senior in the 1940–41 school year, Plains High School was one of many public schools in Sumter County. Within the county, there were two school systems—one for the county and one for the city of Americus. Plains was part of the county system and the largest in the county's west. The schools were also racially segregated. Both the county and city systems had schools for whites and for nonwhites. Functionally, *four* school systems existed in Sumter County.

There was significant variation within and between the systems. Some white schools were better than others. Using multiple measures, the data reported here illustrate the variation and the unevenness of educational opportunities. By the time Carter joined the Sumter County Board of Education in December 1955, half of the white schools that existed when he attended Plains had closed. The smaller white schools, usually in the more remote and rural areas of the county, consolidated with the larger ones. Furthermore, the data presented provides clear evidence of the reality of "separate but equal" schooling.

Sumter County System—White Schools

According to the Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report for 1940–1941, there were ten white schools. They were Andersonville, Anthony, Chambliss, Concord, New Era, Plains, Shiloh, Thalean, Thompson, and Union (Table 3.1). Andersonville, Chambliss, and New Era were located in the northeastern part of the county. Union was in the southeast. Anthony, a school established in 1931, was in Americus, near Georgia Southwestern College. Thalean and Thompson were in the southwest, Concord and Shiloh were in the northwest. Plains was in the west-central portion.[1]

[1] Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT-2272, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

While once common in the rural parts of the United States, none of the county white schools at the time were church schools. Each of the ten schools were formal public schools specifically built for the purpose of education. However, Chambliss, Concord, and Shiloh were adjacent to churches. Furthermore, none of the county's white schools relied on significant private, philanthropic sources of funding.

Table 3.1. Students and Teachers of Sumter County Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	# of Students	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio*	Level of Education of Teachers		
Grades 1–11				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Plains	226	12	19:1	7	5	0
Union	245	13	19:1	11	2	0
Grades 1–9						
Andersonville	81	4	20:1	0	4	0
Chambliss	88	4	22:1	3	1	0
Concord	63	4	16:1	0	4	0
New Era	147	5	29:1	3	2	0
Shiloh	81	5	16:1	1	4	0
Thalean	124	5	25:1	1	4	0
Grades 1–7						
Thompson	50	3	17:1	0	3	0
Grades 1–6						
Anthony	147	6	25:1	6	0	0
County Total	1,252	61	21:1	32	29	0

*Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, Georgia State Archives.

Six schools had grades 1–9 (Andersonville, Chambliss, Concord, New Era, Shiloh, and Thalean), one had grades 1–7 (Thompson), and one grades 1–6 (Anthony). Plains and Union were the only complete schools, offering grades 1–11. Twelfth grade was not added until the early 1950s. Plains was the only complete county school in western Sumter County, and Union, located in Leslie, was the only complete county school in eastern Sumter County.[2]

In total, 1,252 students were enrolled in these white schools. The largest school was Union with 245 enrolled students; Plains was second with 226. Thompson and Concord had the smallest enrollments. Thompson had 50 students and Concord had 63 in 1940–41. Andersonville, Chambliss, and Shiloh also had enrollments of less than 100. Anthony, New Era, and Thalean had student enrollments in between.

[2] The Sumter County School Board approved a plan to add a twelfth grade. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 13, 1951.

In 1940, one-teacher, one-room schools were not extant for Sumter whites. The last one for whites (Pennington) closed in 1923. Each school was a multi-teacher school, ranging from three to thirteen teachers. Plains and Union each had more than ten teachers and a student-teacher ratio of 19:1. Concord and Shiloh, at 16:1, had the best student-teacher ratios in the county. Thompson was next with 17:1. With three, the Thompson school had the fewest teachers in the county.[3]

Every teacher employed in the white Sumter County schools was college-educated. Each teacher had a minimum of a two-year college education. A majority of the teachers at Plains, Union, and some of the smaller schools possessed four to five years of college. All six teachers at the Anthony school in Americus had four to five years of college. This was probably due to the fact that Anthony became a teacher preparatory school. Students from Georgia Southwestern regularly did their student-teaching at this school. It was converted for this purpose in 1939 to meet a growing need for teaching training. Prior to it becoming an experimental school, it was a high school. This move led to the consolidation of the Anthony and Americus high schools by the county and city school boards.[4]

In the early twentieth century, across the state of Georgia, school districts consolidated smaller, wood-frame rural schools into larger, brick, multiclassroom schools. They were commonly rectangular and had corridors with classrooms on either side. There was a main, central entrance and a rear entrance, usually with access to a playground. Modern schools were touted as expressions of "economy, safety, and utility." The Georgia Department of Education encouraged the modernization efforts. Sumter County was part of this trend.[5]

As a sign of the county's embrace of modernity and greater efficiency, structurally, most of the white county schools were made of brick and situated on multi-acre sites (Table 3.2). In Sumter County, the New Era brick school opened in 1928 and the Shiloh

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[3] One-teacher, one-room schools were once common in rural America. They were also common in rural areas in Europe. This was true even into the early twentieth century. See Leidulf Mydland, "The Legacy of One-Room Schoolhouses: A Comparative Study of the American Midwest and Norway," *European Journal of American Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2011), https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/9205. The information about the Pennington school is from Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1915–1961," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1915_1961.htm. Pennington was located in the county's 28th school district. This was in the northeastern part of the county. See "Map of Sumter County, Georgia, 1910," Sumter County Miscellaneous Maps, Juanita S. Brightwell Special Collections Room, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia.

[4] See Mildred Tietjen, *A Century of Achievement, 1906–2006, Georgia Southwestern State University* (Boyd Brothers, 2005), 45–46. According to the county school board minutes, the Anthony school was to become a "new high school" and "the elementary practice school" at the college. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 2, 1930. College president J. M. Prance actively promoted the Anthony building's construction at county board meetings. According to board minutes, the plan was for "building an elementary school on the Americus Normal campus for a demonstration school." See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 4, 1930.

[5] See Marion Ellis, Bamby Ray, and Lynn Speno, "Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868–1971." Special History Study, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. Document made available by the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

brick school opened in 1935. Two county schools were wood-frame schools (Chambliss and Concord). The Thalean school, located on the largest school plot of thirteen acres, was a mix of brick and frame. Each white county school was a multiclassroom school. Built on a school plot of 6.25 acres, Plains had the most, with fourteen classrooms in use. Union, on 10 acres, was next with twelve classrooms. The other schools had a range of between four and six classrooms. In addition, each of the white county schools had at least one other room for school purposes (e.g., a principal's office).[6]

Six of the white county schools had indoor plumbing. This involved running water for drinking and a sanitary flush toilet system. Only the Andersonville school lacked both conveniences. Three schools (Chambliss, Concord, and Shiloh) had running water for drinking, but a pit-type toilet system or the use of outhouses.

Table 3.2. Structure and Property of Sumter County Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	Type of Building	School Plot-# of Acres	# of Classrooms	Running Water for Drinking	Type of Toilet System
Grades 1–11					
Plains	Brick	6.25	14	Yes	Flush
Union	Brick	10	12	Yes	Flush
Grades 1–9					
Andersonville	Brick	5	4	No	Pit
Chambliss	Frame	3.5	4	Yes	Pit
Concord	Frame	4	4	Yes	Pit
New Era	Brick	4	5	Yes	Flush
Shiloh	Brick	5	6	Yes	Incinerator
Thalean	Mix	13	5	Yes	Flush
Grades 1–7					
Thompson	Brick	2	5	Yes	Flush
Grades 1–6					
Anthony	Brick	1	5	Yes	Flush

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

The white county schools had many resources (Table 3.3). Not counting school readers, each school had hundreds of books in their respective room and central libraries. In 1940–41, Plains High School had by far the most. Between the high school and elementary school, Plains had 2,928 total book volumes. Anthony, an elementary school located near Georgia Southwestern College, was second with 1,800. In fact, at 16, it had the highest average number of books per child in average daily attendance (ADA); the Shiloh school

[6] Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1915–1961," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1915_1961.htm.

had an average number of books at 14, and New Era was at 10. Union High School was third in total book volumes, with 1,279, and the New Era school was a close fourth with 1,250.

All of the white schools in the Sumter County school system had patent or other individualized desks available for their students. Union High School had 281 of these available in 1940–41. Plains High School had 260 of these desks. Only in a few cases did a school have an inadequate number of patent desks for the number of students registered. But the disparity was not necessarily significant. For example, Chambliss had 88 students registered and had 79 patent desks. However, there were 32 additional desks available. Presumably, each student had adequate space for their schoolwork.

Nine of ten schools had an auditorium "especially built for assembly purposes," complete with seats and chairs. Anthony was the lone exception. For seven schools, laboratory equipment for vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop was generally available. Every school had some type of investment in other equipment. This may have included teacher's desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, and playground/recreational equipment.

Table 3.3. Educational Resources of Sumter County Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	# of Book Volumes*	Avg. # Books Per Child ADA	# of Desks, Patent/Other	Auditorium w/ Seating	Availability of Lab/Other Equip.^
Grades 1–11					
Plains	2,928	7	260 / 38	Yes	Yes / Yes
Union	1.279	6	281 / 85	Yes	Yes / Yes
Grades 1–9					
Andersonville	365	7	100 / 12	Yes	Yes / Yes
Chambliss	430	7	79 / 32	Yes	Yes / Yes
Concord	134	3	60 / 12	Yes	No / Yes
New Era	1,250	10	150 / 60	Yes	Yes / Yes
Shiloh	1,050	14	123 / 0	Yes	Yes / Yes
Thalean	450	5	110 / 28	Yes	Yes / Yes
Grades 1–7					
Thompson	250	6	50/ 27	Yes	No / Yes
Grades 1–6					
Anthony	1,800	16	75 / 65	No	No / Yes

*Figures do not include school readers.

^According to the annual report, laboratory equipment defined included "vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop equipment." "Other" equipment is defined here as including "teachers' desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, playground equipment, etc."

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

The Sumter County School Board made bus transportation available to students attending each of the county's white schools (Table 3.4). Each school had at least one bus and one bus driver. The buses were publicly owned and made of either steel or steel and wood. Union, New Era, and Thalean had three buses in service. Plains, Anthony, and Chambliss had two. Some bus drivers made more than one daily round trip taking students to and from school. The single driver at Andersonville, Concord, and Shiloh made three daily round trips. Most of the school bus routes covered unpaved roads.

Table 3.4. Transportation for Sumter County Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	# of Vehicles	# of Bus Drivers	# of Daily Round Trips	Daily Avg. # of Students	% of Enrolled Students Using Bus*
Grades 1–11					
Plains	2	2	6	118	52
Union	3	3	6	137	56
Grades 1–9					
Andersonville	1	1	3	34	42
Chambliss	2	2	2	50	57
Concord	1	1	3	50	79
New Era	3	3	4	140	95
Shiloh	1	1	3	67	83
Thalean	3	3	6	85	69
Grades 1–7					
Thompson	1	1	2	44	88
Grades 1–6					
Anthony	2	2	2	78	53

*Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Most white students in the county went to school by bus. The only exception was Andersonville, where 42 percent of enrolled students rode the bus. At Plains, 52 percent took the bus to school. It was 56 percent at Union. The schools with the highest percentage of its student body using the bus were New Era (95 percent), Thompson (88 percent), Shiloh (83 percent), and Concord (79 percent).

In the years ahead, the Sumter County School Board further consolidated the white schools. This was not the first consolidation of schools in the county. By 1919, Mossy Dell and Planter's Academy, two small rural schools located south of Plains, merged with the Plains school to create "one strong school." By the time Jimmy Carter joined the board in 1955, the number of white schools was reduced from ten to five. The schools that closed were Andersonville, Chambliss, Concord, Shiloh, and Thompson. There were many

"vacant" school buildings. These were the smaller schools and were the farthest away from the county seat of Americus. Whites no longer attended wood-frame schools or schools without running water or without a flush-toilet system.[7]

The Andersonville school was suspended for the 1950–51 to 1953–54 school years for insufficiently low school attendance. It was "too expensive" for the county "to operate [the] school." Students were assigned to attend the New Era and Anthony schools in Americus. Parents were permitted to send their children to a different school if costs to the county were not excessive. The school was finally closed for good in 1954, and the school building and property were put up for sale. The board decided that "it conclusively appears that it is no longer practical, necessary and convenient to operate the white school." The Town of Andersonville bought the school building.[8]

The Thompson and Concord schools were suspended for the same reason. Their students were assigned to Plains High School. They remained closed in the years ahead.[9]

The Shiloh school was in a similar situation in 1950, but after a request by community leaders, the board permitted it to continue. The status of Shiloh remained an issue for the next few years. The next year, the board decided again to close the school for the lack of sufficient enrollment. The Shiloh school was finally suspended for the 1953–54 year. The church next door, Shiloh Baptist Church, looked to acquire the property, and it eventually did.[10]

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[7] See James E. Bagwell, "Schools," in Jack F. Cox and the Sumter Historic Preservation Society, *History of Sumter County, Georgia* (Roswell, GA: Wolfe Associates, 1983), 28. In January 1920, the county board approved a consolidation plan for three white schools (Gammage, Oak Grove, and Pleasant Grove) to join with New Era and two white schools (Pennington and Mt. Mary's) with Andersonville. The Sumter City white school would be split between Thalean and Thompson. The Williams school was also to join Thompson. The consolidated New Era school opened in 1928. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 6, 1920; Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1915–1961," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1915_1961.htm; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 18, 1956.

[8] Select references for the Andersonville school: Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 1, 1950; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 7, 1951; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 5, 1953; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 6, 1954; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 1, 1954; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 20, 1954.

[9] Select references for the Thompson and Concord schools: Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 1, 1950; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 7, 1951; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 5, 1953; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 23, 1955; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 3, 1955; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1955.

[10] Select references for the Shiloh school: Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 1, 1950; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 22, 1950; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 1, 1951; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 24, 1951; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 5, 1951; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 2, 1953; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 4, 1955; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1955.

Americus City System—White Schools

Americus is the county seat of Sumter County. Beginning in 1873, it had its own school district. The system lasted for more than one hundred years, until it finally consolidated with the county in the early 1990s. For much of the twentieth century, it was not all that unusual for Georgia counties to have separate county and city school systems. Many of the city systems, like Americus, ultimately merged with their counties. In 2019–20, each of Georgia's 159 counties had a public school system and nearly two dozen city systems. The following Georgia cities continue to independently operate their own schools: Atlanta, Bremen, Buford, Calhoun, Carrollton, Cartersville, Chickamauga, Commerce, Decatur, Dublin, Gainesville, Jefferson, Marietta, Pelham, Rome, Social Circle, Thomasville, Trion, Valdosta, and Vidalia. The roots of the parallel system partly reflected and perpetuated the class divisions among whites. There was also a racial dimension as most blacks used to reside in the rural county areas.[11]

In January 1880, after a few years of fits and starts, the Americus school system offered free, universal public education. It was "fully functional" and "racially segregated." For whites, there was a public school at the former Furlow Female Masonic College. Given its location, it was originally known as the Jackson Street school. It contained grades 1–10. Within the decade, an eleventh grade was added. In 1897, the school became the Furlow school, named in memory of Timothy Mathews Furlow (1814–90). Furlow was "the man who made Americus" and a devoted public servant. According to the *Atlanta Constitution*, he was once "one of the leading figures in Georgia politics" and "a distinguished citizen and statesman." He was a secessionist delegate, a Confederate veteran, a mayor, a state legislator serving in both the Georgia House and Senate, a tax collector, and even a gubernatorial candidate. He was an original member of the Americus School Board and a sponsor of the previously all-girls school located on the same site. Furlow was also a wealthy planter and slaveholder. According to the 1850 US Census Slave Schedules, he owned fifty enslaved people: twenty-six women and girls and twenty-four men and boys. The youngest was a six-month-old male child.[12]

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[11] Alan Anderson, "Americus School History," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/AmSchHx.htm; Denise S. Mewborn, "Public Education (PreK-12)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), August 2019. For this list of city school districts, see "Schools and Districts," Georgia Department of Education, https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/AskDOE/Pages/Schools-and-Districts.aspx, accessed June 7, 2019.

[12] Alan Anderson, "Americus School History," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/AmSchHx.htm. Alan Anderson, *Remembering Americus, Georgia: Essays on Southern Life* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2006), 43–47. Furlow is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Americus. In 2015, a charter school opened in his name. Slaveholding data came from Ancestry.com, *1850 US Federal Census—Slave Schedules* (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, 2004). A transcript of Furlow's obituary was also found on Ancestry.com (August 31, 2019). It appeared in the Atlanta Constitution on December 3, 1890.

With increased enrollment, the high school grades were separated from the primary and junior high grades in 1910 and placed in the new high school built at Rees Park. In addition to a separate high school to ease the overcrowding problem, the school board established new primary schools in other parts of the city. The new schools were East Americus and Prospect Heights. The old Furlow school was torn down and replaced with a new modern facility. It opened in 1914 with Miss Sarah Pope Cobb (1870–1959) as principal, a position she held until her retirement in 1948. She was an educator for more than a half century. The introduction of corporal punishment for male students was viewed as another measure to address the overcrowding situation. Disruptive female students were dismissed and sent home to their parents.[13]

The district underwent further changes in the 1930s. In 1938, whites received a new high school. It was named Americus High School. This school was formed by the merger of the city high school at Rees Park and the county's Anthony High School. According to a local historian, a major reason for the creation of this school was because the city's blacks received, with the aid of federal monies, a new high school in 1936. The school adopted the name A. S. Staley High School. Meanwhile, the Rees Park school facility became a junior high school. Furlow served as the elementary school.[14]

According to the Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report for 1940–41, there were three white schools at the time Jimmy Carter was a senior at Plains: Americus High School, Americus Junior High School, and Furlow Grammar School (Table 3.5). In terms of student enrollment, the city's white schools were clearly larger than the county's white schools. While there were more students enrolled in the county system than the city system for the 1940–41 school year, the city schools were larger than any in the county. Americus High School had 322 students enrolled, making it the largest Sumter high school. With 264 students enrolled, Americus Junior High School was the largest of its kind in the county. Furlow Grammar School, a school with grades 1–5, had an enrollment of 343. This made it the largest school—elementary, junior, or high school—in Sumter County.[15]

Americus had a consolidated, uniform system for the matriculation of its students: one elementary school, one junior high school, and one high school. Its three schools were multiteacher schools, with Americus High School having twelve—the same number as

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[13] Alan Anderson, "Americus School History," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/AmSchHx.htm. The Prospect Heights school is sometimes referred to as Brooklyn Heights. Cobb Elementary School in Americus was named for Miss Cobb. She was also a granddaughter of Howell Cobb, a significant political leader from Georgia. He served as US House Speaker (1849–51), Georgia governor (1851–53), and US Secretary of the Treasury (1857–61). He was also a member of the Confederate Congress and then served in the Confederate Army. He obtained the rank of lieutenant colonel.

[14] Alan Anderson, "Americus School History," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/AmSchHx.htm.

[15] Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT-2273, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

Plains. In the city, each teacher was college-educated, with most having four to five years of college schooling. Impressively for the county, the entire twelve-person faculty at Americus High had four to five years of college.

The student-teacher ratio in the white schools of Americus was significantly higher than in the county. The city average for white schools was 30:1, compared with the county's 21:1. With 27:1, Americus High School had the best student-teacher ratio for the city.

Table 3.5. Students and Teachers of Americus City Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	# of Students	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio*	Level of Education of Teachers		
Grades 9–11				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Americus	322	12	27:1	12	0	0
Grades 6–8						
Americus	264	8	33:1	7	1	0
Grades 1–5						
Furlow	343	11	31:1	7	4	0
City Total	929	31	30:1	26	5	0

*Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

The white city schools were brick structures with multiple classrooms (Table 3.6). Furlow had sixteen classrooms; Americus High and Junior High had ten classrooms. Americus High had eight additional rooms available for use. The Junior High had two more rooms. Americus High was located on a five-acre site, and Furlow was on a four-acre site. Joining the Anthony school, Americus Junior High was on a single acre. The three city schools had indoor plumbing with running water for drinking and a sanitary flush toilet system. Each city school employed a custodian.

Table 3.6. Structure and Property of Americus City Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	Type of Building	School Plot-# of Acres	# of Classrooms	Running Water for Drinking	Type of Toilet System
Grades 9–11					
Americus	Brick	5	10	Yes	Flush
Grades 6–8					
Americus	Brick	1	10	Yes	Flush
Grades 1–5					
Furlow	Brick	4	16	Yes	Flush

Source: Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

The white city schools had the most resources in the county (Table 3.7). Americus High School was by far the leader. Not counting school readers, it had 4,660 total volumes for the three-grade school. Matching the Anthony school, the average number of books per child in ADA was 16. Furlow also had more than 4,000 volumes, and Americus Junior had more than 3,000.

The city's high school and junior high school had an auditorium for assembly purposes, laboratory equipment for vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop, and resources that included teacher's desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, and playground/recreational equipment. Furlow Grammar School had most of these resources, too.

Given the compactness of the city district, the Americus school board did not provide bus services in 1940.

Table 3.7. Educational Resources of Americus City Public Schools—White, 1940–1941

School	# of Book Volumes*	Avg. # Books Per Child ADA	# of Desks, Patent/Other	Auditorium w/ Seating	Availability of Lab/Other Equip.^
Grades 9–11					
Americus	4,660	16	0 / 444	Yes	Yes / Yes
Grades 6–8					
Americus	3,183	15	140 / 132	Yes	Yes / Yes
Grades 1–5					
Furlow	4,296	16	475/ 0	No	No / Yes

*Figures do not include school readers.

^According to the annual report, laboratory equipment defined included "vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop equipment." "Other" equipment is defined here as including "teachers' desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, playground equipment, etc."

Source: Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Sumter County System—"Colored" Schools

In 1940–41, with a total enrollment of 1,252 students, there were 10 white schools in the Sumter County system. However, most schools were designated as "colored" schools. In the year that Carter graduated from high school, there were 39 African American schools with a total enrollment of 2,532. While these schools were public schools, like the ten white schools, there were significant differences among them.

There were three key types of schools that served the county's black population at the time. It was an eclectic mix of church schools, Rosenwald schools, and general community schools. The church school was the most common type. As the designation suggests, these schools were housed within a black church. According to the Superintendent's

Annual Report, there were eighteen church schools identified in 1940–41. They were identified in the report's section on "Colored Schools—XVII. Buildings and Grounds." In the column on "Value of buildings," nearly half of all the schools did not have a recorded monetary value. Instead, the county superintendent recorded "church" or "ch." In the column on "Value of grounds," the church schools were marked with the letter "c." A Rosenwald school was a school that received partial funding from a private fund established by Julius L. Rosenwald (1862–1932), a renowned philanthropist and a president of Sears, Roebuck and Co. These schools were identified from news stories in the *Americus Times-Recorder* and from research conducted by Rosenwald scholars. Even though the Rosenwald Fund closes in the 1940s, the classification is used throughout this study for those historic schools. A community school is defined as a public school that existed independently from a church, though it may be near or adjacent to an established church; did not receive Rosenwald funding; and served the immediate vicinities. There were six Rosenwald schools and fourteen community schools.[16]

Sumter County's "Colored" Church Schools

Historically, black churches provided the center for the communities they served. In Sumter County, as in many counties throughout the region, they were centers of education. Whether the teaching occurred within the church or in a separate building next to it, for most students, each school was a reminder that churches were more than places of worship. They were places that ministered to the whole person.

Black churches were available sites that could accommodate the seating of many under one roof. As the one institution created and controlled by African Americans that served both religious and nonreligious needs, the churches possessed legitimacy as centers of the black community. The church-as-school only reinforced that impression and that reality.

As listed in the 1940–41 report, the eighteen church schools were Antioch, Davis Grove, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Long Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, McMath, New, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Spring Creek, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, and Wards Chapel. Since the county board of education did

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[16] Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT 2272, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia. See various articles found in select folders ("Sumter County Public Schools" and "McCay Hill School") in the Sumter County Files, Juanita S. Brightwell Special Collections Room, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia; Jeanne Cyriaque, Keith Hebert, and Steven Moffson, "Rosenwald Schools in Georgia, 1912–1937," Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, June 2009, p. 77. Document available at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division website, https://georgiashpo.org/statewidecontexts.

not fully fund education for black children, adequate schools were not built. The county board apparently rented these churches for school purposes at a nominal price. In some cases, it assumed maintenance responsibilities for the church.[17]

The church schools were scattered about Sumter County. They were near cities and far out in the rural areas. Many of these church sites still exist, and several remain in use for worship. Some of these are described in more detail in the "Profiles of Black Sumter County Public Schools, 1940–1941" supplemental section.

The Sumter County church schools offered a minimum education, and they dramatically highlighted the material disparities between black students and white students. Their continued existence in the mid-twentieth century signified the enduring impact of "separate but equal."

All church schools were one-classroom schools. Typically, they had grades 1–7. There were no high school students in these schools. The church sanctuary doubled as the school where all the grades met together. There were no patent desks or chairs. Students sat on church benches to receive their daily lessons.

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[17] See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, March 7, 1944: "A committee of trustees from Jackson Grove school asked the Board to aid in recovering the Church where the school is being taught, and a motion was passed agreeing to furnish half of the material to cover this building." The following year, the board approved funding additional roof work at Jackson Grove. Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, June 5, 1945, and June 25, 1945. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, March 4, 1947: "Motion passed to furnish material for roof on the Flintside church in which a school is taught." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, March 2, 1948: "Repair bill for Mt. Carmel church used for school building was approved, and church to pay $150 on said bill." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, August 23, 1949: "Motion made and passed to pay Pleasant Grove Cobb school $36.00 on benches built for use in church where school is taught." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, February 3, 1950: "Motion made and passed to investigate what is needed to repair floor at Huntington school and fixed it." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, September 2, 1952: "Mr. Carter made a motion seconded by Mr. Smith that the Board pay the two churches at Andersonville $25.00 per year rent for the use of the negro school." See also Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, December 1, 1953: "Motion made and passed that $25.00 be paid the Andersonville negro church for use of building as school. A stove was furnished the other church, by request of several church officials, to replace this $25.00 for this year." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, January 4, 1955: "Motion made and passed to pay $25.00 rent to the colored church at Andersonville where we teach school in addition to heater previously purchased." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, February 5, 1952, and December 2, 1952: The board had the floors refinished at the Huntington church school. It did not, however, cover the cost of labor. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, February 2, 1954: "Motion made and passed to help colored church, Mt. Carmel by donating $50.00 for bldg repairs as we use building for school." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, March 2, 1954: A $50 limit was imposed by the board at the next meeting. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, April 6, 1954: "Motion made and passed to give Shipp Chapel school—church $50.00 on material for repairs as we have used their building for a number of years as school." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, August 3, 1954: "Motion made and passed to pay Corrinth [sic] colored school $36.00 for rent in using their church bldg for school purposes." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, June 7, 1955: "Motion made and passed to donate $25.00 to Mt. Carmel colored school to take care of repairs as we teach in their church."

In terms of the number of students, the church schools were comparatively small schools. The largest was Antioch, with an enrollment of 109. Still, it was smaller than five of the white schools. Davis Grove, with an enrollment of 76, was the next largest. The Mt. Creek church school had an enrollment of 72 students. With enrollments under 25 students, the smallest church schools were McMath, Salem, and Spring Creek (Table 3.8).

While the church schools may have had comparatively few students, some of these schools were grossly overcrowded. Compared with the county schools for whites, the black church schools typically had a poor student-teacher ratio. The average was 41:1, twenty points higher than the white county school average. Based on the reported enrollment figures for each church school, Davis Grove had the worst, with a 76:1 student-teacher ratio, followed by Mt. Creek (72:1), Antioch (55:1), Union Oak Grove (50:1), Wards Chapel (49:1), and Piney Grove (47:1).

Table 3.8. Students and Teachers of Sumter County Public Schools—Black Church, 1940–1941

School	# of Students	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio*	Level of Education of Teachers		
Church Schools				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Antioch	109	2	55:1	0	0	0
Davis Grove	76	1	76:1	0	0	1
Huntington	32	1	32:1	0	0	0
Jackson Grove	43	1	43:1	0	0	0
Long Grove	32	1	32:1	0	0	1
McMath	18	1	18:1	0	0	1
Mt. Carmel	33	1	33:1	0	0	0
Mt. Creek	72	1	72:1	0	1	0
Mt. Mary	46	1	46:1	0	0	0
New	36	1	36:1	0	1	0
Piney Grove	47	1	47:1	0	0	0
Pleasant Grove	40	1	40:1	0	0	1
Salem	24	1	24:1	0	0	0
Shipp Chapel	28	1	28:1	0	1	0
Spring Creek	17	1	17:1	0	0	0
Union Oak Grove	50	1	50:1	0	0	0
Union Whitely	27	1	27:1	0	0	1
Wards Chapel	49	1	49:1	0	0	1
Church Total	779	19	41:1	0	3	6
White School						
Plains	226	12	19:1	7	5	0

*Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Most of the black church schools had only one teacher. Antioch was the sole exception, with two teachers. Few of the teachers had a college education. Three of the nineteen teachers (16 percent) in the church schools had at least two to three years of a college education (Mt. Creek, New, and Shipp Chapel). This was the minimum level for the teachers serving the white county schools in 1940–41. Six teachers had a one-year college education. Most of the church school teachers (ten in all) merely had a county license.

Table 3.9. Structure and Property of Sumter County Public Schools—Black Church, 1940–1941

School	Type of Building	School Plot-# of Acres	# of Classrooms	Running Water for Drinking	Type of Toilet System
Church Schools					
Antioch	Frame	2	1	No	Pit
Davis Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Huntington	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Jackson Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Long Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
McMath	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Mt. Carmel	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Mt. Creek	Frame	2	1	No	Pit
Mt. Mary	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
New	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Piney Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Pleasant Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Salem	Frame	2	1	No	Pit
Shipp Chapel	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Spring Creek	Frame	2	1	No	Pit
Union Oak Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Union Whitely	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Wards Chapel	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
White School					
Plains	Brick	6.25	14	Yes	Flush

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives

The black church schools of Sumter County of 1940–41 did not benefit from the state modernization program that consolidated many of the smaller, wood-frame rural schools into larger, brick, multiclassroom schools. They missed out on the "economy, safety, and utility" provided to many white schools, including seven of the ten white schools in the Sumter County school district.[18]

[18] See Marion Ellis, Bamby Ray, and Lynn Speno, "Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868–1971." Special History Study, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. Document made available by the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Unlike most of the white county schools, none of the black church schools were made of brick. They were all wood-frame structures located on one-to-two-acre sites (Table 3.9). Church schools Antioch, Mt. Creek, Salem, and Spring Creek were on two acres. The Anthony and Thompson schools were the only white county schools with a campus similar in size to the black church schools. Plains High School was situated on more than six acres.

All ten of the Sumter County white schools were multiclassroom schools. Plains High School alone had fourteen in-use classrooms. Union High School had twelve. A four-classroom school was the minimum for white county schools. Andersonville, Chambliss, and Concord had four classrooms. For the nineteen black church schools, each had only one classroom for use. Each of the white county schools had at least one other room available for school or administrative purposes (e.g., a principal's office). None of the church schools had this additional space. Nor did any of the church schools have a gymnasium or an auditorium "built for assembly purposes."

Most of the white county schools, including Plains High School, had indoor plumbing. They had running water for drinking and operating flush toilets for student and faculty use. Three schools had one but not the other. Only one white school, Andersonville, lacked these two modern amenities.

No church school had running water for drinking. In most cases, wells provided students and teachers with access to fresh water. No church school had flush toilets, either. A pit-type toilet system, or outhouse, was available for use.[19]

Compared with the white schools in Sumter County, the black church schools had few educational resources on hand for their students (Table 3.10). Beyond the school readers, each white county school had hundreds of books available for students. Plains High School alone had a total of 2,928 book volumes available for its elementary to high

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[19] Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, October 1, 1940. There was discussion at this board meeting for a well to be dug at the Andersonville community school and the Shipp Training school (Rosenwald). Subsequent discussion on the well project at Shipp Training was held at other meetings. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, December 3, 1940, and February 4, 1941. In another case, the board approved ten dollars "for well man to repair school well at Plains colored school provided the local trustees furnish curb and labor." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, November 30, 1943. The board passed a motion to have the school superintendent "to arrange for a well at Salem colored school. Board to pay for labor and the trustees pay for the material." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, June 6, 1944. The board voted to allocate "a donation to Mt. Carmel school of $35 on a well." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, October 31, 1944. The board approved a well for Wards Chapel. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, May 4, 1948, and January 4, 1949. The board agreed "to fix well at the Andersonville colored school provided the colored people would come over and help." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1949. This was a recurring issue at the Andersonville school. See also Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, October 3, 1950. The board okayed a motion "to clean and repair well at the Pleasant Gr. colored school." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1949. For two schools, Faust and Bethel, "wooden kegs" were suggested as a solution to the lack of running water. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 13, 1951. A "water keg" was also proposed for Davis Grove—"Motion made and passed not to dig well at Davis Grove but to furnish a water keg to carry water to school which would be sufficient and cheaper." See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 4, 1955.

school students. The Anthony school near Georgia Southwestern College had 1,800 book volumes for grades 1–6. The Concord and Thompson schools had the fewest books available for their students. Concord had 134 books on hand, and Thompson had 250 books. But for its student population size, Thompson's inventory was at least comparable to most of the other white county schools.

Table 3.10. Educational Resources of Sumter County Public Schools—Black Church, 1940–1941

School	# of Book Volumes*	Avg. # Books Per Child ADA	# of Desks, Patent/Other	Auditorium w/ Seating	Availability of Lab/Other Equip.^
Church Schools					
Antioch	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Davis Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Huntington	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Jackson Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Long Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
McMath	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Mt. Carmel	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Mt. Creek	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Mt. Mary	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
New	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Piney Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Pleasant Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Salem	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Shipp Chapel	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Spring Creek	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Union Oak Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Union Whitely	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Wards Chapel	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
White School					
Plains	2,928	7	260 / 38	Yes	Yes / Yes

*Figures do not include school readers

^According to the annual report, laboratory equipment defined included "vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop equipment." "Other" equipment is defined here as including "teachers' desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, playground equipment, etc."

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

The black church schools in 1940–41 had no more than thirty volumes each. The value of the books at each school was recorded as $15.00 (an estimated $263.24 in 2020 dollars). The value for the full collection of books at Plains High School was $1,352 (an estimated $23,726.31 in 2020).[20]

White students in the Sumter County school system typically sat at a patent or other individualized desk. At Plains High School alone, there were 260 of these available. None of the black church schools had this modern type of classroom seating. Students sat on wooden church benches.

None of the black church schools had an auditorium "especially built for assembly purposes." Nor did they have a gymnasium. With the exception of Anthony, nine out of the ten white county schools had an auditorium. Union High School had a gymnasium identified in the annual report.

Table 3.11. Transportation for Sumter County Public Schools—Black Church, 1940–1941

School	# of Vehicles	# of Bus Drivers	# of Daily Round Trips	Daily Avg. # of Students	% of Enrolled Students Using Bus*
Church Schools					
Antioch	0	0	0	0	0
Davis Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Huntington	0	0	0	0	0
Jackson Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Long Grove	0	0	0	0	0
McMath	0	0	0	0	0
Mt. Carmel	0	0	0	0	0
Mt. Creek	0	0	0	0	0
Mt. Mary	0	0	0	0	0
New	0	0	0	0	0
Piney Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Pleasant Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Salem	0	0	0	0	0
Shipp Chapel	0	0	0	0	0
Spring Creek	0	0	0	0	0
Union Oak Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Union Whitely	0	0	0	0	0
Wards Chapel	0	0	0	0	0
White School					
Plains	2	2	6	118	52

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

[20] These figures are from the Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT 2272, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia. The figures for 2020 are from the CPI Inflation Calculator, https://cpiinflationcalculator.com/, accessed February 27, 2020.

The black church schools also lacked laboratory equipment for vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop. These schools also lacked teacher's desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, or playground/recreational equipment. Plains High School generally had these educational enhancements.

The Sumter County Board of Education provided bus transportation to each of the white schools. At a minimum, each school had one bus and one driver. Most white students in the county system took the bus to school. At Plains, 52 percent rode the bus each day. At four schools, approximately 80 percent or more used the bus. This public service was not available for black students (Table 3.11). They typically walked to school, often on unpaved, dirt roads. The walk to and from school could be quite challenging for the children, particularly during winter and inclement weather.

Over the years, the number of black church schools in Sumter County fluctuated (Table 3.12). In 1937–38, the first year the annual report was submitted to the state by the county school superintendents, there were 38 total black schools and, as in 1940–41, 18 were church schools. This was the largest type, representing 47.4 percent of the black county schools.

However, there were some different types of schools in 1937–38 than there were in the year Carter graduated. Bethel and Paradox were identified that year as church schools. Bethel had an enrollment of twenty-one students but had just one teacher. Most of the students were in the first and second grades. Paradox had ninety-four students and two teachers. Fifty of its students were listed as first graders. In 1940–41, Bethel and Paradox were community schools. Bethel was a one-classroom school and Paradox was a two-classroom school. In 1937–38, the Mt. Creek school was housed in a "lodge hall" and the McMath school was not extant.

In 1938–39, the number of black county schools increased by one to thirty-nine schools. That year, the annual report listed twenty church schools, thus constituting more than half of the black county schools (51.3 percent). This appeared to be the peak year for this school type. To this list, McMath, Mt. Creek, and St. Paul were added, and Bethel became listed as a community school.

The number of church schools declined after 1941. There were fourteen church schools identified in 1941–42, thirteen identified in 1942–43, and twelve identified in 1944–45 and 1945–46. In 1947–1948, fourteen were recorded as church schools. By 1950, there were ten church schools remaining. Some of the church schools were later coded as

community schools, and they continued as such into the 1950s—places like Antioch, Davis Grove, Mt. Creek, and Paradox. Others, like New, Spring Creek, and Union Whitely, were closed.[21]

County school board minutes show that there were efforts to assist church schools with new buildings to be constructed near the church. For example, in 1941, Earl Carter and E. L. Bridges served on a county board committee "with authority to act to erect Antioch School Building." Others served on a county board committee "to erect Davis Grove School Building."[22]

Table 3.12. Black Church Schools in Sumter County, Select Years

School Year	# of Ch Schools	% of all County Schools
1937–38	18	47.4
Schools:	Antioch, Bethel, Davis Grove, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Long Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Mary, New, Paradox, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Spring Creek, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, Wards Chapel	
School Year	**# of Ch Schools**	**% of all County Schools**
1938–39	20	51.3
Schools:	Antioch, Davis Grove, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Long Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, McMath, New, Paradox, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Spring Creek, St. Paul, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, Wards Chapel	
School Year	**# of Ch Schools**	**% of all County Schools**
1940–41	18	46.2
Schools:	Antioch, Davis Grove, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Long Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, McMath, New, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Spring Creek, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, Wards Chapel	
School Year	**# of Ch Schools**	**% of all County Schools**
1941–42	14	36.8
Schools:	Huntington, Jackson Grove, Long Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, New, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, Wards Chapel	
School Year	**# of Ch Schools**	**% of all County Schools**
1942–43	13	34.2
Schools:	Huntington, Jackson Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Spring Creek, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, Wards Chapel	

[21] The Long Grove church school burned in 1942. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, May 5, 1942, July 6, 1943, and August 3, 1943. Years later, Flintside did too. A "negro house close to Flintside school" was used in the interim until the church school could be repaired. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, November 6, 1951, February 5, 1952, March 4, 1952, and June 17, 1952. In the mid-1940s, the board approved the construction of a separate school building for Ward's Chapel. "Motion passed to build school house for Ward's Chapel colored school and labor to cost $250." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, September 4, 1945.

[22] See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, June 3, 1941, June 27, 1941, and August 5, 1941.

School Year	# of Ch Schools	% of all County Schools
1944–45	12	31.6
Schools:	Huntington, Jackson Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely, Wards Chapel	

School Year	# of Ch Schools	% of all County Schools
1945–46	12	32.4
Schools:	Flintside, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely	

School Year	# of Ch Schools	% of all County Schools
1947–48	14	36.8
Schools:	Flintside, Gatewood, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Spring Creek, Union Oak Grove, Union Whitely	

School Year	# of Ch Schools	% of all County Schools
1948–49	12	33.3
Schools:	Flintside, Gatewood, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Creek, Mt. Mary, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Shipp Chapel, Union Oak Grove	

School Year	# of Ch Schools	% of all County Schools
1950–51	10	27.8
Schools:	Flintside, Gatewood, Huntington, Jackson Grove, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Mary, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Salem, Union Oak Grove	

Note: The annual reports for 1943–1944, 1946–1947, and 1949–1950 were not obtained at the time of writing.

Sumter County's "Colored" Community Schools

The second-largest group of schools listed in the 1940–41 report was the community schools. There were fifteen of them. They were Andersonville, Bethel, Corinth, DeSoto, Eastpoint, Faust, Harvey Grove, Leslie, Old Corinth, Paradox, St. Paul, Spring Hill, Tabernacle, Union Grove, and Welcome.

Unlike the church schools, the community schools had their own buildings. Even so, they were often located adjacent to a church. In fact, on US census maps and county maps, several black churches in Sumter County were visibly listed as "church and school." Figure 3.1 illustrates this.

The image from the 1950 US Census Enumeration District Map for Sumter County shows the St. Paul AME Church and School. The church and school were situated in Smithville, Georgia, at the corner of Logan Store Road and Della Glass Road. The church remains to this day, but not the school.

Figure 3.1. US Census map of St. Paul AME Church and Community School, 1950



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

The community schools were typically larger than the church schools. In fact, most of the county's black students (1,068) were enrolled at community schools. For the 1940–41 school year, there were four community schools with an enrollment of 100 students or more. They were Andersonville, Leslie, Paradox, and Welcome (Table 3.13).

Leslie was the largest of the community schools with an enrollment of 150 students. Welcome was second with 131 enrolled, and Andersonville was third with 129. The smallest community schools were Harvey Grove with 20 students, Corinth with 27, Bethel with 36, and Union Grove with 37.

To meet this need, there were more teachers in the community schools. There were twenty-five teachers. Indeed, seven of the fifteen schools had two or more teachers. The other eight were one-teacher schools. Still, the student-teacher ratios were inadequate. The county church schools averaged 41:1. The community schools were slightly worse at 43:1. Based on the reported enrollment figures for each community school, Eastpoint had the worst score with a 60:1 student-teacher ratio. It was followed by Tabernacle (58:1), St. Paul (57:1), Paradox (51:1), Leslie (50:1), and Old Corinth (48:1). Harvey Grove had the best score, 20:1, but the school only had an enrollment of twenty.

In the community schools, more teachers had a college education. That was rare in the church schools. Ten of the 25 community school teachers (40 percent) had at least two to three years of a college education. Seven had at least one year of college. The remaining eight only possessed a county license.

Table 3.13. Students and Teachers of Sumter County Public Schools—Black Community, 1940–1941

School	# of Students	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio*	Level of Education of Teachers		
Community Schools				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Andersonville	129	3	43:1	0	3	0
Bethel	36	1	36:1	0	0	0
Corinth	27	1	27:1	0	1	0
DeSoto	90	2	45:1	0	1	1
Eastpoint	60	1	60:1	0	0	0
Faust	54	2	27:1	0	1	0
Harvey Grove	20	1	20:1	0	0	0
Leslie	150	3	50:1	0	1	2
Old Corinth	48	1	48:1	0	0	0
Paradox	101	2	51:1	0	0	2
St. Paul	57	1	57:1	0	0	1
Spring Hill	70	2	35:1	0	0	0
Tabernacle	58	1	58:1	0	1	0
Union Grove	37	1	37:1	0	1	0
Welcome	131	3	44:1	0	1	1
Community Total	1,068	25	43:1	0	10	7
White School						
Plains	226	12	19:1	7	5	0

*Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Like the church schools, the community schools were not modernized in 1940–41. They, too, were wood-frame schools and situated on one-to-two-acre sites (Table 3.14). Andersonville, DeSoto, Leslie, Paradox, and Welcome were the only ones on two acres.

Table 3.14. Structure and Property of Sumter County Public Schools—Black Community, 1940–1941

School	Type of Building	School Plot-# of Acres	# of Classrooms	Running Water for Drinking	Type of Toilet System
Community Schools					
Andersonville	Frame	2	2	No	Pit
Bethel	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Corinth	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
DeSoto	Frame	2	1	No	Pit
Eastpoint	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Faust	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Harvey Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Leslie	Frame	2	3	No	Pit
Old Corinth	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Paradox	Frame	2	2	No	Pit
St. Paul	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Spring Hill	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Tabernacle	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Union Grove	Frame	1	1	No	Pit
Welcome	Frame	2	2	No	Pit
White School					
Plains	Brick	6.25	14	Yes	Flush

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Generally, the community schools were one-classroom schools. Four schools had two or more classrooms. Leslie, the largest community school in terms of enrollment, had three. Like the church schools, none of the community schools had additional rooms available for school or administrative use. No community school had a gym or an auditorium. None of them had indoor plumbing. They lacked running water for drinking and flush toilets.[23]

The black community schools also had few educational resources on hand for their students (Table 3.15). In 1940–41, each school had no more than thirty books. There were no patent desks available for individual use, only benches. Students lacked access to laboratory equipment for vocational training, and these schools were not provided teacher's

[23] The county board at times recognized the general inadequacy of toilets at black schools or even their unavailability. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, November 2, 1943, and September 5, 1950. In 1946, the board voted "to build pit toilets at all colored schools during the summer." See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, April 2, 1946.

desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, or playground/recreational equipment. The county also did not provide bus transportation to get to and from school (Table 3.16). That service was still a few years away.[24]

Overall, the black community schools in the Sumter County system were only marginally better than the black church schools, and that was mainly in the area of teaching training.

Table 3.15. Educational Resources of Sumter County Public Schools—Black Community, 1940–1941

School	# of Book Volumes*	Avg. # Books Per Child ADA	# of Desks, Patent/Other	Auditorium w/ Seating	Availability of Lab/Other Equip.^
Community Schools					
Andersonville	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Bethel	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Corinth	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
DeSoto	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Eastpoint	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Faust	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Harvey Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Leslie	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Old Corinth	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Paradox	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
St. Paul	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Spring Hill	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Tabernacle	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Union Grove	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
Welcome	30	--	0 / Benches	No	No / No
White School					
Plains	2,928	7	260 / 38	Yes	Yes / Yes

*Figures do not include school readers.

^According to the annual report, laboratory equipment defined included "vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop equipment." "Other" equipment is defined here as including "teachers' desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, playground equipment, etc."

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

[24] Occasionally, the county board addressed the lack of desks at black schools. However, when it did address the matter, the solution was to purchase old desks. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, November 30, 1943, August 1, 1950, February 13, 1951, and January 3, 1956. In one case, the board purchased benches from a church to enhance the seating arrangements at a community school in DeSoto. See Minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education, December 16, 1947.

Table 3.16. Transportation for Sumter County Public Schools—Black Community, 1940–1941

School	# of Vehicles	# of Bus Drivers	# of Daily Round Trips	Daily Avg. # of Students	% of Enrolled Students Using Bus*
Community Schools					
Andersonville	0	0	0	0	0
Bethel	0	0	0	0	0
Corinth	0	0	0	0	0
DeSoto	0	0	0	0	0
Eastpoint	0	0	0	0	0
Faust	0	0	0	0	0
Harvey Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Leslie	0	0	0	0	0
Old Corinth	0	0	0	0	0
Paradox	0	0	0	0	0
St. Paul	0	0	0	0	0
Spring Hill	0	0	0	0	0
Tabernacle	0	0	0	0	0
Union Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Welcome	0	0	0	0	0
White School					
Plains	2	2	6	118	52

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Sumter County's Rosenwald Schools

There were six Rosenwald schools in Sumter County in 1940–41. Though they were not identified as such in the Superintendent's Annual Report, we were able to confirm the existence of six. The extant Rosenwald schools were Gatewood, Nunn Industrial, Plains, Seay Industrial, Shady Grove, and Shipp Training. From the 1910s to the 1930s, 259 of these schools were established in Georgia. Sumter County is one of 103 Georgia counties that had this type of school.[25]

The schools are named for Julius F. Rosenwald (1862–1932), a Chicago businessman and philanthropist. During his years as the president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., Rosenwald formed a partnership with Booker T. Washington and Alabama's Tuskegee Institute to invest in the education of African Americans in the South, namely in the rural

[25] "Six Rosenwald Schools in Co.," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 20, 1931; Jeanne Cyriaque, Keith Hebert, and Steven Moffson, "Rosenwald Schools in Georgia, 1912–1937," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 2009, 2, 12; Beverly Jones, "Rosenwald Schools," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, September 1, 2016, accessed on August 22, 2017; Sissy Bowen, "Plains Dedicates First Formal School for Blacks," *Sumter Free Press*, February 27, 2002, 1, 5.

areas. It was considered "a new chapter" in the schooling of the region's largest minority population. In 1912, a fund was established. From this, thousands of schools were built across the South.[26]

Some contend Rosenwald was motivated by his Jewish faith and experience. His philanthropy reflected his commitment to *tzedakah*, or righteousness. Moreover, as the son of Jewish immigrants from Germany, he understood all too well how minority groups faced discrimination. To help overcome this or blunt its effects, he believed in the importance of public education.[27]

By the time of Rosenwald's death in 1932, there were more than five thousand of such schools. Many notable African Americans, such as Maya Angelou, US Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), and Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post*, received their education at a Rosenwald school.[28]

The first Rosenwald-funded school was in Lee County, Alabama. The location was in Loachapoka, a small town about seventeen miles to the north of Tuskegee. It was dedicated in 1913. This was the first of six experimental schools.[29]

Black community leaders, such as educators and clergy, played a major role in securing Rosenwald grants for local schools. They helped raise matching funds from the community. Given this type of local support, Rosenwald schools were not surprisingly often built near churches.[30]

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[26] Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 49; Witold Rybczynski, "Remembering the Rosenwald Schools," *Architect: Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, September 16, 2015, https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/culture/remembering-the-rosenwald-schools_o, accessed March 22, 2017.

[27] Cyriaque, Hebert, and Moffson, "Rosenwald Schools in Georgia, 1912–1937," 13. The influence of Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch of Chicago's Temple Sinai on the philanthropic career of Rosenwald has been particularly noted. See Peter M. Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald: *The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 51–54.

[28] Karen Heller, "The Enlightening Legacy of the Rosenwald Schools," *Washington Post*, August 30, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-enlightening-legacy-of-the-rosenwald-schools/2015/08/30/946b72ca-4cc6–11e5-bfb9–9736d04fc8e4_story.html, accessed March 22, 2017; Witold Rybczynski, "Remembering the Rosenwald Schools," *Architect: Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, September 16, 2015, https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/culture/remembering-the-rosenwald-schools_o, accessed March 22, 2017.

[29] Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, 38–41; Abraham Aamidor, "Rosenwald Schools in Alabama," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, May 5, 2009, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2126.

[30] Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, 43; Evan A. Kutzler, "On New Era Road: A Rosenwald School's Decline," *Americus Times-Recorder*, January 22, 2020, A1, A3.

Local whites were also interested in obtaining these monies. For instance, in 1922, the Sumter County Board of Education allocated funds for "the established of two schools for the vocational training of negroes." In this case, the two schools were the Plains Rosenwald school and the Nunn Industrial school. However, sometimes white benefactors had ulterior motives and did not share the vision of the leaders of the black community. [31]

Comparatively, at least in terms of what can be measured, the Rosenwald schools offered a better education for black children than the other county schools. This was their very purpose. They were established because black students across the South were failed by their state and local governments. The Rosenwald schools operated for nine months and often started the school year at the same time as the white schools. Most black schools in the county started later "so as to interfere as little as possible with work in the fields."[32]

According to the *Americus Times-Recorder*, the Rosenwald schools signified that "Sumter County's colored schools are making progressive strides." For example, Shady Grove, the last of the Rosenwald schools established in the county, was "a four-room frame building" and intended to have four teachers. In the 1930s, it was to be "the largest colored school in the Sumter system."[33]

Materially, the six Rosenwald schools offered a more complete educational experience to county black students. The practical training students received was especially welcomed. As reported in the *Americus Times-Recorder*,"The curriculum is so devised as to require 60 percent of pupils time in vocational work." According to the local newspaper, the vocational curriculum included the following: "These pupils are taught carpentry, metal working, wood working and mechanical work of all elementary grades. They are taught to weld brass and iron, to take an engine apart and rebuild it, to run tractors and to do all kinds of blacksmithing."[34]

When the Rosenwald schools opened in Plains and around the county in 1923 and 1924, both black and white community leaders praised the development. Colonel J. E. D. Shipp, the chair of the Sumter County Board of Education, spoke at the dedication ceremony for the Plains school. The school was said to have "the largest and finest of several similar school buildings built in the county through co-operation between the school authorities and managers of the funds." The date was January 2, 1924.[35]

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[31] "County Board Plans Negro Trade School," *Americus Times-Recorder*, August 2, 1922. The Nunn school was named after George Wardlow Nunn (1868–1926), a farmer and merchant from the Huntington area in Sumter County who served as a school trustee in the Huntington district. See "Board Calls for Place in Rural School District," *Americus Times-Recorder*, February 5, 1920.

[32] "Sumter's Rural Schools Open Soon," *Americus Times-Recorder*, August 22, 1923.

[33] "Six Rosenwald Schools in Co.," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 20, 1931.

[34] "Dedicate Rosenwald School Thanksgiving," *Americus Times-Recorder*, November 27, 1923.

[35] "Will Dedicate New Negro School Soon," *Americus Times-Recorder*, December 28, 1923.

Shipp "paid a glowing tribute to the late Booker T. Washington" and said, "this noted negro educator though dead lives in the lives of the many graduates of Tuskegee Institute who are in hundreds of communities of the South teaching the dignity of labor." Shipp "urged the negro leaders to tell their children more about worthy negro persons who have risen by hard struggle to prominence."[36]

White local leaders like Shipp were not merely interested in the utility that vocational education provided. There was also the element of social control and law and order. In his remarks, as reported by the Americus paper, Shipp contended that "the only way to eliminate vice and crime is by educating." "Ignorance," he continued, "is costing Sumter county ten times more than it would cost to maintain good schools in every section of the county."[37]

Plains Mayor Alton Carter, Jimmy Carter's uncle, also spoke at the school dedication as a representative of his race. Through a biracial lens, the *Americus Times-Recorder* reported, "Among the white persons present were Alton Carter, mayor of Plains, who spoke on behalf of the white citizens. He told the negro leaders they could always depend upon [the] support of white people in any movement for developing their people." Mayor Carter extolled the leadership of Shipp, specifically "the progress the rural white and colored schools of Sumter county have made during the last five years."[38]

At the dedication of the Shipp Training school in November 1923, Shipp declared, "Industrial farming and other courses are offered to students under a well-trained corps of instructors. It is hoped that other schools for the education of the negro youth will be erected in the near future."[39]

The following month, in December 1923, board chair Shipp dedicated the opening of the Gatewood Rosenwald school. He believed that the focus on the industrial arts was, as the *Americus Times-Recorder* characterized it, "especially suited to elevate the negro both as a race and individually." Gatewood's principal was Sarah Orr. She was described at the time as "an estimable colored woman."[40]

By student enrollment, the Rosenwald schools were the largest of the black county schools. Five of the six Rosenwald schools had an enrollment of more than 100 students. Plains was by far the largest with 171 students enrolled in 1940–41. With an enrollment of 57 students, Seay Industrial was the smallest of the county's Rosenwald schools (Table 3.17).

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[36] "Shipp Pays Tribute to Negro Leaders," *Americus Times-Recorder*, January 3, 1924.

[37] "Shipp Pays Tribute to Negro Leaders," *Americus Times-Recorder*, January 3, 1924.

[38] "Shipp Pays Tribute to Negro Leaders," *Americus Times-Recorder*, January 3, 1924.

[39] "Dedicate New Shipp Industrial School," *Americus Times-Recorder*, November 30, 1923.

[40] "Shipp and McMath Dedicate School," *Americus Times-Recorder*, December 28, 1923.

For the most part in 1940, schooling for black children in the county system went from first grade to seventh grade. There was no county high school for students until the late 1950s. But the very few who did receive an eighth- or ninth-grade education did so at a Rosenwald school. For example, Nunn Industrial had an enrollment of twenty-two students in the eighth and ninth grades. Shipp Training had ten such students in 1940, Plains had nine, and Shady Grove had four.

There were twenty-one teachers at the Rosenwald schools, slightly more than the total number for the church schools. Four of the schools (Nunn Industrial, Plains, Shady Grove, and Shipp Training) had four teachers, one had three, and one had two. No other black county school had four teachers.

Eighteen (86 percent) of the Rosenwald teachers had a college education and three had county licenses. Indeed, of all the teachers employed in the black county schools, the only teachers with four years of college education were Rosenwald teachers. Fifteen (71 percent) of the Rosenwald teachers had at least two years of college.

The student-teacher ratio in Sumter County's six Rosenwald schools was slightly better than the church and community schools. In 1940–41, with 730 enrolled students and 21 teachers, the ratio was 35:1. The range of the ratios was 27:1 at Shipp Training to 43:1 at Gatewood and Plains. When compared with the church schools and community schools, the Rosenwald schools represented an improvement.

Table 3.17. Students and Teachers of Sumter County Public Schools—Rosenwald, 1940–1941

School	# of Students	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio*	Level of Education of Teachers		
Rosenwald Schools				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Gatewood	130	3	43:1	1	1	1
Nunn Industrial	132	4	33:1	1	1	1
Plains	171	4	43:1	1	2	1
Seay Industrial	57	2	29:1	0	2	0
Shady Grove	134	4	34:1	0	2	0
Shipp Training	106	4	27:1	1	3	0
Rosenwald Total	730	21	35:1	4	11	3
White School						
Plains	226	12	19:1	7	5	0

*Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Unlike one-classroom church and community schools, each Rosenwald school was a multiclassroom, wood-frame school located on a two-acre site (Table 3.18). In 1940–41, Gatewood and Seay Industrial were three-room schools. Plains and Shady Grove were

four-room schools. Shipp Training and Nunn Industrial were the largest—with five and six classrooms, respectively. Three of the schools had additional rooms available for school or administrative use. Shipp Training had a teachers' home. Nunn Industrial had a workshop. Plains even had an auditorium. The Rosenwald schools may have been the most modern of the Sumter County black schools, yet none of them had indoor plumbing for water fountains or restrooms.

Table 3.18. Structure and Property of Sumter County Public Schools—Rosenwald, 1940–1941

School	Type of Building	School Plot-# of Acres	# of Classrooms	Running Water for Drinking	Type of Toilet System
Rosenwald Schools					
Gatewood	Frame	2	3	No	Pit
Nunn Industrial	Frame	2	6	No	Pit
Plains	Frame	2	4	No	Pit
Seay Industrial	Frame	2	3	No	Pit
Shady Grove	Frame	2	4	No	Pit
Shipp Training	Frame	2	5	No	Pit
White School					
Plains	Brick	6.25	14	Yes	Flush

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Table 3.19. Educational Resources of Sumter County Public Schools—Rosenwald, 1940–1941

School	# of Book Volumes*	Avg. # Books Per Child ADA	# of Desks, Patent/Other	Auditorium w/ Seating	Availability of Lab/Other Equip.^
Rosenwald Schools					
Gatewood	30	--	75 / 0	No	No / No
Nunn Industrial	190	2	125 / 0	No	No / Yes
Plains	30	--	75 / 0	Yes	No / Yes
Seay Industrial	30	--	60 / 0	No	No / No
Shady Grove	30	--	100 / 0	No	No / No
Shipp Training	140	2	100 / 0	No	No / No
White School					
Plains	2,928	7	260 / 38	Yes	Yes / Yes

*Figures do not include school readers.

^According to the annual report, laboratory equipment defined included "vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop equipment." "Other" equipment is defined here as including "teachers' desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, playground equipment, etc."

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

The Rosenwald schools had more educational resources available than the church or community schools (Table 3.19). In 1940–41, two schools exceeded the 30 books normally available to a black school in Sumter County. Nunn Industrial had 190 volumes, and Shipp Training had 140. Furthermore, patent desks instead of benches were available for individual use. Like the other schools, Rosenwald students lacked laboratory equipment. Two schools, Nunn Industrial and Plains, did provide teacher's desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, or playground/recreational equipment. They were the only ones in the county system.

Unlike the white county schools, bus transportation was not provided for the thirty-nine black county schools. Whites in the county had nineteen school buses and nineteen school drivers. Even for the Rosenwald schools, no bus services were provided by the county at this time. Students had to find their own way (Table 3.20). For black students, there were no buses and no bus drivers. Black students had to find their own way to and from school. Most walked to school.[41]

Table 3.20. Transportation for Sumter County Public Schools—Rosenwald, 1940–1941

School	# of Vehicles	# of Bus Drivers	# of Daily Round Trips	Daily Avg. # of Students	% of Enrolled Students Using Bus*
Rosenwald Schools					
Gatewood	0	0	0	0	0
Nunn Industrial	0	0	0	0	0
Plains	0	0	0	0	0
Seay Industrial	0	0	0	0	0
Shady Grove	0	0	0	0	0
Shipp Training	0	0	0	0	0
White School					
Plains	2	2	6	118	52

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

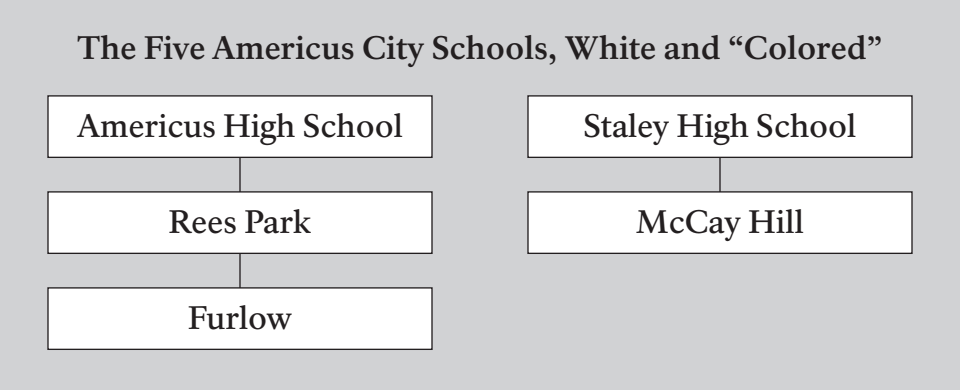
Americus City System—McCay Hill and Staley

In 1940–41, there were three white schools and two black schools in the Americus city system. The three white schools were Furlow, Rees Park, and Americus, and the two black schools were McCay Hill and A. S. Staley. Americus and Staley were the two high schools in the city system. The enrollment in white schools was 929, and the enrollment in black schools was 1,155.

[41] See list of Sumter County Rosenwald schools, school buildings, construction costs, and Rosenwald Fund contributions in Attachment 1 in Cyriaque, Hebert, and Moffson, "Rosenwald Schools in Georgia, 1912–1937."

In the year that Jimmy Carter graduated from Plains High School, McCay Hill offered grades 1–7 and Staley offered grades 8–11. Indeed, Staley was the only high school at the time for blacks in Sumter County. Both schools were community schools. The city did not have black church schools or Rosenwald schools. It was a consolidated system under racial segregation. For both races, if conditions were right for a student to stay in school, there was a clear, direct matriculation path from grammar school to high school (Figure 3.2). Under this consolidated system and the relative compactness of the city, bus transportation was not provided to neither the white schools nor the black schools. Some students from the county did attend Staley, but only a few. They had to find their own way to Americus.

Figure 3.2. School consolidation and racial segregation in the Americus City System, 1940–1941



At the time, McCay Hill (pronounced McCoy Hill) was the oldest black school in the county. It was also the first. Early on, the school had a large enrollment. The *Americus Times-Recorder* reported in 1891 that 813 students were enrolled.[42]

The school was established in the mid-1880s in a historically black neighborhood bearing the same name—a name that originated with Henry Kent McCay (1820–86), a local white landowner, attorney, and Confederate military officer who served on the Georgia Supreme Court (1868–75) after the Civil War and was a federal judge appointed by President Chester Arthur in 1882. The McCay Hill neighborhood, founded by formerly enslaved individuals during Reconstruction, was a place of pride and a symbol of success. It was a place rich in memory. It was home to an emerging middle class and the first public library in the city for black patrons. The site of the old school, now a public park, remains a

[42] Alan Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files Online, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/BlackHx.htm, accessed February 6, 2018; "Good Time to Come: The Pupils and Teachers of the Public Schools Complimented," *Americus Daily Times-Recorder*, April 18, 1891, 6.

place of community gatherings and celebrations. Many locals envision ways to preserve the historic legacy of the school and the surrounding area. For the community, the school was once "a focal point of learning and culture."[43]

In 1952, the school published its first yearbook, the "McCoy Hill Maybook." It is a precious artifact containing photographs and the names of those who attended the school and those who taught at the school. At the time, the principal was Walter T. Pace and the assistant principal was B. LeAndrew Fuse.[44]

With the start of the equalization period, the school finally closed in January 1958. It was replaced by Eastview, the new grade school for the city's black community.

Staley was the first public high school for blacks in Sumter County. It was constructed in 1936 as a Public Works Administration project and was dedicated the following year. The twelve-room structure was built on the site of the Americus Institute. E. J. Granberry was the first principal (1936–40). He was succeeded by G. L. Edwards (1940–41) and J. C. Reese (1942–44) during the critical early years.[45]

The school was named after Alfred Samuel "A. S." Staley Sr. (1862–1927), a prominent black educator who served the Americus community for more than four decades. Although born enslaved in Houston County, Georgia, he became an esteemed local figure. He was a teacher and principal at McCay Hill for many years. He was a strong supporter of the Americus Institute. He was described in his obituary as a teacher with "few superiors." Staley was also an ordained Baptist minister. He had stints in the pulpit at Spring Hill and Shady Grove. In fact, his original headstone is kept at the Shady Grove Baptist Church.[46]

The school had a reputation for offering a progressive education. In 1940, it was one of the black high schools in the South selected to participate in a secondary school study funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. The curriculum was to be innovative, holistic,

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[43] "Ashby Street Shotgun Row Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/4e3460f8-a514–4989-a69d-6cb2acb6bf61, accessed March 19, 2021; Alan Anderson, Meda Krenson, and Desi L. Wynter, "123 Heads Avenue—Americus," Historic American Building Survey, HABS No. GA-2303; Beth Alston, "McCoy Hill Community Has Reunion," *Americus Times-Recorder*, March 10, 2016, https://www.americustimesrecorder.com/2016/03/10/mccoy-hill-community-has-reunion/; Beth Alston, "District 1 Town Hall held in McCoy Hill Park," *Americus Times-Recorder*, June 19, 2019, https://www.americustimesrecorder.com/2019/06/19/district-1-town-hall-held-in-mccoy-hill-park/.

[44] "Annual Published By McCoy Hill," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 1, 1952; Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files Online.

[45] Craig Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black High Schools: The Secondary School Study, 1940–1946* (Columbia, SC: Museum of Education of the University of South Carolina, 2015), 80–84; Alan Anderson, "History of A. S. Staley High School," Sumter County History Files Online, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/StalyHigh.htm, accessed February 6, 2018.

[46] "A. S. Staley, M'Kay Hill Principal, Dies," *Americus Times-Recorder*, November 9, 1927; Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files Online; Alan Anderson, "Americus," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, July 18, 2003, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/americus.

and practical. The industrial arts were part of the curriculum but not exclusively so. The arts and music were included. The school had an award-winning marching band. In athletics, Staley had football and basketball.[47]

With the equalization program in the late 1950s, Staley lost its high school status for about a decade. It was briefly restored as a high school from 1967 to 1970. Afterward, it became a junior high school once again. As of the 2020–21 school year, the Americus-Sumter Ninth Grade Academy is located on the old Staley site.

According to the Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report for 1940–41, the enrollment for McCay Hill was 896 students. This was by far the largest public school in Sumter County—whether in the city or county system, whether a white school or black school. It even had an enrollment larger than all the black county church schools (779) combined. In 1952–53, the enrollment ballooned to 1,032.[48]

Understandably, McCay Hill had the largest faculty—twenty teachers. Each teacher had at least a two-year college education. This was comparable to the level of education possessed by teachers at the county Rosenwald schools. At 45:1, the student-teacher ratio at McCay Hill was rather high. It was the highest of the five schools in the Americus school system (Table 3.21). It was also higher than the average church school, community school, and Rosenwald school in the county system. In 1952–53, there were 23 teachers. But the 45:1 student-teacher ratio remained.[49]

Staley High School had an enrollment of 259. While that was slightly smaller than Americus High School (322), it was comparable to Plains High School (226) and Union High School (245). A decade later, in 1952–53, Staley had an enrollment of 435 for grades 8–12.[50]

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[47] Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black High Schools: The Secondary School Study, 1940–1946*, 80–84; Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files Online; Alan Anderson, "History of A. S. Staley High School," Sumter County History Files Online.

[48] Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT 2273, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia; Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1952–1953, FLAT 1483, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[49] Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT 2273, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia. According to the report, seventeen of the teachers were on the public payroll that year and three were paid with outside funds. It is suspected that the funds came from the Jeanes Fund. In the 1952 "McCoy Hill Maybook," on page 2, there is a photograph of the school's three administrators. Among them is "Mrs. Dorothy J. Bozeman, Jeanes Supervisor." See Juanie Noland, "Jeanes Supervisors," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, July 2, 2009, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2327. Cherisse Jones-Branch, "Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teachers," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, October 22, 2019, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/jeanes-supervising-industrial-teachers-8493/; Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1952–1953, FLAT 1483, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[50] Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, FLAT 2273, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia; Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1952–1953, FLAT 1483, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

Table 3.21. Students and Teachers of Americus City Public Schools—Black, 1940–1941

School	# of Students	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio*	Level of Education of Teachers		
Grades 8–11				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Staley	259	8	32:1	7	1	0
Grades 1–7						
McCay Hill	896	20	45:1	2	18	0
White School						
Plains	226	12	19:1	7	5	0

Source: Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Staley had eight teachers in 1940–41. That was the smallest of the four Sumter high schools. As such, of the high schools, Staley had the highest student-teacher ratio of 32:1. Americus was 27:1, and Plains and Union were 19:1. In terms of education, the teachers at Staley had essentially the same level. Each teacher had at least three years of a college education. Among all the African American schools in Sumter County, Staley's faculty was the most educated. With increased enrollment in the 1950s, Staley employed thirteen teachers in 1952–53. All thirteen had at least four years of college.

Like the other black schools in the county, McCay Hill was a wood-frame school. By 1930, it had three buildings dedicated to classroom use. Staley was the only brick school. Both were multiclassroom schools on lots spanning several acres. McCay Hill had twenty classrooms, and Staley had twelve. The two black city schools also had indoor plumbing for flush toilets and drinking water. No other black school at the time had this level of modernization and convenience (Table 3.22).

Table 3.22. Structure and Property of Americus City Public Schools—Black, 1940–1941

School	Type of Building	School Plot-# of Acres	# of Classrooms	Running Water for Drinking	Type of Toilet System
Grades 8–11					
Staley	Brick	5	12	Yes	Flush
Grades 1–7					
McCay Hill	Frame	4	20	Yes	Flush
White School					
Plains	Brick	6.25	14	Yes	Flush

Source: Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Separate was not equal. As further evidence, the black city schools of Americus had fewer resources than the white city schools (Table 3.23). Staley had 1,400 book volumes, and McCay Hill had 150. Staley's figure was approximately 3,200 volumes fewer than Americus High School; McCay Hill trailed Furlow by more than 4,000 volumes. Staley had more than 350 patent desks, and it had an auditorium for assembly purposes. It also had laboratory equipment for vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop, and it had resources that included teacher's desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, and playground/recreational equipment. McCay Hill had more than 450 patent desks, along with some other equipment.

Table 3.23. Educational Resources of Americus City Public Schools—Black, 1940–1941

School	# of Book Volumes*	Avg. # Books Per Child ADA	# of Desks, Patent/Other	Auditorium w/ Seating	Availability of Lab/Other Equip.^
Grades 8–11					
Staley	1400	6	360 / 140	Yes	Yes / Yes
Grades 1–7					
McCay Hill	150	0.2	479 / 0	No	No / Yes
White School					
Plains	2,928	7	260 / 38	Yes	Yes / Yes

*Figures do not include school readers.

^According to the annual report, laboratory equipment defined included "vocational agriculture, home economics, and shop equipment." "Other" equipment is defined here as including "teachers' desks, cabinets, bookcases, office furniture, cafeteria, playground equipment, etc."

Source: Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1940–1941, Georgia State Archives.

Excerpts from an Interview with Kay Bell and Amy Wise

Georgia Southwestern State University
Americus, Georgia
May 15, 2018

DR. JASON BERGGREN: Today is May 15th, 2018. I'm Dr. Jason Berggren with my colleague, Dr. Adrienne Petty. We are doing interviews for a special history project sponsored by the National Park Service on Public Education in Sumter County from the 1930s to the 1970s. We are at Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) in Americus, Georgia. We have two people here with us today and they're going to go ahead and introduce themselves.

KAY BELL: I'm Kay Bell. I work at the library at GSW. I'm the Senior Administrative Assistant.

DR. BERGGREN: And what schools did you attend?

MS. BELL: You want me to start with elementary?

DR. BERGGREN: Sure. Just mentioning which schools, yes.

MS. BELL: New Era was my elementary, and then I went to Americus High School, and then I came to Georgia Southwestern for two years.

DR. BERGGREN: OK, very good.

MS. WISE: I'm Amy Wise and I'm a lifelong citizen of Sumter County. I attended Plains High School, and I also attended Georgia Southwestern and graduated from Georgia Southwestern in 1979.

School Memories in Sumter County, Georgia

DR. BERGGREN: OK. Very good. Welcome, and thank you for agreeing to do interviews with us. Just to kind of start off with, what are your impressions of the education that you received in the public schools in Sumter County? What are the most memorable things?

MS. WISE: I think it was a wonderful educational system. It prepared us for, you know, secondary educations. And it prepared us to go out into the world. I don't know how educational systems are today, but there was a togetherness with the small school systems. We were more like a family unit. We were offered good clubs, organizations, FFA [Future Farmers of America], FHA [Future Homeowners of America], glee club, basketball, baseball. We even had Audubon club because we had a fifth-grade teacher who loved birds, and she wanted everyone to be a member of the Audubon Club. So, we had good opportunities there to round the students out in their knowledge of so many things there.

MS. WISE: I can say we had very good teachers. We were there during the days when there was discipline in schools, which rounded students off. But I don't think we ever had many problems, so to speak, with students' faculty-type relationships or anything like that. . . .

DR. BERGGREN: What stands out most to you about your schooling in Sumter County? Tell us about something memorable and the impact it may have had on your life.

MS. BELL: Well, it gave me a basic education you need to get out and go—

DR. BERGGREN: Starting at New Era, right?

MS. BELL: Yes. It was one through seven there and I attended all those years. And then the eight through twelve was over at Americus High.

DR. BERGGREN: OK.

MS. BELL: But it was a small school, and similar to what Amy (Wise) was saying, I think our assemblies were a weekly thing on Friday and then we might have a presentation. I can remember because I was born in February, and we honored our presidents that month. On Abraham Lincoln's birthday, we did something to talk about him, and maybe the students reenacted and did some role-playing.

MS. BELL: You pretty much knew what was going on if you were in the first grade, knew what was going on in the seventh grade, because it was just an L-shaped hall there. And I had recess a couple of times a day, and then we played ball and had a cafeteria that was apart from the school. And there was a lunch program, I think. You could get lunch for thirty cents back then.

MS. BELL: Then after finishing the seventh grade, going to the eighth grade, it seemed like every year we were the youngest group in that school because they'd take the eighth grade away. We'd go to the ninth. And then once we got to the tenth, they took the ninth away. So I think we were juniors in high school before we ever got somebody younger than us there.

MS. BELL: But I wasn't ever really active in sports and things like that. My family we rode the school bus, came home, and, living out in the country, there were always chores and things we had to do there.

Extracurricular School Activities

DR. BERGGREN: OK, did you join any clubs or organizations?

MS. BELL: In high school, I joined the Beta Club and got to really transition among different students and get to know them. But that was about it. That's all I can remember.

School Assembly

DR. BERGGREN: Were your assemblies similar, in that they encouraged patriotism and faith? Did they do that in New Era?

MS. BELL: In high school, we had an intercom system, and every morning we would start off with a morning devotion and then pledge allegiance to the flag. And our principal would, I guess by the time we got there at 8:15 and I think at 8:30, tell us to disperse to our first classes. That was just a regular thing.

Education of Parents

DR. BERGGREN: Did your parents go to Sumter County schools as well?

MS. BELL: My father and mother were children of sharecroppers. So that meant they moved a lot. They worked in the fields. And my mother is the only one who graduated from high school because she said, "Daddy would pull us out of school." They would sometimes be in three different places, so her brothers and sister ended up getting their GED once they got older. I used to think when I was growing up, "Why don't we ever move?" Because I'd hear it from school or students. And she said, "If you only knew how often we had to move growing up, then you'd appreciate being in one spot."

DR. ADRIENNE PETTY: Did they stay in the same county? Or they were moving all over the state?

MS. BELL: Schley County. . .

MS. BELL: It's not far from here. And, my father, he was one of twelve siblings, and there were two children who passed away. They're buried somewhere in south Georgia. But he couldn't tell me when I started trying to learn about my aunts and uncles. Well, I know a lot of them from growing up. There were some I didn't know. I remember being in the first grade, and he and my mother went to a funeral in Atlanta for his oldest brother. So the ages,

they were really spread out. So I got their names and I talked to my aunt. He had a sister who was the last surviving of the twelve. But I think they moved around so much that they didn't really remember every place they were in, especially when they got older.

DR. BERGGREN: Did your mom graduate from this county or. . .?

MS. BELL: She graduated from Americus High.

DR. BERGGREN: From Americus High School.

MS. BELL: And like Amy was saying, it was eleven grades, and there was something about her class. I think I graduated with the largest class, and I was trying to remember how many that was. But she and my sister and her all graduated from Americus High.

DR. BERGGREN: OK.

Rural Living

DR. PETTY: And you said you grew up on a farm, too?

MS. BELL: It wasn't so much a practicing farm by the time I got there. . . . Every year we'd have a garden, it wasn't that operating farm. A lot of my father's family had moved to Florida, but they were still in farming.

DR. PETTY: By that time, they owned their own farm or was it still sharecropping or what?

MS. BELL: My grandfather, I never knew him, but I understand he was able through government assistance to purchase that place. My mother still has ten acres, but it was just under two hundred acres. And they farmed it, and my mother recalls that my father and another brother had to go in and sign. I guess it was something about his age, but he was in his fifties and he dropped from a heart attack. I was born in '55, and I think it was the early fifties when that happened. So, it was all kind of—well no, that's not right. Because my mother and father got married in '41 and they moved on that property, so that was prior to then. . . .

Afterschool Chores

DR. BERGGREN: Did you have chores before- or afterschool chores during the week?

MS. WISE: Oh, yeah, after school. When you came home from school, the first thing you did is you did your homework and then there was sweeping floors, sweeping porches, washing dishes. Yeah, we were given chores. We were never entitled by any means whatsoever.

DR. PETTY: What kind of chores did you. . .

MS. BELL: My mom worked at Manhattan Shirt Company, where most women in this community worked. It provided a job where they could earn money. And my mother, she had to supplement what my father did. So, she'd get off at five, and when I got off of that school bus at four, I would start supper so that when she got home shortly thereafter, we would be having supper. Then cleaning up, then going to the next thing. But something Amy said about in the summers, gardens, I would tell people my fingers stayed green in the summer because we were always shelling butter beans or peas.

MS. WISE: Or purple for purple hulls.

MS. BELL: Grandmother and Daddy would go out there and pick it in the morning, and then we'd be in a circle and we'd all have a pan where we would be shelling. But now, as you're older and lives are changed and you work and it seems like you're spread out, we really had good meals. It was out of the garden.

DR. BERGGREN: Was that common for most people to have their own gardens?

MS. WISE: Yeah.

MS. BELL: You didn't realize that was a bonus.

MS. WISE: Exactly, all that hard work paid off.

MS. BELL: We had a freezer and it got full; filled it in the summers and you ate on it through the winter.

The Rural Diet and School Lunch

DR. PETTY: What kind of things did you remember cooking as a girl?

MS. BELL: We usually had a meat, whether it was pork chops or. . .my mother showed me how to prepare that. But after they started having some health problems in the sixties—gallbladder, that kind of thing—we started baking. And she would put something on low heat—that's when she'd come home for her lunch, and then I'd turn it off. And it'd either be chicken or something like that. But then a vegetable. And my father don't have much bread now, but we'd always have biscuits. But we learned how to use those refrigerated biscuits to have that every day. But I used to cook a mean pot roast like my mother could. Sauté it and then have the potatoes and carrots and onions in it. I know my mother hadn't gotten home from work one day, and I had an uncle who came with his family, and I went ahead and served them. And they said, "You can make a pot roast like your mom." And I said, "Oh good." Because that was kind of like icing on the cake.

DR. BERGGREN: Was meat an important part of your diet?

MS. BELL: Yeah, we had meats, vegetables, and breads. We had big meals. Every night we had big meals. My mother loved to cook like yours did. The best thing in the world is fresh-cut corn with peas and chopped-up tomatoes and onions in it. Oh my god, it was so good.

DR. PETTY: You all are making me hungry.

DR. BERGGREN: Yeah, I know. Speaking of food, lunch at school, did you all bring your lunch to school or did you get it at school?

MS. BELL: We got it at school.

DR. BERGGREN: And what would they typically serve?

MS. WISE: Meats, vegetables, a bread. We had milk.

MS. BELL: Always some milk.

DR. BERGGREN: So that was a common thing is that you went part of a lunch school program?

MS. WISE: Yeah, and it was so funny, I remember when it started out, it was $1.10 a week, going up to $1.15 and $1.25. Each year it would go up like 10 cents. For a whole week for a child to eat, that's pretty cheap.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you like the food that was served at school?

MS. WISE: Yeah. Yeah, pretty much. We did like it.

DR. BERGGREN: In terms of the school lunch, did anybody bring their lunch to school? Or it was pretty much everybody just ate at school?

MS. BELL: I never did see that at the high school.

MS. WISE: I didn't, no.

MS. BELL: Now, once you get older than high school, you think, those kids would skip class and go out and leave and come back. And they probably had lunch elsewhere. I wasn't one of those. I don't remember anybody complaining about it. . . . It was a good lunch.

DR. BERGGREN: Did kids go home for lunch?

MS. WISE: No, I don't remember any.

MS. BELL: Probably our senior year, they took more liberty than before.

DR. BERGGREN: OK, did all the different schools have a lunchroom?

MS. BELL: Yes. New Era had a cafeteria that was apart from the building, but then Americus High went through a renovation there. I don't know exactly when, but it was kind of updated and it seemed like the cafeteria was enlarged. I guess the population demanded it too. I had no complaints, and I don't remember anyone complaining. That's not to say there weren't any complaints.

Teachers and School Discipline

DR. PETTY: What are your earliest memories of your teachers and the subjects that you liked, like in grammar school?

MS. WISE: What would stand out more than—well with us over there—what we studied was our teachers. We can say, "Well, Miss So-and-So always had a flower pinned to her dress and beads to match the dress." You know what I'm saying? And then, Miss So-and-So loved birds, so you had to hang popcorn and cranberries on the cedar trees outside the school building every year, and things like that, but that's kind of what we relate to. Maybe we weren't paying attention too much in class—maybe we were looking at the teacher too much.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember any of the teachers' names who you were especially fond of?

MS. WISE: Yeah, sure.

MS. BELL: My first-grade teacher was Miss Bernice McGlamery, and she was just a really good teacher, just understanding. On Mondays, she would have us get up and tell everyone about our weekend. And as I think back over that, I think that was giving us experience in getting up in front of people and speaking. I remember it seemed like every kid, being from a rural area, every kid had a horse. And I just recall going home and begging my father for a horse after that. In the third grade, Christmas, I got one, but it took three years. . . .

MS. BELL: But we had a teacher—and I shouldn't—Mrs. Coats in the fourth grade. We were all scared of her.

DR. BERGGREN: Really, why?

MS. BELL: She was just tough. I mean I guess she was a disciplinarian. But I had a friend, she was a neighbor too, Pat—always had to sit in the back of the room because she cried, she just cried all the time. And so, if she was going to cry, Mrs. Coats put her in the back of the room. And that just stood out in my mind, but I just remember, I didn't know if I was

going to pass that grade. And I'm not really sure what I was fearful of, other than she was just a strong, I guess, disciplined individual. But you always had a different teacher the next year, so. . .

MS. WISE: Yeah, the same teacher taught all courses in grammar school.

MS. BELL: Yeah, we had the same teacher through the day in grammar school and then we got different teachers once we got over to the eighth grade in Americus High, change classes. You have some tough ones too?

MS. WISE: Yeah. They'd take their time if somebody couldn't get something. They made sure. . . .

DR. BERGGREN: They were very patient?

MS. WISE: Yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: Were they disciplinarians, the teachers?

MS. WISE: You'd get a pop on the hand with a ruler, or if you were really being bad, you got sent to the principal's office.

MS. BELL: There were some boys that wrote dirty words on a schoolteacher's car. I mean, I think they scratched it in there.

MS. WISE: Uh-oh.

DR. BERGGREN: This is elementary school or high school?

MS. BELL: Elementary school, and they didn't know right off who it was, but they found out. And when they did, they got a paddling. And I guess you don't do that anymore, but you could hear that paddling throughout the school over there. And I thought, "They won't be doing that no more."

MS. WISE: Speaking of, when you'd get a message, it'd come over the intercom. "So-and-so, please report to the principal's office."

DR. BERGGREN: Everybody goes, "Ooh."

MS. WISE: You would freeze. No, we were good kids.

High School Memories and Favorite Subjects

DR. BERGGREN: What was high school like?

MS. WISE: Hmm. That's when your life starts changing, isn't it?

MS. BELL: Yeah, you get in trouble.

MS. WISE: Yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you all like high school?

MS. BELL: I did.

MS. WISE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MS. BELL: My sister, my mother would ask her, what were you doing on such-and-such road? And, of course, she had her driver's license, and she had to explain herself. And she said, "Well how do you know that?" Well, all those ladies worked at Manhattan Shirt Company, and they knew each other. So, children pretty much didn't—they knew who was how and where they were going. "I saw Marcia!" I always thought that was funny.

MS. BELL: She always took me places to dance and things because she had her driver's license. And we'd go to church on Sunday and that.

DR. BERGGREN: What stood out in high school? Or what did you like about it? Was it a tough transition? You were mentioning the grades kept getting cut and you felt like you were forever a freshman.

MS. BELL: I wish I had some of my friends here. They could probably share more information. I don't know. My mother made a believer out of me. I was supposed to be where I was supposed to be. So, I didn't do too much. We usually went to school and came home, and I was involved in some of the clubs. But sports and things—I didn't do that. Because I was thinking one time, it would have been fun to go to those Friday night football games and stuff. But my family didn't do that and so I didn't do it either.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you have favorite subjects?

MS. BELL: Subjects? History. Coach Parrish taught that. It's amazing how many coaches we had teaching.

MS. WISE: We had a lot of good teachers.... And we liked our teachers. We had a lot of respect for them, and we learned from them. So, I think they did prepare us for secondary education, you know. There were all different kinds of people. Some were fun—you

learned a lot from the fun ones. And some were very strict. Just like with everybody's school. Just all types of them. [*Motions to Ms. Bell.*] She's laughing—she remembers one in particular.

MS. BELL: Well, you know, you should remember positive things, but I just can remember Martha Ireland doing her multiplication on her fingers under the desk, and I thought, "Oh, she's getting it."

DR. BERGGREN: And this was in high school?

MS. BELL: In high school, and so it was just funny. Things that stick out in your mind.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you have any teachers that became like mentors to you? That you had a really close bond with?

MS. WISE: I remember a couple of them. If you saw them outside of the school, they would always take the time. If you need a question or just anything you wanted to talk about, yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: Ms. Amy, did you have any favorite subjects?

MS. WISE: What did I like? History, English. . .math, no.

DR. BERGGREN: That was my next question: Were there ones you didn't like?

MS. WISE: Pretty much everything was OK. Literature.

MS. BELL: I think more time needed to be spent on math. . .

DR. BERGGREN: Literature?

MS. WISE: Mm-hmm.

MS. BELL: . . .than it was.

MS. WISE: You know it kind of tickles me, you know. You'll hear the old school song about reading, writing, and arithmetic. That's some simple words, but there's a lot to be said for those three simple words: reading, writing, and arithmetic. . . .

DR. BERGGREN: How high did Plains or Americus High offer in mathematics, for instance? How far did it go, do you remember?

MS. WISE: Algebra, algebra II.

MS. BELL: Oh, yeah, algebra II.

DR. PETTY: Were the girls as encouraged to do well in math as the boys, and science too?

MS. WISE: Yeah, they were encouraged to, but we all know boys like science and math better than girls. There were some rare, rare occasions where the girls really liked math.

DR. BERGGREN: Were girls mostly, what, in English? Literature?

MS. WISE: Probably literature, English, yeah, things like that. You know, nowadays, I look back and I see boys are so much more interested in history than girls are. I think a lot of times, depending on the history. You start talking about these world wars, and oh my goodness.

DR. PETTY: I taught a class on World War I; it was all boys except one.

MS. WISE: Absolutely. Except for one.

DR. PETTY: And they looked at me like, "What are you doing teaching?"

DR. BERGGREN: Did you find that true then? That boys were more interested in history? Or was it more even?

MS. WISE: I think it would depend on the particular history being taught. You're talking like during the war, I think the boys would be more interested in that. State history and things, I think girls and boys would be interested in Georgia state history and things like that because they're just all familiarized with parts of it, you know—such is that.

School Structures

DR. BERGGREN: What did your schools look like? If you were going to describe them for us, what kind of stands out?

MS. WISE: You all just spent the last few days in my old school. Pretty much our auditorium looks the same as you all have seen. The only difference I can think of is in the hallways, there were wooden lockers. They were open lockers. Nobody stole anything or messed with your stuff.

DR. BERGGREN: There was no combination or anything like that?

MS. WISE: No, no, no. And the top is like a boxed-in, screened-in section where people put their books up there, and then they'd hang their coats in the lockers.

MS. BELL: When was that?

MS. WISE: That was the whole time.

MS. BELL: Whole time and what?

MS. WISE: Since the school was built as far as I know.

DR. BERGGREN: Did every kid have a locker? Even in the early grades?

MS. WISE: Oh, you mean like, probably, I would think the high school students used the lockers.

MS. BELL: Yeah, because I can remember having a combination lock in high school.

MS. WISE: Oh, now see you all were fancier than we were.

MS. BELL: Amy took me to the high school over there in Plains, and that was one thing I said it looks so similar to New Era. It was made almost like New Era, that school. The bathrooms on the outside, and just that, that L. Wasn't it an L-shape? Or your school was probably bigger than New Era. But it was so similar. I guess because it was built in the same decade or whatever.

DR. BERGGREN: All wood floors.

MS. BELL: Wood floors. Had the auditorium, it was wood seats.

DR. BERGGREN: Had water fountains or whatever?

MS. BELL: Yes.

MS. WISE: Yes, water fountains. You had a little sink in the hallway too because the teachers would get you to line up and wash your hands before you went to lunch.

MS. BELL: Mm-hmm.

MS. WISE: I forgot about that.

Class Reunions

DR. BERGGREN: We were talking to some people yesterday, and they were talking about class reunions. Has your class had any reunions, and have you been able to attend any of them?

MS. BELL: As a matter of fact, I've been on a few committees. OK, when did it all start? We graduated in '73, and I think we started—what is it? You wait five years or ten years? Ten years the first time. Let's see, I was working with committees in the '90s and we would have the—what's the golf conference? Used to be what they called the Country Club, and so we'd have a few of them out there. And then, oh, different places. Those places don't exist anymore. But, yes. And to see how successful some are and where they come from. I mean, there were some that traveled from California to come back to class reunions. And far north. Because they used to do that thing: Who has the most children? And all that kind of stuff.

MS. BELL: I think the last one we had was at one a classmate's home because it dwindled down over the years and it was just an evening. We used to, when we started out, it would start on a Friday night, a meet and greet. And Saturday, they'd do golf and you'd bring your children to meet. And I think they would do something on Sunday. I've never gone to the Sunday, but the Fridays and Saturdays we had events to attend. Let's see, but the last one, I think I missed the last one. And I don't know, I think I've seen something, but I guess we're getting too old or something. I don't know what it is. It may pick up again.

MS. BELL: I know my sister—she is seventy-five and she has been to some of hers. But she's sick now, so she don't get out as much as she once did. I have a retired classmate. I was telling Amy, I should get Louise to come visit you all because she would probably have more. . . .

DR. BERGGREN: She was also in the same class?

MS. BELL: Same class as me, and she's now a retired schoolteacher. She worked in the school system and. . .

DR. BERGGREN: What's her last name?

MS. BELL: Tucker.

DR. BERGGREN: Tucker.

MS. BELL: Louise Tucker. I saw her pushing a baby. I said, "I saw you pushing a baby stroller the other day." I ran into her and she said, "Oh, that's my third grandbaby." And I said, "I didn't know you had a third grandbaby." So, I said, "It's been a long time." I need to take some time to catch up with them. I used to see them pretty often but haven't as of late.

DR. BERGGREN: Ms. Amy? Class reunions?

MS. WISE: I was just trying to think. I think I did go to a reunion; I believe it was in 2005, at the Plains Community Center.

DR. BERGGREN: OK.

MS. WISE: And I know I didn't get to go to maybe one or two before then. . . .

DR. BERGGREN: Have they held any since 2005?

MS. WISE: I haven't heard of one. And that's the reason I missed one before because whoever was sending the invite. . .I mean, I never knew about it. But I did go to that one.

DR. BERGGREN: Yeah, because one of the individuals said yesterday, "I think they're starting to have it every year."

MS. WISE: Oh wow.

DR. BERGGREN: Because as they're getting older.

DR. PETTY: Oh, yeah. After the fifties.

DR. BERGGREN: Yeah, they start having it every year.

MS. WISE: And so many people have moved away from the area, I think, that it's maybe sometimes hard to get them all back together sometimes. A lot of people in this area, seriously, they get out of college and they're up in Atlanta. There they go. Or Florida.

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Excerpts from an Interview with Eugene Edge

Jimmy Carter National Historic Site
Plains, Georgia
June 5, 2017

DR. JASON BERGGREN: Today is June 5, 2017. This is Dr. Jason Berggren of Georgia Southwestern State University. I am here with Mr. Eugene Edge. We are in Plains, Georgia, at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. This interview is part of a special history project that looks at education in the county in the 1950s and 1960s. We're interested in transitions between segregation, desegregation, and then ultimately to integration. Mr. Edge, welcome today.

MR. EUGENE EDGE: Thank you.

School Memories in Sumter County, Georgia

DR. BERGGREN: As we get started, could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your connections here to Sumter County?

MR. EDGE: OK, I was born here in Sumter County in 1942 and I began school at—basically, I was going on seven years old because at that time you had to be six years old before you could go to school. I was almost a year past that time when I started. At that time, it was strictly segregated. Strictly segregated, totally. We had to walk to school in that period. The white kids had buses. Sometimes they would come by you and the buses would splash mud

on you, you know. All those things that I distinctly remember, and I distinctly remember that the books that we had was hand-me-downs. They were always a year or so behind the time.

DR. BERGGREN: It was from the white schools?

MR. EDGE: Right, it was handed down from the white schools, and those were the books that we had, and we studied from those, but we had very good teachers. They were very good; they were very dedicated to their work. As a matter of fact, I spoke with one of those old teachers last week, but she is in her nineties, and I didn't want to impose on her coming out here. You might could interview her at her house. If you wanted to, then I could arrange that.

DR. BERGGREN: I'd like to definitely get her name.

MR. EDGE: Her name is Maddie Clark—I'm sorry, not Maddie. Let's see, this is her first name. . . Gladys. She's Gladys Clark now, but at that time her name was Gladys Thomas. She was very efficient, very good at what—

DR. BERGGREN: What did she teach?

MR. EDGE: At the time that I went, she did math and history and that sort of thing. She's well adept with the system from that era because she was one of the best, and she was the basketball coach. Yeah, the basketball coach, and she was very good at what she did.

DR. BERGGREN: What school was this?

MR. EDGE: At that time, the school's name was Plains Rosenwald.

DR. BERGGREN: Plains Rosenwald.

MR. EDGE: I think the history would go back and show that Rosenwald built that school. I can't tell you where they came from or whatever, what kind of business they were in, but that was what was said—that the Rosenwalds built that school. At that time, Plains was totally, totally segregated. As they would say, blacks knew where they belonged, whites knew where they belonged, and that's the way they liked it. The first time that I remember meeting with President Carter was right after he came out of the navy, and he came to take over his father's business at that time, and that was my first encounter with him.

MR. EDGE: As far as the school system, it went from the first grade to the eighth grade here in Plains. Then if you wanted to further your education, you would have to get your own transportation at that time to Americus to continue.

DR. BERGGREN: For high school?

MR. EDGE: The name of the school was A. S. Staley High. That was the name of the school at that time. It was totally segregated, as I said before. Only black kids went there, and like I said, we had the secondhand books. That's the way it evolved for a long, long time until I would say 1954. Then things began to change because the Supreme Court sent documents and all that stuff. It went on that way until '54, and from then on it progressed upward until 1980 when my kids finally came to this school. Prior to that, the first kids that came to this school were the kids in the late '60s or early '70s. I'm quite sure about that.

MR. EDGE: My kids didn't come until the '80s, around the '80s. Around that time, there was a situation with the school board because they didn't want to build a proper school. What they at that time—I distinctly remember because I ran for the board at that time—they took all the children from both sides of the county and bundled them up at what is now the Health Department, or was the Health Department, and it was called Sumter High. Sumter High had all the kids. It was bunched up like forty kids in a classroom.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you know about what time frame this was?

MR. EDGE: This had to be anywhere from the late '70s to early '80s. In the early '80s, we formed a group called SCOPE, Sumter County for Public Education, or something like that. We had all the kids out of school, shut the whole system down. At that time, the school board would call in certain heads of that group. They tried to get us to settle, but we would not settle unless we got the school. That's why Sumter County has the schools that it has now, because we would not stop until we got a commitment that that school would be built. The way it was built, it was designed to be added on to. If you notice, if you were to ride out to Sumter County High, it was built to be added on to, but that never happened.

DR. BERGGREN: I see.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, it never happened. But when the time came when they put kids in different schools, it went back to Americus High, spending money on an old, dilapidated building, which still didn't do the job. Now, that brings you to today. There is a process of building another white high school, and that's how it's been all these years. It's a long story.

Attending Plains Rosenwald and Staley

DR. BERGGREN: Yes, sir. I want to go back to something: Are you saying the first school you attended was Plains Rosenwald School?

MR. EDGE: Plains Rosenwald, yes.

DR. BERGGREN: What grades were available?

MR. EDGE: From first through eighth.

DR. BERGGREN: First through eighth.

MR. EDGE: Yes, sure was.

DR. BERGGREN: You went all eight years to the Rosenwald School.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, I went all eight years there, and then I went one year in Americus. I only got a ninth-grade education.

DR. BERGGREN: Was that one year at Staley?

MR. EDGE: No, I got that after—after dropping out. At that time, back in those days, if a black man had a lot of boys, you'd work on a farm, and you had to stay out so many days to help out.

DR. BERGGREN: Out from school, you mean.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, stay of out of school—you would have to. The thing was, when I was going to Plains, I would stay out but I could always catch up. But when I got into the system in Americus, there were so many students, the teachers didn't have time for that. I got frustrated and dropped out. But after I got married, I went back and got my GED. If I had gotten [*inaudible*]. I did. That was around, that was in the '60s. That was in the '60s, it sure was.

DR. BERGGREN: What school was it in Americus that you attended?

MR. EDGE: Staley High.

DR. BERGGREN: Staley High, OK.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, that was Staley. Staley ran from nine through twelve. That's the way it went at that time.

DR. BERGGREN: At the Rosenwald School from grades one through eight, is that where Ms. Thomas had taught?

MR. EDGE: That's right, she was my teacher. Very efficient, and I always admired her courage because she told me at one time; she said, "Eugene." I can remember very well. "You have a head, use it for something besides a hat rack." Those were her words. "You're going to get it." At that time, she had to be in about her twenties—you know, young, brash, and determined. I guarantee you, she was. I can remember most of my teachers, I can.

DR. BERGGREN: What grade did she teach?

MR. EDGE: At that time, you transferred from one class to another. I think she mostly had the fifth, sixth grade—somewhere in that area, if I'm not mistaken. All of those teachers at that time were very good at what they did. They had to work. It's not like the modern-day teacher. In that era, there were teachers who had never been to college. You know what I'm saying? They were teaching. It was according to how smart a person was—that's the way it went.

DR. BERGGREN: How many teachers were there at Rosenwald—do you remember?

MR. EDGE: There was one called Ms. Jones and there was one named Maddie Hamilton and Bessie Hargrove, one called Ms. Walker—I can't remember her first name. Ms. Annie B. Floyd was the principal. There was also a gentleman there called Willie Paschal. He's on record in Americus. Then there was one called Constance Coley. But I think most of those people have passed, I think, except for Ms. Clark, and I saw Mr. Paschal over the weekend. I think over the weekend, yeah, I remember that. That's the way it ran.

DR. BERGGREN: How many classrooms were there?

MR. EDGE: I think there was, let me get it straight. There was about four to five classrooms or more, and always they had classes in the auditorium—they had classes in there. The main thing I think is they were just the general subjects like math, science as they had back then, history, and literature. But all these books, like I said, was out of date. Yeah, out of date, so you never got the best stuff.

Studying History

DR. BERGGREN: In terms of the subject matter, we've asked a couple of other residents, was black history ever taught?

MR. EDGE: No.

DR. BERGGREN: Were there any black figures?

MR. EDGE: I take that back. There was only a slight mention of Booker T. Washington. I think that's the only one I can remember being taught, and maybe George Washington Carver, but that was it. That was the extent of it, really. Even now, I don't understand that, I really don't. It's like even when I watch war movies and I know there were black soldiers in the service, but I never see anything that black soldiers did. That disturbs me a little bit. I know they did stuff because the Tuskegee Airmen were there, I know that, they were there. But we never got any information on that.

MR. EDGE: Even today, I look at the system, and I see a lot of smart black guys go into service, but I don't see much about them on the newscast and that disturbs me too. I'm not saying nowadays; I'm not laying it so much on a race thing. I think it's like a wisdom because they wasn't taught to be. That's my thing today. I tell my Sunday school class that if this generation does not teach the coming generation, then they're doomed to disaster. You have to be taught to do things.

MR. EDGE: Back then, they thought keeping a black man down was the right thing to do. It's never a good thing to keep a man down. The most educated person is the best person there is to deal with. That's a personal opinion, that is personal. I believe that you should be allowed to achieve your fullest potential, no matter what color.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember that bothering you at the time?

MR. EDGE: No, at that time, you were told that's the way it's supposed to be. That's what you had in that era. Now that people know better, it's a different story. I've always thought that you keep trying. You never give up. You ought to always dream. I am seventy-five years old and I still love to dream, what could be. . .

Classrooms and Restrooms

DR. BERGGREN: Going back to your school. You said there were about four or five classrooms.

MR. EDGE: Yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: How many students might be in a classroom per teacher?

MR. EDGE: Oh, God. It's hard to say right now. Somewhere at my house, I have a picture of that school, I think I do. I think I have a picture of it. I can picture it in my mind. There was a structure here, and on the side, we had two classrooms on each side. I think that each teacher had about two different classes in that one room. You can imagine what that was like. I can show you where the site is. I can even tell you how the restrooms were, which weren't restrooms; they were outhouses.

DR. BERGGREN: Is there any part of the structure remaining?

MR. EDGE: No. There's only a marker.

DR. BERGGREN: OK.

MR. EDGE: There's no [*inaudible*] there.

DR. BERGGREN: I'd like to see that site.

MR. EDGE: The boys' restroom, where they had to go was on this side—you go across the road to it. The girls' was on the left side, and they had to go out to it. There was these old coal or wood heaters in each classroom. In the afternoon, the boys would have to go out and get stuff to stay warm with coal or whatever for the next day, but that was the era. It wasn't like it is now. That was in my time.

DR. BERGGREN: How far was that school from Plains High School?

MR. EDGE: It's within the city limits. It's down 45, and if you see the brick church on that side, it was directly.... [Motions to document] I think it says right here it was within a hundred yards or something. It may not be in here but that's where it was, where the church is. By the way, that church wasn't.... Actually, the Baptist church originally was from a cemetery over there.

DR. BERGGREN: You're talking about Lebanon.

MR. EDGE: Right, Lebanon Cemetery. At that time, before my time, then they began to let blacks use it one Sunday and the whites would use it another Sunday, split up, and Lebanon kept the same name and they went on that side of town. This is information that my dad told me. Plains Baptist came right there.

DR. BERGGREN: Those two churches were originally using the same facility.

MR. EDGE: Right, meeting in the same building. That was the history I have on it. But Lebanon as a whole, I don't know if they had schools in there or what, I don't know. But the first thing I remember was Plains Rosenwald—that's what I remember, Plains Rosenwald.

Getting to School

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember any other schools for black students in this vicinity?

MR. EDGE: There was a school, I think [*inaudible*], and there was one up here, Concord, they call it at that time.

DR. BERGGREN: Concord, OK. [Concord was a white school. However, there was a school called Corinth.]

MR. EDGE: Then at that time, they merged that all into Plains Rosenwald.

DR. BERGGREN: I see.

MR. EDGE: That's the way it came to be large as it was. When they built the new school, like I said, it only went as far as the eighth grade then. Once you finished the eighth grade, you were bused to Americus. When they did finally get black buses, you knew what bus you went on because the body was yellow and the fenders were black. The bus was yellow and black.

DR. BERGGREN: That's how you knew.

MR. EDGE: Exactly, exactly. Like I said, the world has grown up from that, I hope.

DR. BERGGREN: You had to ride a bus into Americus.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, I had to ride a bus into Americus.

DR. BERGGREN: In town here, you had to walk to school. How far was the walk?

MR. EDGE: I had to walk to school the whole time. We would catch the bus at school when we were going to Americus. We had to walk to school. Some kids walked about two miles or more, some kids. I walked total about a mile because we lived on the west side—basically almost where I live now. We lived there and we had to walk. Back in those days, it was only dirt roads. If it rained, there would be ice popping up out of the ground, and you'd see it if you walked to school. That's why I say they would come by sometimes; you would get mud on you from that bus. That's the way it was; you knew that. Until you learn better, you don't do better.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you see white students going to school as well?

MR. EDGE: They were going to [Plains High School].

DR. BERGGREN: Did the paths of black students and white students cross at all?

MR. EDGE: Not that I remember because, like I said, the blacks were on this side. Everything of the white race was coming here to this school right here. They had all the comforts and everything.

DR. BERGGREN: But you remember seeing the buses.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, you definitely saw it because they would go by you in the morning. But as far as you interacting with them, it didn't happen. It did not.

Driving for Ms. Julia Coleman and Mr. Alton Carter

DR. BERGGREN: You had never entered into this school [Plains High School] at any time?

MR. EDGE: No, I had never come in here before it became a National Historic Site.

DR. BERGGREN: Oh really? That was the first time.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, that's right. Like I said, about Ms. Coleman. She was President Carter's teacher, and my brother was her driver because she could not drive because she had a handicap.

DR. BERGGREN: Your brother drove for Ms. Coleman?

MR. EDGE: Ms. Coleman, yeah. He drove for her, and when he couldn't, I would have to. I would tell you something else—I was President Carter's uncle's chauffeur for a time. He was in the horse business. Did you ever hear of Uncle Buddy?

DR. BERGGREN: Yes.

MR. EDGE: They called him Mr. [*inaudible*].

DR. BERGGREN: This was Mr. Earl's brother, right?

MR. EDGE: Mr. Earl's brother. I would drive for him, I would take him into Atlanta, over in Alabama, up in Tennessee. He bought horses; we'd go buy horses and he would send his truck to pick them up. Here's the part that sticks with me. When we were stopped to get food, he would take me to the back and tell them, "Give him anything he wants; bring me the bill up front." We were in the same car together, but we couldn't eat together. I didn't understand that, and I still don't.

MR. EDGE: That's the way he was. He had his way, he had his right to how he felt. The only thing I say is "I got feelings too." You see, because my skin is darker doesn't mean I don't feel. That's the way I looked at it. I think he was one of those people that was against the race issue. His kids came to school up here. He was the banker, he was the man. I was his chauffeur.

MR. EDGE: Then when it come to trying to get a motel at night, he would go to a motel and get his room and then give me money: "Go get you one." OK, but that's one time I got over on him. He would give me the money and then I'd take the car around to the back of the motel and find a safe place and sleep in the car and keep the money. That's what I did. I kid you not. He paid me for driving. It's what you'd pay a black person of that era. But he never knew [about] the money he gave me. . . . I would lock the car down, and I would sleep in the car. I was young, and it didn't really matter. I wasn't afraid. The world wasn't as terrible as it is now.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember how many years you did that or how long you had done that?

MR. EDGE: How long I drove for him?

DR. BERGGREN: Yes.

MR. EDGE: That was between '59 and the early '60s. I don't know how many years in the '60s, but anyway, it started about '59 because I wasn't yet married.

DR. BERGGREN: Was that your primary job during that time?

MR. EDGE: No, no. I was working the farm with my dad, and this was just part-time. Actually, I unloaded peanuts with President Carter when he first came out of the navy. He probably don't even remember it. I was just another black guy making extra money. I kid you not, he worked just like anybody else, he did. He was a hard worker. Like I said, at that time, he didn't join the racist group. He did not, to my remembrance.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you have any interactions with Mr. Carter?

MR. EDGE: No, only that one time. I knew of him and what he stood for because there's always somebody gonna talk.

DR. BERGGREN: Right. You saw him or what you knew of him. . .there was a distinction between Mr. Carter on matters of race and the larger community. You could see daylight.

MR. EDGE: I would say he and his mom, totally different—his mom, Ms. Lillian. She was the kind of person who stood up for what she believed in, and that part I do know. If she didn't agree with you, she would tell you, and I think that's the way it was with him.

DR. BERGGREN: . . . You knew Ms. Lillian.

MR. EDGE: Definitely, so. I knew her [*inaudible*]. I think that this is a personal thing—President Carter and Ms. Lillian were two of a kind. I can't tell you much about his dad because I rarely saw him. But I definitely know about Uncle Buddy.

Meeting Mr. Jimmy Carter for the First Time

DR. BERGGREN: Mr. Jimmy Carter, can you talk about the first time you met him?

MR. EDGE: The first time I met him?

DR. BERGGREN: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

MR. EDGE: The first time I met him was after he come out of the navy. It was during peanut season. You've got to pick up peanuts. We had kind of called up, as they called it back then. Work was light. I would go down and make extra money. We would help unload trailers, and he was up there himself and I unloaded some trailers with him. That was my first interaction with him, sure was.

DR. BERGGREN: When he started entering into politics, did you follow his career at all?

MR. EDGE: No, I did not. I was not into politics then. I was not. To be honest with you, I was more into girls then at that time in my life. I didn't get into politics until it affected my kids. That's when I became involved in politics.

Entering Politics—Running for the School Board, 1980

DR BERGGREN: What kind of political activities have you been involved with?

MR. EDGE: I ran for the board of education. As a matter of fact, I ran against a permanent lady here in town, Ms. Sewell, Martha Sewell.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember when that was when you ran?

MR. EDGE: This was 1980.

DR. BERGGREN: 1980.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, 1980. Because it was four of us from this organization who ran against that current school board. Actually, we won, but you know how they manipulate things.

DR. BERGGREN: Were you one of the first African American candidates to run for school board?

MR. EDGE: For school board? I can't say that I was the first, but I know that I ran in 1980. I can tell you who the first black councilperson was in Plains. It was a man named Henry Jackson.

DR. BERGGREN: Henry Jackson.

MR. EDGE: Henry Jackson, yeah. I can't give you the dates and times on that either, but I know that he was the first one.

DR. BERGGREN: Did you pursue any other elective offices after school board?

MR. EDGE: Me? I am on the council now.

DR. BERGGREN: OK, and how long have you been on there?

MR. EDGE: Since the early '90s. Yeah, since the early '90s, and that's been rewarding to me in a way because I've seen it change also. Really, from the way it was to the way it is now. I want to say this also, we have a very, very fine mayor, Mr. Godwin. He's an honest, fair person. That's my personal opinion.

DR. BERGGREN: Boze Godwin, right?

MR. EDGE: Right. He's a very fair man and he's soft-spoken also. He's not this rowdy loud type of person. He's very well put together.

DR. BERGGREN: I know it's a little bit afar from the topic of education, but I'm interested in also knowing more about you. You said that things had been very different on the city council. Can you talk a little bit about city council politics?

MR. EDGE: Yeah, the city council, when I first got on there, it wasn't as. . . It's totally equal now, we are three/three.

DR. BERGGREN: When you say "three/three," what does that mean?

MR. EDGE: As far as council representation. There's a good atmosphere there. It's not like you've got to watch what you say. Everyone speaks their opinion; everyone's opinion is respected. There's a lot of differing. For instance, we all know our roles. I am the streets and subdivisions, and someone else is whatever, and we make our reports and realize that the mayor is depending on you to handle your part. It's not a. . .how shall I say? A figure-head. I never liked that. Don't put me there to make it look good. If you're gonna have me to do a thing, don't do it just for show. I demand respect.

DR. BERGGREN: So I understand Plains politics, how many city council seats are there?

MR. EDGE: There are six.

DR. BERGGREN: There are six and then the mayor.

MR. EDGE: And the mayor, yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: There's a total of seven individuals.

MR. EDGE: Seven total, yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: How many are African American?

MR. EDGE: Three.

DR. BERGGREN: Three.

MR. EDGE: It's three-three.

DR. BERGGREN: Gotcha, OK.

MR. EDGE: Every time I say, "I'm not gonna run anymore," then I get a lot of feedback, but one of these days I have to quit.

DR. BERGGREN: You've served there a very long time, more than two decades.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, I've been there, like I said, since the early '90s. I've seen the attitudes of councilpersons change. Now, I can't say why, but it's a more relaxed atmosphere and it's more togetherness than it used to be.

DR. BERGGREN: Compared to when you first started.

MR. EDGE: Right, togetherness. That's what I respect in this council. There's a very good [*inaudible*]—naturally, I would say that. But I really mean it. The mayor don't just come in and dictate whatever. It is a council; we discuss.

Rosenwald School Advice: "Got a Head, Use It"

DR. BERGGREN: In your preparation for becoming of community leader and a political leader, would you connect any of your interests, traits, or abilities to your experience at the Rosenwald school?

MR. EDGE: From the old school?

DR. BERGGREN: Mm-hmm.

MR. EDGE: I don't think. . .

DR. BERGGREN: Do you feel it prepared you for that kind of role?

MR. EDGE: No, I don't think so. Unless [my teacher] instilled in me the values of doing what you believe in. Again, maybe that came from my mom and dad. My mom was the kind of lady who was kind of hard-nosed. She taught me values. You always have to have something that you believe in, and I still feel that way, I really do. I don't believe in sitting there because a person says you can't do something. If you tell me I can't, then it makes me more determined to see that I can. That's the way I am, and that's the way I've always been taught. That's what Gladys Thomas taught me: "You've got a head, use it."

Teachers at the Rosenwald School

DR. BERGGREN: What would you say were the strengths of the Rosenwald school that you attended?

MR. EDGE: Rosenwald?

DR. BERGGREN: Yeah, the strengths of it.

MR. EDGE: I think the strength of it was the teachers.

DR. BERGGREN: The teachers? Did they have formal training?

MR. EDGE: I can't tell you what kind of training they had because most of them were there when I first went. I think their determination to teach you a better way made the difference, really. It really did. Like I said, Principal Annie B. Floyd, she really ran the thing, she did.

DR. BERGGREN: You really respected your teachers and your principal.

MR. EDGE: I did, I did. I think they demanded it. Like you see parents go into schools now because a teacher has disciplined their child. It didn't happen. My mom never went to the school. As a matter of fact, if I got in trouble in school, I was in trouble at home. That's the way it was. I really think the teachers made the difference. The instructors, they really worked with you. I was in the school play one year. I had the secondary role, and the guy who had the main role lived further out in the country and he couldn't come to the play that night. One of the teachers directing the play, she said, "Eugene, can't you do this part? He's not here." I said, "Yes, ma'am. I think I can." I did both parts that night.

MR. EDGE: The next day, she gave me a reward. I went into the little kitchen they had.... At lunchtime, they would sell croquettes and grits to those that could buy. We were poor; we couldn't buy. I went in there that morning; somebody asked me to go in there and get them something. I went in there and I remember, it was Bessie Congrove, that was her name. She said, "Eugene, you did good last time." I said, "Thank you, ma'am." She said, "Come on, I'm gonna buy you an ice cream." A reward for doing what you do. That's the reward for you just doing the best you can.

Favorite School Subjects

DR. BERGGREN: What were your favorite subjects in school?

MR. EDGE: History.

DR. BERGGREN: History?

MR. EDGE: Yeah, history and math. Those were my favorite subjects. I loved that.

DR. BERGGREN: What did you like about history?

MR. EDGE: What it told me about the past, stuff that happened before I came, and I loved that—I still do. I try to keep up. You've got to take the past; the past will help you shape your future. I loved history and I loved math, I did. As a matter of fact, I challenged Ms. Floyd one day in a class. She was teaching math over in the new school and being the principal as well. She had an algebra problem on the board, and a couple of the guys worked it out, but it was wrong and I knew it was wrong. She come and she says, "Yeah, that's right." I said, "No, ma'am. That's not right. That is not right." She said, "Yes, it is." I said, "No ma'am. It's not right." She said, "You come up here and work it out then." When I did, she said, "Yeah, that's right. If you believe in something, you stick to it." I knew it was wrong because I had done it over and over on paper, and I knew that my way was right and theirs was not right.

Religion at School

DR. BERGGREN: It's been noted here at the Plains High School that religion was incorporated into the curriculum, such as maybe going to the auditorium for chapel. Was there any kind of religious aspect to your schooling?

MR. EDGE: Yes. You had the devotion. The devotion, I believe it was every morning. It was somewhere in the auditorium.

DR. BERGGREN: For everybody.

MR. EDGE: Yeah, everybody. All classes were assembled there, and they would have morning devotion. I don't know if they did scripture, but I know they did song and prayer every morning and then you went to your classes.

DR. BERGGREN: Was it like a five- or ten-minute kind of. . .

MR. EDGE: Yeah, it wasn't a long, drawn-out thing, but they were gonna have a devotional period. I think that it was a terrible mistake when they took the Bible out, I really do. I don't want to get too. . .

DR. BERGGREN: Was the Bible ever used as a text?

MR. EDGE: Sometimes we'd use the scripture, yeah, sure would. It was very much so—how shall I say it—then they would pledge allegiance to the flag and that sort of thing. Every Friday, at that time, you would have a 4-H Club meeting, every Friday. They would put on a little skit, song. But when I went to Americus, we had the chorus, of course. I was singing in the chorus, and the person that was teaching the chorus wanted to make a vocalist out of me—a soloist, I'm sorry. But then I had to stay out of school. That shut that back. When I went back to school, they had fired the chorus instructor. They fired him because they caught him drinking. I missed out on that. There were a lot of experiences that I had.

Extracurricular Activities

DR. BERGGREN: At your school, at the Rosenwald school, were there extracurricular activities?

MR. EDGE: They had basketball and they had stuff like baseball and basketball. The basketball was the most active [*inaudible*]. Like I said, that's what Gladys. . .

DR. BERGGREN: Were there other sports?

MR. EDGE: Those were the only ones that were offered. They didn't offer stuff like tennis, stuff like that, hockey. That wasn't heard of.

DR. BERGGREN: Were there clubs like student council or. . .

MR. EDGE: The only club there was the 4-H club.

DR. BERGGREN: The 4-H Club.

MR. EDGE: They may have had home economics, and that was brought in by some of the teachers, I think. It wasn't offered as a subject, I don't think. I'm not sure about that.

DR. BERGGREN: Were you part of any extracurricular activities?

MR. EDGE: No, I love to watch sports, but I never could play. . . . I am still a sports fan, but I don't like to do it. I was a member of the 4-H Club and a part of the program up at [*inaudible*].

Start of School for Black and White Children

DR. BERGGREN: I have read that white schools and black schools may have started the school year at different times. Was that true in your case?

MR. EDGE: I think that they started about the same time. I'm not quite sure about that because it all started in September.

DR. BERGGREN: OK, in September.

MR. EDGE: I think it all started in September. The only difference I can remember is that the whites got a chance to go over to the schools first and the black kids were out gathering the crops. That might be what they were talking about. That was the case with me, I do know. I couldn't start when the other kids started because in those days if you had cotton in the field, it had to be gathered, and it was about that time of year. If there were peanuts in the field, the peanuts had to be gathered. That put the black kid at a disadvantage, especially the male side.

DR. BERGGREN: You were doing that?

MR. EDGE: That was the male part. The male side had to go out there and help their dad gather the crop because that was part of his livelihood, and he needed the male help more so than the female help so they got a chance to go. That's why I think black girls are better educated than black boys, because they could go to school when the boys couldn't. Sometimes I think that black males got disenfranchised from being held back. I think if they had had the kind of education that is available now, they would have appreciated it more than they do now.

DR. BERGGREN: Was it in the case of your experience that black girls might have already been in school before you were able to go?

MR. EDGE: Definitely so, definitely so. Like I said, the girls could go but those males had to work. Consequently, girls got a better education.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember how long of a delay there was?

MR. EDGE: I would say anywhere from two weeks to a month at least.

DR. BERGGREN: It was up to a month.

MR. EDGE: For instance, if you have a crop, cotton, you're gonna have all the machines to pick the cotton, you have to pull up the form. The peanuts, once they dried, they had to be picked.... Consequently, the boys were late going to school because their fathers needed them to help support the family. Any black man who had a lot of boys, he was in demand. That's the way it was.

Parental Influence

DR. BERGGREN: Could you talk a little bit about your parents?

MR. EDGE: My parents, OK. Like I said about my mom, my mom was a very headstrong lady, very headstrong. My dad was a gentle giant. He was very, very gentle but strong. Strong man, and he believed in his faith and you didn't change him, you didn't change him....

DR. BERGGREN: Do you think your parents were your biggest influences?

MR. EDGE: My dad, yes, of course. My dad was my hero. My dad and, like I said, my brother who was ten years older than me, I respected them better than I did anybody, I really did. My dad was a special kind of guy. He wasn't gonna argue with you. If he told you no, it was no. You didn't have to worry about it. That was what he meant. I heard my mom fussing at him from time to time, and he said, "Oh honey, that don't make any sense." I learned from that. I learned patience from him. You've got to be patient sometimes. I also learned this: Everything has a season, everything. Nothing stays the same. Life changes. You change from a child to a teenager, teenage to an adult, a young adult to an elderly adult. Seasons—everything has one, I don't care what it is. That's the way I patterned my life. In my childhood days, I acted like a child. As I grew older, I began to change. I think that happens to everybody whether they recognize it or not....

DR. BERGGREN: Were your parents both natives of Sumter County?

MR. EDGE: My dad, I guess you can't say that. He was from up around Andersonville, and my mom was born in Sumter County. My dad originated from the Carolinas. His parents originate from the Carolinas.

DR. BERGGREN: But your mom is from Sumter County?

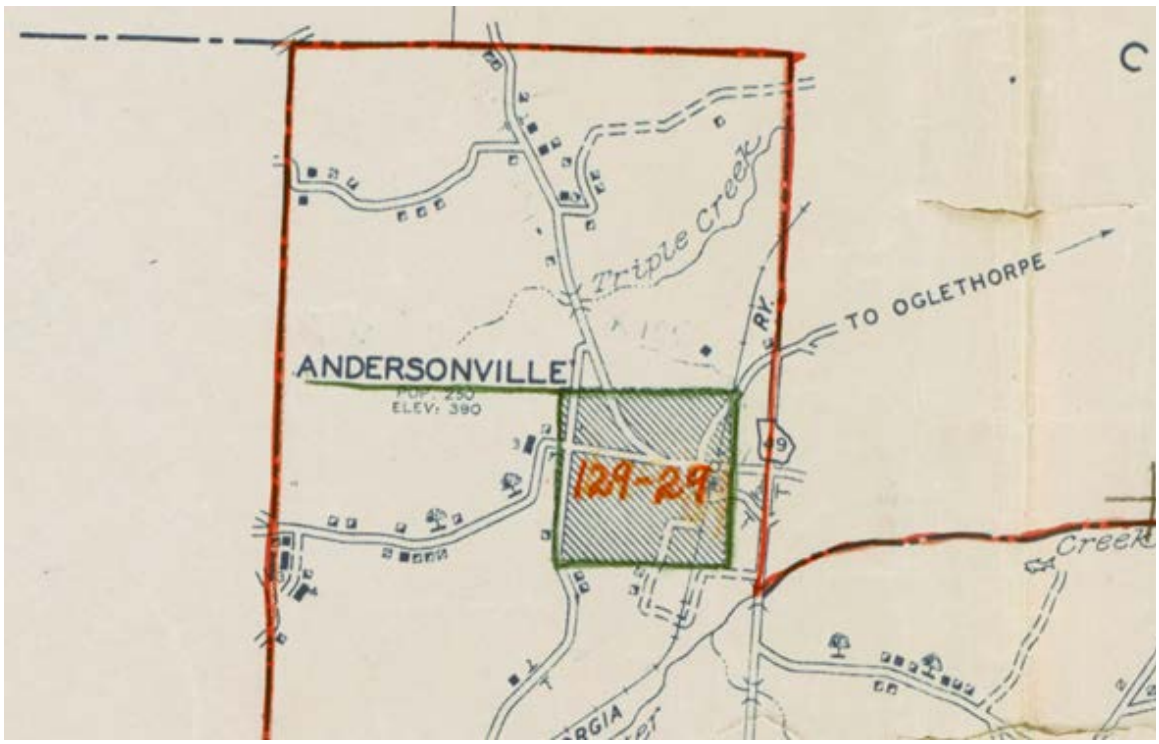
MR. EDGE: My mom was. Her father was a minister. Her brothers, two of them were deacons of the church.

DR. BERGGREN: Did they have any formal schooling?

MR. EDGE: Yeah, they went to some schooling. I don't know, it might have been homeschooling or what it was, but they had some. All of them could read and write.

Profiles of White Sumter County Public Schools, 1940–1941

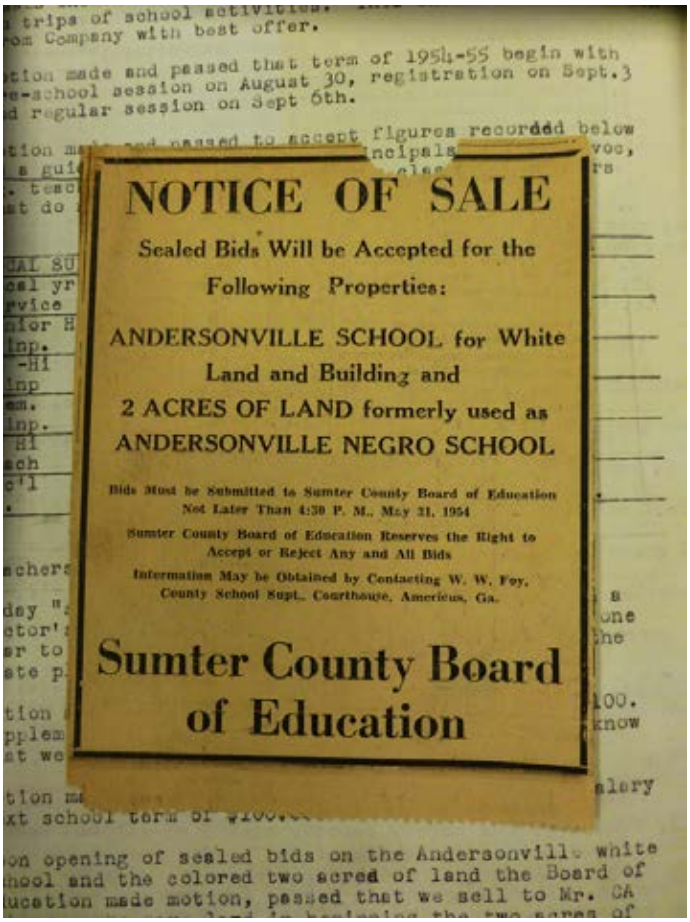
Figure 3.3. Andersonville School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Northeast of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	5 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (4 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	4
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	81 (42 boys, 39 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	Yes, 1 bus (steel/wood body type)

Figure 3.4. Notice of Sale—Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 1, 1954



NOTICE OF SALE

Sealed Bids Will be Accepted for the Following Properties:

ANDERSONVILLE SCHOOL for White Land and Building and 2 ACRES OF LAND formerly used as ANDERSONVILLE NEGRO SCHOOL

Bids Must be Submitted to Sumter County Board of Education Not Later Than 4:30 P. M., May 31, 1954

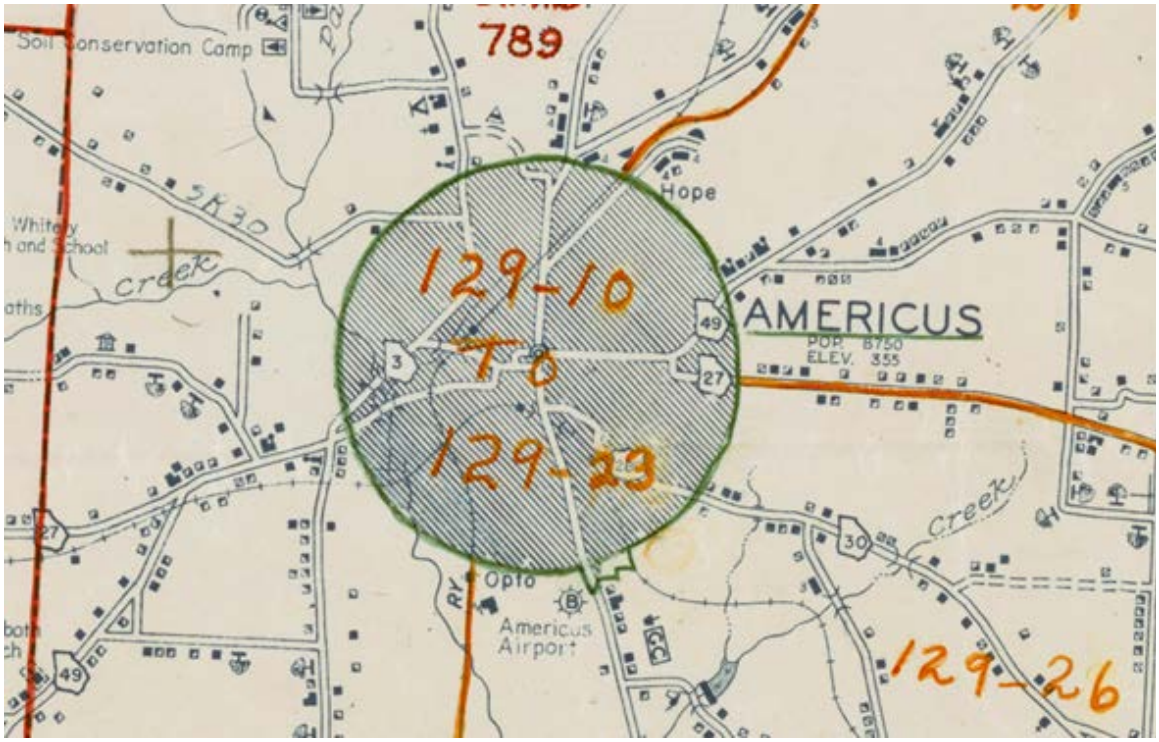
Sumter County Board of Education Reserves the Right to Accept or Reject Any and All Bids

Information May be Obtained by Contacting W. W. Foy, County School Supt., Courthouse, Americus, Ga.

Sumter County Board of Education

Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 1, 1954

Figure 3.5. Anthony School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	Anthony Street and Edgewood Drive
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	6 (6 with 4-yr college)
Classrooms:	5
Seating:	Patent desks and other seating
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	147 (91 boys, 56 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	Yes, 2 buses (steel type)

Figure 3.6. Anthony School main building, a property of the GSW Foundation, located at 952 Anthony Street, Americus. The bottom photo shows the east side of the building.





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.6 (cont'd). The back of the Anthony School (top) and the west side of the Anthony School building (bottom)





Figure 3.7. Images of the Anthony School building and site at demolition, March–April 2021



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.7. (cont'd)









Figure 3.7. (cont'd)

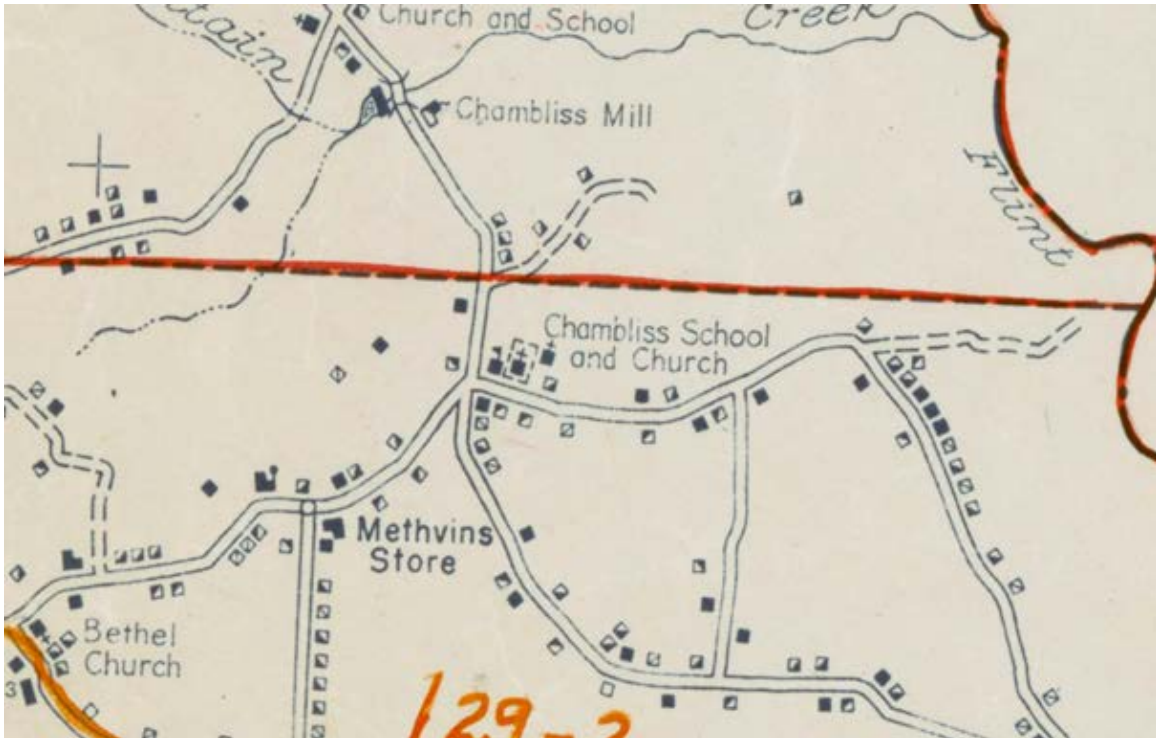








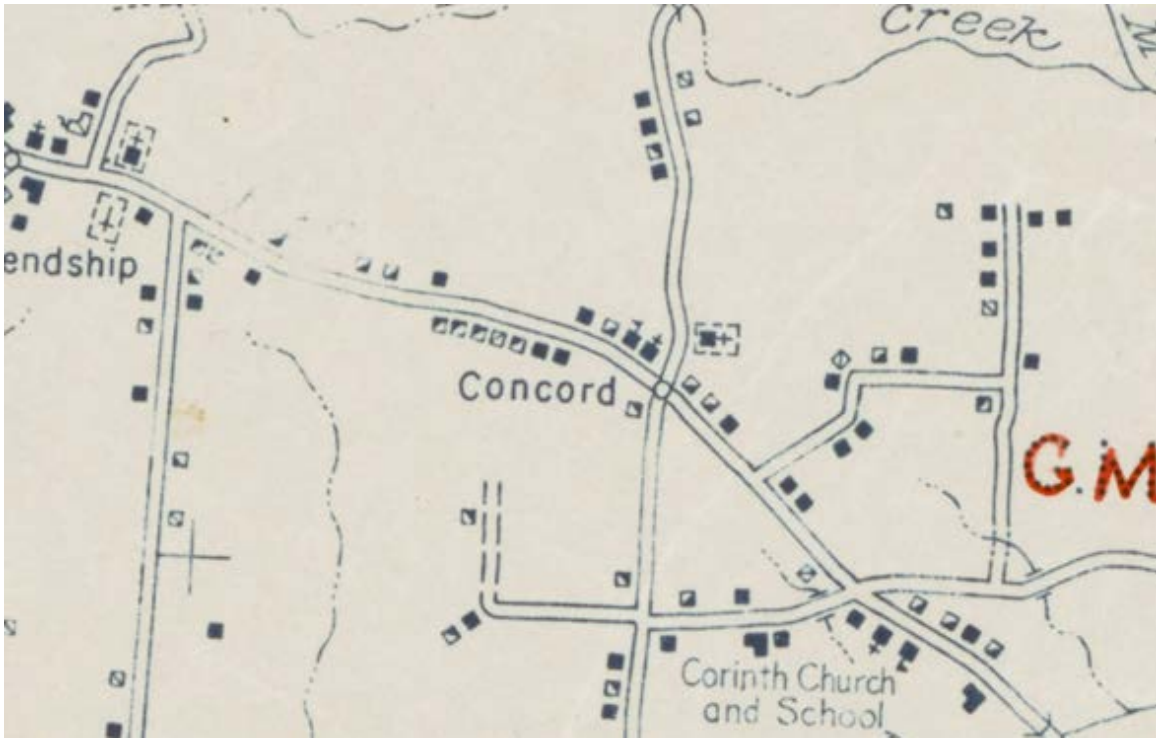
Figure 3.8. Chambliss School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Southeast of Andersonville, Georgia
Proximity:	GA Hwy 195 and Chambliss Road
Lot Size:	3.5 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (3 with 4-yr college, 1 with 3-yr college)
Classrooms:	4
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	88 (48 boys, 40 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	Yes, 2 buses (1 steel type, 1 steel/wood body type)

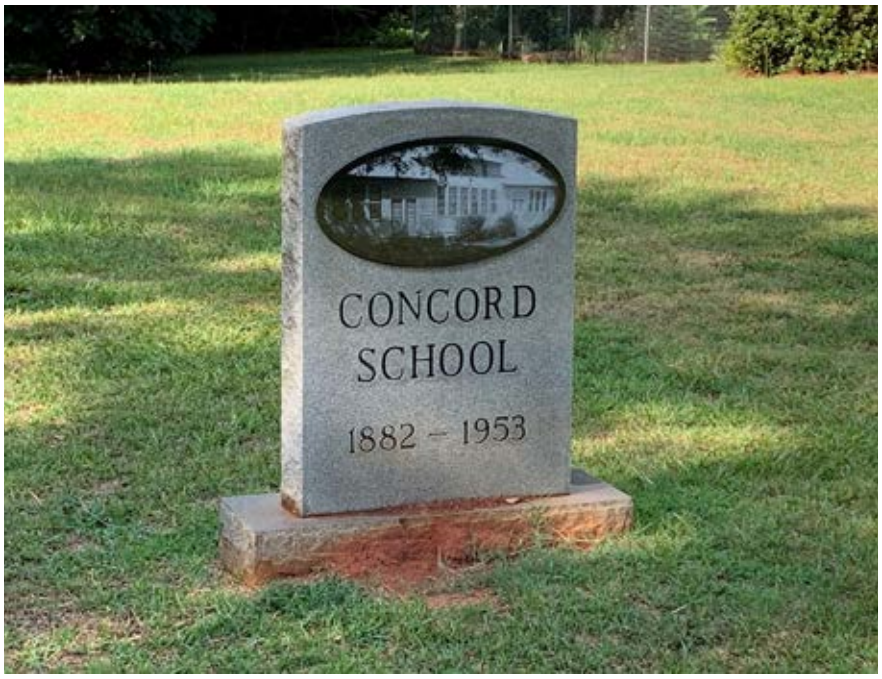
Figure 3.9. Concord School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Northwest of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	GA Hwy 30 and GA Hwy 45
Lot Size:	4 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (1 with 3-yr college, 3 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	4
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	63 (41 boys, 22 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	Yes, 1 bus (steel/wood body type)

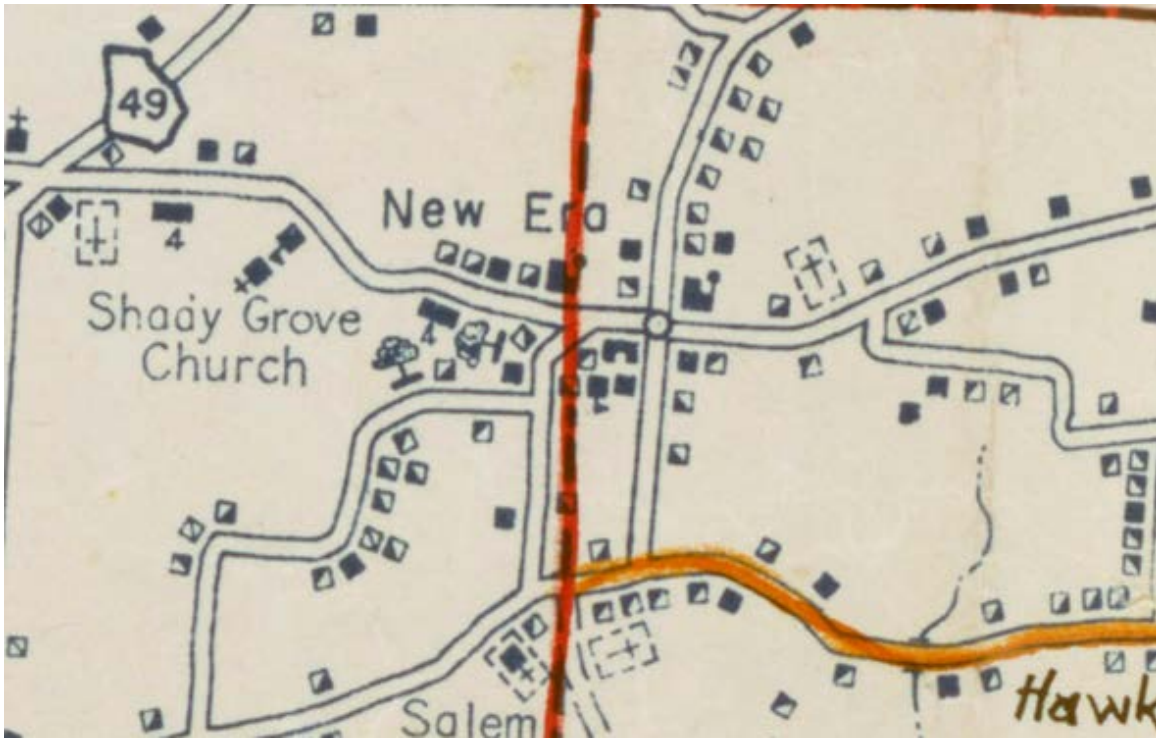
Figure 3.10. Concord School monument (top) and Concord United Methodist Church, adjacent to former school site (bottom)





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.11. New Era School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Northeast of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	New Era Road and Tom Summers Road
Lot Size:	4 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	5 (3 with 4-yr college, 1 with 3-yr college, 1 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	5
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	147 (76 boys, 71 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	Yes, 3 buses (1 steel body type, 2 steel/wood)

Figure 3.12. New Era School main building and cafeteria as residential property, located at 448 New Era Road, Americus



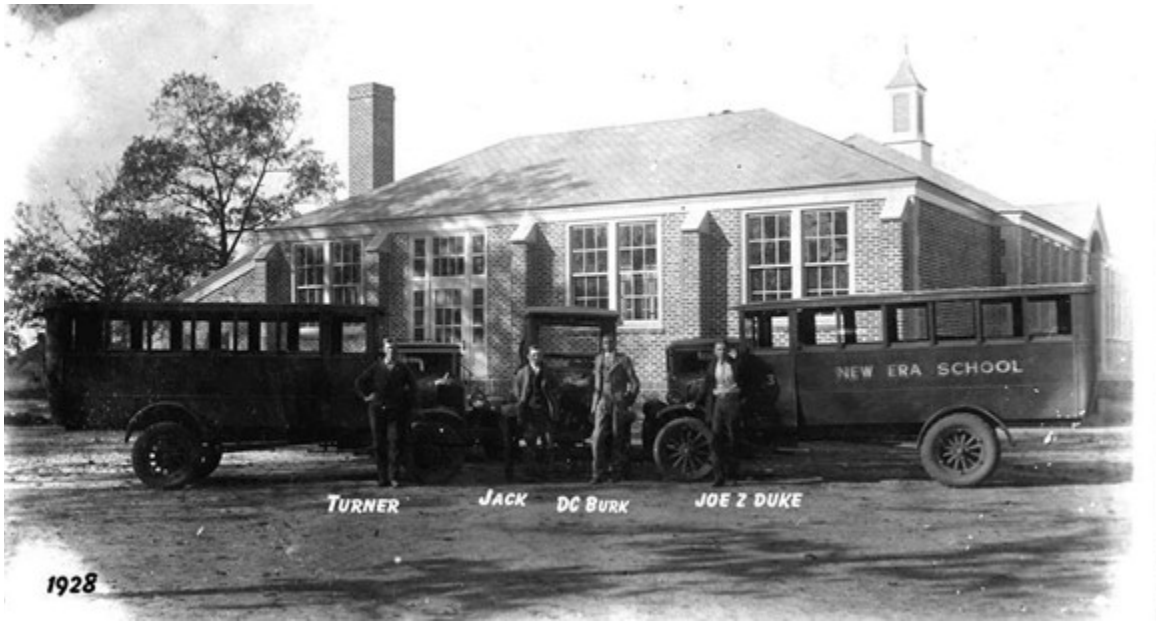
Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.13. New Era School auditorium



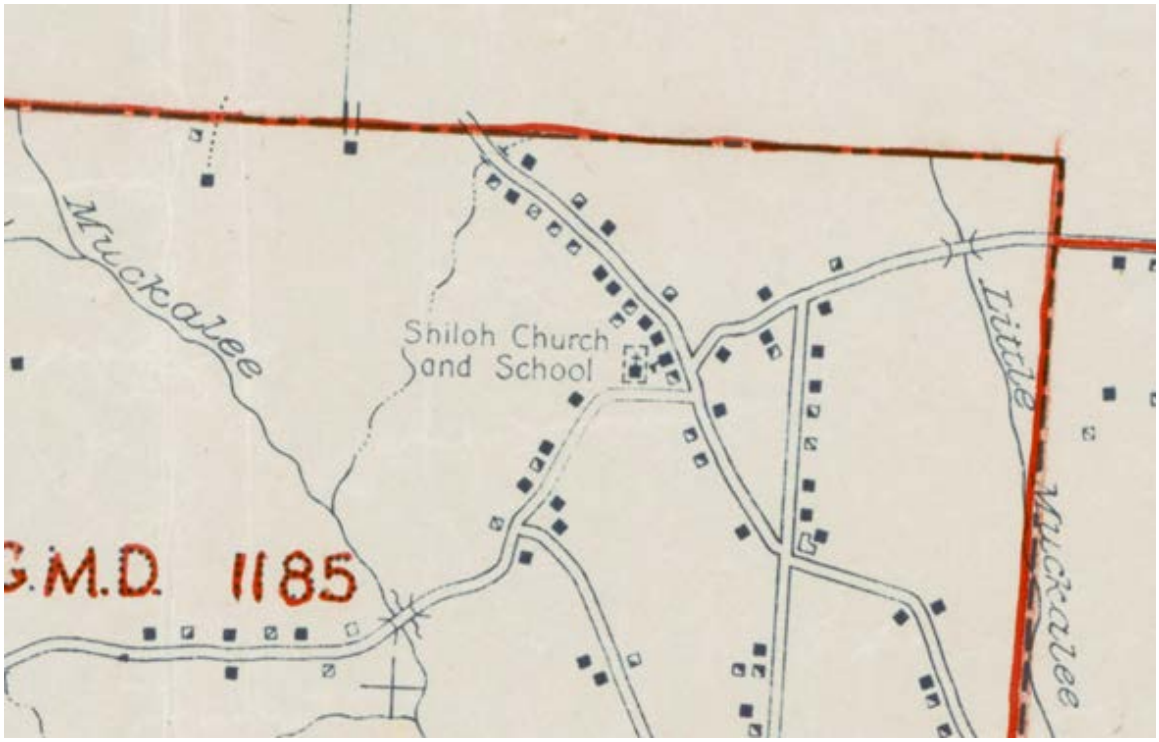
Photos posted by Realtor.com. Images located by Mary McGarr.

Figure 3.14. 1928 school transportation photo



Posted by Realtor.com

Figure 3.15. Shiloh School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Northwest of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	Shiloh Road and Lasco Harvey Road
Lot Size:	5 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Incinerator
Faculty:	5 (1 with 4-yr college, 2 with 3-yr college, 2 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	6
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	81 (45 boys, 36 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	Yes, 1 bus (steel/wood body type)

Figure 3.16. Shiloh School building as church property (top); Shiloh Baptist Church, 961 Shiloh Road (bottom)



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.17. Inside the main entrance to the Shiloh School Building



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.18. Hallway view, north entrance to the Shiloh School building

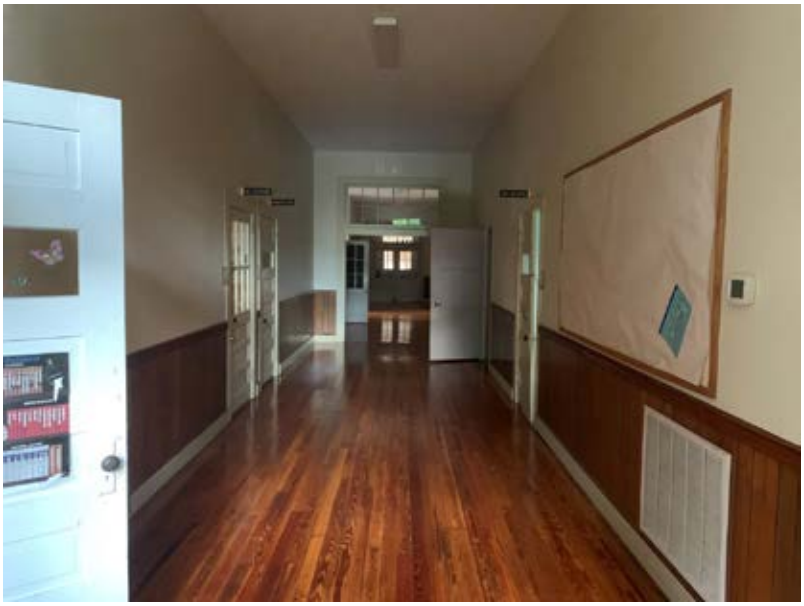


Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.19. Shiloh School building cornerstone



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.20. Recognition of the school as a WPA project (bottom)



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.21. Thalean School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Southwest of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	GA Hwy 49 and Salters Mill Road
Lot Size:	13 acres
Building Type:	Brick and wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	5 (1 with 4-yr college, 4 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	5
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	124 (57 boys, 67 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	Yes, 3 buses (1 steel body type, 2 other types)

Figure 3.22. Thalean School structures on the residential property of Ira N. Kelly, located at 770 GA Hwy 49 S, Americus





Photos by D. Jason Berggren





Figure 3.22. (cont'd)









Figure 3.23. Thompson School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

=Location:	Southwest of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	GA Hwy 308 and Croxton Cross Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	3 (3 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	5
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	50 (28 boys, 22 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1—7
Public Transportation:	Yes, 1 bus (steel and wood body type)

Figure 3.24. Union High School



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

=Location:	Leslie, Georgia
Proximity:	173 E. Allen Street
Lot Size:	10 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	13 (1 with 5-yr college, 10 with 4-yr college, 1 with 3-yr college, 1 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	12
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	245 (121 boys, 124 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–11
Public Transportation:	Yes, 3 buses (3 steel type)

Figure 3.25. Union High School site as municipal public property, located at 173 E. Allen Street, Leslie

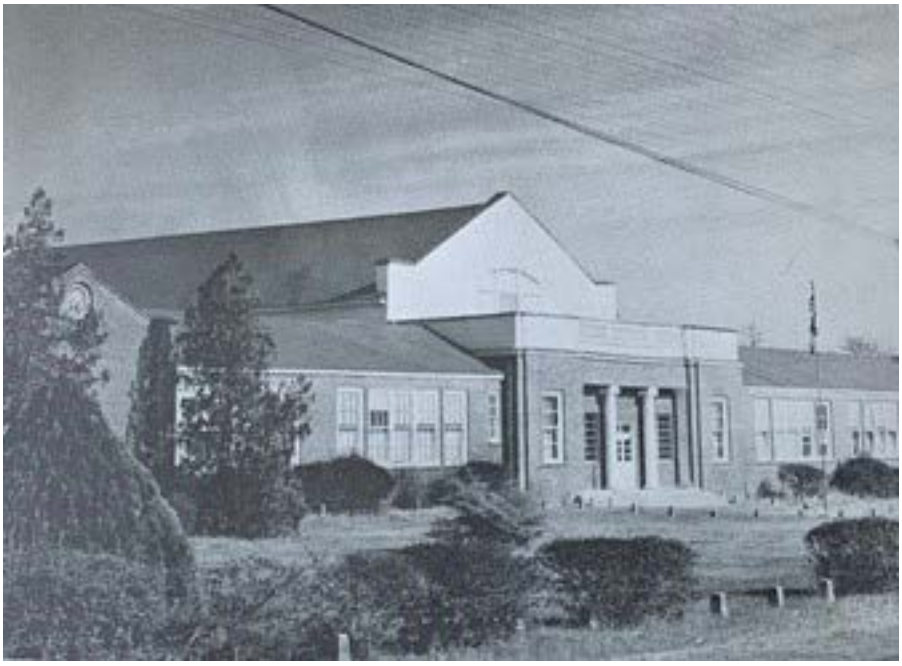




Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.26. 1968 (top) and 1969 (bottom) yearbook photos of Union High School Main Entrance

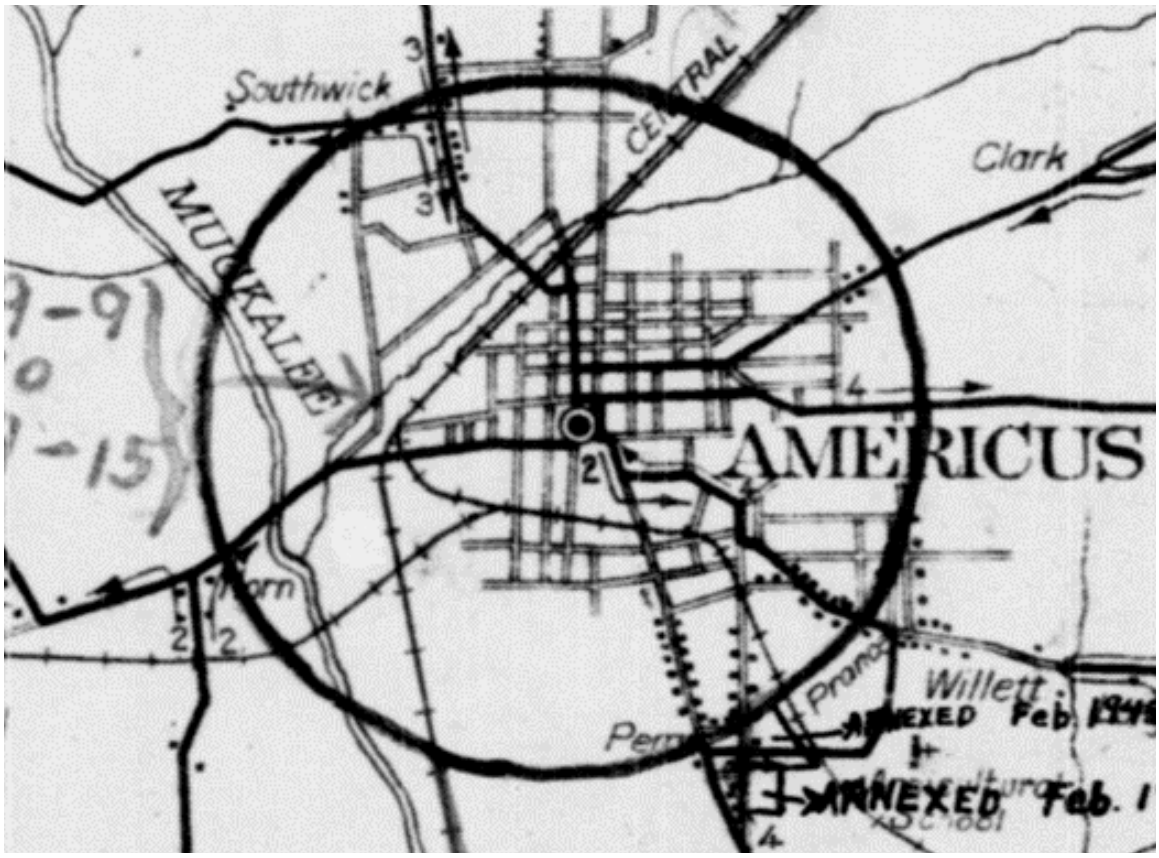




Courtesy of Claude Frazier

Profiles of White Americus City Public Schools, 1940–1941

Figure 3.27. Americus High School



1940 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	805 Harrold Ave
Lot Size:	5 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	12 (5 with 5-yr college, 7 with 4-yr college)
Classrooms:	10
Seating:	Other classroom desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	322 (156 boys, 166 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	9–11
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.28. Americus High School main building and sign (later Americus-Sumter), located at 805 Harrold Avenue, Americus





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

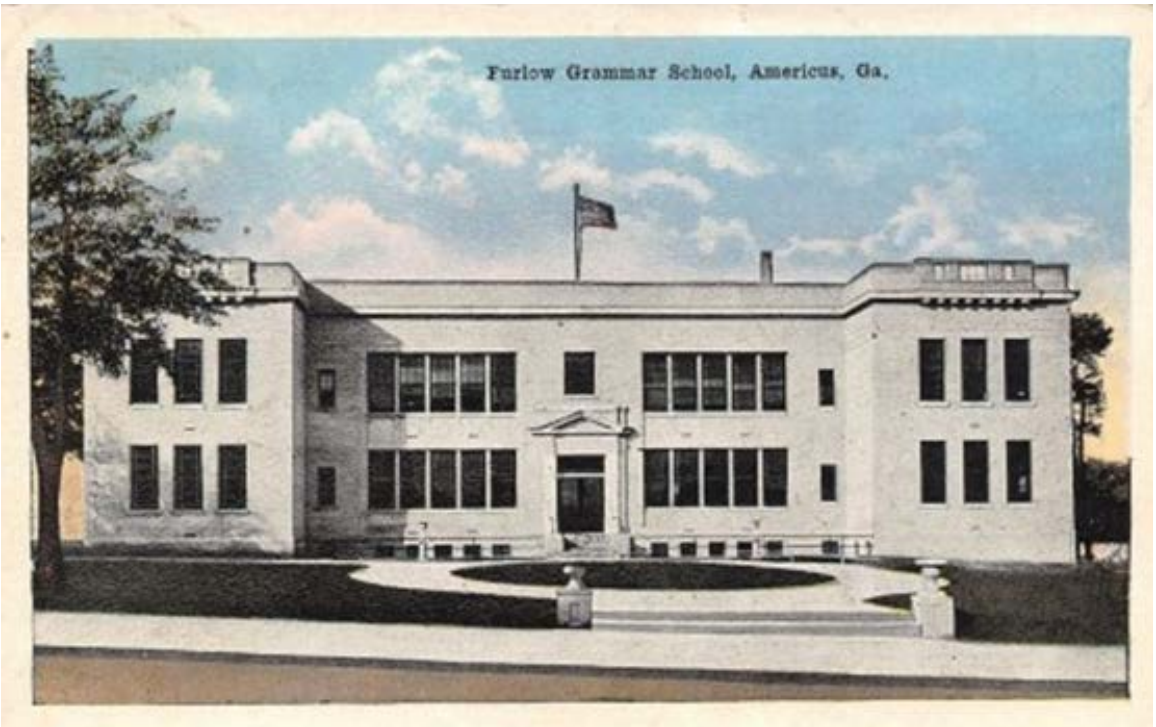
Figure 3.29. Americus Junior High School—Rees Park



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	409 Elm Avenue
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	8 (7 with 4-yr college, 1 with 3-yr college)
Classrooms:	10
Seating:	Patent desks and other seating
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	264 (134 boys, 130 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	6–8
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.30. Furlow Grammar School



Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	411 S. Jackson Street
Lot Size:	4 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	11 (7 with 4-yr college, 3 with 3-yr college, 1 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	16
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	343 (183 boys, 160 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.31. Furlow Grammar School, located at 411 S. Jackson Street, Americus, from the front and side





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.32. Timothy Mathews Furlow (1814–1890), original Americus City School Board member



Figure 3.33. Furlow grave at Oak Grove Cemetery, Americus



Find A Grave, Oak Grove Cemetery, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.34. Grave of Miss Sarah Pope Cobb (1870–1959), long-serving Furlow educator and principal; Buried at Oak Grove Cemetery, Americus



Find A Grave, Oak Grove Cemetery, Americus, Georgia

Profiles of Black Sumter County Public Schools, 1940–1941

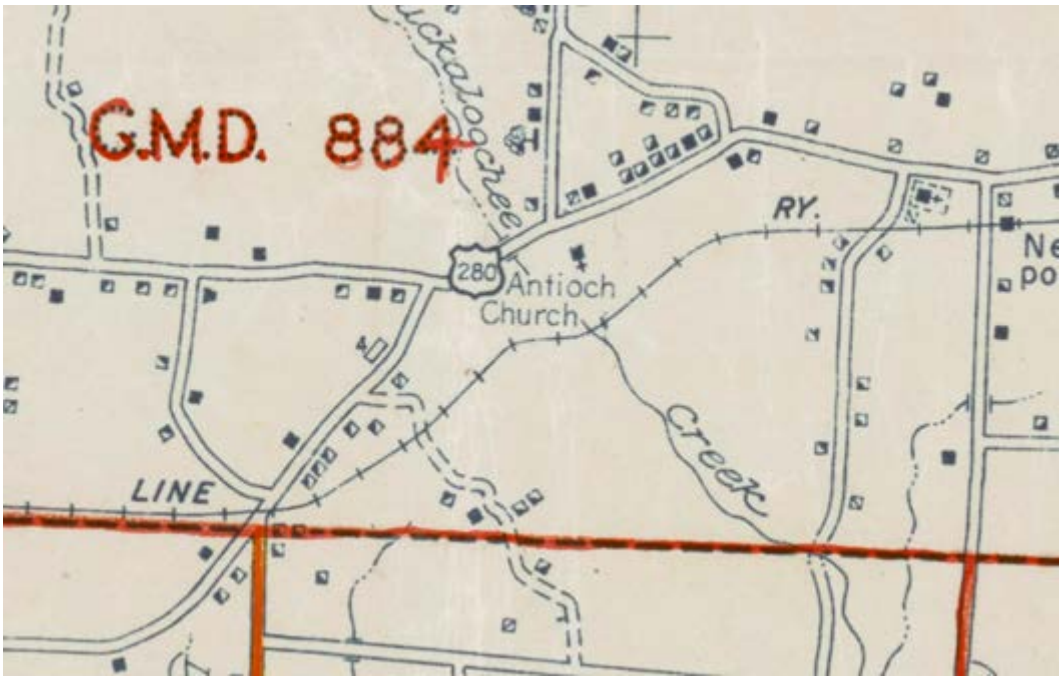
Figure 3.35. Andersonville



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Andersonville, Georgia
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	3 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	2
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	129 (62 boys, 67 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.36. Antioch



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Plains, Georgia
Proximity:	1153 US Route 280
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	112 (42 boys, 70 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

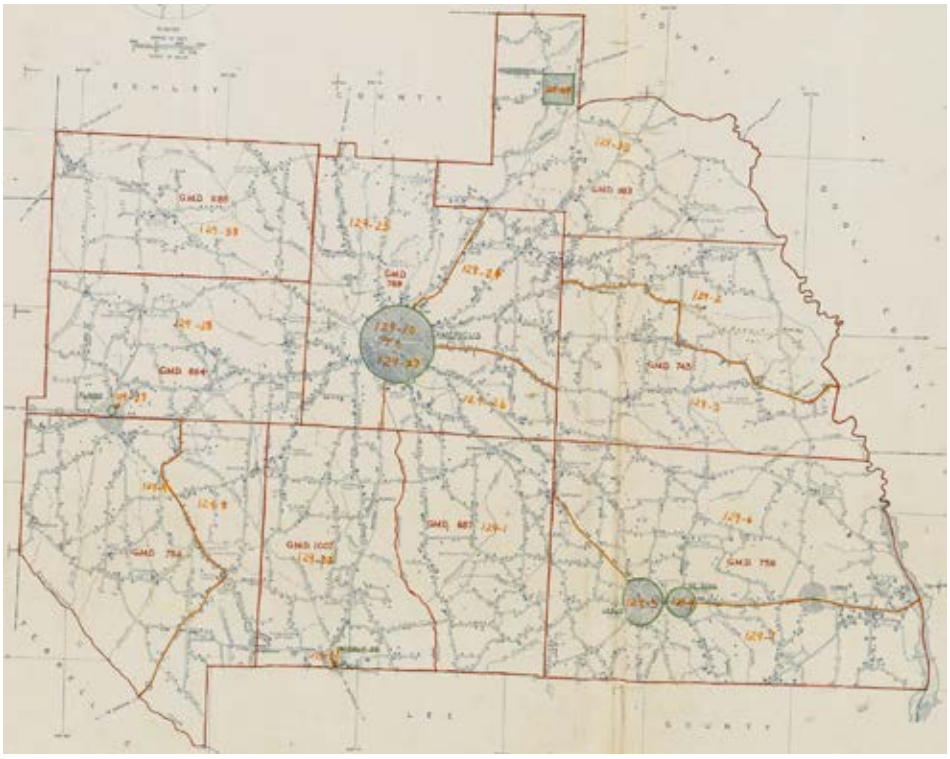
Figure 3.37. Antioch Baptist Church





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

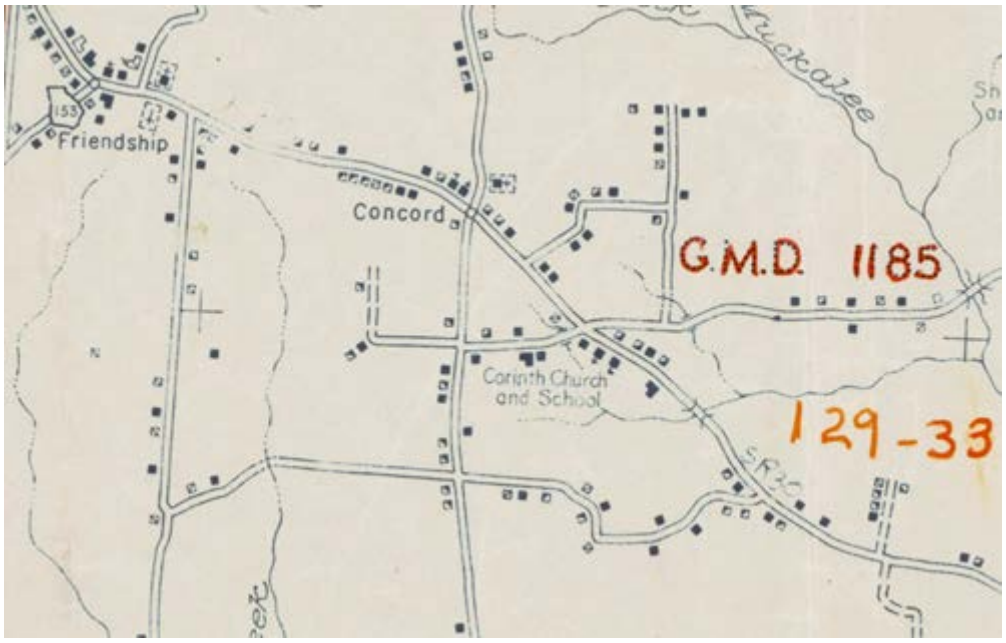
Figure 3.38. Bethel



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	36 (16 boys, 20 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.39. Corinth



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

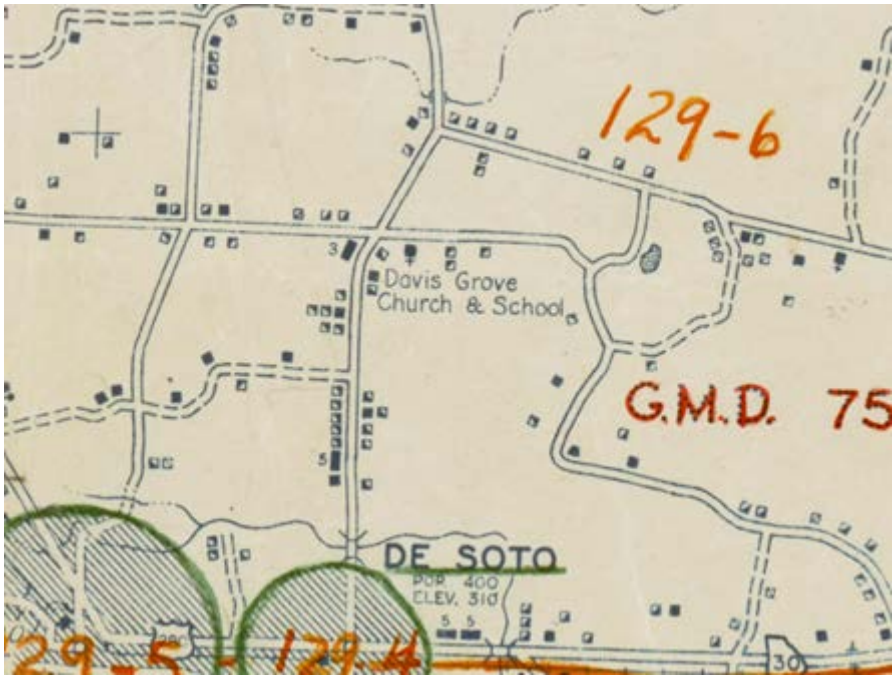
Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	1739 GA Hwy 30
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	27 (16 boys, 11 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–4, and 7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.40. Corinth Holy Bible Church



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.41. Davis Grove



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	North of DeSoto, Georgia
Proximity:	Tommy Smith Road and Bailey Avenue, across from Friendship Baptist Church
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	76 (38 boys, 38 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.42. Friendship Baptist Church and School Site



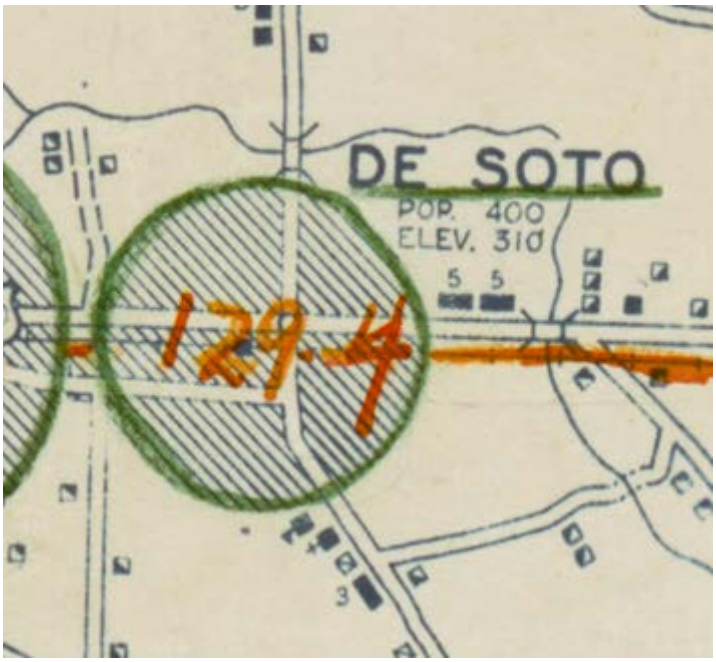


Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.42 (cont'd). When it became a community school, the Davis Grove school was located on the north side of the Friendship Baptist Church, approximately here.



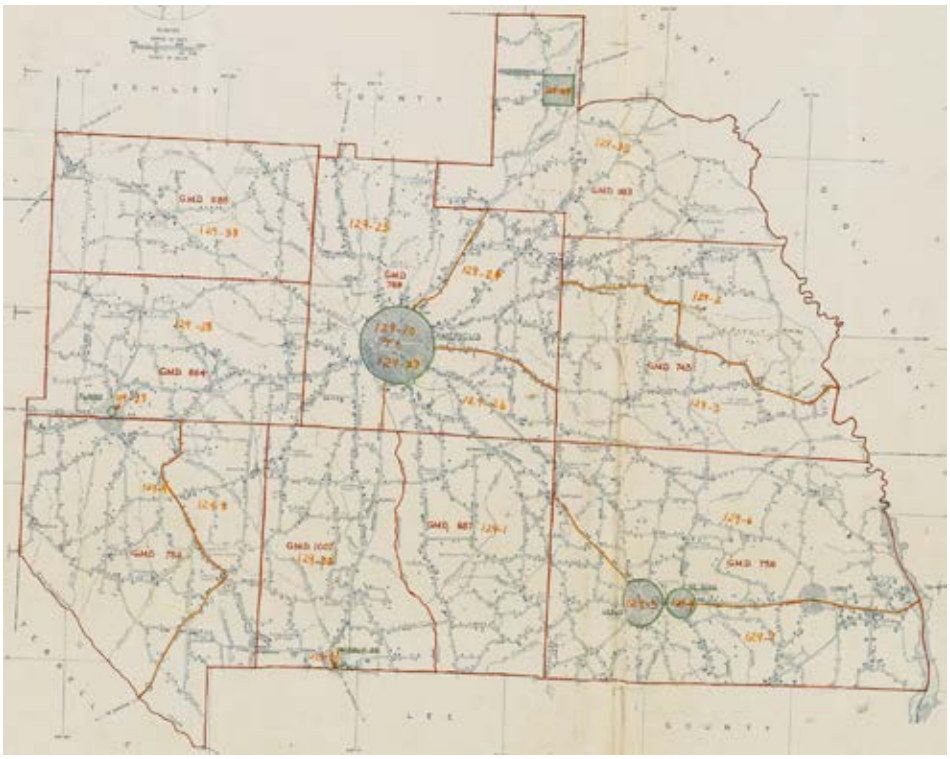
Figure 3.43. DeSoto



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	South of DeSoto, Georgia
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 (1 with 2-year college, 1 with 1-yr college)
Classrooms:	2
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	90 (40 boys, 50 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

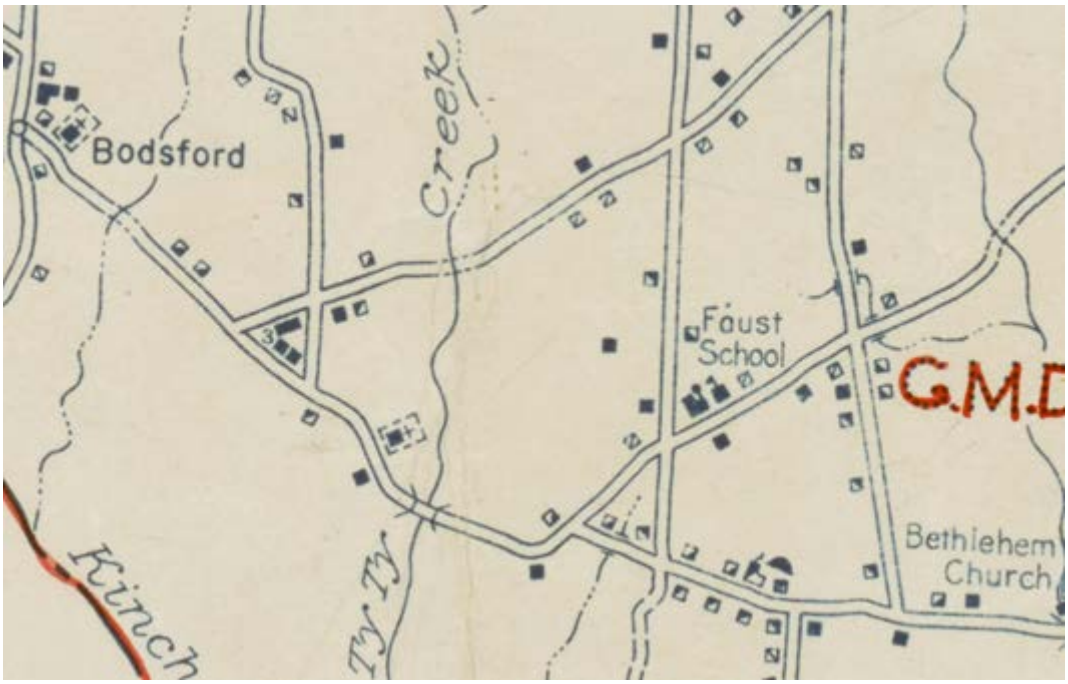
Figure 3.44. Eastpoint



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	60 (23 boys, 37 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5, and 7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.45. Faust



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	South of Plains, Georgia
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 (1 with 2-yr college, 1 with county license)
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	57 (22 boys, 35 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

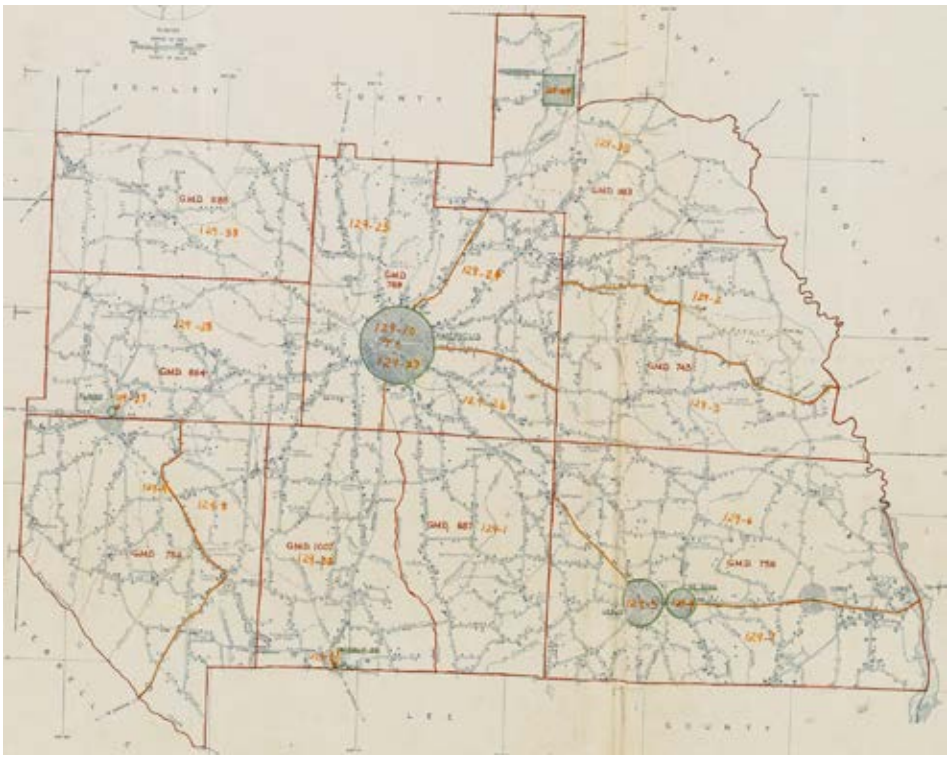
Figure 3.46. Gatewood



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	636 Mask Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	3 (1 with 4-yr college, 1 with 2-yr college, and 1 with 1-yr college)
Classrooms:	3
Seating:	75 patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	130 (61 boys, 69 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.47. Harvey Grove



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	20 (14 boys, 6 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5
Public Transportation:	None

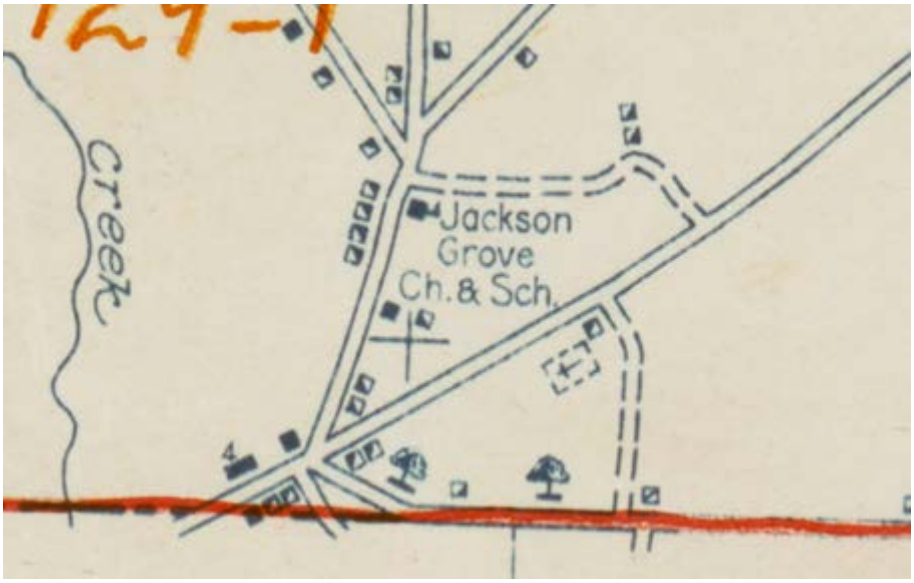
Figure 3.48. Huntington



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	32 (15 boys, 17 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.49. Jackson Grove



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	DeSoto, Georgia
Proximity:	487 Pryor Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	43 (20 boys, 23 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

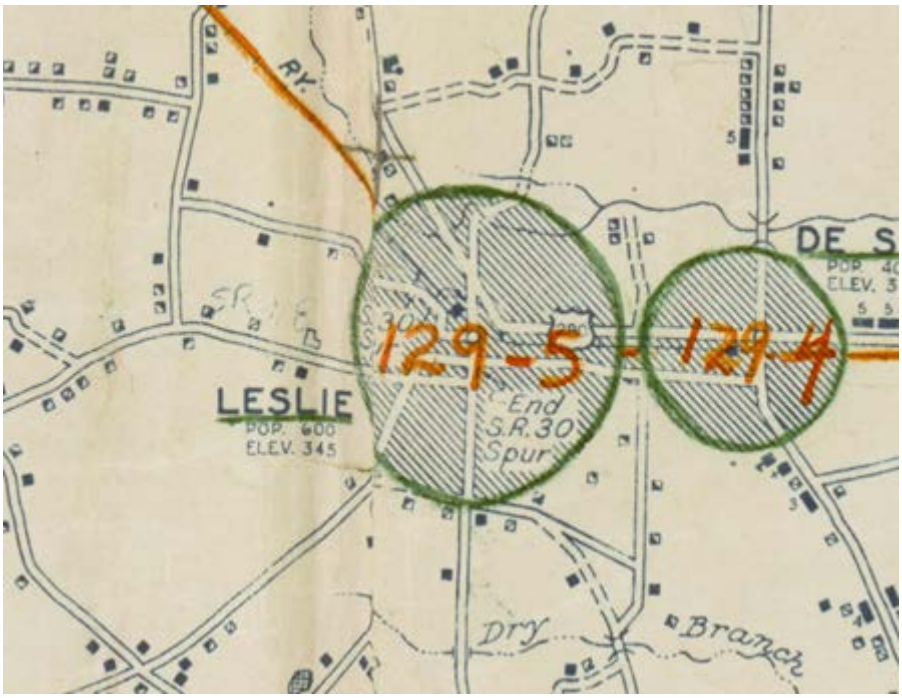
Figure 3.50. Jackson Grove Baptist Church





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.51. Leslie



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

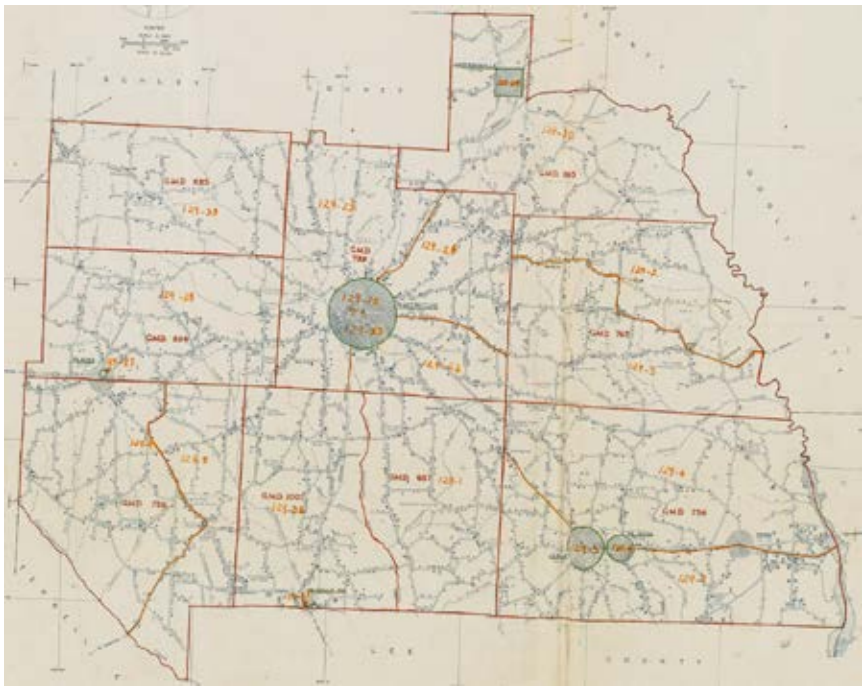
Location:	Leslie, Georgia
Proximity:	W Bailey Street, off US Route 280
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	3 (1 with 2-yr college, 2 with 1-yr college)
Classrooms:	3
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	150 (60 boys, 90 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–8
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.52. Leslie School building



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

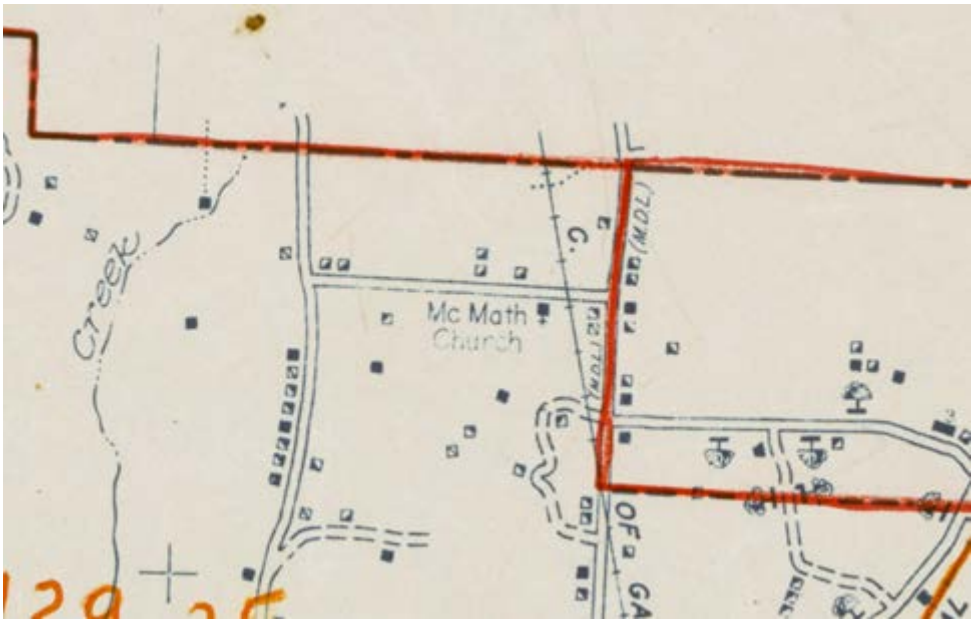
Figure 3.53. Long Grove



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	32 (17 boys, 15 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.54. McMath



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	North of Americus, Georgia, near Schley County border
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	18 (9 boys, 9 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.55. Mount Carmel



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	South of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	Hooks Mill Road and Mask Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	33 (16 boys, 17 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

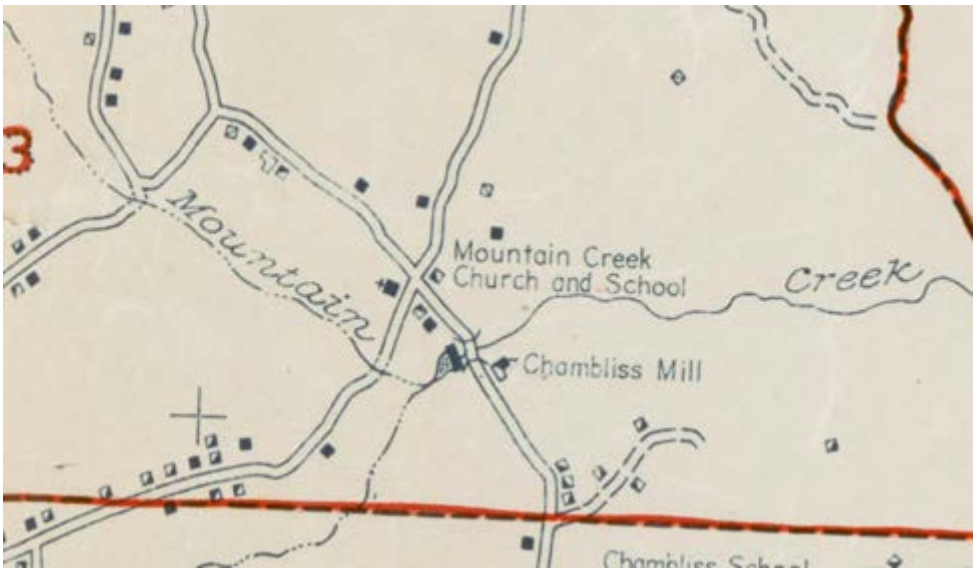
Figure 3.56. Mount Mary



1910 Map of Sumter County, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Location:	Northeast of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	46 (22 boys, 24 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.57. Mountain Creek



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Andersonville, Georgia
Proximity:	729-787 Sam Bradley Road, south of GA Hwy 195
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	72 (32 boys, 40 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.58. Mountain Creek AME Church





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

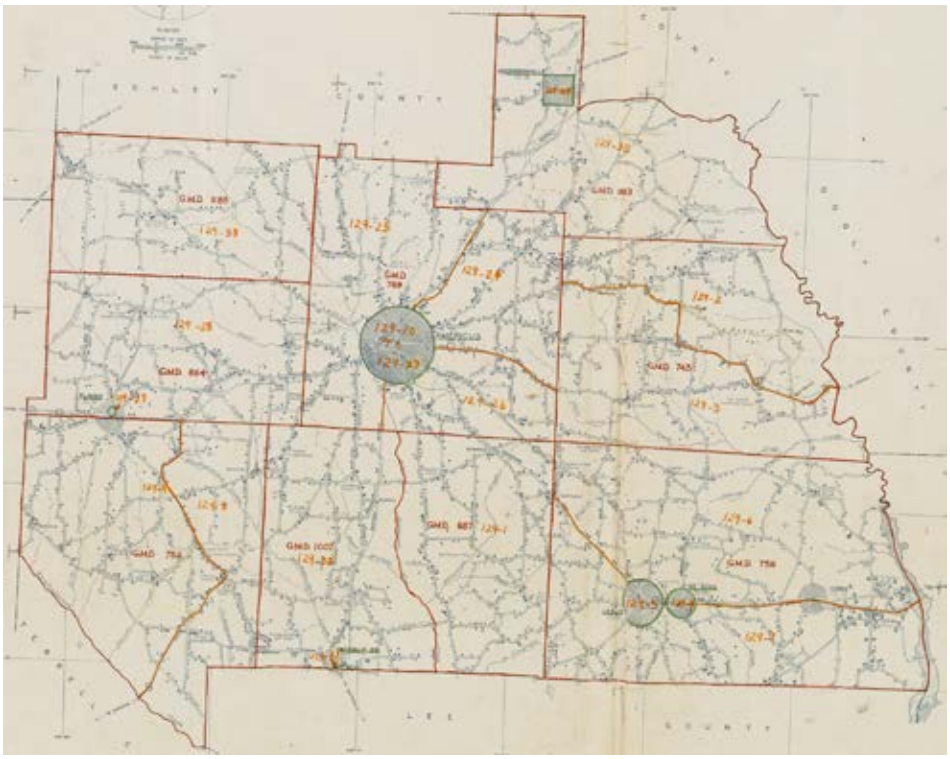
Figure 3.58 (cont'd). Rearview of the Mt. Creek AME Church



Figure 3.58 (cont'd). The AME church cornerstone laid in 1915



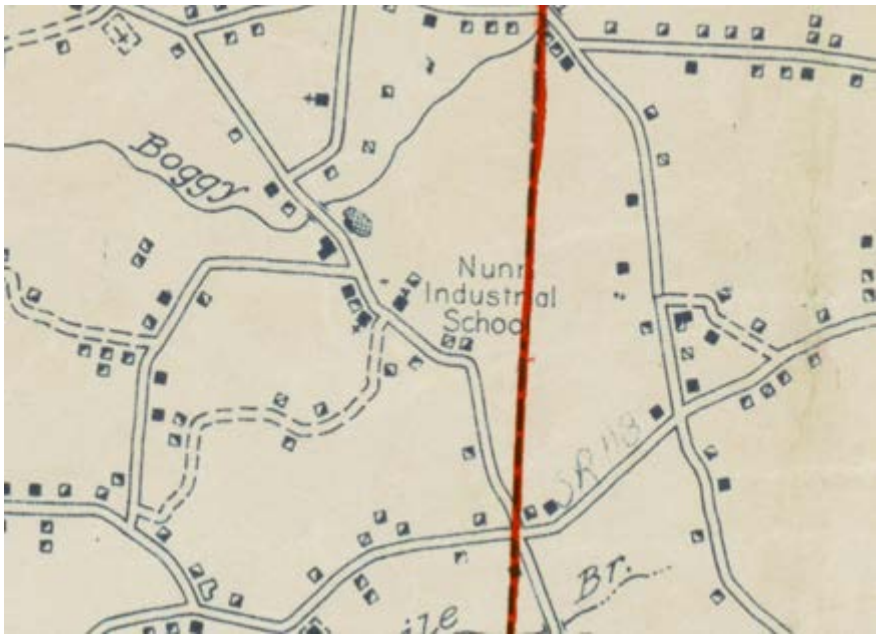
Figure 3.59. New



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	36 (15 boys, 21 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–3, and 6
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.60. Nunn Industrial



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Leslie, Georgia
Proximity:	1658 Hooks Mill Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (1 with 4-yr college, 1 with 2-yr college, 1 with 1-yr college, and 1 with county license)
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	48 (23 boys, 25 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

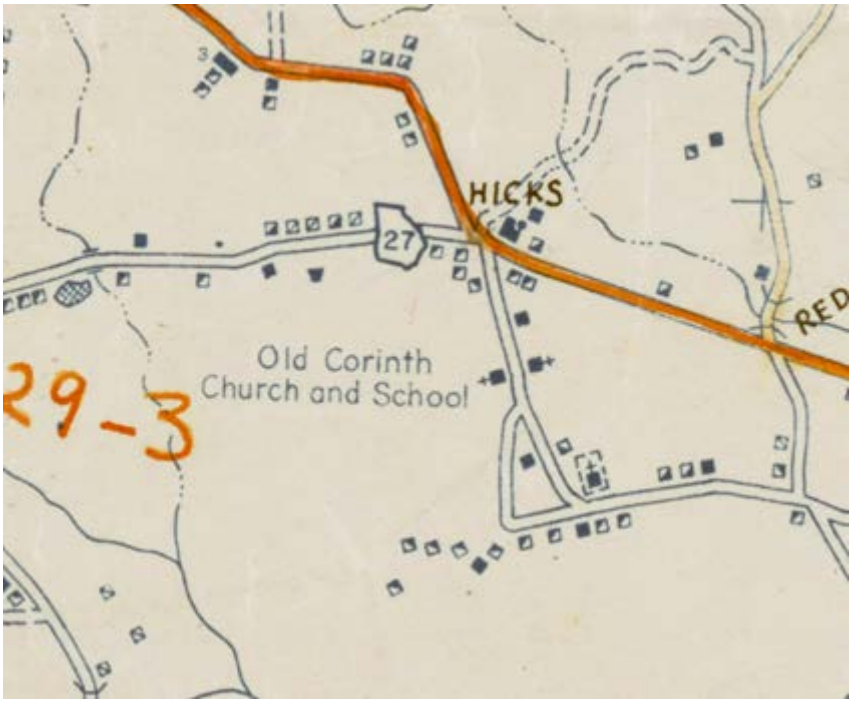
Figure 3.61. Approximate location of Nunn Industrial School site. Note the Nunn Industrial School was located across the street from the church. The images represent an approximate location.





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.62. Old Corinth



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Leslie, Georgia
Proximity:	425 Brown Small Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	48 (23 boys, 25 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.63. Old Corinth Baptist Church



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

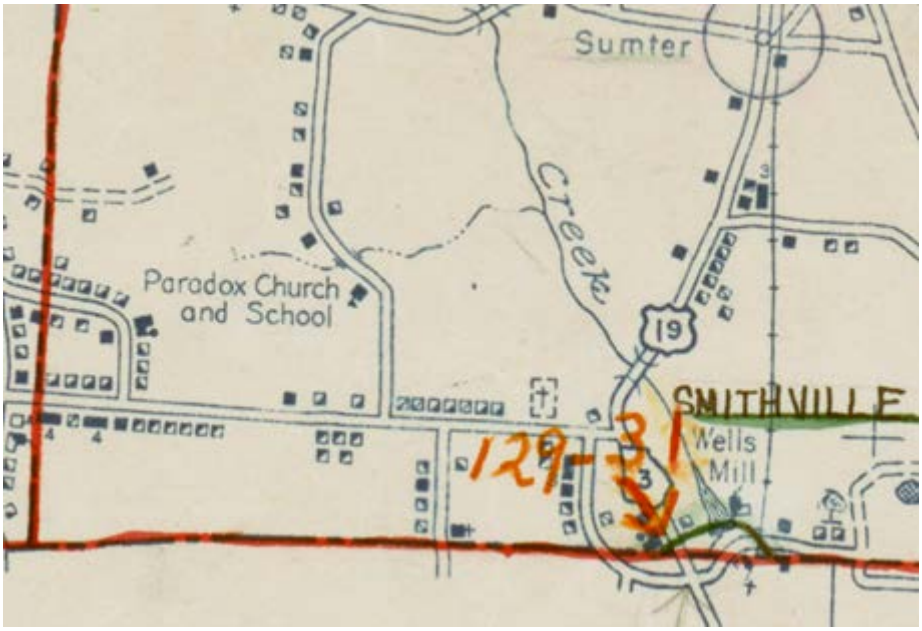
Figure 3.63 (cont'd). Looking south on Brown Small Road



Figure 3.63 (cont'd). Looking north on Brown Small Road



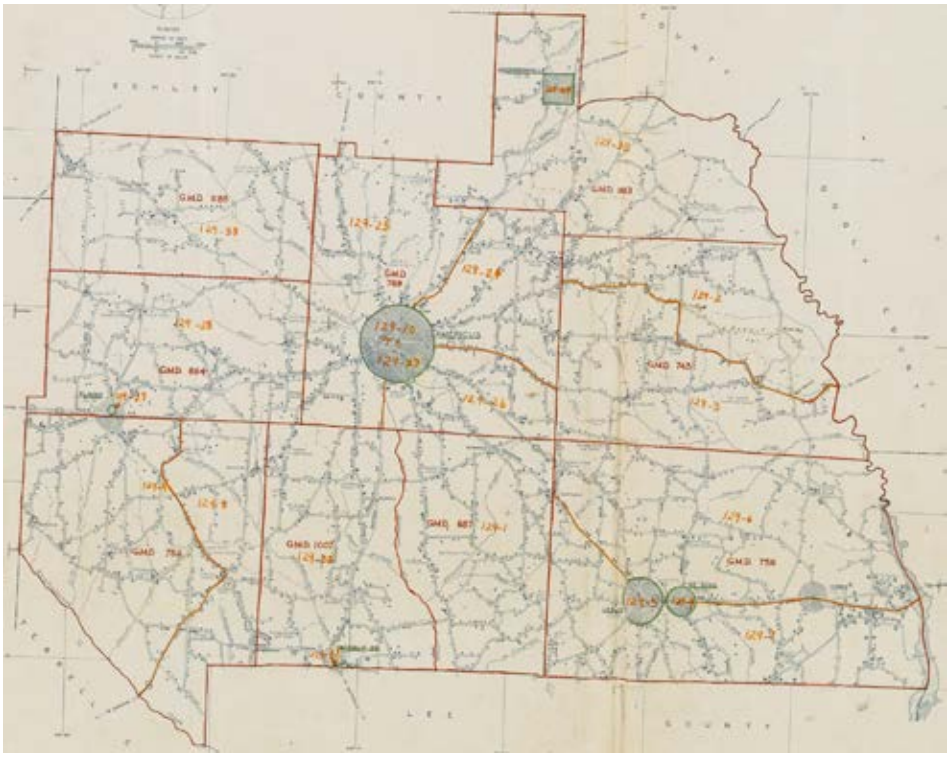
Figure 3.64. Paradox



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Near Smithville, Georgia
Proximity:	Off GA Hwy 308 and Wiggins Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	2
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	101 (44 boys, 57 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.65. Piney Grove



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	47 (23 boys, 24 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5, and 7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.66. Plains



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Plains, Georgia
Proximity:	403 Botsford Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (1 with 4-yr college, 1 with 3-yr college, 1 with 2-yr college, 1 with 1-yr college)
Classrooms:	4
Seating:	75
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	171 (84 boys, 87 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.67. Pleasant Grove



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Cobb, Georgia
Proximity:	233 Bailey Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	40 (17 boys, 23 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.68. Pleasant Grove Baptist Church





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.69. St. Paul



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Smithville, Georgia
Proximity:	759 Logan Store Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	57 (24 boys, 33 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

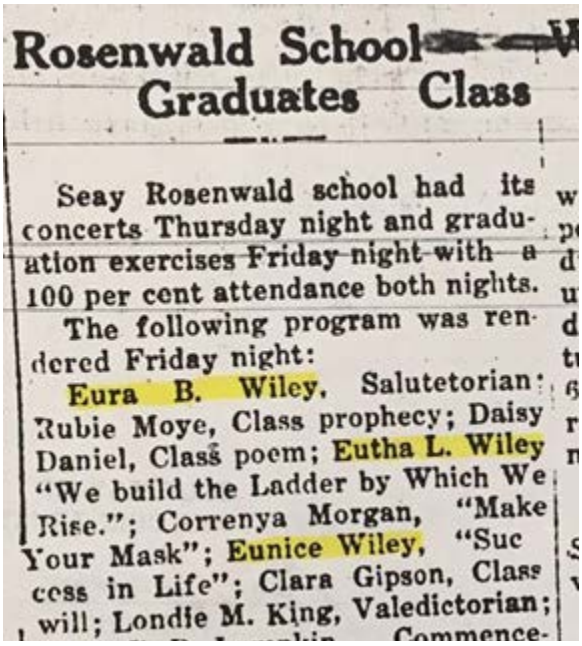
Figure 3.70. Salem



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	265 Salters Mill Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	24 (14 boys, 10 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.71. Seay Industrial



Rosenwald School Graduates Class

Seay Rosenwald school had its concerts Thursday night and graduation exercises Friday night with a 100 per cent attendance both nights.

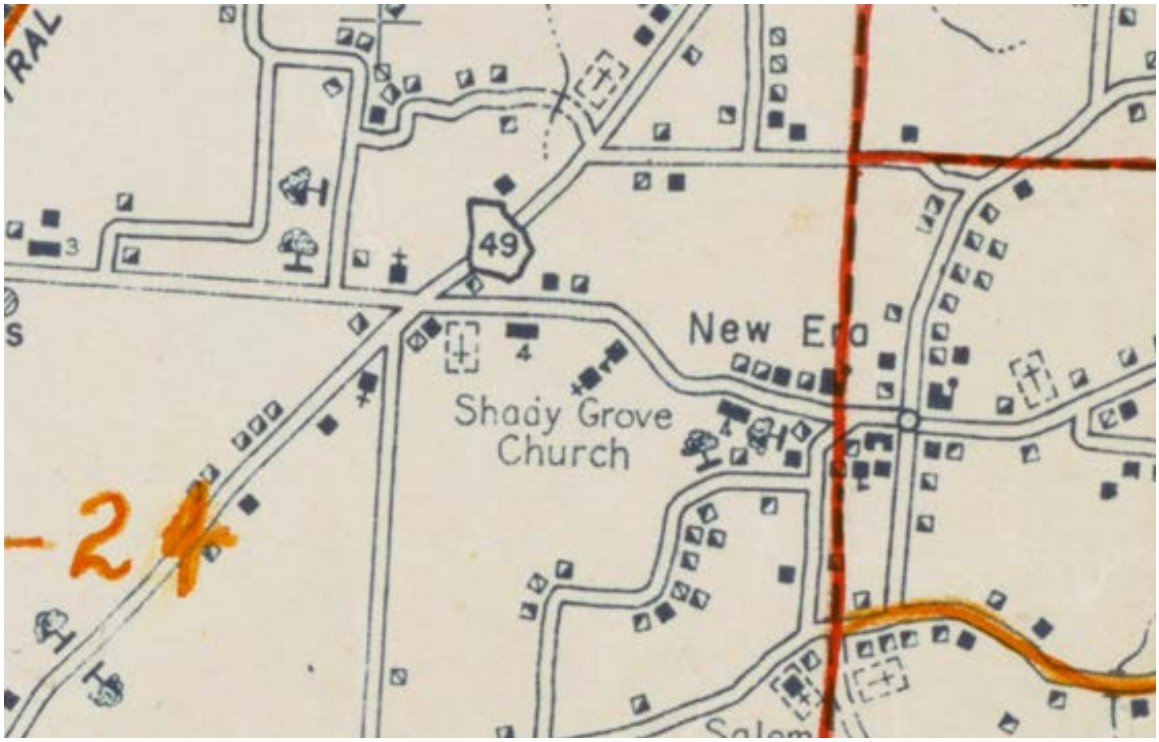
The following program was rendered Friday night:

Eura B. Wiley, Salutetorian; Rubie Moye, Class prophecy; Daisy Daniel, Class poem; Eutha L. Wiley "We build the Ladder by Which We Rise."; Correnya Morgan, "Make Your Mask"; Eunice Wiley, "Success in Life"; Clara Gipson, Class will; Londie M. King, Valedictorian;

"Sumter County Public Schools," Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Location:	—
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	3
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	57 (26 boys, 31 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.72. Shady Grove



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

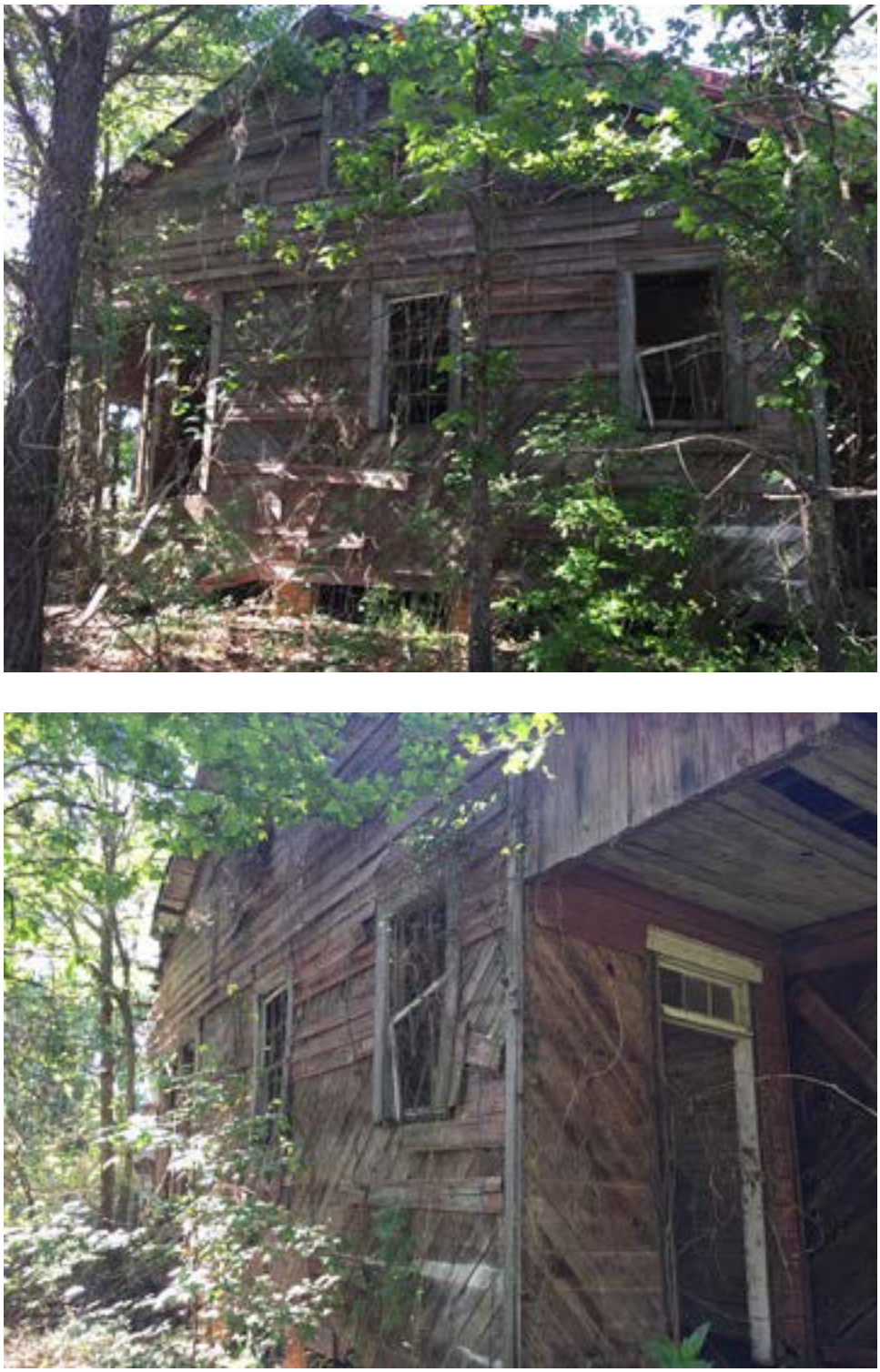
Location:	Northeast of Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	300 New Era Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (2 with 2-yr college, 2 with county license)
Classrooms:	4
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	134 (75 boys, 59 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–8
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.73. North side (top) and west side (bottom) of Shady Grove



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.74. South-side views of Shady Grove



Photos by D. Jason Berggren





Figure 3.75. Shipp Chapel



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	130 GA Hwy 49 S
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	28 (14 boys, 14 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–6
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.76. Shipp Training



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Sumter City, Georgia
Proximity:	Off US 19 and Cemetery Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	4 (1 with 4-yr college, 3 with 2-yr college)
Classrooms:	5
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	106 (50 boys, 56 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–9
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.77. Looking south on Shipp School Road



Photo by D. Jason Berggren



Google Maps Image

Figure 3.78. Spring Creek



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Cobb, Georgia
Proximity:	2473 Lamar Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	17 (11 boys, 6 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–4
Public Transportation:	None

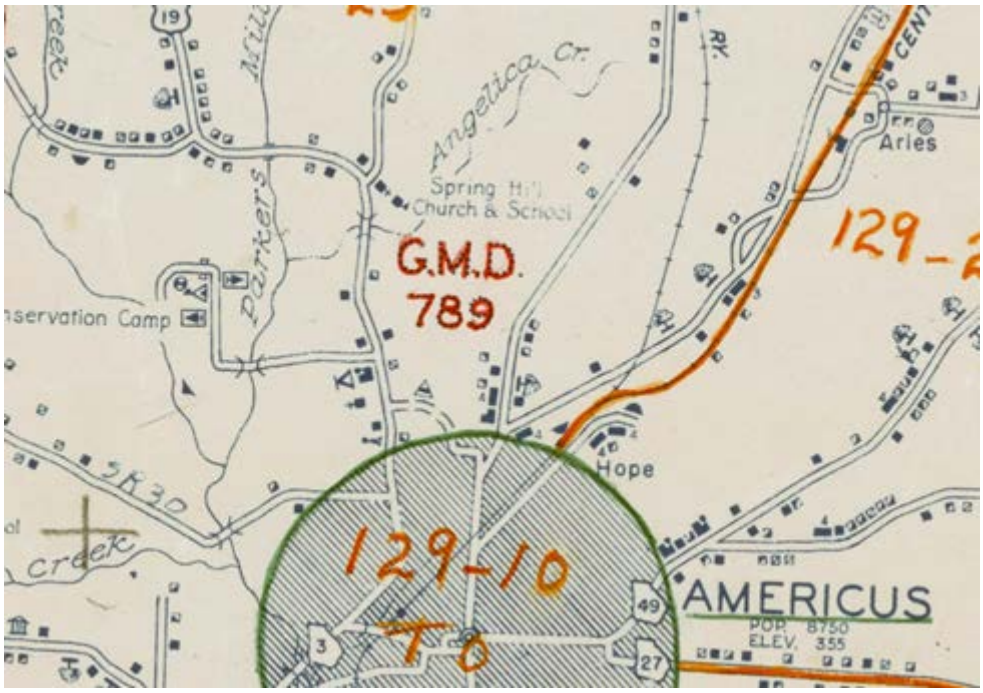
Figure 3.79. Spring Creek Baptist Church (top).
The cornerstone was laid in 1902 (bottom).





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.80. Spring Hill



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	102 Lacross Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	64 (33 boys, 31 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

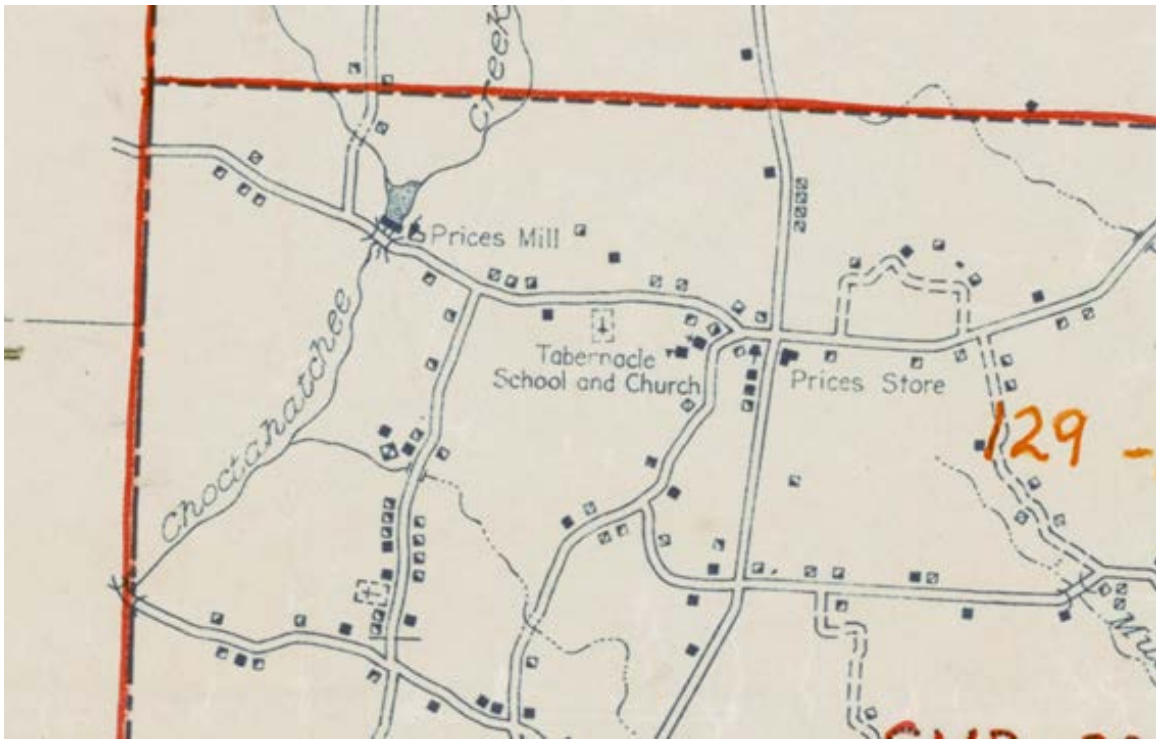
Figure 3.81. Springhill Baptist Church





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.82. Tabernacle



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	North of Plains, Georgia
Proximity:	Near Cow Pen Road and Youngs Mill Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	55 (28 boys, 27 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.83. Union Grove



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Andersonville, Georgia
Proximity:	Chambliss Mill Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 2-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	37 (12 boys, 25 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

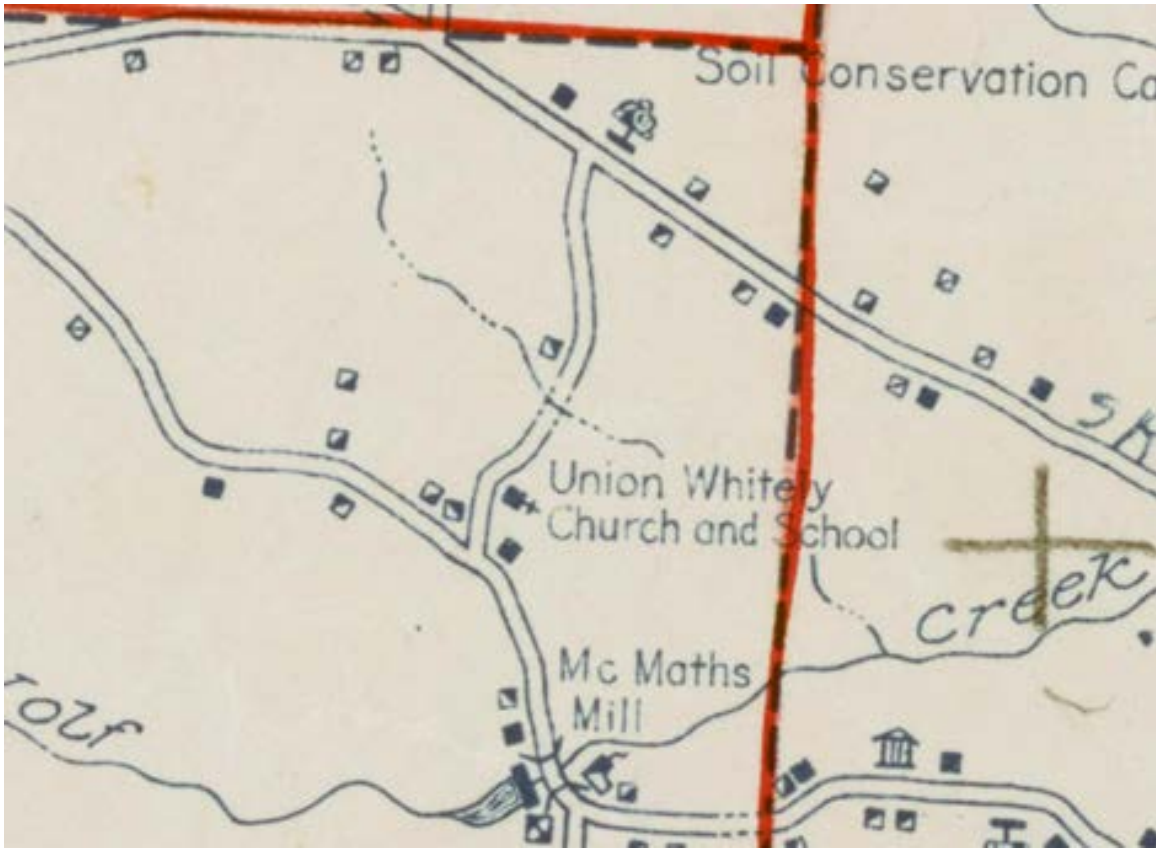
Figure 3.84. Union Oak Grove



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Andersonville, Georgia
Proximity:	714 Neil Hodges Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with county license
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	50 (23 boys, 27 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–5, 7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.85. Union Whitely



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	295 James Hart Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	27 (12 boys, 15 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.86. Union Whitely Church building



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.87. Wards Chapel



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Location:	Southeast of Plains, Georgia
Proximity:	Hudson Road, north of Thomas Mill Road
Lot Size:	1 acre
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 1-yr college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	49 (21 boys, 28 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.87 (cont'd). Wards Chapel School was located on Hudson Road, north of Thomas Mill Road.

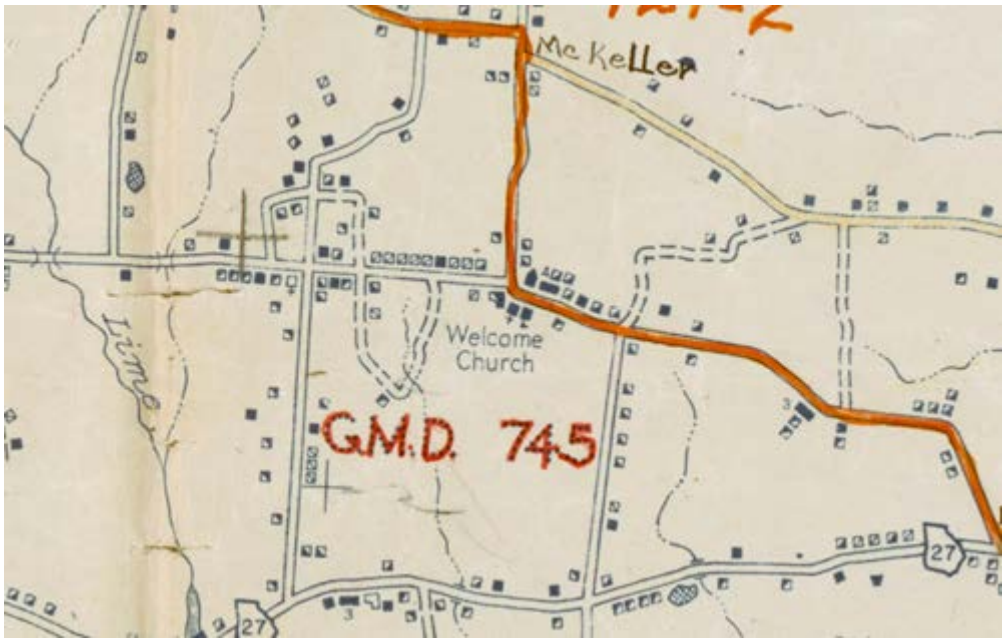


Figure 3.87 (cont'd). Note that Hudson Road is unpaved.



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.88. Welcome



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	1436 Middle River Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	3 (1 with 3-yr college, 1 with 1-yr college, 1 with county license)
Classrooms:	2
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	131 (55 boys, 76 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–8
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.89. Welcome Baptist Church





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Profiles of Black Americus City Public Schools, 1940–1941

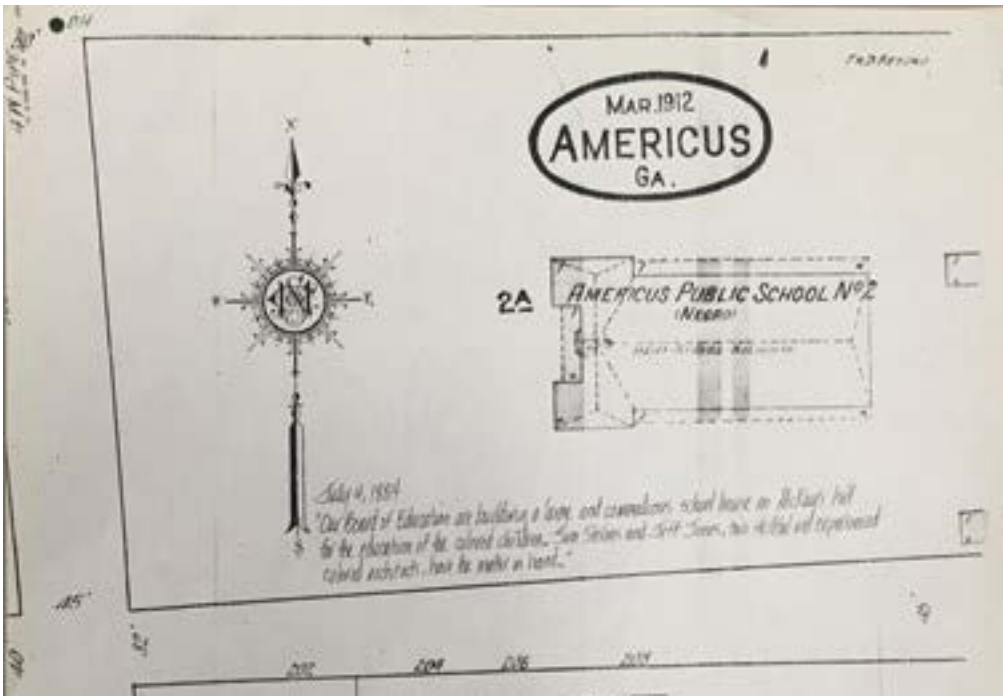
Figure 3.90. McCay Hill

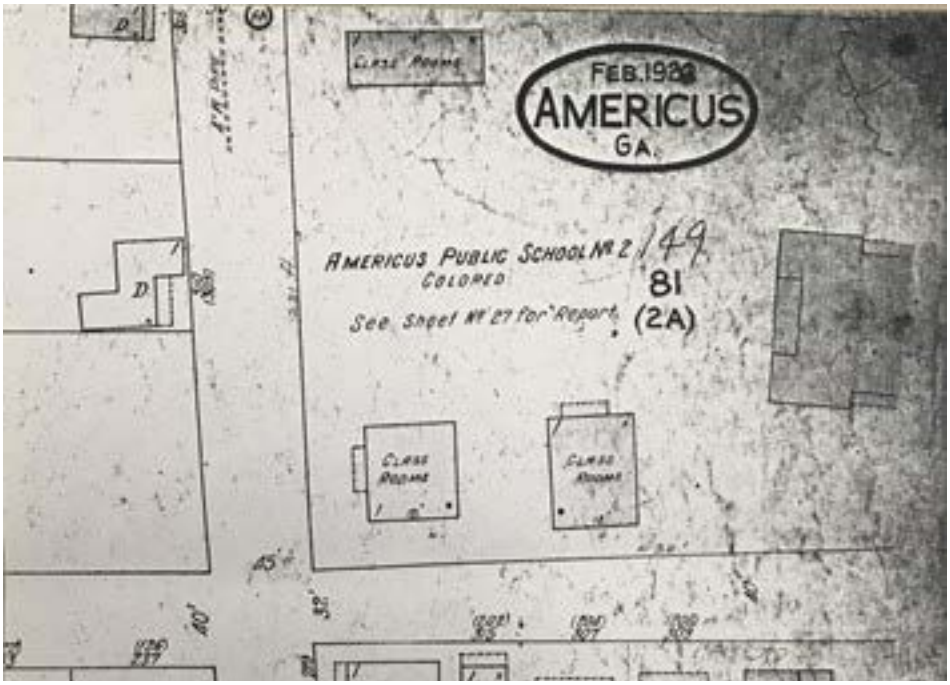


"McCay Hill School" Folder, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	315 Popular Street
Lot Size:	4 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	20 (2 with 4-yr college, 10 with 3-yr college, 5 with 2-yr college; 3 with 2-yr college and not on state payroll)
Classrooms:	20
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	896 (447 boys, 449 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.90 (cont'd). McCay Hill





"McCay Hill School" Folder, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.91. McCay Hill—Images from the *Americus Times-Recorder*

guns. May 1, 1952

Annual Published By McCoy Hill

The 1952 graduating class of McCoy Hill Grammar school has published a year book for the year of 1951-'52.

The Year book entitled the "Maybook" is the first of its type to be published by the school.

The Maybook contains the pictures of the students and the faculty of the school.

Walter T. Pace, principal of the school, said in the introduction of the Maybook that "one should use an intelligent approach in aiding to implement Democracy for all citizens. Generating emotional verbal heat is hardly an approach to say the least."



"McCay Hill School" Folder, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.92. A. S. Staley High School



Georgia State Archives, Image c. 1943-1945

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	915 N. Lee Street
Lot Size:	5 acres
Building Type:	Brick
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Flush
Faculty:	8 (1 with 5-yr college, 6 with 4-yr college, 1 with 3-yr college)
Classrooms:	12
Seating:	Patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1940–41:	259 (88 boys, 171 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41:	8–11
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 3.92 (cont'd). Front view of Americus-Sumter Ninth Grade Academy, school site of the Americus Institute and A. S. Staley High School

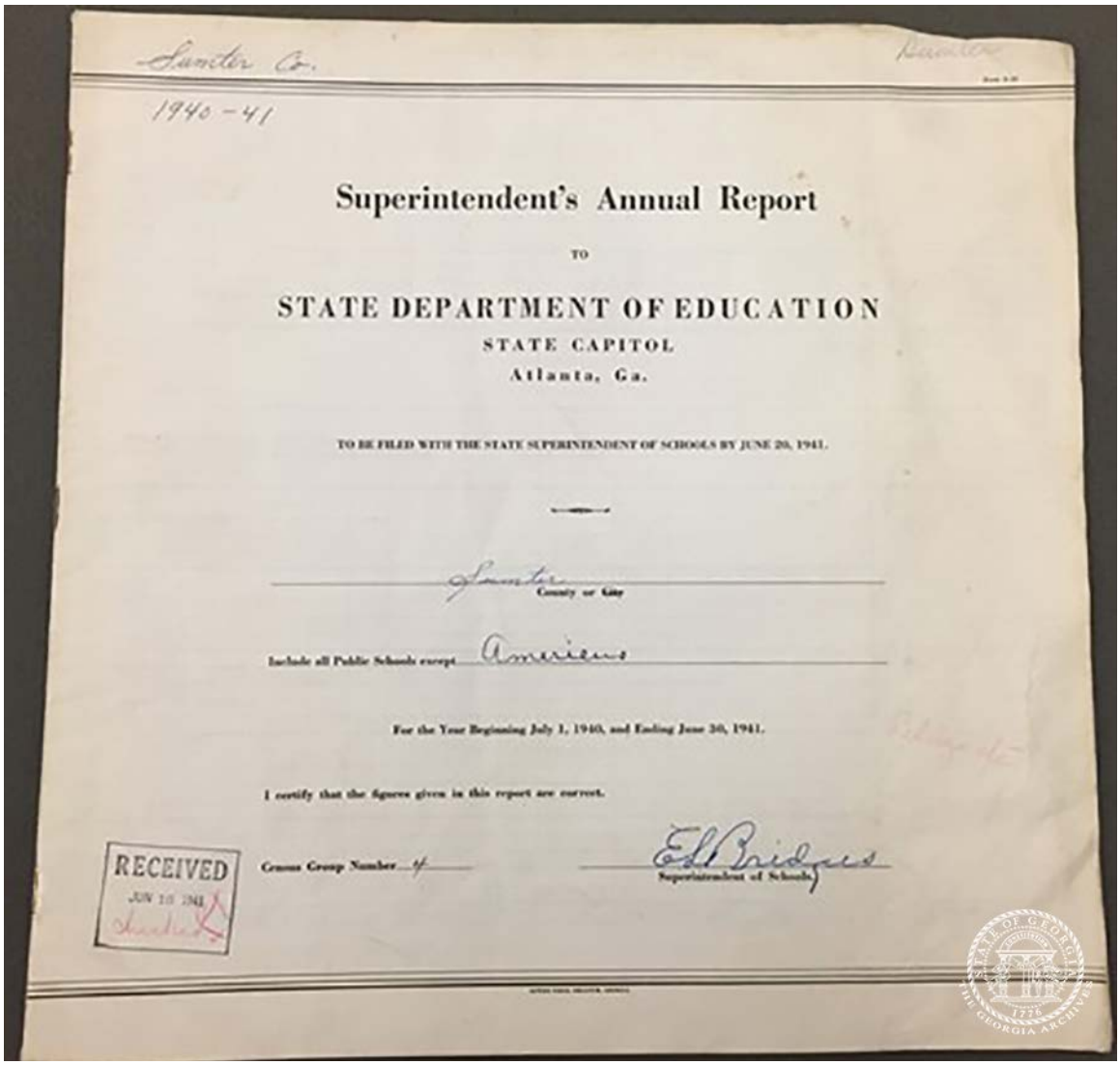


Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Documents, Images, and Artifacts

Documents:
Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to the Georgia State Department of Education, 1940–1941—"Colored Schools" Section

Figure 3.93. Title page of the Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report, 1940–1941



Sumter Co.

1940-41

Superintendent's Annual Report

TO

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATE CAPITOL

Atlanta, Ga.

TO BE FILED WITH THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS BY JUNE 20, 1941.

Sumter
County or City

Include all Public Schools except Americus

For the Year Beginning July 1, 1940, and Ending June 30, 1941.

I certify that the figures given in this report are correct.

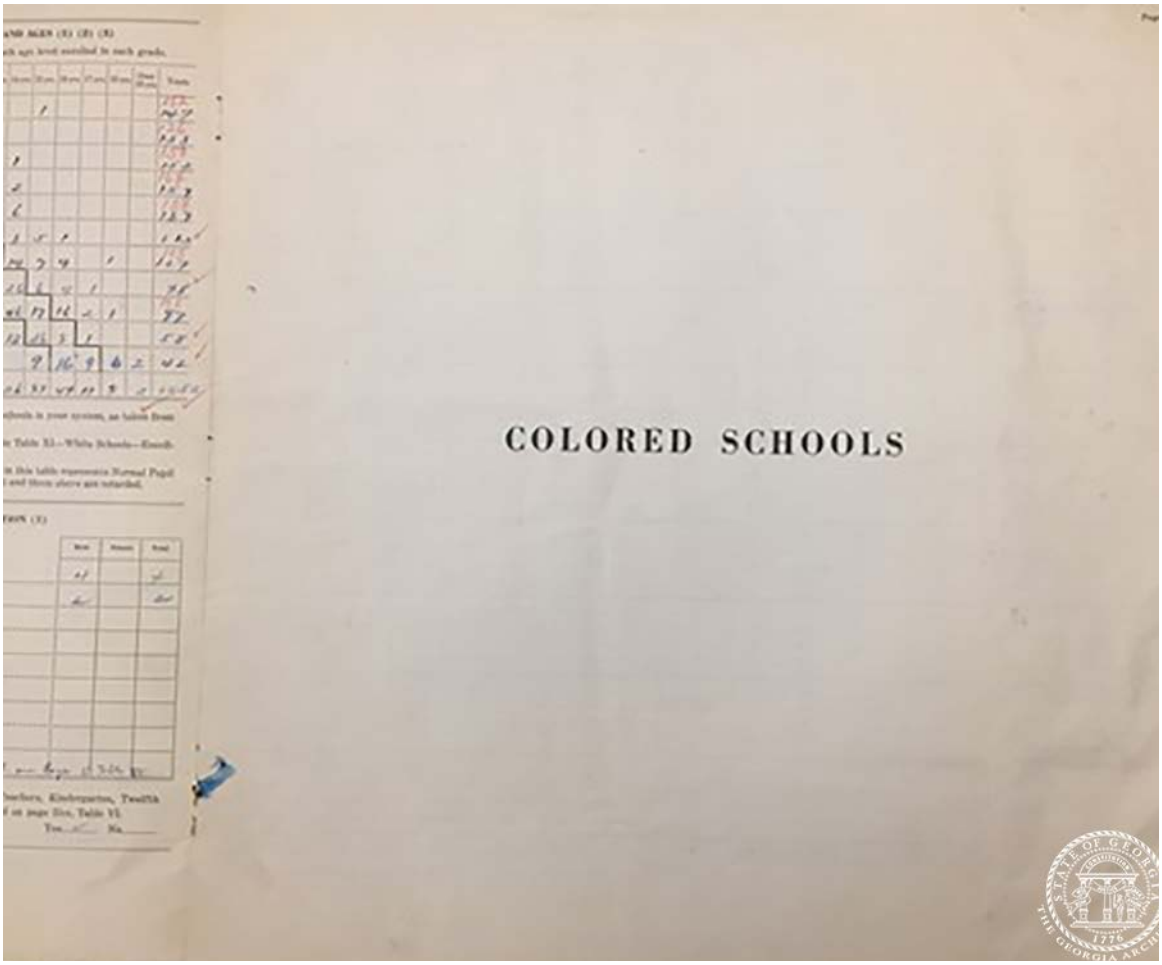
RECEIVED
JUN 10 1941

Census Group Number 4

E. L. Bridges
Superintendent of Schools

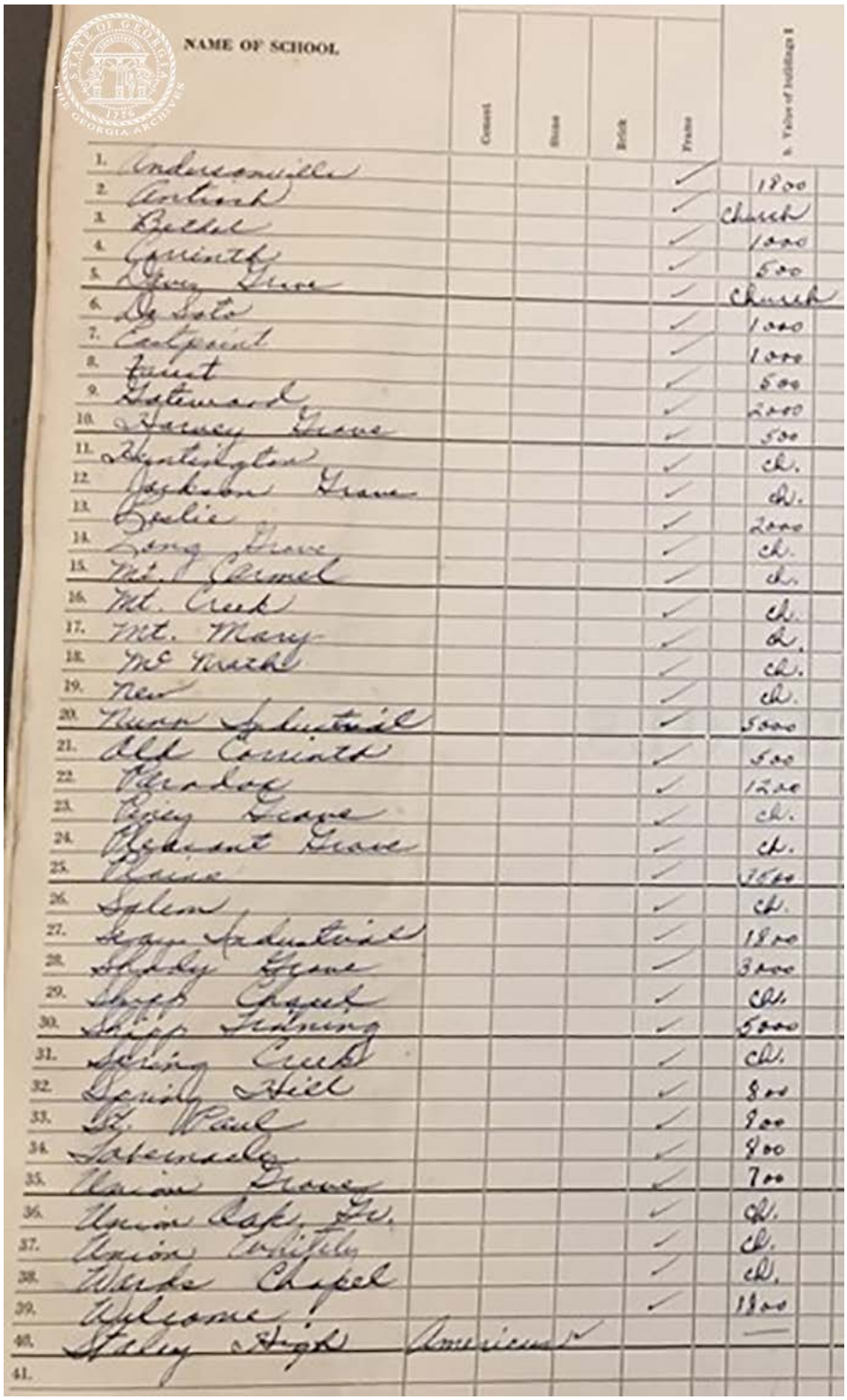
Georgia State Archives

Figure 3.94. "Colored Schools" section of the Sumter County Annual Report, 1940–1941



Georgia State Archives

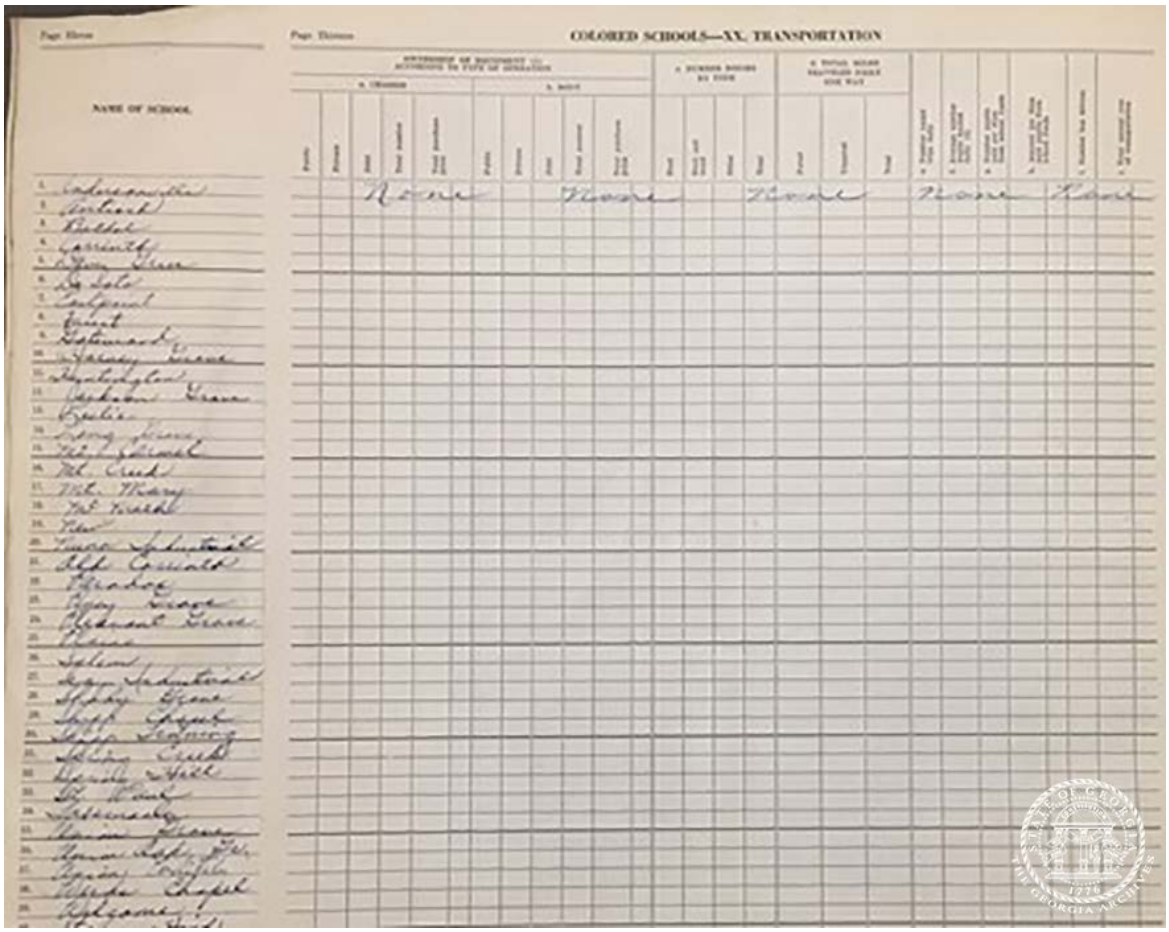
Figure 3.95. List of Sumter County "Colored Schools," 1940–1941



	NAME OF SCHOOL	Cement	Stone	Brick	Frame	a. Value of buildings
1.	Andersonville				✓	1800
2.	Antioch				✓	Church
3.	Bethel				✓	1000
4.	Corinth				✓	500
5.	Cross Grove				✓	Church
6.	De Soto				✓	1000
7.	Eastpoint				✓	1000
8.	Faust				✓	500
9.	Gateswood				✓	2000
10.	Harvey Grove				✓	500
11.	Huntington				✓	ch.
12.	Jackson Grove				✓	ch.
13.	Leslie				✓	2000
14.	Long Grove				✓	ch.
15.	Mt. Carmel				✓	ch.
16.	Mt. Creek				✓	ch.
17.	Mt. Mary				✓	ch.
18.	Mt. Nebo				✓	ch.
19.	New				✓	ch.
20.	New Industrial				✓	5000
21.	Old Corinth				✓	500
22.	Oleander				✓	1200
23.	Pilgrim Grove				✓	ch.
24.	Redmont Grove				✓	ch.
25.	Rome				✓	1500
26.	Salem				✓	ch.
27.	Sasser Industrial				✓	1800
28.	Shady Grove				✓	3000
29.	Sharp Chapel				✓	ch.
30.	Sharp Training				✓	5000
31.	Spring Creek				✓	ch.
32.	Sandy Hill				✓	800
33.	St. Paul				✓	900
34.	Statenville				✓	800
35.	Union Grove				✓	700
36.	Union Oak, Jr.				✓	ch.
37.	Union Unified				✓	ch.
38.	Wade Chapel				✓	ch.
39.	Welcome				✓	1800
40.	Valley High	Concrete	✓			—
41.						

Georgia State Archives

Figure 3.96. "Colored Schools"—Transportation, 1940–1941



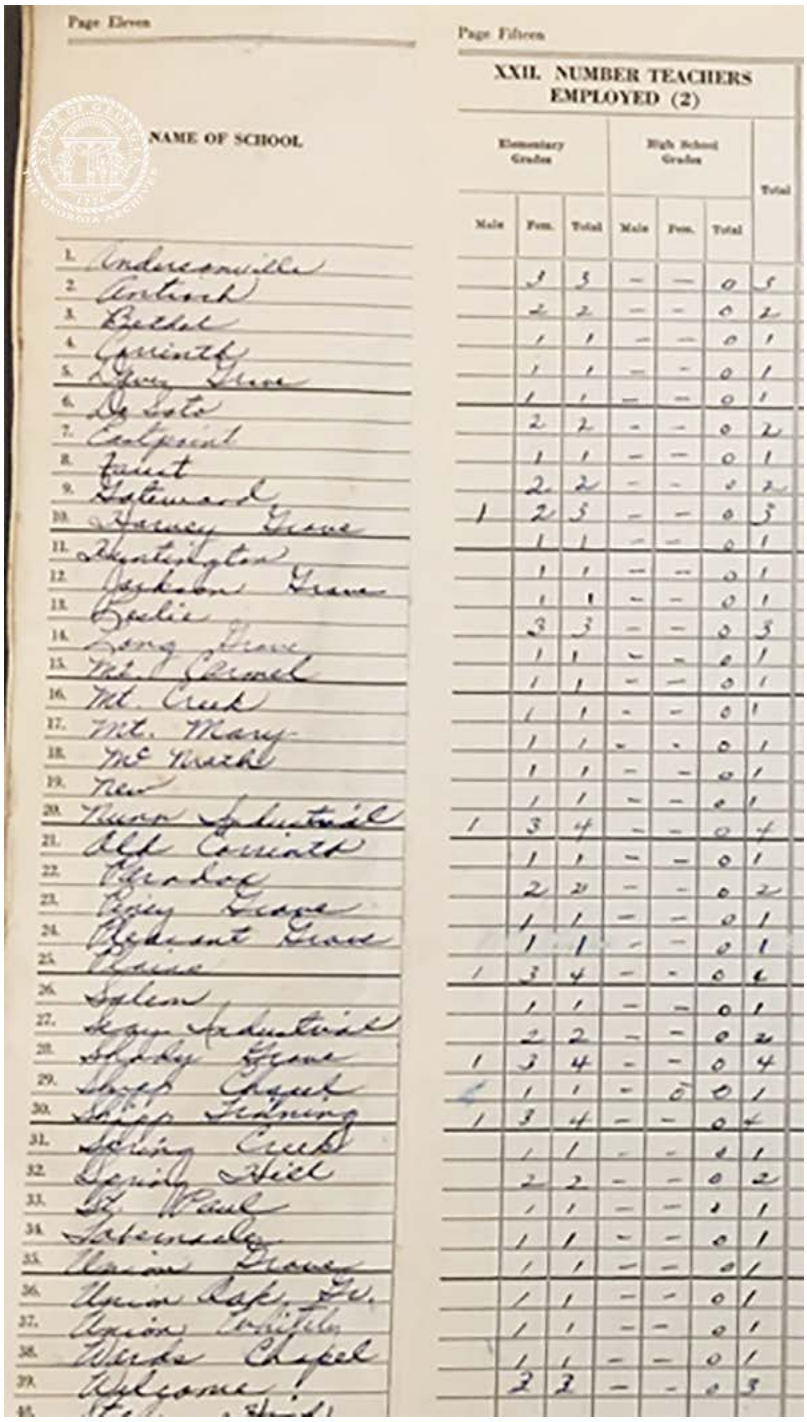
COLORED SCHOOLS—XX. TRANSPORTATION

NAME OF SCHOOL

None None None None Road

Georgia State Archives

Figure 3.97. "Number Teachers Employed"—Sumter County "Colored Schools," 1940–1941



Page Eleven

NAME OF SCHOOL

1. Andersonville
2. Antioch
3. Bethel
4. Corinth
5. Deer Tree
6. De Soto
7. Coleman
8. Forest
9. Fortenard
10. Furney Grove
11. Huntington
12. Jackson Grove
13. Leslie
14. Long Grove
15. Mt. Calvary
16. Mt. Carmel
17. Mt. Mary
18. Mt. Nebo
19. New
20. New Industrial
21. Old Corinth
22. Overlook
23. Pilgrim Grove
24. Redmont Grove
25. Rose
26. Salem
27. Sam Industrial
28. Shady Grove
29. Shop Chapel
30. Silver Training
31. Spring Creek
32. Spring Hill
33. St. Paul
34. Tabernacle
35. Union Grove
36. Union Lake, Ga.
37. Union Corinth
38. Wade Chapel
39. Welcome

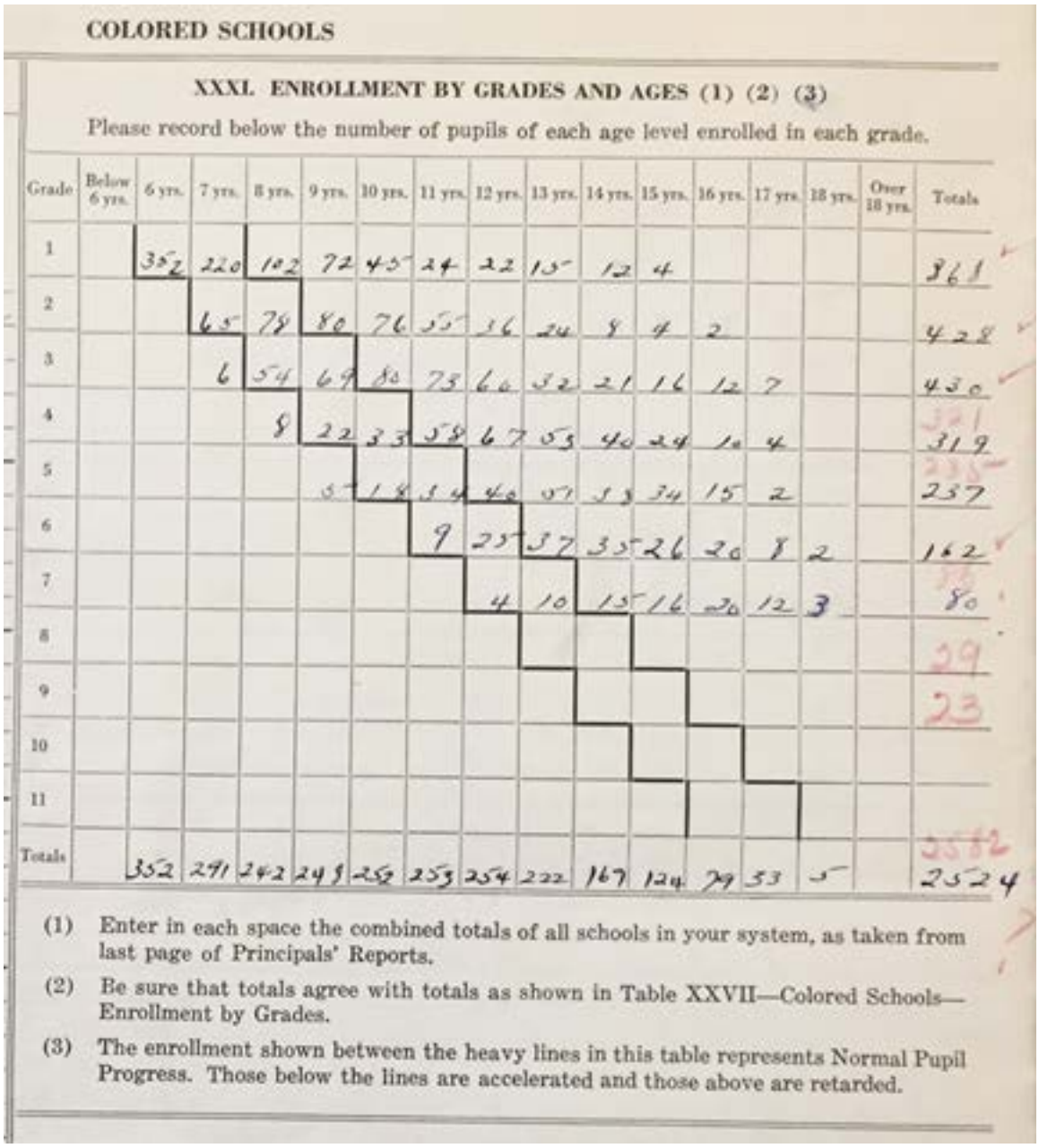
Page Fifteen

XXII. NUMBER TEACHERS EMPLOYED (2)

	Elementary Grades			High School Grades			Total
	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	
1.		3	3	–	–	0	3
2.		2	2	–	–	0	2
3.		1	1	–	–	0	1
4.		1	1	–	–	0	1
5.		1	1	–	–	0	1
6.		2	2	–	–	0	2
7.		1	1	–	–	0	1
8.		2	2	–	–	0	2
9.	1	2	3	–	–	0	3
10.		1	1	–	–	0	1
11.		1	1	–	–	0	1
12.		1	1	–	–	0	1
13.		3	3	–	–	0	3
14.		1	1	–	–	0	1
15.		1	1	–	–	0	1
16.		1	1	–	–	0	1
17.		1	1	–	–	0	1
18.		1	1	–	–	0	1
19.		1	1	–	–	0	1
20.	1	3	4	–	–	0	4
21.		1	1	–	–	0	1
22.		2	2	–	–	0	2
23.		1	1	–	–	0	1
24.		1	1	–	–	0	1
25.	1	3	4	–	–	0	4
26.		1	1	–	–	0	1
27.		2	2	–	–	0	2
28.	1	3	4	–	–	0	4
29.		1	1	–	0	0	1
30.	1	3	4	–	–	0	4
31.		1	1	–	–	0	1
32.		2	2	–	–	0	2
33.		1	1	–	–	0	1
34.		1	1	–	–	0	1
35.		1	1	–	–	0	1
36.		1	1	–	–	0	1
37.		1	1	–	–	0	1
38.		1	1	–	–	0	1
39.		2	2	–	–	0	2

Georgia State Archives

Figure 3.98. "Normal Pupil Progress"—Student Enrollment by Grades and Ages, 1940–1941



COLORED SCHOOLS

XXXI. ENROLLMENT BY GRADES AND AGES (1) (2) (3)

Please record below the number of pupils of each age level enrolled in each grade.

Grade	Below 6 yrs.	6 yrs.	7 yrs.	8 yrs.	9 yrs.	10 yrs.	11 yrs.	12 yrs.	13 yrs.	14 yrs.	15 yrs.	16 yrs.	17 yrs.	18 yrs.	Over 18 yrs.	Totals
1		352	220	102	72	45	24	22	15	12	4					361
2			65	78	80	76	55	16	24	8	4	2				428
3			6	54	69	80	73	60	32	21	16	12	7			430
4				8	22	33	58	67	55	40	24	10	4			319
5					3	18	34	46	51	33	34	15	2			237
6							9	23	37	35	26	20	8	2		162
7								4	10	15	16	20	12	3		80
8																
9																
10																
11																
Totals		352	291	242	249	252	253	254	222	167	124	79	53	5		2524

(1) Enter in each space the combined totals of all schools in your system, as taken from last page of Principals' Reports.

(2) Be sure that totals agree with totals as shown in Table XXVII—Colored Schools—Enrollment by Grades.

(3) The enrollment shown between the heavy lines in this table represents Normal Pupil Progress. Those below the lines are accelerated and those above are retarded.

Georgia State Archives

Remembering Julius Rosenwald

Figure 3.99. Rosenwald historical marker at Tuskegee University

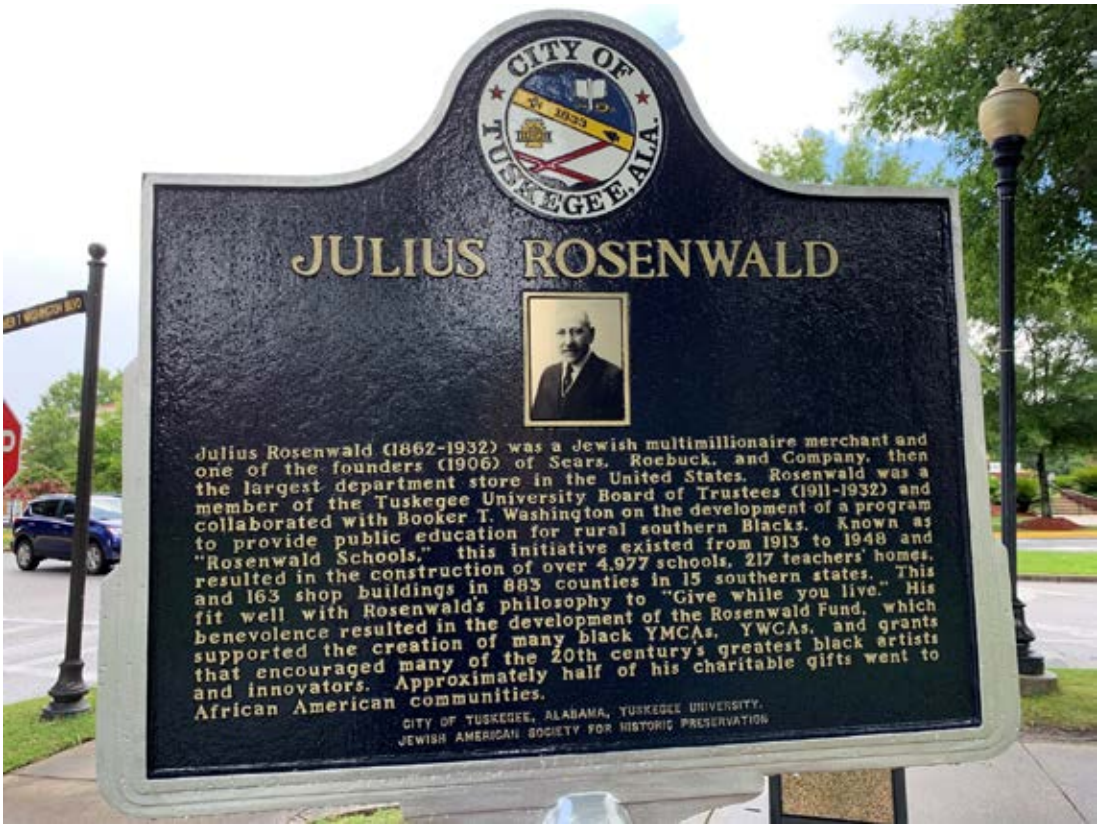
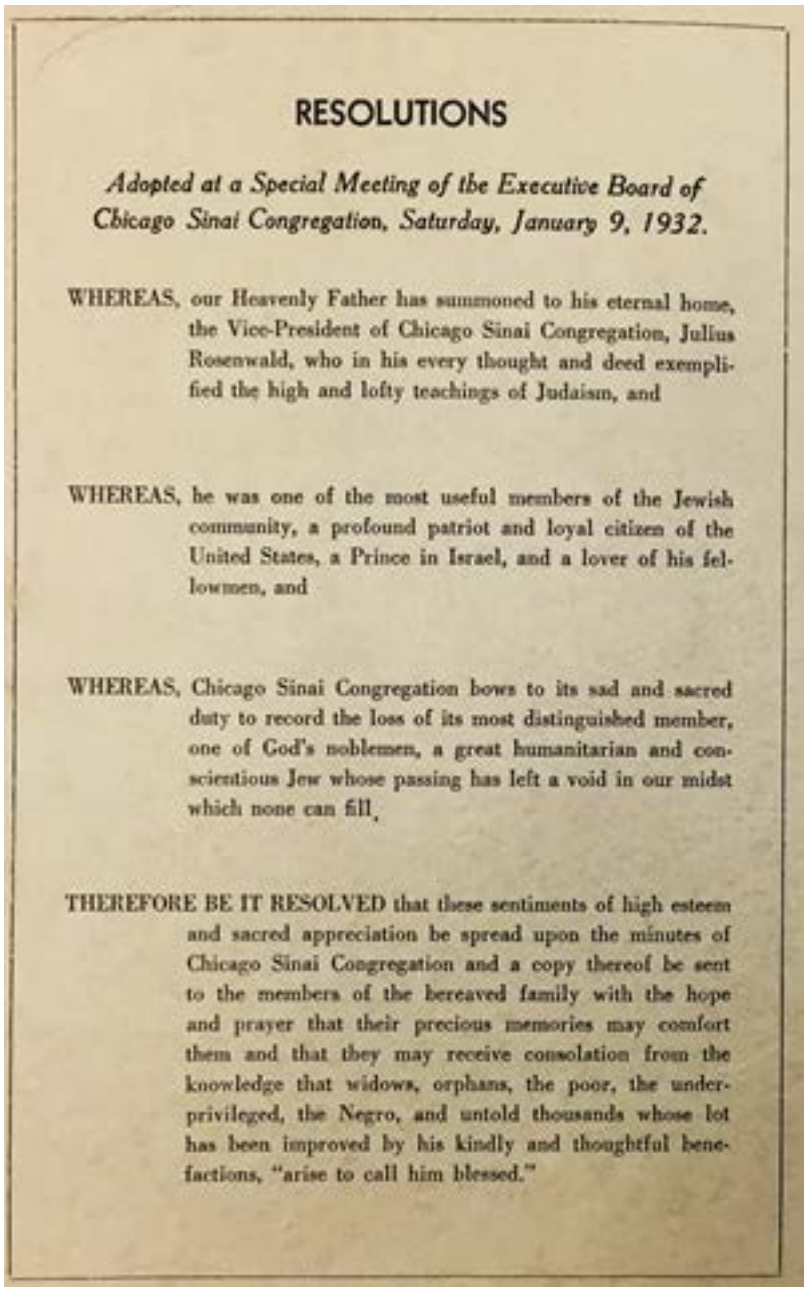


Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.100. Rosenwald—"One of God's Noblemen"



RESOLUTIONS

Adopted at a Special Meeting of the Executive Board of Chicago Sinai Congregation, Saturday, January 9, 1932.

WHEREAS, our Heavenly Father has summoned to his eternal home, the Vice-President of Chicago Sinai Congregation, Julius Rosenwald, who in his every thought and deed exemplified the high and lofty teachings of Judaism, and

WHEREAS, he was one of the most useful members of the Jewish community, a profound patriot and loyal citizen of the United States, a Prince in Israel, and a lover of his fellowmen, and

WHEREAS, Chicago Sinai Congregation bows to its sad and sacred duty to record the loss of its most distinguished member, one of God's noblemen, a great humanitarian and conscientious Jew whose passing has left a void in our midst which none can fill,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that these sentiments of high esteem and sacred appreciation be spread upon the minutes of Chicago Sinai Congregation and a copy thereof be sent to the members of the bereaved family with the hope and prayer that their precious memories may comfort them and that they may receive consolation from the knowledge that widows, orphans, the poor, the underprivileged, the Negro, and untold thousands whose lot has been improved by his kindly and thoughtful benefactions, "arise to call him blessed."

Julius Rosenwald Papers, The University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Center

The First Rosenwald School—Loachapoka, Alabama

Figure 3.101. The First Rosenwald School—historical marker in Alabama



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.101 (cont'd). First Rosenwald School dedicated in 1913



Figure 3.101 (cont'd). First Rosenwald School historical marker (reverse side)



Documents:
News Coverage of the Rosenwald Schools by the *Americus Times-Recorder*

Figure 3.102. Dedication ceremony for the Shipp Industrial School



DEDICATE ROSENWALD SCHOOL THANKSGIVING

Plans To Open New School Being Made; J. E. D. Shipp To Deliver Address

The largest and greatest of the several schools in Sumter county that have been built by the philanthropy of Julius Rosenwald is to be dedicated on the 29 of November at Sumter at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. The colored people from all over the county are invited to be present. This school has as its president, W. H. Craig, a graduate of Hampton Technological college. The boys are taught as in all junior technological schools. These pupils are taught carpentry, metal working, wood working and mechanical work of all elementary grades. They are taught to weld brass and iron, to take an engine apart and rebuild it, to run tractors and to do all kinds of blacksmithing.

There is not only a very beautiful and commodious school building but a new elegant residence for teachers also. They have ten acres of land. The colored people have an organized society that has bought and paid for 200 acres of other land adjoining the academy [illegible] when the school needs it this land can also be acquired. They have a teacher of agriculture and home economics. This school will be one of the largest and greatest of schools for the training of colored children anywhere in this section. The curriculum is so devised as to require 60 per cent of pupils time in vocational work. The white and colored people of Sumter are invited to be at the dedicatory exercises on Thursday evening.

The dedicatory address will be delivered by J. E. D. Shipp, chairman of the Board of Education of Sumter county. The new building will on that day be ready for occupancy. The colored people of the Third district have paid in with Julius Rosenwald an equal amount to build and equip this great industrial school which will ever stand as a monument to their enterprise.

Americus Times-Recorder, November 27, 1923, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.103. Newspaper clipping, "Dedicate New Shipp Industrial School"



DEDICATE NEW SHIPP INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

Negro Masonic Ceremonies Held In Honor of New Negro Educational Institution

Dedicating exercises of the [illegible] Industrial School were held at 1 O'clock Thursday with appropriat eexercises by leading Georgia negro masons. The school was named in honor of J. E. D. Shiop chairman of the Sumter board of eduvation.

Bright Hill, negro, special deputy of the grand master of masons, was deputized to make the dedication. In spite of the drizzling rains a number of persons were present.

Mr. Shipp delivered a short address in behalf of Sumter educators, and other addresses followed. The school now has a total enrollment of 152.

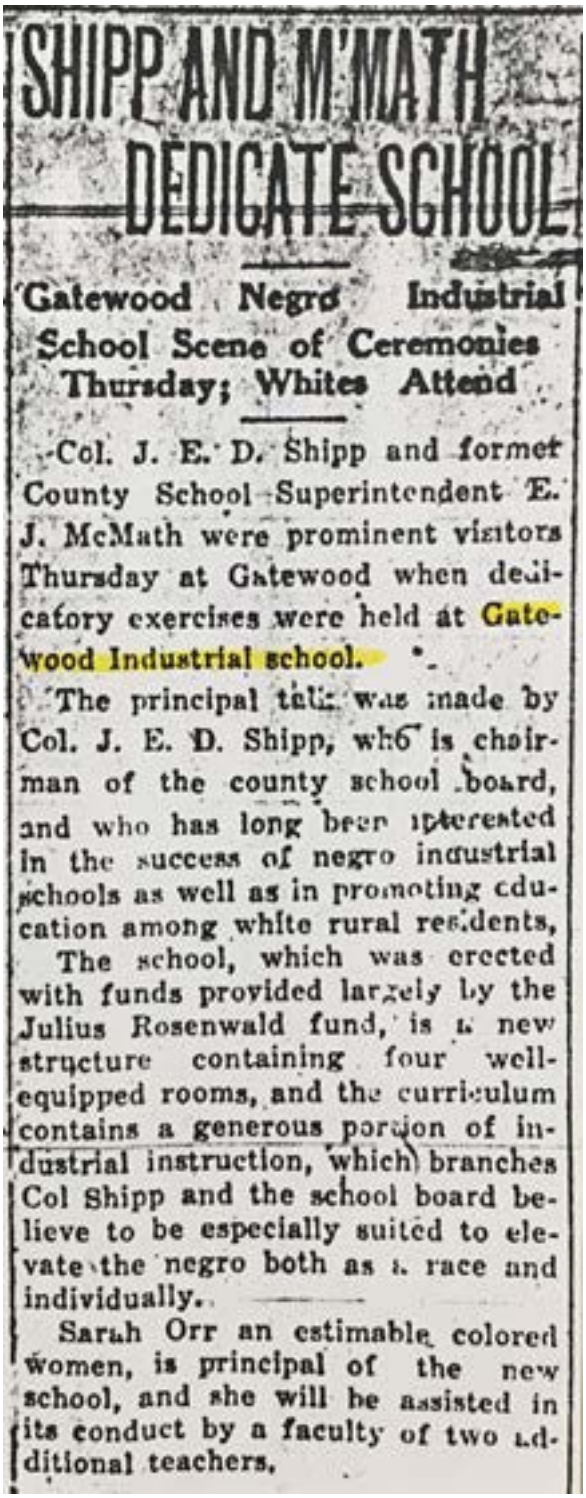
"Industrial farming and other courses are offered to students under a well trained corps of instructors," Mr. Shipp stated. "It is hoped that other schools for the education of the negro youth will be erected in the near future."

COURTESY OF
SUMTER HISTORIC TRUST, INC.

ARCHIVIST

Americus Times-Recorder, November 30, 1923, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.104. Dedication ceremony for the Gatewood Rosenwald School



SHIPP AND M'MATH DEDICATE SCHOOL

Gatewood Negro Industrial School Scene of Ceremonies Thursday; Whites Attend

Col. J. E. D. Shipp and former County School Superintendent E. J. McMath were prominent visitors Thursday at Gatewood when dedicatory exercises were held at Gatewood Industrial school.

The principal talk was made by Col. J. E. D. Shipp, who is chairman of the county school board, and who has long been interested in the success of negro industrial schools as well as in promoting education among white rural residents.

The school, which was erected with funds provided largely by the Julius Rosenwald fund, is a new structure containing four well-equipped rooms, and the curriculum contains a generous portion of industrial instruction, which branches Col Shipp and the school board believe to be especially suited to elevate the negro both as a race and individually.

Sarah Orr an estimable colored women, is principal of the new school, and she will be assisted in its conduct by a faculty of two additional teachers.

Americus Times-Recorder, December 28, 1923, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.105. Dedication ceremony for the Plains Rosenwald School



WILL DEDICATE NEW NEGRO SCHOOL SOON

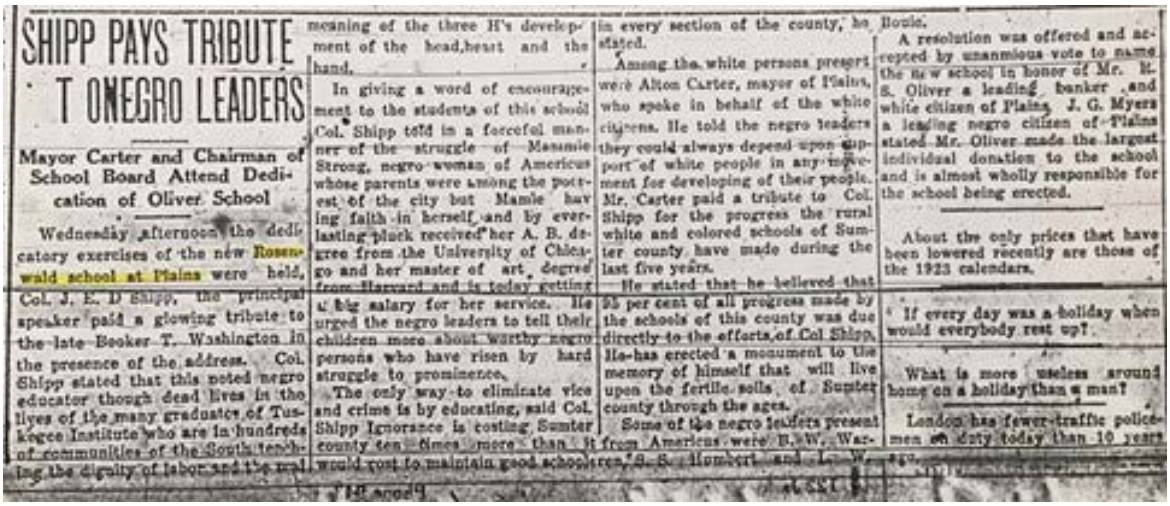
Col. J. E. D. Shipp today accepted an invitation to deliver an oration at the dedication of a new Rosenwald Negro Industrial school at Plains on January 2d, it is announced.

This school erected almost entirely through the patronage of the Julius Rosenwald fund, is the largest and finest of several similar school buildings built in the county through co-operation between the school authorities and managers of the funds. In addition to a limited literary course the students there will receive instruction in many industrial branches, including farming and farm from problems, in acc dance with the policy of the county school board to advance industrial education among negroes here.

Besides Col. Shipp, it is expected that E. W. Dupree, county school superintendent and a number of other white citizens interested in education of the negro will attend the dedicatory exercises.

Americus Times-Recorder, December 28, 1923, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.106. "Shipp Pays Tribute to Negro Leaders"



SHIPP PAYS TRIBUTE T ONEGRO LEADERS

Mayor Carter and Chairman of School Board Attend Dedication of Oliver School

Wednesday afternoon the dedicatory exercises of the new Rosenwald school at Plains were held. Col. J. E. D Shipp, the principal speaker paid a glowing tribute to the late Booker T. Washington in the presence of the address. Col. Shipp stated that this noted negro educator though dead lives in the lives of the many graduates of Tuskegee Institute who are in hundreds of communities of the South teaching the dignity of labor and the real meaning of the three H's development of the head,heart and the hand.

In giving a word of encouragement to the students of this school Col. Shipp told in a forceful manner of the struggle of Mamie Strong, negro woman of Americus whose parents were among the poorest of the city but Mamie having faith in herself and by everlasting pluck received her A. B. degree from the University of Chicago and her master of art degree from Harvard and is today getting a big salary for her service. He urged the negro leaders to tell their children more about worthy negro persons who have risen by hard struggle to prominence.

The only way to eliminate vice and crime is by educating, said Col. Shipp Ignorance is costing Sumter county ten times more than it would cost to maintain good schools in every section of the county, he stated.

Among the white persons present were Alton Carter, mayor of Plains, who spoke in behalf of the white citizens. He told the negro leaders they could always depend upon support of white people in any movement for developing of their people. Mr. Carter paid a tribute to Col. Shipp for the progress the rural white and colored schools of Sumter county have made during the last five years.

He stated that he believed that 75 per cent of all progress made by the schools of this county was due directly to the efforts of Col Shipp. He has erected a monument to the memory of himself that will live upon the fertile soils of Sumter county through the ages.

Some of the negro leaders present from Americus were B. W. Warren, S. S. Humbert and L. W. [illegible]

A resolution was offered and accepted by unanmious vote to name the new school in honor of Mr. H. S. Oliver a leading banker and white citizen of Plains. J. G. Myers a leading negro citizen of Plains stated Mr. Oliver made the largest individual donation to the school and is almost wholly responsible for the school being erected.

About the only prices that have been lowered recently are those of the 1923 calendars.

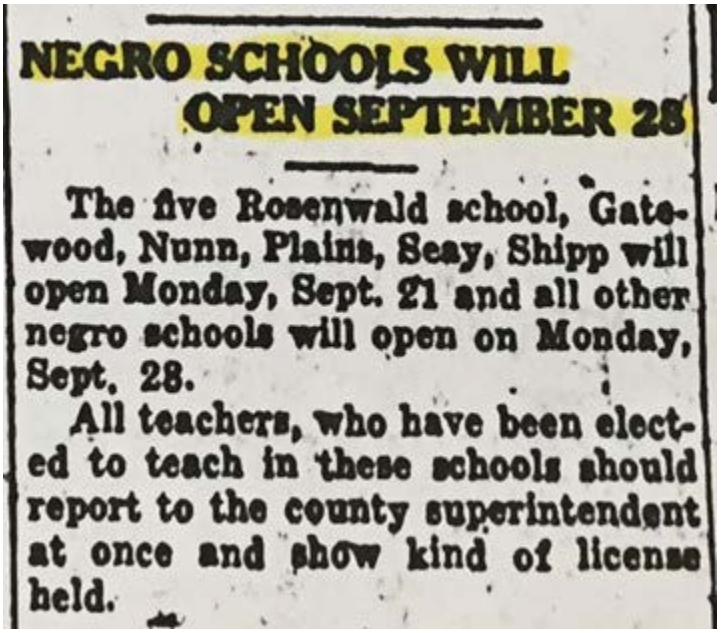
If every day was a holiday when would everybody rest up?

What is more useless around home on a holiday than a man?

London has fewer traffic policemen on duty today than 10 years

Americus Times-Recorder, n.d., Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.107. Late-September start for Sumter Rosenwald Schools—1925



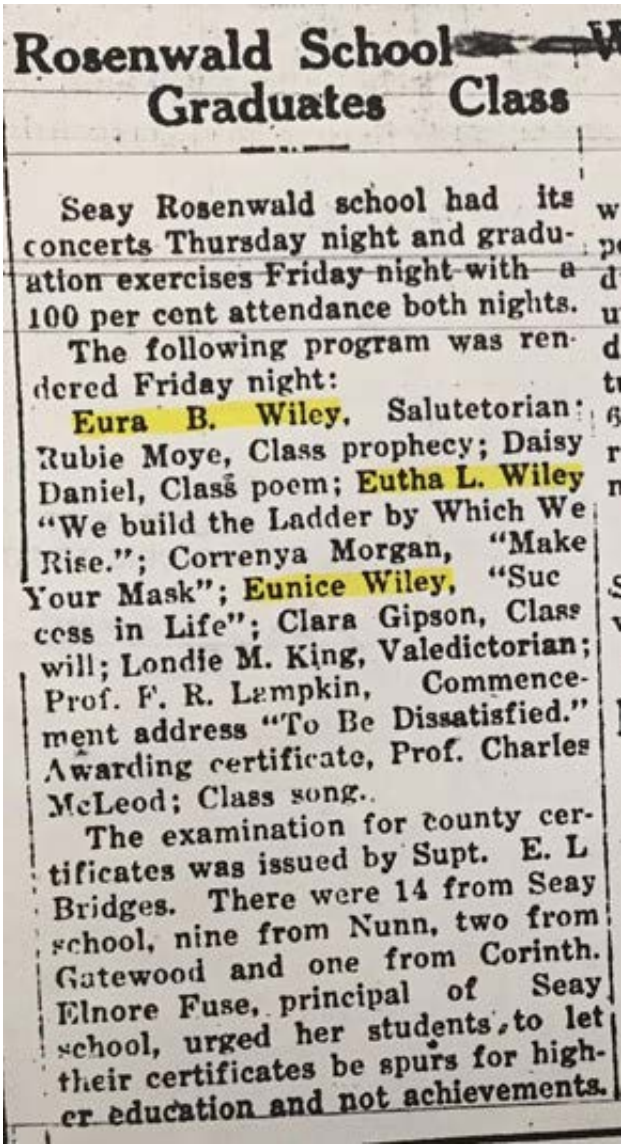
NEGRO SCHOOLS WILL OPEN SEPTEMBER 28

The five Rosenwald school, Gatewood, Nunn, Plains, Seay, Shipp will open Monday, Sept. 21 and all other negro schools will open on Monday, Sept. 28.

All teachers, who have been elected to teach in these schools should report to the county superintendent at once and show kind of license held.

Americus Times-Recorder, September 15, 1925, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.108. Graduation at Seay Rosenwald—1929



Rosenwald School Graduates Class

Seay Rosenwald school had its concerts Thursday night and graduation exercises Friday night with a 100 per cent attendance both nights.

The following program was rendered Friday night:

Eura B. Wiley, Salutetorian; Rubie Moye, Class prophecy; Daisy Daniel, Class poem; Eutha L. Wiley "We build the Ladder by Which We Rise."; Correnya Morgan, "Make Your Mask"; Eunice Wiley, "Success in Life"; Clara Gipson, Class will; Londie M. King, Valedictorian; Prof. F. R. Lampkin, Commencement address "To Be Dissatisfied." Awarding certificate, Prof. Charles McLeod; Class song.

The examination for county certificates was issued by Supt. E. L Bridges. There were 14 from Seay school, nine from Nunn, two from Gatewood and one from Corinth. Elnore Fuse, principal of Seay school, urged her students to let their certificates be spurs for higher education and not achievements.

Americus Times-Recorder, May 6, 1929, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.109. Shady Grove: Sumter's Sixth Rosenwald School—1931



Six Rosenwald Schools in Co.

Sumter county's colored schools are making progressive strides.

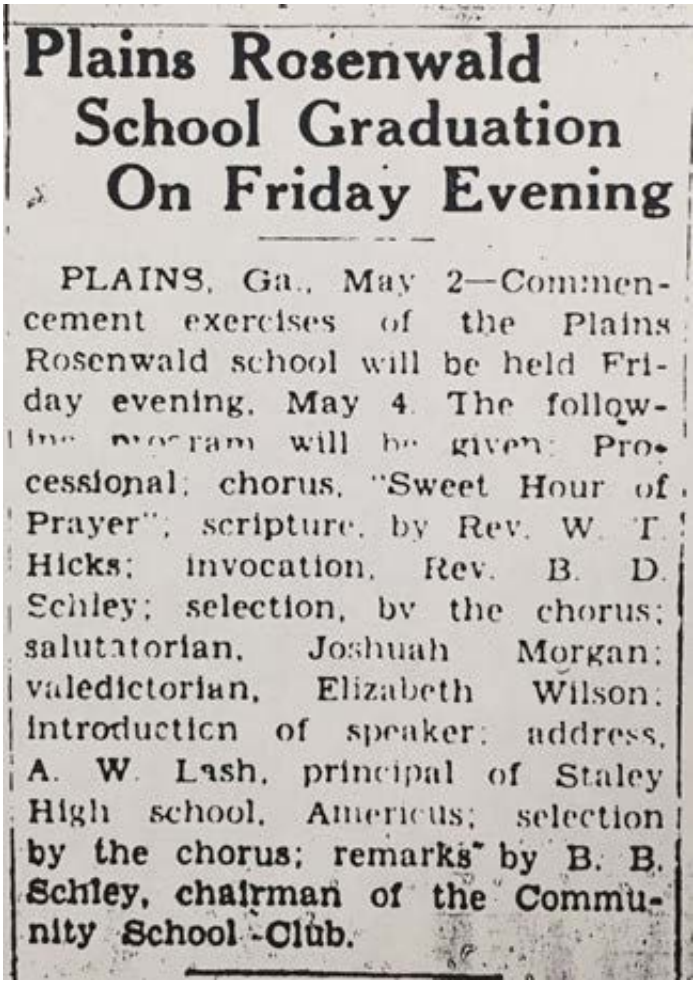
With the completion of a new Rosenwald building for Shady Grove district, Sumter has six plants that are constructed according to the Rosenwald specifications. There are only four other Georgia counties that have as many and only two possessing more.

The building is a four-room frame building. It has been accepted as standard by one of Rosenwald's inspectors. It was constructed by the negroes of that community who were given substantial aid by the Sumter county board of education.

Shady Grive is the largest colored school in the Sumter system, showing an enrollment of 250 pupils. There are four teachers serving the patronage. It is expected that equipment will be provided for the new building before the next term beging, probably in October. Four teachers handle the courses taught, one of whom will direct a new course, in home economics, next term.

Americus Times-Recorder, July 20, 1931, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.110. Graduation at Plains Rosenwald—1945



Plains Rosenwald School Graduation On Friday Evening

PLAINS, Ga., May 2—Commencement exercises of the Plains Rosenwald school will be held Friday evening, May 4. The following program will be given: Processional; chorus, "Sweet Hour of Prayer"; scripture, by Rev. W. T. Hicks; invocation, Rev. B. D. Schley; selection, by the chorus; salutatorian, Joshuah Morgan; valedictorian, Elizabeth Wilson; introduction of speaker; address, A. W. Lash, principal of Staley High school, Americus; selection by the chorus; remarks by B. B. Schley, chairman of the Community School Club.

Americus Times-Recorder, May 2, 1945, Sumter County Files, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Documents:
1952 Graduation Program from the Plains Rosenwald School

Figure 3.111. 1952 Plains School Graduation Commencement Program



The Plains Site

THE PLAINS SITE, PLAINS, GEORGIA COMMENCEMENT NO. 1952

A New Day In 4-H Club At Plains Jr. High School

The 4-H Club of Plains Jr. High School represents its club motto, "To Make The Best Better" for our school and community.

To develop these characters, we must encourage better citizens and to do this we must have the cooperation of the school and community.

The 4-H Club has done much to aid mobilization during the past terms such as canning, clothing, children's gardening, cooking and home improvement.

Our 4-H club has an enrollment of eighty-nine girls and boys.

The past four terms our club has put over many minor projects with one major project each term.

This term our major project was a trip to Atlanta which was successful. This trip was April 18, 1952. Miss Wiley, Mrs. Hammond, Mrs. Cottle, and Mrs. Floyd were chaperones for the tour.

A bus was chartered. Mr. Pritty, our bus driver helped make our trip a successful and enjoyable one. We visited The Carver High School, The Capital, Stone Mountain, Cyclorama and some of the business stores of Atlanta.

Pictures were made at Stone Mountain and dinner was eaten there also. The tour was enjoyed by all.

Mattie E. Hammond, Advisor

OFFICERS FOR 1952

President ..... Simmie Tellis
Vice-President ..... Charlie T. Mays
Secretary ..... Dorothy Schley
Ass't. Secretary ..... Mel Rose Gibson
REPORTERS:
Garden ..... Annette Lanier
Poultry ..... Eleanor Lanier
Program Committee ..... Carrie Lee Polk, Oliver Gibson
Recreation Committee ..... Edna Johnson, Betty Tatum

NOTE OF THANKS

The faculty of Plains Junior High School extends a hearty Thanks to the following people:

Mr. Thad Jones who filmed the Christmas play of the children to be shown on the screen. Mrs. Dorothy Bowman, county supervisor, who showed pictures and audio-visual aid; Miss Wiley, Home Demonstration Agent who helped to supervise group on 4-H club trip to Atlanta, Mrs. Carter who donated many helpful magazines to the s[illegible]

OUR WORK SHOP

Reading left to right—Simmie Tellis, Charlie T. Mays, Joseph Schley, Willie Clyde Kitchens, Joe Lewis Brown, Allen Johnson, Principal, Annie B. Floyd, Willie Lee Rogers and George Kitchens.

Our workshop has really been humming with excitement during the term. In this course of study we devoted most of our time to Home "Furniture". After several weeks of observation and planning, we made a list of the general requirements.

First our teacher, Mrs. Annie Floyd listed the things that could be made in our workshop. Each boy made his selection and paid a fee of two dollars. Then we set to work on the plans. The following were considered:
A. Measurements for desired project. B. Amount of material needed. C. Cost. D. Number of hours necessary for completion. A reasonable amount of time was spent during practice work. The work was far from being easy and yet it wasn't too complicated.

We received some very severe scolding before we finished our book but we deserved them. We will admit that we were pranksters but we didn't mean any harm. Our teacher was patient with us and we love her for it. Knowing so well our characteristics and abilities she worked faithful with us I am sure she was pleased with the fruits of our labor when we completed and painted.
A. Twelve lawn chairs. B. Eight small writing desks. C. One wall cabinet. D. Four magazine cases. E. Two small tables. F. One book case.

We have received many compliments on our work. We spent $40 for materials.

The demand for architects are increasing yearly. We sincerely trust that we will be prepared to meet the requirements for this skilled work in the very near future.

George Kitchens, Charles Hicks, Joseph Schley.

CHURCH NEWS

The 31st anniversary of the Lebanon Baptist Church will be held Wednesday night, May 28th, under the leadership of our efficient Pastor, Rev. W. B. Mathis. Great work has been accomplished.

Each member is asked to pay $1.00.

Mrs. Almeta Tatum, Clerk Rev. W. B. Mathis, Pastor

Courtesy of Eugene Edge

Editorial Department

Editor-In-Chief ..... Joseph Schley
Assistant Editor ..... Willie Clyde Kitchens
Feature Editor ..... Melrose Gipson
Literary Editor ..... Carrie Lee Polk
Sports Editor ..... Dorothy Schley

Business Department

Business Manager ..... Charlie T. Maye
Assistant Manager ..... Joe Louis Brown
Circulation Manager ..... Simmie Tullis
Treasurer ..... Arthur Bridges
Secretary ..... Ida Mae Jackson

Reporters

Tenth ..... Willie Polk and Thelma Jane Miller
Ninth ..... Eleanor Lasiter
Eighth ..... Orangie Mae Bryant
Seventh ..... Alice Floyd
Sixth ..... Clinton Marshall
Fifth and Fourth ..... Tiney Glover Jr.
Third & Second ... James Carl Slater, Stanley Robert Harper
First Grade ..... Bernice Floyd

Faculty Advisers

Mrs. Annie Floyd, Mrs. Katie Cottle and Mrs. Mattie Hammond.

Plains Jr. High Has A Long List Of Accomplishments

Under the leadership of our Principal, Mrs. Annie B. Floyd, Plains Jr. High is proud of several accomplishments.

The Board of Education replaced our old Westinghouse Electric range with a new one. New equipment for kitchen was bought by the Home Ec. class for an approximate total of $20.

Dorothy Schley, one of our 4-H club members won a 24-piece baking set for 1st place in bread baking contest in Albany, Ga. Carrie Lee Polk won a medal and certificate for being the most outstanding 4-H club member.

Mr. Thad Jones, a prominent citizen of Plains gave us the priviledge of becoming Movie Stars. He filmed two pictures at our school, "The Prince of Peace" and "Santa's Helpers" which was shown for our Christmas Cantata.

The school registered with the State Department of Education for Audio—visual aids in relation to each teacher's class work. Each teacher received at least one picture each week.

NEW SWINGS WERE BOUGHT FOR PLAY GROUND

Our boys and girls basketball teams each won 3rd Place in the county tournament. Each received a beautiful trophy.

With the assistance of the parents and teachers 40 members of the 4-H club raised $190 to pay for trip to Atlanta. The tour was enjoyed by all. Miss Wyley, our county agent, Mrs. Floyd, Mrs. Hammond and Mrs. Cottle chaperoned the group. Some of the places visited in Atlanta were the Capital, Carver High School, Stone Mountain and Rich's Department Store.

At Fields Day which was held at Shady Grove, we won
1st Place in 50 yard Dash
2nd Place in Speech Contest
1st Place in Woodwork Exhibit.

Miss Constance E. Coley, 1st Grade teacher

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sunday—May 18—3:00 P. M. Commencement
Staley High School
Monday—May 19—Primary Grades
"Miss Muffett Eats", "Its Easy To Cook", and The Happy Health Children. Conducted by—Messers. Bessie Hargrove, Gladys Thomas and Miss Constance Coley.
Tuesday—May 20—Intermediate Grades "Men Not Wanted".
Conducted by—Mrs. Mattie Hammond.
Wednesday—May 21—School Picnic.
Monday—May 26—Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Grades.
"The New Parson"
conducted by Mrs. Annie Floyd and Mrs. Katie Cot[illegible]

News From The Homemaking Class



In Foods and Homemaking are included many suggestions and devices to stimulate pupils to participate in home activities and do their share in making their home attractive and happy. The Homemaking class consists of the 9th and 10th grades.

The first unit of study was on Modern Etiquette. The first six weeks of school the class studied the following topics for discussion:

A. Making Introductions
B. Silver Teas
C. Writing Invitations
D. Table Services

The next unit of work was in the area of clothing. In this course of study the class learned to use the machine. They learned to make different kinds of seams. Their project was to make a simple garment. Each girl made a white pinafore apron for the cooking class. They also made a simple child's garment.

In addition to studying the girls learned to prepare and serve simple dishes such as:

A. Fruit Beverages
B. Fruit Salads
C. Creamed Soups
D. Creamed Vegetables
F. Scalloped Dishes
F. Breads

On Halloween the girls entertained with a lovely party. A delicious repast was served to the guests. At the close of the party favors were given to the guests. They were cone shaped paper cups filled with candy in the Halloween colors. The cups were made by the class.

In think every girl should know something about Homemaking whether she plans to work in an office, school, factory, hospital, bank or store. We often learn to like to do things when we know how to do them well. Studying Homemaking may be the beginning of an interesting life's work.

Ocie Lee Bryant
Carolyn Wright



CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

MRS. LILLA B. JOHNSON, An outstanding citizen of our community has been secretary of the Community Club for the past 12 years. She is very active in church work as well as school activities.

Figure 3.111. (cont'd)



COMMENCEMENT NO. 1951 THE PLAINS SITE, PLAINS, GEORGIA PAGE THREE

Will The School Instill Wisdom Or Build Character

The school is not so much a place to instill wisdom as it is a place to build men and women. The boy may fail in one or many studies! do not discourage him; if he comes out with the character of a man he has won. The girl may not lead her class, but if she comes out pure and true for life that is success.

Moral qualities live longer than intellectual ones because they have more power over the heart of the individual.

Parents, teachers and friends are you trying to impress upon your children and the youth of today that good manners will get one farther in the world than money? Yes, money will purchase goods, but good manners will win friends and good will.

Seemingly, today's youth feel that to have good manners is old fashion. "Thank You", "Please", "Pardon me", "Good morning" "Good bye", etc. are words that have been taken from the language of too many homes in this fast moving age.

Children must be taught how to behave in church, at school, on the street, at the theatre, on train, trolley or bus and in all public places.

Our boys and girls are building the houses in which they are going to live and if they are not carefully guided in the selection of material their buildings will not withstand the tides of a changing world.

Education consists in action, conduct, self-control self-culture and all that tends to discipline a man and fit him for the proper performance of duties and business of life.

To ascertain the true nature of a person, observe his deportment in public, most people contrive to conduct themselves agreeably toward the small group of acquaintance comprising their social circle. Such efforts cannot be wholly unselfish for they win them the approbation and companionship without which no human being lives happily. But how do they behave toward persons they encounter only in passing and from whom they expect no favors? Do they always think in terms of self-satisfaction or of the satisfaction of others as well?

The church must assist the home and school in character building. It is the duty of adult leaders to teach the child what is right; Give him the desire to do right; and then provide ample opportunity to practice the desired act.

A friendly smile, a quiet voice and good honest eyes open many doors and hearts.

Mrs. Annie B. Floyd, Prin.

THE SCHOOL CHORUS

State Supervisor Visits School

Mrs. M. Dempsey, our state supervisor visited our school during the early fall. She told us about her many travels in foreign countries. She gave us helpful information on our school program and complimented us on the work we had done.

Annette Lanier

ELEANOR SHOP
126 S. JACKSON ST.
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

REX JEWELRY CO.
108 N. JACKSON ST.
"YOUR CREDIT IS GOOD"

W. L. LITTLE & SONS
106 W. LAMAR ST.
"Complete Home Furnishing"
"The Home Of Good Things To Eat"

COMPLIMENTS OF
DELOACH PASTRY SHOP
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

COMPLIMENTS OF
FRATERNAL UNION DISTRICT
MR. B. B. SCHLEY—D. C.
MRS. L. B. JOHNSON—D. Sec.

COMPLIMENTS OF
CHURCHWELL'S
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

BELL JEWELRY COMPANY
P. O. BOX 234
DIAMONDS, WATCHES CLOCKS
JEWELRY, SILVERWARE

DIANA SHOP
134 W. LAMAR ST.
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

MEN'S SPORT SHOP
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

B. F. CLORE
130½ W. LAMAR ST.
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

DR. HARROLD CLAYTON
OPTOMETRIST
LAMAR ST.
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

HAT SHOPPE
JACKSON ST.
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

STILL GAS COMPANY
Your Friendly L. P. Gas Dealer
BUTANE-PROPANE GAS
209 WEST LAMAR ST.

BASKETBALL 3RD PLACE CHAMPS



From left to right—Kneeling: Carrie L. Polk, Forward, Annette Schley, Guard, Thelma Rogers. Standing—Ellian Morgan, Forward, Olivia Gibson, Forward, Mollie McGarrah, Guard. In Back—Miss C. Coley, Ass't. Coach, Mrs. G. Thomas, Coach. Not shown on picture—Melrose Gibson, Forward, Dorothy Schley, Guard, Annette Lanier, Forward, Eleanor Lanier, Guard

The boy's team also won third place in the tournament.

Who's Who at Plains Jr. High School

The Smartest Girls ..... Jerry Dean Dudley, Catherine Rogers, Bernice Floyd, Alice Floyd, Thelma Rogers, Olivia Gibson, Marjorie Edge, Marjorie Jackson, Orsugie Mae Bryant, and Lessie Mae Kitchen.

The Smartest Boys ..... David Burke, Willie C. Kitchen, Allen Johnson, Earnest Wilcher, James C. Slater, Jerry Sims, Kenneth Hicks, and Bowman Calwell.

Most Helpful Girls ..... Bessie Slappey, Dorothy Schley, Emily Burke, Nathelma Bryant, Catherine Rogers, Betty Tatum, Willie Polk, Carolyn Wright, Olivia Kitchens, Juanita Bryant, Barbara Ann Howard, Mollie McGarrah, and Ellian Morgan.

Most Helpful Boys ..... Stanley Harper, Charles Hicks, MacArthur Polk, Estee Jackson, Joe Louis Brown, Arthur Bridges, Jerry Perry, and Benny Perry.

Neatest Girls ..... Jessie Hamilton, Carolyn Wright, Thelma Miller, Alice Floyd, Marjorie Jackson, Bernice Floyd, Marthanne Tullis, Johnnie Polk, and Edna Jean Harris.

Best All Around Students ..... Jeanette Harper, Tiney Glover, Mel Rose Gibson, Edna Johnson, Earnest Wilcher, Willie Lee Rogers, Ida Mae Jackson, Miriam Polk, and Rosa Mae Bridges.

Ocsie Lee Bryant '53

HUDSON'S
MILLINERY, BAGS, INFANT WEAR
Corner Lamar and Jackson
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

COMPLIMENTS OF
J. E. CARTER
FIRE INSURANCE
PEANUTS, COTTON SEED AND FERTILIZERS
PLAINS, GEORGIA

COMPLIMENTS OF
DENNIS TURNER GRO. & MARKET
FANCY AND STAPLE GROCERIES, CHOICE MEATS
PLAINS, GEORGIA

WALTER GROCERY COMPANY
FANCY GROCERIES AND CHOICE MEATS
Your Business Is Appreciated
PHONE 771 PLAINS, GA.

PLAINS MERCANTILE CO.
MULES, GROCERIES
LADIES' READY-TO-WEAR, SHOES
PHONE 221

STAPLETON STUDIO
FILM—FINISHING
FORSYTH ST. AMERICUS, GA.

PEARLMAN'S
A GOOD PLACE TO SHOP
48 Years of Service
LAMAR ST. AMERICUS, GA.

COMPLIMENTS OF
FLOYD'S CLEANERS
CLAYTON FLOYD, Mgr.
PHONE 761
PLAINS, GEORGIA

COMPLIMENTS OF
PARAMOUNT CLUB
BERRY'S PARK—RECREATION CENTER
PLAINS, GEORGIA

COMPLIMENTS OF
MR. ROBERT McGARRAH
POSTMASTER
PLAINS, GEORGIA

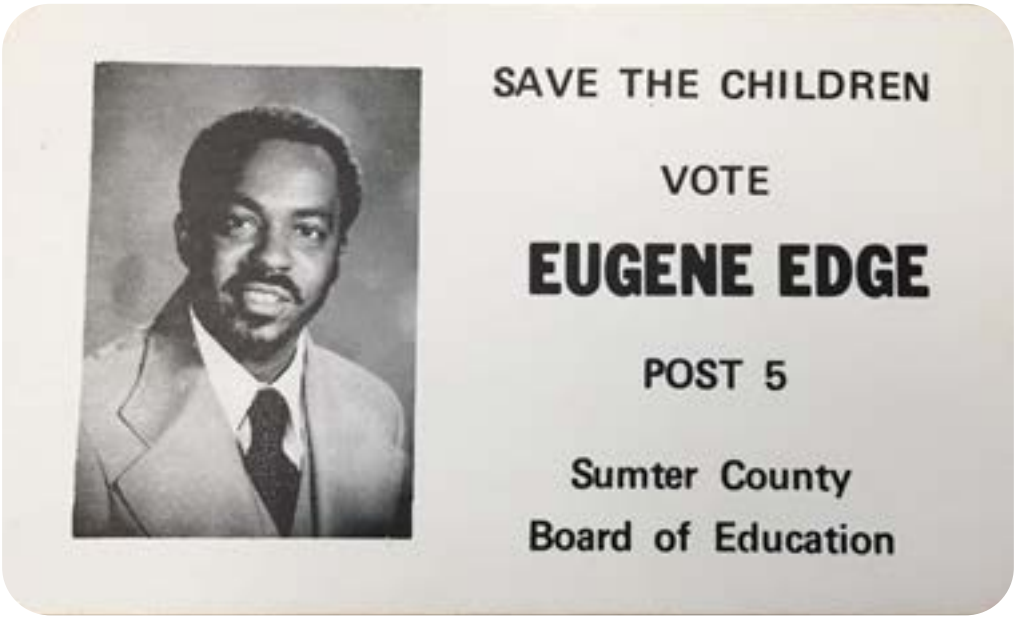
COMPLIMENTS OF
MR. THAD M. JONES
Owner and Operator of Automatic Sprinkler System
PLAINS, GEORGIA

PLAINS PHARMACY
The REXALL Store
PHONE 221

"FOR GOODNESS SAKE"
FOREMOST ICE CREAM

Documents:
1980 Campaign Items for Eugene Edge, Plains Rosenwald Alumnus and Candidate for the Sumter County Board of Education

Figure 3.112. 1980 campaign card for Eugene Edge, candidate for the Sumter County Board of Education



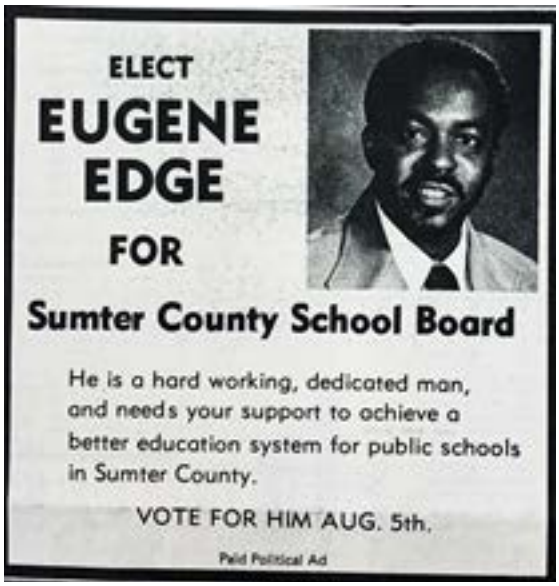
Courtesy of Eugene Edge

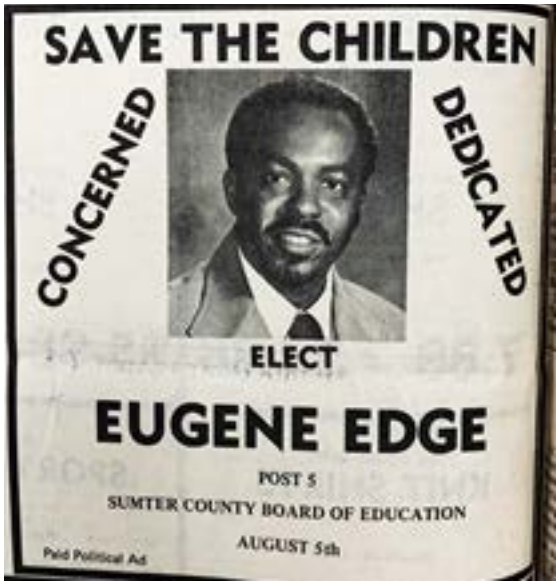
Figure 3.113. 1980 "Save the Children" campaign brochure, candidates for the Sumter County Board of Education



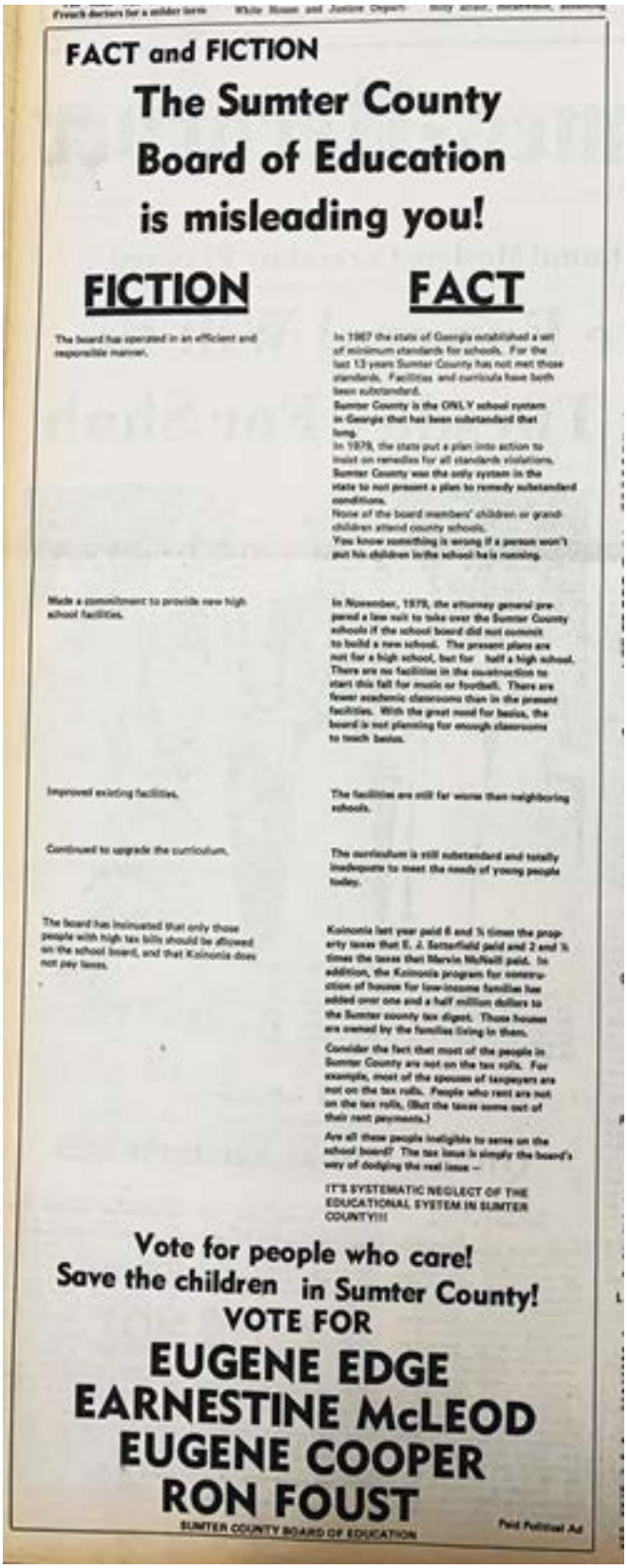
Courtesy of Eugene Edge

Figure 3.114. 1980 newspaper political advertisements for Eugene Edge, candidate for the Sumter County Board of Education





Americus Times-Recorder, July 23, 1980, and July 30, 1980



FACT and FICTION

The Sumter County Board of Education is misleading you!

FICTION	FACT
The board has operated in an efficient and responsible manner.	In 1967 the state of Georgia established a set of minimum standards for schools. For the last 13 years Sumter County has not met those standards. Facilities and curricula have both been substandard. Sumter County is the ONLY school system in Georgia that has been substandard that long. In 1979, the state put a plan into action to insist on remedies for all standards violations. Sumter County was the only system in the state to not present a plan to remedy substandard conditions. None of the board members' children or grandchildren attend county schools. You know something is wrong if a person won't put his children in the school he is running.
Made a commitment to provide new high school facilities.	In November, 1979, the attorney general prepared a law suit to take over the Sumter County schools if the school board did not commit to build a new school. The present plans are not for a high school, but for half a high school. There are no facilities in the construction to start this fall for music or football. There are fewer academic classrooms than in the present facilities. With the great need for basics, the board is not planning for enough classrooms to teach basics.
Improved existing facilities.	The facilities are still far worse than neighboring schools.
Continued to upgrade the curriculum.	The curriculum is still substandard and totally inadequate to meet the needs of young people today.
The board has insinuated that only those people with high tax bills should be allowed on the school board, and that Koinonia does not pay taxes.	Koinonia last year paid 6 and ½ times the property taxes that E. J. Setterfield paid and 2 and ½ times the taxes that Marvin McNeill paid. In addition, the Koinonia program for reconstruction of house for low-income families has added over one and a half million dollars to the Sumter county tax digest. Those houses are owned by the families living in them. Consider the fact that most of the people in Sumter County are not on the tax rolls. For example, most of the spouses of taxpayers are not on the tax rolls. People who rent are not on the tax rolls. (But the taxes come out of their rent payments.) Are all these people ineligible to serve on the school board? The tax issue is simply the board's way of dodging the real issue -- IT'S SYSTEMATIC NEGLECT OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN SUMTER COUNTY!!!

Vote for people who care!
Save the children in Sumter County!
VOTE FOR

EUGENE EDGE
EARNESTINE McLEOD
EUGENE COOPER
RON FOUST

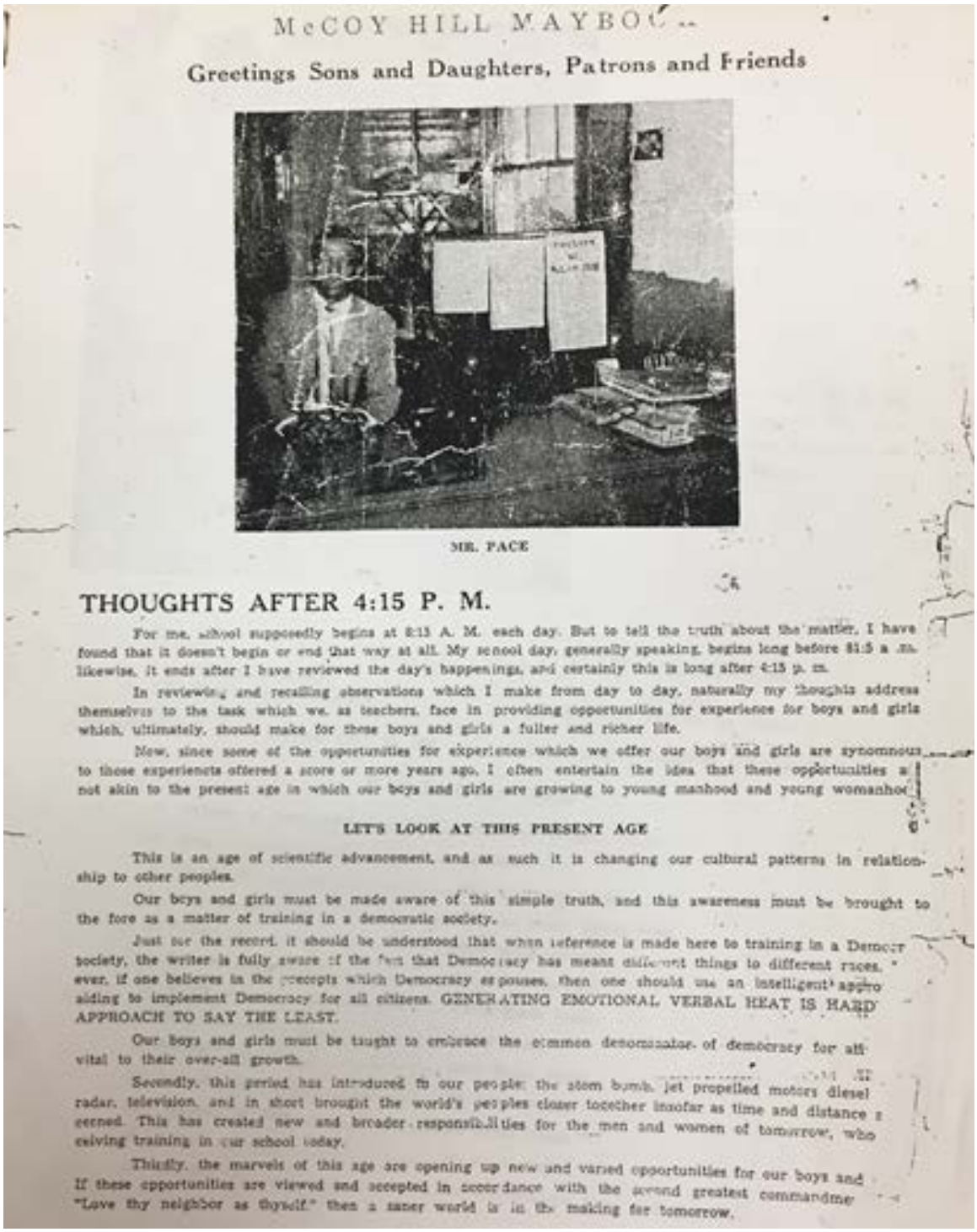
SUMTER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Paid Political Ad

Americus Times-Recorder, July 28, 1980

Documents:
1952 McCay Hill School "Maybook"

Figure 3.115. 1952 McCay Hill School "Maybook"



McCOY HILL MAYBOOK

Greetings Sons and Daughters, Patrons and Friends

MR. PACE

THOUGHTS AFTER 4:15 P. M.

For me, school supposedly begins at 8:15 A. M. each day. But to tell the truth about the matter, I have found that it doesn't begin or end that way at all. My school day, generally speaking, begins long before 8:15 a. m. likewise, it ends after I have reviewed the day's happenings, and certainly this is long after 4:15 p. m.

In reviewing and recalling observations which I make from day to day, naturally my thoughts address themselves to the task which we, as teachers, face in providing opportunities for experience for boys and girls which, ultimately, should make for those boys and girls a fuller and richer life.

Now, since some of the opportunities for experience which we offer our boys and girls are synonmous to those experiences offered a score or more years ago, I often entertain the idea that these opportunities a not akin to the present age in which our boys and girls are growing to young manhood and young womanhoo

LET'S LOOK AT THIS PRESENT AGE

This is an age of scientific advancement, and as such it is changing our cultural patterns in relationship to other peoples.

Our boys and girls must be made aware of this simple truth, and this awareness must be brought to the fore as a matter of training in a democratic society.

Just for the record, it should be understood that when reference is made here to training in a Democr society, the writer is fully aware of the fact that Democracy has meant different things to different races. ever, if one believes in the precepts which Democracy espouses, then one should use an intelligent approa aiding to implement Democracy for all citizens. GENERATING EMOTIONAL VERBAL HEAT IS HARD APPROACH TO SAY THE LEAST.

Our boys and girls must be taught to embrace the common denominator of democracy for all vital to their over-all growth.

Secondly, this period has introduced to our people the atom bomb, jet propelled motors diesel radar, television, and in short brought the world's peoples closer together insofar as time and distance c cerned. This has created new and broader responsibilities for the men and women of tomorrow, who eeiving training in our school today.

Thirdly, the marvels of this age are opening up new and varied opportunities for our boys and If these opportunities are viewed and accepted in accordance with the second greatest commandme "Love thy neighbor as thyself" then a saner world is in the making for tomorrow.

Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard



THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Reading from left to right: Mr. B. LeAndrew Fuse, Asst. Principal; Mrs. Dorothy J. Bozeman, Jeanes Supervisor; and Mr. Walter T. Pace, Principal.

THE McCOY HILL SCHOOL MAY DAY PROGRAM

SPONSORED BY
THE McCOY HILL FACULTY

DIRECTOR
MRS. KATIE DOZIER, 5th GRADE C

2:00 O'CLOCK P. M. — FRIDAY, MAY 16, 1952

STALEY HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

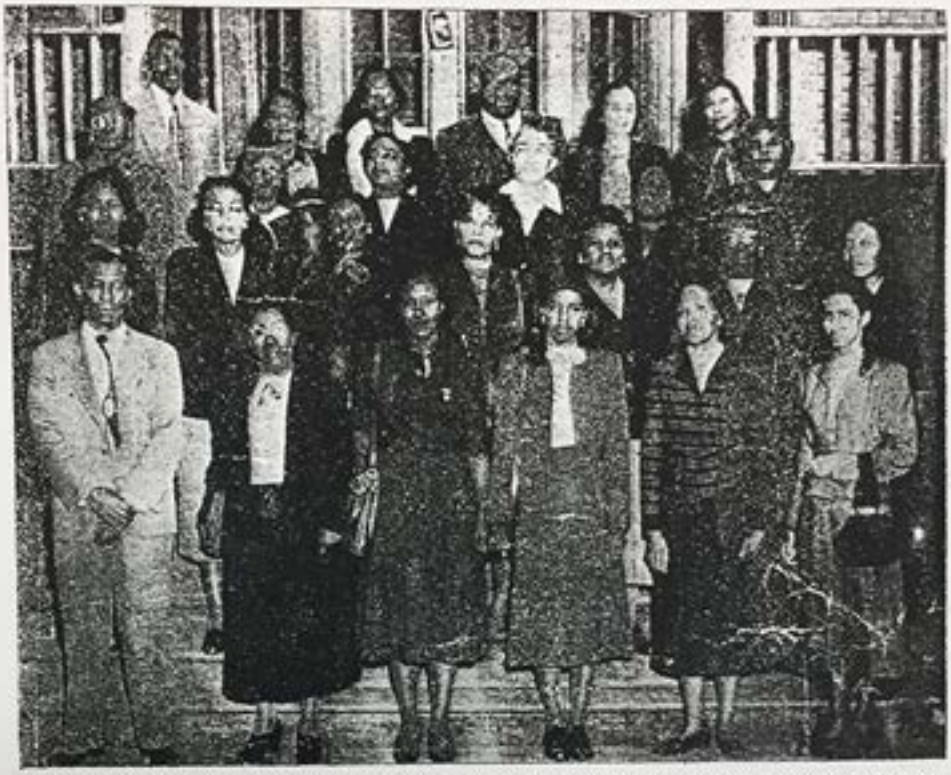
MAY DAY PROGRAM

1. Mistress of Ceremonies ..... Miss Mary Wallace, 6th C
2. Song ..... America
3. Invocation ..... Rev. L. Jerome Jones
4. Song ..... Welcome Sweet Spring Time
5. Poem ..... Mary Emma Jackson
6. Dancing Shoes ..... 1st and 2nd Grades
7. Stunts ..... Third Grade Pupils
8. Song ..... School Chorus
9. Playlet ..... Sixth Grade Pupils
10. Patriotic Drill ..... 5th Grade Pupils
11. Numbers at Play ..... 4th Grade Pupils
12. A Two Act Play ..... 7th Grade Pupils
13. Remarks ..... Mr. B. LeAndrew Fuse, Asst. Principal

—2—

Figure 3.115. (cont'd)

THE McCOY HILL GRAMMAR SCHOOL FACULTY

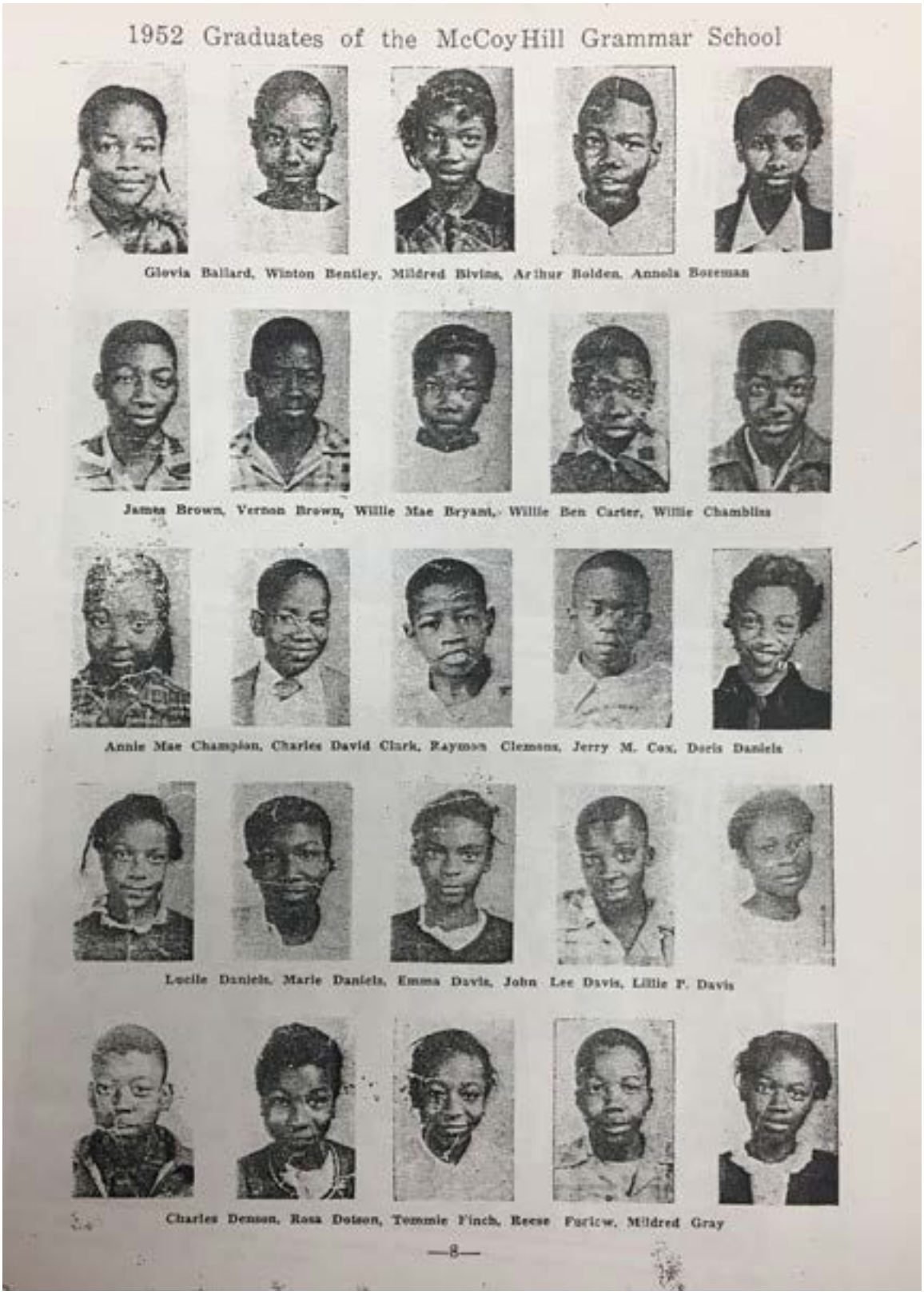


READING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: 1st Row—Mr. Walter T. Pace, Principal; Mrs. Elizabeth Bethune, 6th A; Mrs. Mary Blount, 3rd D; Mrs. Emma Grant, 2nd C; Mrs. Ethel Burleigh, 1C; Mrs. Valeria Pace, 1D;

2nd Row: Mrs. Mattie Harris, 5A; Mrs. Lottie Barber, 7B; Mrs. Lois Wallace, 4A; Mrs. Mattie Sharpe, 4B; Mrs. M. L. Driggers, 3C; Mrs. Ethel Lewis, 1B; Mrs. Sarah Rucker, 5B.

3rd Row: Mrs. Addie Major, 1A; Mrs. Janie Dunning, 2B; Mrs. Emma Anderson, 6C; Mrs. Quincy Taylor, 6B; Mrs. Bobbie Hill, 2A and Mrs. Katie Dozier, 5C

4th Row: Mr. B. LeAndrew Fuse, Asst. Principal, Miss Mary Wallace, 6C ; Mrs. Artibel Roberts, 5A; Rev. R. L. Freeman, 7C, Miss Rubye Pughsley, 3B.



1952 Graduates of the McCoy Hill Grammar School

Glovia Ballard, Winton Bentley, Mildred Bivins, Arthur Bolden, Annola Borreman

James Brown, Vernon Brown, Willie Mae Bryant, Willie Ben Carter, Willie Chamblins

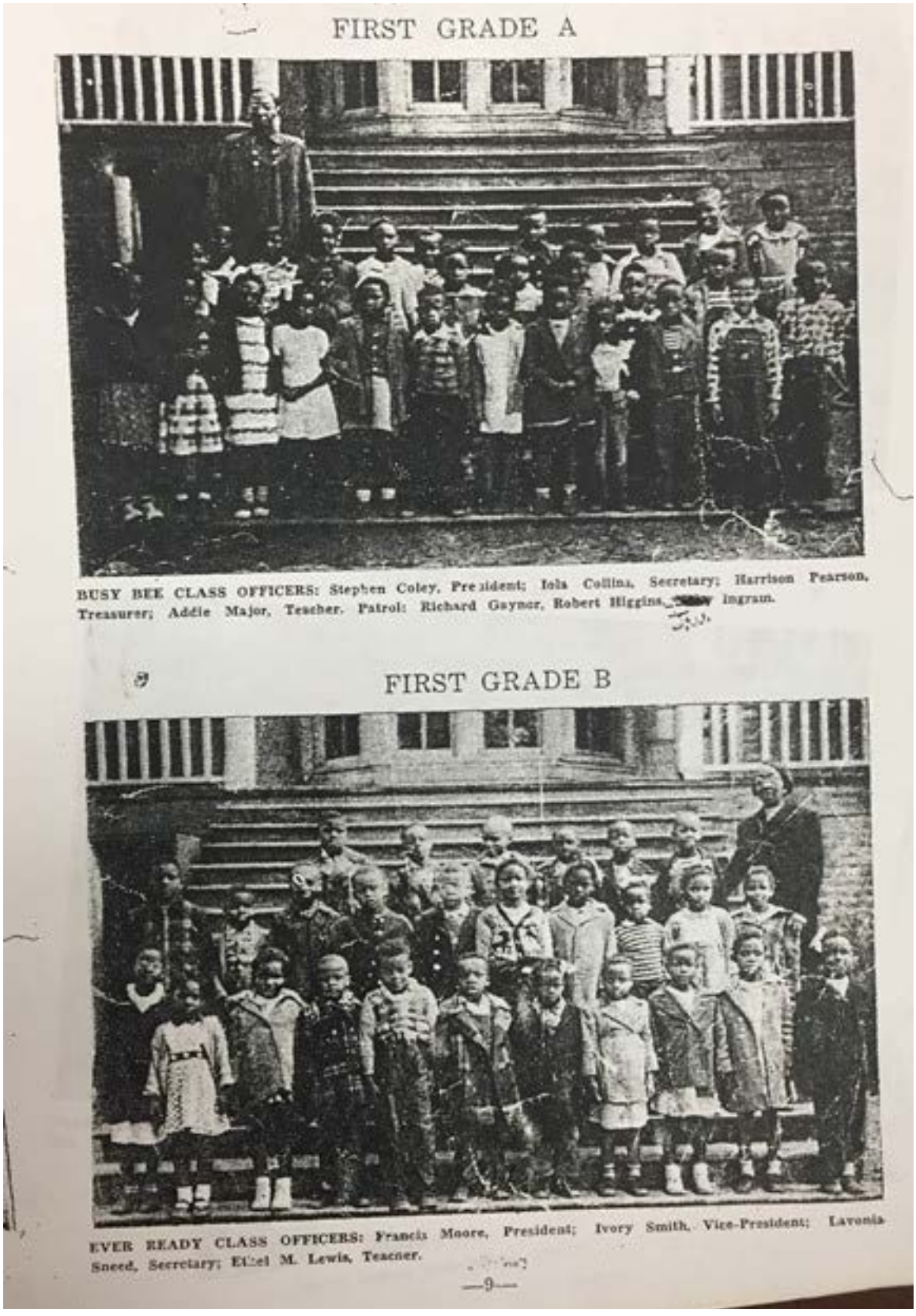
Annie Mae Champion, Charles David Clark, Raymon Clemons, Jerry M. Cox, Doris Daniels

Lucile Daniels, Marie Daniels, Emma Davis, John Lee Davis, Lillie P. Davis

Charles Denson, Rosa Dotson, Tommie Finch, Reese Furlow, Mildred Gray

—8—

Figure 3.115. (cont'd)



FIRST GRADE A

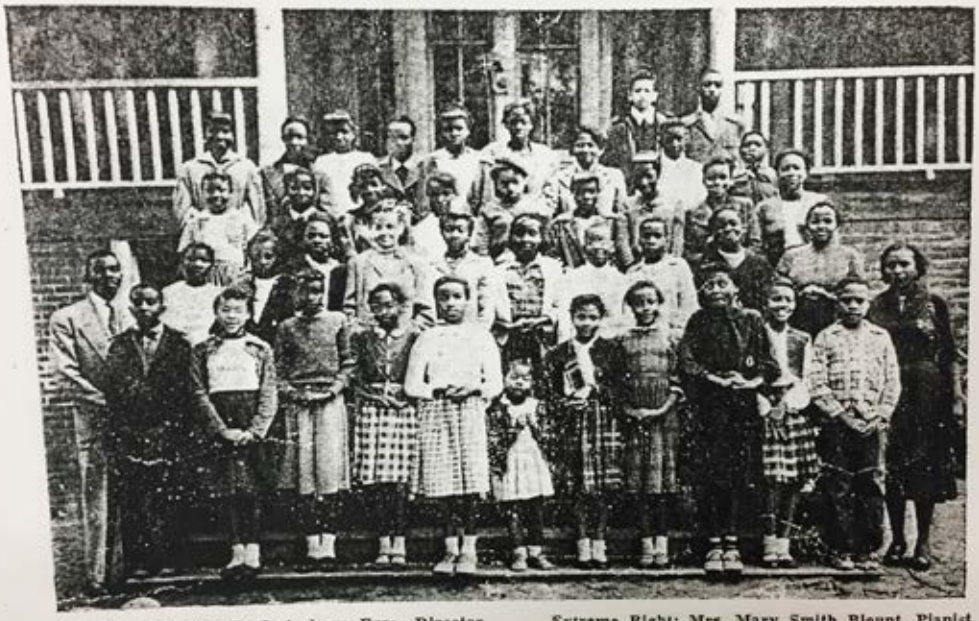
BUSY BEE CLASS OFFICERS: Stephen Coley, President; Iola Collins, Secretary; Harrison Pearson, Treasurer; Addie Major, Teacher. Patrol: Richard Gaynor, Robert Higgins, [illegible] Ingram.

FIRST GRADE B

EVER READY CLASS OFFICERS: Francis Moore, President; Ivory Smith, Vice-President; Lavonia Sneed, Secretary; Ethel M. Lewis, Teacher.

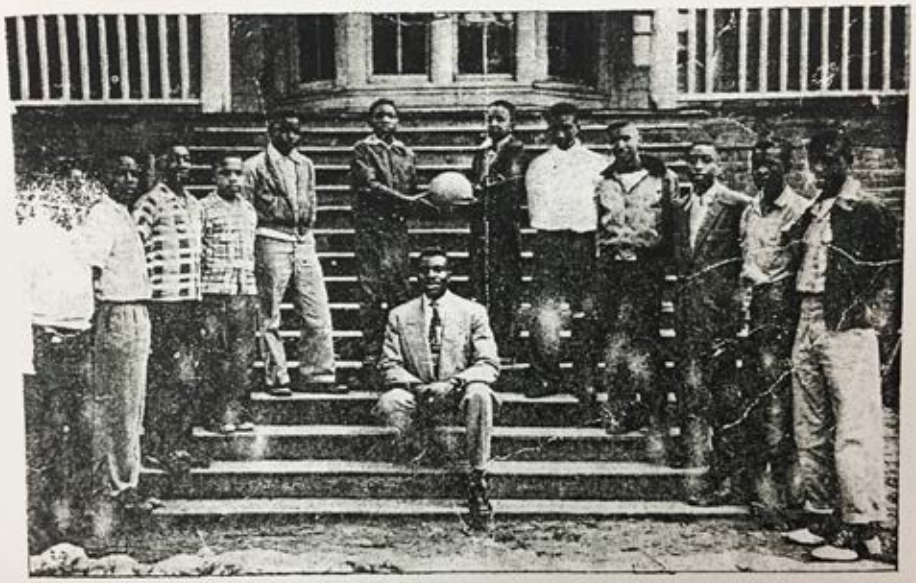
—9—

McCOY HILL SCHOOL CHORUS



Extreme Left: Mr. B. LeAndrew Fuse, Director Extreme Right: Mrs. Mary Smith Blount, Pianist

McCOY HILL BOYS' BASKETBALL TEAM



SUMTER COUNTY CHAMPIONS — 1951 - 52 — Milton Myrick, Captain, Mr. B. L. Fuse, Coach

—25—

Drinking Water and Toilet Systems at School: Example of Shiloh Rosenwald—Notasulga, Alabama

Figure 3.116. Well at Shiloh Rosenwald School



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.117. Pit toilet system at Shiloh Rosenwald School



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.116. (cont'd)









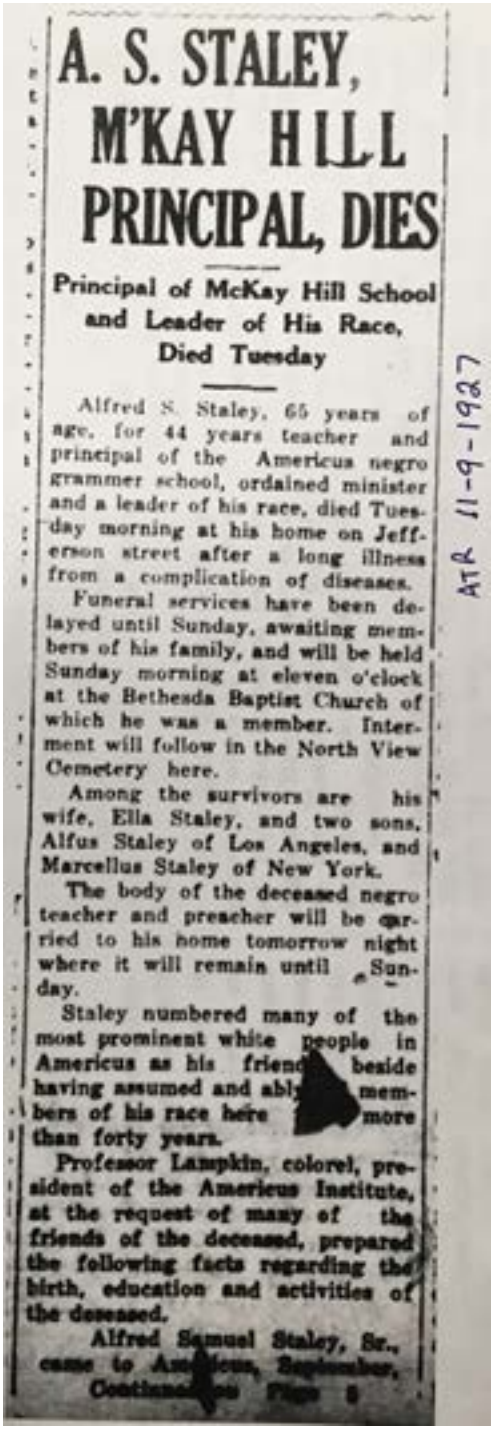
Obituaries and Grave Images

Figure 3.118. Military headstone for Henry Kent McCay



Photo from Find A Grave, Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta, Georgia

Figure 3.119. Obituary for A. S. Staley, high school namesake



A. S. STALEY, M'KAY HILL PRINCIPAL, DIES

Principal of McKay Hill School and Leader of His Race, Died Tuesday

ATR 11-9-1927

Alfred S. Staley, 65 years of age, for 44 years teacher and principal of the Americus negro grammer school, ordained minister and a leader of his race, died Tuesday morning at his home on Jefferson street after a long illness from a complication of diseases.

Funeral services have been delayed until Sunday, awaiting members of his family, and will be held Sunday morning at eleven o'clock at the Bethesda Baptist Church of which he was a member. Interment will follow in the North View Cemetery here.

Among the survivors are his wife, Ella Staley, and two sons, Alfus Staley of Los Angeles, and Marcellus Staley of New York.

The body of the deceased negro teacher and preacher will be carried to his home tomorrow night where it will remain until Sunday.

Staley numbered many of the most prominent white people in Americus as his friend[redacted] beside having assumed and ably [redacted] members of his race here [redacted] more than forty years.

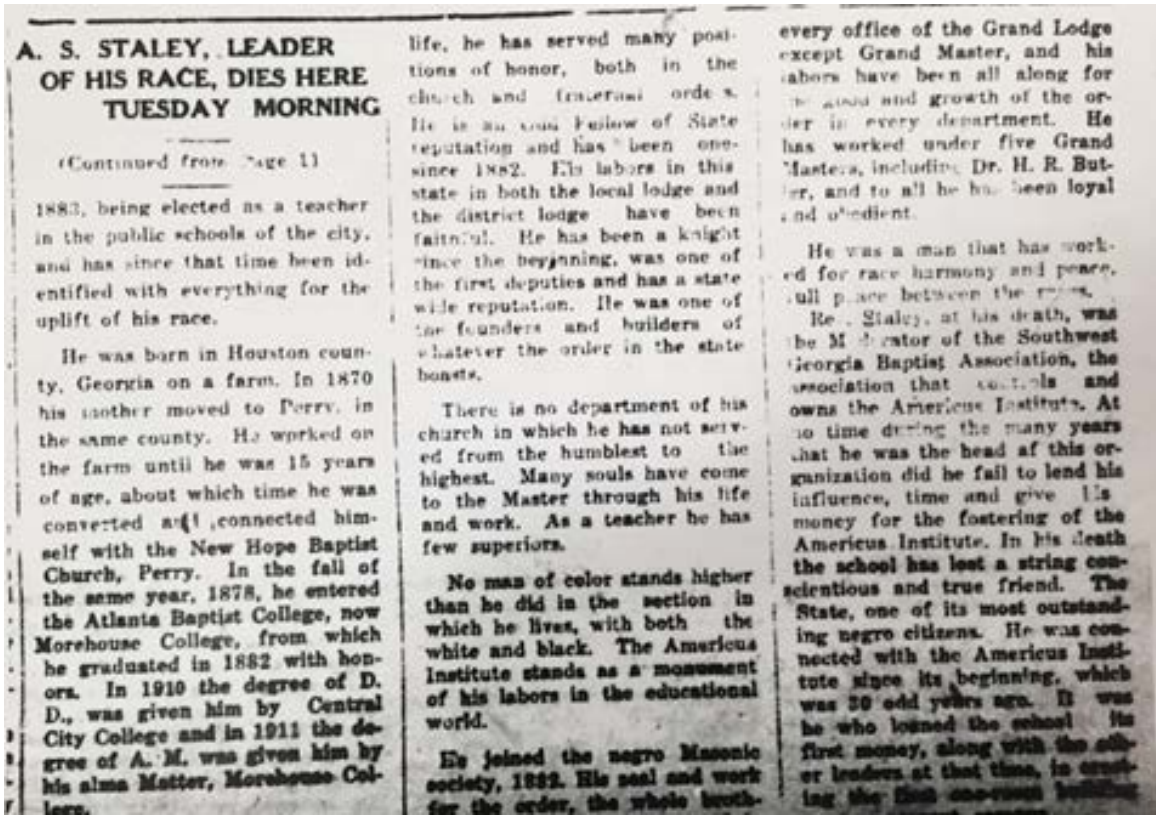
Professor Lampkin, colorel, president of the Americus Institute, at the request of many of the friends of the deceased, prepared the following facts regarding the birth, education and activities of the deceased.

Alfred Samuel Staley, Sr., came to Am[redacted]icus, September,

Continued on Page 8

Americus Times-Recorder, November 9, 1927, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 3.119. (cont'd)



A. S. STALEY, LEADER OF HIS RACE, DIES HERE TUESDAY MORNING

(Continued from Page 1)

1883, being elected as a teacher in the public schools of the city, and has since that time been identified with everything for the uplift of his race.

He was born in Houston county, Georgia on a farm. In 1870 his mother moved to Perry, in the same county. He worked on the farm until he was 15 years of age, about which time he was converted and connected himself with the New Hope Baptist Church, Perry. In the fall of the same year, 1878, he entered the Atlanta Baptist College, now Morehouse College, from which he graduated in 1882 with honors. In 1910 the degree of D. D., was given him by Central City College and in 1911 the degree of A. M. was given him by his alma Matter, Morehouse College.

life, he has served many positions of honor, both in the church and fraternal orders. He is an old Fellow of State reputation and has been one since 1882. His labors in this state in both the local lodge and the district lodge have been faithful. He has been a knight since the beginning, was one of the first deputies and has a state wide reputation. He was one of the founders and builders of whatever the order in the state boasts.

There is no department of his church in which he has not served from the humblest to the highest. Many souls have come to the Master through his life and work. As a teacher he has few superiors.

No man of color stands higher than he did in the section in which he lives, with both the white and black. The Americus Institute stands as a monument of his labors in the educational world.

He joined the negro Masonic society, 1882. His zeal and work for the order, the whole brotherhood

every office of the Grand Lodge except Grand Master, and his labors have been all along for the good and growth of the order in every department. He has worked under five Grand Masters, including Dr. H. R. Butler, and to all he has been loyal and obedient.

He was a man that has worked for race harmony and peace, full peace between the races.

Rev. Staley, at his death, was the Moderator of the Southwest Georgia Baptist Association, the association that controls and owns the Americus Institute. At no time during the many years that he was the head of this organization did he fail to lend his influence, time and give his money for the fostering of the Americus Institute. In his death the school has lost a string conscientious and true friend. The State, one of its most outstanding negro citizens. He was connected with the Americus Institute since its beginning, which was 30 odd years ago. It was he who loaned the school its first money, along with the other leaders at that time, in erecting the first one-room building

Figure 3.120. Original headstone for A. S. Staley, located at Old Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church

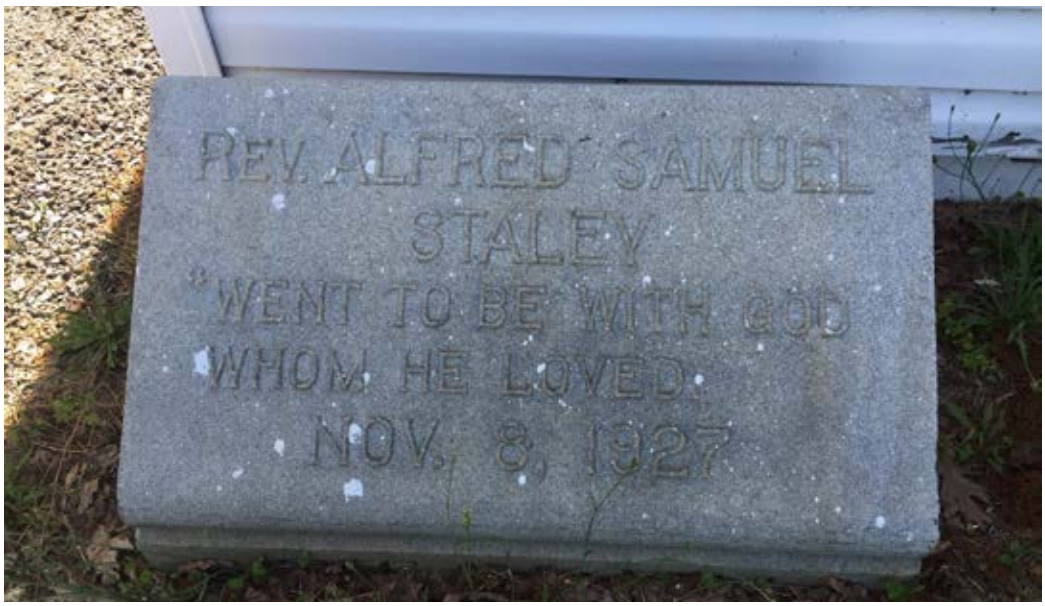


Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 3.121. Grave marker and headstone for Julius Rosenwald, Rosehill Cemetery, Chicago





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

CHAPTER FOUR

Carter's First Political Experience

Selection and Service on the Sumter County Board of Education

Jimmy Carter was a Washington outsider. During the 1976 campaign, he highlighted this fact as an advantage in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate political environment in the country. He was right. It was politically advantageous in 1976. He wanted a government that was "honest, decent, open, fair, and compassionate." It was a simple, compelling, winning message.[1]

To win the presidency in the country's bicentennial year, Carter defeated several very experienced politicians, including George Wallace, Morris Udall, and Henry Jackson, for the Democratic Party's nomination. Then, in November, he defeated President Gerald Ford in the general election. Carter's rise to the presidency was viewed as an extraordinary feat. In fact, he was a trendsetter. It is part of his unheralded presidential legacy that for the next forty years the winning presidential candidate in the general election, whether Republican or Democrat, was usually the one with the least Washington political experience.[2]

Prior to being elected president in 1976, Carter had served in three political positions. None were in Washington. He served one 4-year term as governor of Georgia (1971–75) and two 2-year terms as a state senator (1963–67). But his very first office was that of a member of the Sumter County Board of Education. In this office, he served just over seven years (1955–63). For the political career of the thirty-ninth president of the United States, the local school board was his longest-held office.

Carter's service on the school board was genuinely his "first politics." When he joined the board in December 1955, it was within two years of his return to Plains after leaving a promising career in the US Navy. He held the seat until he was sworn in as a

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[1] Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976; originally published in 1975), 3, 167.

[2] Gerald Pomper, "The Nominating Contests and Conventions," in *The Election of 1976: Reports and Interpretations*, edited by Marlene M. Pomper (New York: David McKay Company, 1977), 1–34; Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency, 1972–1976* (New York: Viking Press, 1977); Harold Isaacs, *Jimmy Carter's Peanut Brigade* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1977); Dorothy Padgett, *Jimmy Carter: Elected President with Pocket Change and Peanuts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2016); Daniel K. Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical: Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and the Presidential Contest of 1976* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020).

Georgia state senator in January 1963. The path to the presidency may then be said to have begun here. However, these years of Carter's political life have generally been minimized in the literature.[3]

Occasionally, Carter also downplayed the service. In his 1976 campaign autobiography, *Why Not the Best?*, Carter briefly discussed his board tenure. In the chapter "First Politics," he mentions his school board post after noting some of his other community involvements. He wrote, "I was also appointed to fill a vacancy on the Sumter County School Board, and education became a major interest of mine." That was December 1955.[4]

Jumping ahead in time by five years in the narrative, Carter moved on to briefly describe the 1961 political fight for school consolidation in Sumter County. His run for a 1962 Georgia State Senate seat and the controversy surrounding the vote was the focus of the rest of the "First Politics" chapter. More is learned here and there about his years on the school board in his post-presidential works. Perhaps the most important of these is *Turning Point*.[5]

This chapter looks at how Carter became a member of the Sumter County board in 1955 and highlights some of the key moments and issues from his first year. Carter came from a local political family that had connections to the powerful Eugene Talmadge faction in the state. Serving on the county board of education was a valued way to demonstrate community leadership. Carter's father, Earl Carter, had been a board member for years and was serving on it at the time of his death in 1953.

Carter was an active member of the board, and by the summer of 1960, he would become its chairman. It is as a board member that Carter becomes a politician and learns to navigate the sticky and thorny issues of education and race in the post-*Brown* 1950s.

Like the other white political leaders in Georgia and across the South at the time, Carter was a segregationist. Politically, in 1950s Sumter County, Georgia, there was no other viable stance. There is no evidence that Carter supported the US Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to end state-sponsored, de jure school segregation. But neither was he a vociferous critic, calling for massive resistance, nor did he attempt any kind of policy measures to undermine or devalue public education in Sumter

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[3] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 88; Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 175. For some detailed discussion of Carter's school board years, see Betty Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1980), 78–85; Deanna L. Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 11–32; E. Stanly Godbold Jr., *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter*: *The Georgia Years, 1924–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87–91; Jonathan Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 104–16. Biographical timelines sometimes omit his school board years. See "Timeline: Jimmy Carter, Georgia to the White House, 1894–1976," PBS *American Experience: Jimmy Carter*, http://www.shoppbs.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carter/timeline/index.html; Julian E. Zelizer, *Jimmy Carter*, The American Presidents Series (New York: Times Books—Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 165–68.

[4] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 88.

[5] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 42–44, 58–60.

County. There were political variations among southern segregationists. These variations could be quite significant. Carter was a segregationist, but not rabidly or uncompromisingly so. There were politicians in the region who were that, and he was not one of them in the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s. It would be fair to classify Carter the Sumter County school board member as a "moderate segregationist."[6]

Method of School Board Selection—The Grand Jury

In the 1950s, Sumter County had two school systems: one for the county and one for the city of Americus. Plains was part of the county system. In 1955, Jimmy Carter was selected by the Education Committee of the Superior Court Grand Jury to fill a vacancy on the Sumter County Board of Education. He was selected to serve for the remainder of an unexpired five-year term. In 1959, he was reappointed for a full term.[7]

The use of grand juries was an unusual means of selection. The practice was adopted during Reconstruction. In 1872, the Georgia state legislature passed the Education Act, which replaced the direct popular election of school board members with selection by a grand jury. The purpose of this electoral change was racially motivated and discriminatory. It was implemented to effectively exclude African American citizens from the democratic process and educational decision-making. It was part of a wider program to "redeem" the state from the postbellum politics to aid, protect, and uplift the formerly enslaved.[8]

To serve on the grand jury, one had to be a freeholder, listed on the county property tax roll (as opposed to the voter roll), and deemed "upright and intelligent." For most of Georgia, this meant only whites would serve on grand juries and decide who would serve on the school board. As Laughlin McDonald explained, "Well into the twentieth century, the grand jury in Georgia, faithful to its nineteenth century roots, remained an elite, white institution." This was certainly true of Sumter County in the 1950s, where Carter's political

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[6] Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*: *Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 14–15. Black set forth a framework for understanding the campaign positions of white southern gubernatorial candidates in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s.

[7] "Superior Court Hears Civil Cases," *Americus Times-Recorder*, December 9, 1955, 1. The term of office was for five years, June 15, 1954, to June 15, 1959. See "Report of Election of Member of the County Board of Education," December 8, 1955, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia; "Governor's Commission to Serve on the Sumter County Board of Education," December 29, 1955, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia; "Dedimus Potestatem and Certification of Oath of Office for Service on the Sumter County Board of Education," January 3, 1956, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[8] Laughlin McDonald, *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 30–32, 188. See *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 541 F. Supp. 55 (M. D. Ga. 1981); *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 775 F. 2d 1509 (1985); "Findings of Fact" section in *Wright v. Sumter County Board of Elections and Registration*, (M. D. Ga. 2018), 2–3.

career had its start. And Carter understood it to be true that school board members throughout the state were "white community leaders" like himself and were chosen, as he was, by "county grand juries on which black citizens rarely if ever served."[9]

Indeed, it was not until 1968 that an African American would serve on a school board in the county. That year, two African Americans won seats on the Americus City School Board. This was made possible because Americus adopted a direct election plan at the behest of the Georgia General Assembly. However, it would not be until 1992 that an African American would serve on the county school board. In 2010, the county board had its first African American majority.[10]

Almost six years after Carter resigned from the board to take his seat in the Georgia State Senate, the method of choosing the county board members changed. In fact. by the time, Plains High School closed its doors in 1979, two additional methods were used. Under legal pressure to end racial discrimination in jury selection, the grand jury format for choosing school board officials did not survive in Sumter County or in many other areas of the state where it had been in use since Reconstruction.[11]

Grand juries had prevented African Americans from serving on the two Sumter school boards. But times were changing. Like the rest of the South, Georgia was under immense pressure to implement democratic reforms to its election process at many levels of government. Among these changes were the abolition of the white primary, the poll tax, the county unit system, and the malapportionment of congressional and state legislative districts.[12]

In 1968, the State of Georgia reorganized the Sumter County School Board. It increased the size of the board from five seats to seven. Members were to be popularly elected in a mixed system: four members elected from single-member districts, two elected from a multi-member district, and one elected at large countywide. This plan was also found to be problematic because districts were drawn to minimize the winning chances of African American candidates.[13]

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[9] McDonald, *A Voting Rights Odyssey*, 133; Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, p. 43; see also Carter, *Faith: A Journey for All* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 157.

[10] Alan Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History website, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/BlackHx.htm, accessed February 6, 2018; "Findings of Fact" section in *Wright v. Sumter County Board of Elections and Registration* (M. D. Ga. 2018), 4.

[11] See *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 541 F. Supp. 55 (M. D. Ga. 1981); *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 775 F. 2d 1509 (1985); "Findings of Fact" section in *Wright v. Sumter County Board of Elections and Registration*, (M. D. Ga. 2018), 2–3.

[12] Donald L. Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 358, 363, and 372.

[13] See *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 541 F. Supp. 55 (M. D. Ga. 1981); *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 775 F. 2d 1509 (1985).

In 1973, in response to a federal court decision, Sumter County moved entirely to an at-large format for all the seats. However, it failed to obtain clearance from the US Justice Department under the terms of Section 5 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, involving racial discrimination in the use of election procedures, have been the subject of subsequent litigation.[14]

Jimmy Carter, the Eldest Son of a Talmadge Man

Jimmy Carter came from a political family. The Carters werea civic-minded, politically important, and well-connected family at the local level. This is crucial to understanding Jimmy's political entry and political rise. While he may have been a Washington outsider when he declared his candidacy for president in 1974 and then was nominated and elected in 1976, in 1955, he was a Sumter County insider. In his 1992 book, *Turning Point*, he described and discussed some of these family political activities.

His maternal grandfather, Jim Jack Gordy (1863–1948), was "active in local politics and was considered the most politically knowledgeable man in Webster and Stewart counties." He variously served as a postmaster, a federal revenue collector, and a capitol doorkeeper in Atlanta.[15]

William Alton Carter (1888–1978), Jimmy's "Uncle Buddy," was a local politician. He was first elected to the Plains City Council in 1918 and as the mayor during the 1920s and again from 1941 to 1953. His son, Hugh Alton Carter (1920–1999), succeeded Jimmy Carter in the Georgia State Senate and served for fourteen years from 1967 to 1981. Like his first cousin Jimmy, Senator Hugh Carter served on the Education Committee and was a leader on education issues.[16]

At age seven, Carter attended his first political rally with his father and grandfather in the summer of 1932. It was a local event in Sumter County. The rally was for US Representative Charles R. Crisp, who was running for a US Senate seat that year. It was a vacant seat created by the death of William J. Harris, and the election was for the remainder of the term. Crisp, a resident of Americus, lost the contest to Governor Richard Russell. (Carter's father and grandfather backed Russell.) Crisp had served in the House for many

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[14] See *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 541 F. Supp. 55 (M. D. Ga. 1981); *Edge v. Sumter County School District*, 775 F. 2d 1509 (1985); "Findings of Fact" section in *Wright v. Sumter County Board of Elections and Registration*, (M. D. Ga. 2018), 2–3.

[15] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 3–4; Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 244–48; Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 85–86.

[16] James E. Bagwell, "Mayors," in *History of Plains, Georgia*, compiled by the Plains Historical Preservation Trust (Fernandina Beach, FL: Wolfe Publishing, 2003), 130–34; Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 240–41; Rudy Hayes, "Senator Carter Set to Retire, after 14 Years," *Americus Times-Recorder*, March 10, 1980, 1–2; Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 21.

years (1896–97, 1913–32) and served as a congressman when Carter was born in 1924. His father, Charles F. Crisp, had been a congressman (1883–96) and the speaker of the US House of Representatives for four years (1891–95).[17]

Carter characterized his father as "a strong supporter of Franklin Roosevelt" in the 1932 presidential election. However, like many other conservative Democrats in the South, Earl Carter soon turned against Roosevelt and the New Deal, the rural electrification program excepted. He was neither hesitant nor shy "about letting our members of Congress know of his opposition to many other New Deal programs." Earl Carter "was deeply embittered and never again voted for the Democratic president." In 1936, he voted for Republican Kansas governor Alfred "Alf" Landon. He was certainly in a distinct minority in Georgia that year, as Roosevelt carried the state with 87 percent of the vote. He was not sure of his mother Lillian's politics at the time, but he suspected she held different views.[18]

Earl Carter was not just interested in politics. He was a community leader. Significantly, he was affiliated with an important state faction. Carter wrote, "[M]y father was, above all, a Talmadge man." That means he was aligned with the Georgia giant that was Eugene "Gene" Talmadge.[19]

Growing up in the 1930s, Carter said that Talmadge was "the dominant political force in our lives." He was the state's agriculture commissioner and then a three-term governor (1933–37, 1941–43). He remembers his father taking him to Talmadge campaign rallies. Carter reminisced about a rally in Albany that "was one of the most memorable events of our lives." Furthermore, he said, "I never dreamed that someday I would be following in old Gene's political path to the Governor's Mansion."[20]

As part of the Democratic Solid South, Georgia politics in the 1930s and the 1940s were fought within the party. Democratic politics in the state has been described as "bifactional." The party split involved the politics and personality of Eugene "Gene" Talmadge. There was the pro-Talmadge faction and the anti-Talmadge faction. This made primaries the focus of electoral politics.[21]

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[17] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 4–5; Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 86.

[18] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 5–6; See also Carter, *Faith: A Journey for All*, 15; Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 63–64, 70. Carter wrote here that his father "would never acknowledge that Franklin Roosevelt was responsible" for the rural electrification program "or its benefits" to areas like Plains and Sumter County.

[19] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 9–10; Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 6.

[20] At the time, the governor of Georgia was elected for a two-year term. Quotes from Carter, *An Hour before Daylight*: *Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 67–69. See also Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 7–8.

[21] Robert E. Cleary, "Gubernatorial Leadership and State Policy on Desegregation in Public Higher Education," *Phylon* 27, no. 2 (1966): 168; Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, "Georgia: The Politics of Consensus," in *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 136–37.

The Talmadge faction was periodically the stronger of the two as Talmadge was elected Georgia governor three times and was on track for a fourth term in 1946. He died in December as the governor-elect. His death precipitated the so-called "Three Governors Controversy" of 1946–47.[22]

As a politician from Telfair County, Talmadge spoke largely for and represented the rural, agrarian interests of the state. Under the county unit system, Georgia's many rural and small-town counties were deemed "the royal road to power."[23]

Under this format reminiscent of the Electoral College, a candidate could win a primary with a majority of county unit votes while losing the statewide popular vote. At the time Carter was on the school board, there were 121 rural counties, 30 town counties, and 8 urban counties. Sumter County was classified as a town county and worth "2" votes under the basic scheme. Under the 3-2-1 formula, the 8 most populous (i.e., urban counties like Fulton and Bibb), each having "3" votes, were electorally worth the same as the 24 least populous, rural counties, each having "1" vote. Candidates like Gene Talmadge were strengthened by county unit voting.[24]

Carter once tentatively categorized Talmadge as a populist because he endorsed "some choice proposals for cheap automobile tags, lower property taxes, retirement benefits for the elderly, or better school bus service or farm markets." He added, "One of his often repeated remarks was that he didn't care if he never had to campaign in a town with sidewalks or streetcars." Academic observers of southern politics remember Eugene Talmadge more starkly. The noted political scientist V. O. Key, for instance, labeled him as "Georgia's demagogue."[25]

Curiously, the politics of Talmadge could be simultaneously embraced at the opposite ends of the economic scale. His criticism of New Dealism and pledges to oppose strict regulation of business won him support from higher-income groups in some rural areas. He contended that the policies of President Roosevelt created a dependency on government and undermined those that have the means to practice Christian charity for those who have not. The New Deal was "downright communism an' plain damn-foolishness."[26]

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[22] See Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 13–16; Charles S. Bullock III, Scott E. Buchanan, and Ronald Keith Gaddie, *The Three Governors Controversy: Skullduggery, Machinations, and the Decline of Georgia's Progressive Politics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

[23] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 8–11. For discussion of the county unit system and its 3-2-1 allocation formula, see Scott E. Buchanan, "County Unit System," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, April 15, 2005, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/county-unit-system, accessed May 3, 2020; William G. Cornelius, "The County Unit System of Georgia: Facts and Prospects," *Western Political Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (December): 942–60.

[24] See county map in Cornelius, "The County Unit System of Georgia: Facts and Prospects," 943.

[25] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 8–9; V. O. Key Jr., "Georgia: Rule of the Rustics," in *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984, originally published in 1949), 106.

[26] Cortez A. M. Ewing, "Southern Governors," *Journal of Politics* 10, no. 2 (May 1948): 405–6.

Race was very important, too, for the Talmadge brand. There was a "fear of change" to the racial hierarchy in the state. It was said, "Segregation was for many years an important component of the Talmadge program." Governor Talmadge advocated white supremacy in primal ways and swore to protect it. He crudely charged, "No nigger's good as a white man because the nigger's only a few short years from cannibalism."[27]

Sumter County was part of the more racially conservative areas of the state. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once called the Sumter County Sheriff Fred D. Chappell (1912–90) "the meanest man in the world." He was county sheriff from 1956 to 1973. He was known for his strong opposition to the civil rights movement and its sympathizers. He was an intimidating presence. When he died, it was said by those who remembered his "surly," "bulldog"-like demeanor that he had to be buried "extra deep."[28]

Certainly, in political terms, the county was solidly Democratic. But some electoral indicators suggest that race was highly salient. The Democratic Solid South cracked in 1948. The party split that year over whether to remain a party committed to states' rights or become a party to civil rights for African Americans. President Harry Truman began edging the party toward civil rights. In 1947, for example, he issued an executive order to desegregate the US armed forces. Protesting this decision, many southern Democrats initiated a third-party challenge for the 1948 election. Known as the States' Rights Party, or the Dixiecrats, South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond and Mississippi governor Fielding Wright were chosen to be their candidates for president and vice president.[29]

Thurmond won four southern states that year: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. His next strongest state was Georgia, where he won 20 percent of the vote. Truman took 60 percent. Thurmond, however, ran stronger in Sumter County. In Sumter, Truman defeated Thurmond by only seven points, 47 to 40 percent.

In 1964, Sumter County voted for Republican Barry Goldwater for president. Goldwater was one of but six Senate Republicans to vote against the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He was the new states' rights defender. The conservative Arizona senator won Georgia with 54 percent; he carried Sumter with 69 percent. Four years later in 1968, Georgia voted for American Independent George Wallace. In fact, Wallace ran ten points higher in Sumter (53 percent) than statewide (43 percent).

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[27] "Fear of change" quote from Calvin Kytle and James A. Mackay, *Who Runs Georgia? A Contemporary Account of the 1947 Crisis That Set the Stage for Georgia's Political Transformation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 20. "Segregation," quote from Cleary, "Gubernatorial Leadership and State Policy on Desegregation in Public Higher Education," 168. Last quote from Ewing, "Southern Governors," 407.

[28] Quote from Glenn M. Robins, "Americus Movement," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, February 29, 2008. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/americus-movement, accessed May 2, 2020; Jim Auchmutey, *The Class of '65: A Student, A Divided Town, and the Long Road to Forgiveness* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 5, 42–43, 77, and 195; Ansley L. Quiros, *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 93–94, 109

[29] Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932–1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

For his part, Carter remained a loyal Democrat. While a naval officer, he voted for his commander-in-chief, President Truman. In elections to come, he supported the presidential candidacies of Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and 1956, John Kennedy in 1960, Lyndon Johnson in 1964, and Hubert Humphrey in 1968.[30]

Carter recognized the unseemly side to Gene Talmadge. He wrote, "Like all his opponents, Talmadge advocated strict racial segregation, but he would always point out a number of black farmers in prominent locations in the crowd who were also his supporters." The reality was of those who could vote very few black voters actually did support Talmadge. They voted as "bloc" against him in 1946 and did so because of his searing defense of white supremacy.[31]

Black voter disenfranchisement was prevalent in "Talmadge areas," with Talmage supporters fearing that black voters would benefit the political opposition with their votes. Few African Americans were able to register in those rural Georgia counties. For example, according to one source, only 92 of the 650 African Americans who attempted in Sumter County were successful in registering to vote for the 1946 Democratic primary.[32]

After Gene's death in 1947, his son Herman Talmadge picked up the faction's leadership role and brought the Talmadge brand into the 1950s. Herman became governor in 1948 and then a US senator in 1955 and served until 1981. As governor, Herman Talmadge vowed, "As long as I am Governor, Negroes will not be admitted to white schools." His victory was a sign of the looming white backlash. It "ushered in a further decade of aggressive white supremacy in the state."[33]

Carter wrote that his father remained a loyal ally of the Talmadges and even became "personal friends" with Herman: "My daddy never wavered, so far as I know, in his support of the Talmadges. As governor, Herman Talmadge came down to Plains to make a high school graduation speech and spend the night with my parents. They became personal friends. Certainly, by today's standards my father was a segregationist, as were nearly all the white citizens of the area, so far as I knew."[34] The graduation noted here was in 1953. Talmadge was a listed speaker on the program. Miss Julia Coleman had the opportunity to

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[30] Jimmy Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 41, 44, 80, and 162.

[31] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 69; Kytle and Mackay, *Who Runs Georgia?*, 71.

[32] Kytle and Mackay, *Who Runs Georgia?*, 70.

[33] Quoted in Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency*, 13; Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940–1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 74.

[34] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 16; Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 105.

meet Governor Talmadge at the Carters after the graduation ceremony. In a letter to Gloria Carter Spann, Jimmy's sister, she said, "being with Governor Talmadge informally was quite a privilege."[35]

In 1952, Earl Carter became a candidate for the Georgia State House. He was recruited by Talmadge forces to challenge the incumbent J. Frank Myers of Americus, who was considered to be "too liberal for Sumter County." Earl prevailed and became a member of the State House in January 1953. Jimmy recalls: "The Talmadge supporters in our area had persuaded my father to run against the incumbent state representative, who was strongly anti-Talmadge and a thorn in the governor's side. [Herman Talmadge was governor.] Daddy won the election and almost immediately became a champion in the House of Representatives of vocational education. Although he served only one short time before his death, the local college library [Georgia Southwestern State University] is named for him because of this good work."[36]

After serving just for just one legislative session, Earl Carter died that summer in July 1953. He had pancreatic cancer. His death created a vacancy in the State House and on the Sumter County Board of Education. After Lillian Carter rebuffed overtures to serve, a friend of the family, Thad Jones, won the House seat in a special election and became over the years an ardent defender of racial segregation.[37]

Following in the Political Footsteps of Earl Carter

The seat on the school board filled by Carter in fact had been his father's for thirteen years (1940–53). After his father's death in July 1953, Carter resigned his commission in the US Navy and decided to return home. With an honorary discharge on October 9, 1953, he left behind a very promising military career after seven years. He was a submarine officer in the navy's nuclear program commanded by Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, and he had the rank

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[35] "Plains High School Graduation Commencement Program," June 2, 1953, JICA 1367 0003 Box 2, Folder 20: "Sumter County Board of Education: Commencement, 1947–1965," Jimmy Carter National Historical Park, Plains, Georgia; "Letter from Miss Julia Coleman to Gloria Carter Spann," June 3, 1953, JICA 1367 0003 Box 4, Folder 20: "Coleman, Miss Julia L. to Mrs. Gloria Carter Spann," Jimmy Carter National Historical Park, Plains, Georgia.

[36] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 19. The "too liberal" quote is from Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*, 105. According to Bourne, Myers charged that the Talmadge forces stole the election. "The Plains district reported hours after the others and gave Earl such a large majority that he won the race overall by 2,177 to 1,936. Frank Myers believes the ballot box had been stuffed by the Talmadge people without Earl Carter's knowledge." See also Betty Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House*, 87.

[37] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 20; Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House*, 87.

of lieutenant. He was in training "to become an engineering officer for a nuclear power plant." He was pleased with himself and the direction of his military career. It had been a childhood dream.[38]

Carter came back to Plains because he wanted to be like his father and have a life of meaning, significance, and human connectivity. He thought he had lived a life "so admirable" and he too desired to make an impact in others' lives. He was impressed by the stories he heard of how over the years his father discreetly helped so many neighbors and friends in need:

> When I came home, at first my ambition was to have a very complete involvement in the community like my father had. As a matter of fact, the reason I came home was because I spent a couple of weeks with my daddy just before he died and I saw the impact that he had on Plains and the friends that he had accumulated, the responsibilities that he bore to improve other people's lives, and I thought to myself that, even if I got to be Chief of Naval Operations someday, that my life may not be as significant as my father's was in this little town.[39]

"These revelations," his wife Rosalynn explained, "gave Jimmy a whole new perspective on life in small-town Georgia and made his glamorous success in the Navy seem very small."[40]

In emulating his father, he sought community involvement and leadership. This included serving on the school board, as his father had done. In an interview in 1988, he said, "Since my father had had that position, I decided to do it." In terms of civic commitments, his cousin, Hugh Carter, described Jimmy as "almost a reincarnation of his daddy."[41]

Rosalynn objected to and resisted the move south. She enjoyed her life as a navy spouse far and away from southwest Georgia. Since the Carters were married in 1946, they had lived in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Hawaii, California, Massachusetts, and then Schenectady, New York. She liked the independence and distance from her small town, rural past. She feared that in Sumter County she would lose forever the larger world she was just beginning to experience. In *First Lady from Plains*, she wrote, "I argued. I

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[38] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 28, 1940; Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1998; originally published in 1996), 66; "Notable Graduates: James Earl 'Jimmy' Carter," US Naval Academy, https://www.usna.edu/Notables/featured/01carter.php, accessed March 24, 2018; "Jimmy Carter's Naval Service," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/about_us/naval_service, accessed March 24, 2018.

[39] Carter, *Turning Point*, 19–20; Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 259; Carter, *Living Faith*, 49; Carter, Interview with Ed Bearss, Plains, Georgia, May 11, 1988, 38.

[40] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 33.

[41] Carter, Interview with Ed Bearss, Plains, Georgia, May 11, 1988, 38; Hugh Carter with Frances Spatz Leighton, *Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot: My Life with the Carter Family of Plains, Georgia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 112.

cried. I even screamed at him." She confessed that the abrupt decision to leave the navy was "the most serious argument" in their marriage. But Jimmy prevailed, and they returned to Plains, Georgia.[42]

The vacancy on the school board was created by the unexpected resignation of Drue P. Murray Jr., a cousin of Rosalynn's who succeeded Earl Carter on the board but left his position for personal reasons.[43] The following is from the Sumter County School Board minutes for November 1, 1955: "The Board accepted with much regret the resignation of Mr. Drew Murray [*sic*], who offered his resignation due to pressing business at home. Having been appointed to fill the vacancy left by the late Earl Carter, Mr. Murray has been a most faithful and cooperative member. He has been fair and open minded, willing to serve in any capacity and loyal to his oath of office."[44]

For the board position opening, Carter was nominated by the principal of Plains High School, Y. T. Sheffield, and its board of trustees on November 21, 1955: "The Local Board of Trustees of Plains School met on Monday night and recommended Jimmy Carter as a member of the County Board of Education to succeed Drue Murray who resigned."[45] In a letter to W. W. Foy, the Superintendent of Sumter County Schools, Sheffield requested this recommendation be made available to the Grand Jury when it convened the following week. William Alton Carter, Jimmy's "Uncle Buddy," served on the Grand Jury and was chosen as its foreman.[46]

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[42] R. Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 33–34; Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*, 67, 88.

[43] Upon the recommendation of the trustees of the Plains High School, Murray was chosen as the successor to Carter's father, Earl Carter, on the county board. It was for the rest of the term that ended on June 15, 1954. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 4, 1953; "Report of Election of Member of the County Board of Education," December 2, 1953, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia. Murray took his seat at the next meeting in September. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 1, 1953.

[44] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, November 1, 1955. See also the December 1955 correspondence between Drue Murray and Dr. M. D. Collins, the Georgia State Superintendent of Schools: "Letter from Drue P. Murray to M. D. Collins," December 19, 1955, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia, "Letter from M. D. Collins to Drue P. Murray," December 28, 1955, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia. During a 1988 interview, Jimmy Carter said that the vacancy had been created because his wife's cousin "accidentally killed himself crossing a fence with a shotgun." See Carter, Interview with Ed Bearss, Plains, Georgia, May 11, 1988, 38. This explanation was repeated in William Patrick O'Brien's Special History Study for the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District, November 1991, 49. However, Murray did not die until the following year, November 3, 1956.

[45] "Letter from Y. T. Sheffield to W. W. Foy," November 23, 1955, Carter Family Papers, State Senate Papers, 1962–1967, Box 56, Folder: "Education—Sumter County Board of Education—Report on Examination," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[46] "Superior Court Jurors Listed for Nov. Session," *Americus Times-Recorder*, November 28, 1955, 1; "Report of Election of Member of the County Board of Education," December 8, 1955, RCB-10645, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

Jimmy Carter Takes His Seat

Two weeks after Plains made its recommendation, Carter was on the board. The minutes for his inaugural meeting reflected: "The Sumter County Board of Education met December 6, 1955 with all members present and one new member Mr. J. E. Carter, Jr. of Plains." This marked the beginning. Officially, the political career of Jimmy Carter had begun. He was now a politician in his own right and on the road that would ultimately take him to the White House two decades later.[47]

As required by the 1872 Education Act, the county school board consisted of five members. The other board members at that time were Chairman Alford Hamp Jennings of Americus, Johnny W. Cheek of Leslie, Howard Logan of Plains, and Hoke Smith of Americus. Superintendent Foy served as the secretary of the board meetings.

The board typically met only once a month, normally on the first Tuesday of each month in the afternoon at 1:30 or 2:00 p.m. Its meetings were held at the County Courthouse in Americus. At times, the board would have "called" or "call" meetings, meetings called to address a particular matter or to address an emerging issue. Sometimes, the board held a "joint" meeting with the Americus Board of Education. Board members received ten dollars per diem.[48]

Carter Finding His Place on the Sumter County School Board

Carter was an active school board member, and it did not take long for him to assert himself. Perhaps a little hesitant during his first meeting, Carter did not offer any motions. He did offer a second to a motion offered by Mr. Smith. Per standard parliamentary procedure for meetings, a motion introduced by a member needs to be seconded by another member so the motion can reach the floor for consideration.[49]

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[47] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1955.

[48] "Report of Examination of the Financial Records and Accounts of the Sumter County Board of Education, Department of Audits, State of Georgia," 1955–1956 school year, Carter Family Papers, State Senate Papers, 1962–1967, Box 56, Folder: "Education—Sumter County Board of Education—Report on Examination," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia; "Bank Balance Report, December 1961," Jimmy Carter Papers—Pre-Presidential, 1962–1974, Chairman-Sumter County Board of Education, Box 22, Folder #3: "Correspondence, Reports, Minutes," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[49] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1955.

By his second meeting, January 3, 1956, Carter was immersed in education politics. Under new business, Carter proposed that members of the board visit "all schools in the county." "All schools" meant white schools and black schools located outside the limits of the Americus city school system. Table 4.1 provides the complete list of white and black schools at the time Carter joined the board.[50]

At the time, the county system had a student enrollment of 3,109 total: 1,107 (35.6 percent) in white schools and 2,002 (64.4 percent) in black schools. The average daily attendance (ADA) of those students was 954 and 1,206, respectively. In terms of enrollment, Plains was the largest county school, white or black, with 362 students enrolled, followed by Union's 331. These figures are significantly higher than in 1940–41. Plains, for example, had more than 100 more students enrolled in 1955. Union had about 85 more students enrolled. Enrollment in the white elementary schools ranged from 115 students to 167 in 1955–56.

Superintendent Foy made the visitation arrangements for the board members. They visited the white schools first. Carter said "it was natural" to do so: "When I became a member of the board, my seasoned colleagues and I decided to visit all the schools in the county. There were two high schools and three grammar schools for white students, and it was natural that we visit these first."[51]

The two county high schools were Plains High School in the western half of the county and Union High School, located in the eastern half in the town of Leslie. Both schools had grades 1 through 12. The three grammar schools were Anthony (grades 1–8), New Era (grades 1–9), and Thalean (grades 1–9). This was five fewer schools since Carter was in his last year at Plains in 1940–41. Andersonville, Chambliss, Concord, Shiloh, and Thompson had closed.

Table 4.1. Sumter County Public Schools—White and Black, 1955–1956: Grades, Student Enrollment, ADA, and Buildings/Classrooms

White Schools (5)	Type	Grades	Enrolled	ADA	# Buildings/ Classrooms
Anthony	Public	1–8	115	94	2/5
New Era	Public	1–9	167	145	3/7
Thalean	Public	1–9	132	112	3/6
Plains High	Public	1–12	362	323	3/8
Union High	Public	1–12	331	280	7/9
Black Schools (24)	**Type**	**Grades**	**Enrolled**	**ADA**	**# Buildings/ Classrooms**
Andersonville	Church	1–8, 10	70	51	1/1

[50] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 3, 1956; Carter, Interview with Ed Bearss, Plains, Georgia, May 11, 1988, p. 39.

[51] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 42.

Corinth	Church	1–7	31	23	1/1
East Point	Church	1–7	42	25	1/1
Flintside	Church	1–6, 8	53	20	1/1
Mt. Carmel	Church	1–7	71	43	1/1
Piney Grove	Church	1–6, 8	30	18	1/1
Pleasant Grove	Church	1–7	35	23	1/1
Shipp Chapel	Church	1–5	28	21	1/1
Nunn Industrial	Rosenwald	1–10	150	84	2/5
Plains	Rosenwald	1–10	254	182	1/7
Seay	Rosenwald	1–7	76	41	1/2
Shady Grove	Rosenwald	1–10	242	115	1/5
Shipp Training	Rosenwald	1–10	140	99	1/4
Antioch	Community	1–4, 6–7	44	36	1/2
Davis Grove	Community	1–10	54	38	1/2
DeSoto	Community	1–9	96	58	1/2
Leslie	Community	1–8	108	78	1/3
Mt. Hope	Community	1–8	69	34	1/2
Paradox	Community	1–6	57	19	1/1
Spring Hill	Community	1–8	29	28	1/1
Union Grove	Community	1–7	38	23	1/1
Union Oak Grove	Community	1–6	47	24	1/1
Wards Chapel	Community	1–7	123	55	1/2
Welcome	Community	1–10	115	68	1/3
Church Total			360	224	8/8
Rosenwald Total			862	521	6/23
Community Total			780	461	11/20
White Total			1107	954	18/35
Black Total			2002	1206	25/51
County Total			3109	2160	43/86

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, Georgia State Archives.

Table 4.2 shows the number of teachers and the student-teacher ratio for each white school. Based on enrollment figures, the white schools in the county system in 1955–56 had a student-teacher ratio of 24:1. The ADA student-teacher ratio was 20:1. In 1940–41, there was an enrollment of 1,252 and a countywide student-teacher ratio of 21:1.

The teachers in the white schools were formally educated. All forty-seven county teachers had completed at least two years of college. In fact, thirty-five teachers (74 percent) had completed at least four years of college. This was an improvement over the level of education white county teachers had in 1940–41.

Table 4.2. Sumter County Public Schools—White, 1955–1956: Teachers, Student-Teacher Ratios, and Level of Teachers' Education.

White Schools (5)	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratios*		Level of Education of Teachers		
				4–5 yrs	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Anthony	4	29:1	24:1	4	0	0
New Era	7	24:1	21:1	7	0	0
Thalean	6	22:1	19:1	6	0	0
Plains High	16	23:1	20:1	11	5	0
Union High	14	24:1	20:1	7	7	0
County Total	47	24:1	20:1	35	12	0

*Ratios are based on enrollment and average daily attendance. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, Georgia State Archives.

According to the Superintendent's Annual Report, 1955–1956, there were twenty-one school buses (twenty in regular use and one spare) and one carryall automobile serving the white schools for the 180-day school year. Six buses alone were dedicated to bringing students to Plains High School. Three other buses carried students to Thalean and Plains. Five buses had dedicated service to Union High School. Another bus carried students to Anthony and then Union. New Era had three dedicated buses and Anthony had one. One other bus took students to New Era, Anthony, and Americus High School. The carryall transported students (report indicates 12) to Anthony. Most white children in the county rode the bus to school. The data provided to the state showed that 952 of 1,107 (86 percent) enrolled in the five white schools rode a school bus. Five additional students came to school by private car. The driver was compensated for mileage at public expense.[52]

After their visits to the five white schools, Carter reported that the board was generally pleased with the conditions of the schools, the school buses available for county-wide transportation, the availability of school textbooks, and the extracurricular programming: "We found them to be in fairly good condition, although the buildings were pre-1930s vintage. Buses served all the rural homes, books were adequate and current, and there were numerous extracurricular activities in sports, drama, extemporaneous writing, and debating."[53]

[52] See Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, FLAT-2343, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[53] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 42–43.

While Carter identified twenty-six, according to the county superintendent's annual report to the state, there were twenty-four county black schools during the 1955–56 school year (Table 4.1). Of these, eight were church schools, five were historic Rosenwald schools, and eleven were community schools.

The schools ranged in enrollment size from as small as 28 students (Shipp Chapel) to as large as 254 (Plains Rosenwald; Table 4.3). As they had been a decade or so earlier when Carter attended Plains High School, the black church schools were still usually the smallest and most were one-teacher schools. The smallest church schools were Shipp Chapel, Piney Grove (30 students), and Corinth (31 students). Mt. Carmel (71 students) and Andersonville (70 students) were the largest church schools that year.

The eleven community schools were somewhat larger. They had an average student population of 71 compared to 45 for the church schools. With 123 students, Wards Chapel was the largest community school. Next in size was Welcome with 115 students enrolled. Leslie also had an enrollment of more than 100 students. In 1955–56, it had an enrollment of 108. Most of the community schools employed two or three teachers.

The county's Rosenwald schools were usually the largest of the black schools. That had been consistently true over time. In 1955–56, they ranged in enrollment from 76 to 254 and had an average student population of 172. Plains was the largest of them, closely followed by Shady Grove. Nunn Industrial had an enrollment of 150 students; Shipp Training had 140 students. The smallest of the Rosenwald schools was Seay. It had an enrollment of 76 that school year.

Table 4.3 shows that of the black county schools the Rosenwald schools had the most teachers. Of the fifty-five teachers, twenty-four taught at a Rosenwald school. Plains had seven teachers and Nunn Industrial had six. Nevertheless, the student-teacher ratio was 36:1 in the typical black county school, and that was largely true across the three school types. Based on enrollment, the best student-teacher ratios were found at Antioch (22:1), Davis Grove (27:1), Shipp Chapel (28:1), and Spring Hill (29:1). The worst ratio was at Wards Chapel (62:1). Next were Paradox (57:1) and Flintside (53:1).

The ADA student-teacher ratios for the county's black schools (22:1) were comparable to the county's white schools (20:1). The county black schools that had the best ADA student-teacher ratios were Nunn Industrial (14:1), Mt. Hope (17:1), Antioch (18:1), Piney Grove (18:1), Davis Grove (19:1), DeSoto (19:1), Paradox (19:1), and Flintside (20:1). Although these figures suggest a degree of equality within a segregated system, it is very deceiving at first glance. Wide absenteeism was responsible for this apparent equality. For example, in the case of Mt. Hope, only 49 percent of student enrollment attended school daily. It was worse at Flintside (38 percent) and Paradox (33 percent).

Table 4.3. Sumter County Public Schools—Black, 1955–1956: Teachers, Student-Teacher Ratios, and Level of Teachers' Education

Black Schools (24)	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratios*		Level of Education of Teachers		
Church				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Andersonville	2	35:1	26:1	1	1	0
Corinth	1	31:1	23:1	1	0	0
East Point	1	42:1	25:1	1	0	0
Flintside	1	53:1	20:1	1	0	0
Mt. Carmel	2	36:1	22:1	0	2	0
Piney Grove	1	30:1	18:1	1	0	0
Pleasant Grove	1	35:1	23:1	1	0	0
Shipp Chapel	1	28:1	21:1	1	0	0
Church Total	10	36:1	22:1	7	3	0
Nunn Industrial	6	25:1	14:1	5	1	0
Plains	7	36:1	26:1	7	0	0
Seay	2	38:1	21:1	1	1	0
Shady Grove	5	48:1	23:1	4	1	0
Shipp Training	4	35:1	25:1	4	0	0
Rosenwald Total	24	36:1	22:1	21	3	0
Antioch	2	22:1	18:1	2	0	0
Davis Grove	2	27:1	19:1	2	0	0
DeSoto	3	32:1	19:1	3	0	0
Leslie	3	36:1	26:1	3	0	0
Mt. Hope	2	35:1	17:1	2	0	0
Paradox	1	57:1	19:1	0	1	0
Spring Hill	1	29:1	28:1	0	1	0
Union Grove	1	38:1	23:1	1	0	0
Union Oak Grove	1	47:1	24:1	0	1	0
Wards Chapel	2	62:1	28:1	1	1	0
Welcome	3	38:1	23:1	3	0	0
Community Total	21	37:1	22:1	17	4	0
County Total	55	36:1	22:1	45	10	0

*Ratios are based on enrollment and average daily attendance. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, Georgia State Archives.

Though it was his idea, Carter found the visits to the black schools troubling and "embarrassing" for the board. The conditions were so substandard that the board did not conduct any more fact-finding, onsite tours. He provided the following description in *Turning Point*:

> Then we began visiting the county schools for black children. There were twenty-six of them for the elementary grades, a few of which also served high school students. There were so many sites because no buses were provided, and schools had to be within walking distance of the children's homes. The books were those that had been declared too worn out for use in the white schools. Classes were held in various places, including Sunday school classrooms of black churches and even private homes. For some reason, my most vivid memory is of large teenage boys trying to sit on chairs designed for children of kindergarten age. After a few of these embarrassing visits, my fellow board members and I found various reasons not to go on any others.[54]

One of the noticeable improvements in black public education in Sumter County from the 1940–41 school year to the 1955–56 school year was in the area of teaching and teacher education. By this time, the state modified its requirements for school accreditation. According to the standards set by the Georgia Accrediting Commission, high schools and elementary schools were expected to hire teachers who were state-certified and possessed a college education. This requirement was waived for "teachers who have taught for twenty years or more prior to the school year 1955–56." For a school to meet the state standard, it was mandated to have "[f]our-fifths of teachers holding four-year professional certificates, none with less than three-year certificates"; "[h]alf of teachers with four-year certificates, others with two-year certificates"; or "[e]ach teacher holding a certificate based upon two or more of college work."[55]

The teachers in the white schools of Sumter County satisfied this formal education requirement (Table 4.2). All forty-seven county teachers had completed at least two years of college. That alone met the accreditation benchmark. In fact, thirty-five teachers (74 percent) had completed at least four years of college. The remaining twelve teachers had between two and three years. At three schools (Anthony, New Era, and Thalean), all of the teachers had at least a four-year college education.

The teachers in the black schools were similarly educated (Table 4.3). All fifty-five county teachers were college-educated, with a two-year minimum. More impressively, forty-five teachers (82 percent) had four or five years of college, a level surprisingly higher than for the white schools. All seven teachers at Plains Rosenwald had four to five years of college. This was a level of attainment that even outpaced Plains High School. On this measurement, these were signs of the equalization effort happening in the county and across the State of Georgia. To maintain its separate schools, in the 1950s, Georgia made efforts to materially equalize white and black schools.

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[54] Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*, 43.

[55] See "Plains High School Report for the Georgia Accrediting Commission," November 8, 1955, folder: "Chairman-Sumter Board of Education-1962," Jimmy Carter Papers—Pre-Presidential, 1962–1974: Chairman-Sumter County Board of Education, Correspondence, Reports, Minutes [1] through Pamphlets, Publications, Box 22, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

Unlike most presidents, Carter had an unusual and genuine intimacy with African Americans and African American life. He was close to Joe and Rachel Clark, who lived and worked on the Carter farm. He enjoyed visiting Willis Wright, a black farmer in Webster County and an acquaintance of his father. Several of his playmates, like Alonzo Davis and Milton and Johnny Raven, were black. But that was when he was young, while he lived at the Boyhood Home in Archery. After he went away to the US Naval Academy and then embarked on a naval career, Plains and Sumter County were a world away. Once he returned home, it would take some time to get reacquainted.[56]

In 1955, Carter evidently was not aware of the state of education for black students in Sumter County. Rosalynn Carter explained that he first learned about it after he joined the board. She wrote, "[W]hen Jimmy went on the board, he learned that most of the old inequalities remained. The black children had no school buses and still walked to school. Their textbooks and typewriters were old, discards from the white schools, and the quality of education overall for the blacks was far inferior."[57]

It was true that most black children walked to school. However, by the time Carter was on the board, it would be more accurate to say that there was limited bus service as opposed to "no school buses." This was an improvement from when Carter attended Plains High School and the county did not provide any sort of transportation to black schools. Nevertheless, materially speaking, separate and unequal continued between the county's white schools and black schools.

According to the Superintendent's Annual Report for 1955–56, there were seven publicly owned school buses for black children. Six were in regular service and one was a spare. Of the twenty-four black schools extant in the county system at the time, only nine had any bus transportation. The nine schools were Flintside, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Hope, Nunn Industrial, Plains, Shady Grove, Shipp Training, Wards Chapel, and Welcome. There was also bus service to Staley High School in Americus. It was reported that there were two bus trips to each school. For example, one bus route included stops at Plains and Staley.[58]

The data provided to the state showed that 478 of 2,002 (24 percent) enrolled in the 24 black schools rode the bus—a far cry from the 86 percent of whites who did. Another 59 black students were transported to school in 13 privately owned cars subsidized at public expense. However, not all of these students were being transported to school within the county system. Some were going to Staley, and some were going as far as Cordele.

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[56] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 38–41, 73–77, 185–188, 259–261, 270.

[57] R. Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 43.

[58] See Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, FLAT-2343, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

Combined, the total number of black students receiving county-supported school transportation in 1955–56 was 27 percent (537 of 2,002). White schools also had newer buses; none of them were older than a 1951 model. The newest bus for the black schools was a 1949.[59]

Regular Attendance at Board Meetings

Throughout his political career, Carter had a reputation as a diligent, dedicated, hard worker. This continued into his post-presidential life. His parents and his religious faith instilled it in him. After he turned ninety-five in October 2019, in an interview with *People* magazine, he said, "One of the things Jesus taught was: If you have talents, try to utilize them for the benefit of others." Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter lived by that. As the oldest living president in US history, he said being active was a key ingredient to a happy, healthy life.[60]

In his first political office, Carter was an active member. One basic measure of a member's level of activity and commitment is regular attendance. To be an active, effective member of a board or legislative body, one must be there to participate, consider motions, hear testimony, discuss policy, allocate school resources, approve faculty assignments, and cast votes on motions. Political decision makers who exhibit chronic absenteeism are viewed as shirking their duties, "playing hooky," or looking "like a slacker."[61]

Absenteeism appears to increase when legislators run for higher office. Members of Congress who run for president often miss roll-call votes while away on the campaign trail. Members who serve in a leadership role or on certain committees may miss votes due to travel-related responsibilities. Other members may miss due to illness, injury, surgery, pregnancy, or maternity leave. A scheduling conflict with constituent service or district-related activities could matter. Retirement could be a factor, too. As retirement approaches, members may lose interest and show up less frequently.[62]

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[59] Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1955–1956, FLAT-2343, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[60] Adam Carlson, "'It's Hard to Live Until You're 95,' Jimmy Carter Says: How Wife Rosalynn and His Faith Keep Him Going," *People*, October 15, 2019, https://people.com/politics/jimmy-carter-living-to-95-habitat-humanity-build-rosalynn-marriage/, accessed May 1, 2020. See also Rachel DeSantis, "'He Never Stops': Inside Jimmy Carter's Surprisingly Active Life at 94 as He Recovers from Hip Surgery," *People*, May 14, 2019, https://people.com/politics/jimmy-carter-active-life-turkey-hunting-sunday-school/, accessed May 1, 2020.

[61] Mark Fahey and Nick Wells, "The Big Crunch: Does Your Congressman Show Up for Work?," CNBC, October 12, 2015, https://www.cnbc.com/2015/10/12/does-your-congressman-show-up-for-work.html, accessed May 2, 2020; Emma Roller, Stephanie Stamm, and the *National Journal*, "The Best and Worst Attendance Records in the Senate," *The Atlantic*, May 7, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/05/the-best-and-worst-attendance-records-in-the-senate/455949/, accessed May 2, 2020.

[62] Mike Spies, "Which Congressman Misses the Most Votes?," *Vocativ*, February 17, 2015, https://www.vocativ.com/usa/us-politics/congress-absenteeism/, accessed May 2, 2020; Casey Tolan, "Kamala Harris Is Skipping Senate Votes while Running for President—and She's Not the Only One," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 18, 2019, https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/08/18/kamala-harris-cory-booker-president-missed-votes/, accessed May 2, 2020.

As a member of the school board, Carter was there; he showed up. His attendance rate was calculated using the meeting minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education. Table 4.4 shows Carter's level of commitment to the school board. It considers his attendance and attendance rates at board meetings—both regular meetings and called meetings. The thirty-one called meetings include four joint meetings with the Americus City School Board. It includes meetings while Carter was an associate member and acting as the board chair.[63]

Table 4.4. Carter's Attendance Record on the Sumter County School Board

Year	# of Regular Meetings		# of Other Meetings		# of All Meetings	
1955	1	(100)	0	(0)	1	(100)
1956	12	(100)	6	(100)	18	(100)
1957	12	(100)	2	(100)	14	(100)
1958	11	(92)	2	(100)	13	(93)
1959	12	(100)	5	(100)	17	(100)
1960	12	(100)	5	(100)	17	(100)
1961	12	(100)	7	(100)	19	(100)
1962	12	(100)	4	(100)	16	(100)
1963	1	(100)	1	(100)	2	(100)
Total	85	(99)	32	(100)	117	(99)

Percentage in parentheses.

Source: Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education.

As indicated by his attendance record, Carter took his service very seriously. From December 1955 to January 1963, he attended every regular monthly meeting (eighty-five in all) except one on January 7, 1958. He also attended every other meeting. These other meetings included called meetings of the board, special meetings with community leaders,

[63] These are all the meeting dates and meeting types for the Sumter County Board of Education when Carter served from 1955 to 1963: 1955 regular meetings (1)—December 6; 1956 regular meetings (12)—January 3, February 7, March 6, April 3, May 1, June 5, July 3, August 7, September 4, October 2, November 7, December 4; 1956 other meetings (6)—January 18 (called), January 28 (called), May 5 (called), July 11 (called), September 24 (called), October 5 (called); 1957 regular meetings (12)—January 2, February 5, March 5, April 2, May 7, June 4, July 2, August 6; September 3, October 1, November 5, December 3; 1957 other meetings (2)—May 17 (called); August 21 (called); 1958 regular meetings (12)—January 7, February 4, March 4, April 1, May 6, June 3, July 1, August 5, September 2, October 7, November 4, December 2; 1958 other meetings (2)—May 23 (called), June 11 (called); 1959 regular meetings (12)—January 6, February 3, March 3, April 7, May 5, June 2, July 14, August 4, September 1, October 6, November 3, December 1; 1959 other meetings (5)—March 14 (called), March 31 (called), May 21 (called), July 23 (called), August 25 (called); 1960 regular meetings (12)—January 5, February 2, March 1, April 5, May 3, June 7, July 5, August 2, September 6, October 4, November 1, December 6; 1960 other meetings (5)—August 26 (called), October 8 (called), October 25 (called), December 8 (called), December 15 (called); 1961 regular meetings (12)—January 3, February 7, March 7, April 4, May 2, June 6, July 5, August 1, September 5, October 3, November 7, December 5; 1961 other meetings (7)—January 16 (joint), February 13 (called), April 11 (called), May 27 (called), June 12 (joint), August 1 (special—referendum results), October 20 (called); 1962 regular meetings (12)—January 2, February 6, March 6, April 3, May 1, June 5, July 7, August 7, September 4, October 2, November 6, December 4; 1962 other meetings (4)—January 11 (called), March 21 (called), May 26 (called), May 28 (joint); 1963 regular meetings (1)—January 2; 1963 other meetings (1)—January 7, 1963 (called).

or joint meetings held with the Americus Board of Education. Active campaigning for the 1961 referendum on school consolidation and for a 1962 state senate seat did not interrupt his monthly attendance. For the seven-year period, Carter's overall attendance rate was 99.15 percent, attending 117 out of 118 board meetings.

Table 4.5 shows Carter's attendance record in comparison with the other board members who served with him from December 1955 to January 1963. The data shows that Carter had a better attendance rate than any other member who served during his school board years. Carter only missed one meeting (January 7, 1958). Every other member missed a minimum of two or more.

Table 4.5. Carter's Attendance Record on the Sumter County School Board in Comparison with Other Members for December 1955 to January 1963

1955–1956*	# of Reg. Meetings		# of Other Meetings		# of All Meetings	
Jimmy Carter	13	(100)	6	(100)	19	(100)
J. W. Cheek	12	(92)	4	(67)	16	(84)
A. H. Jennings (c)	13	(100)	6	(100)	19	(100)
Howard Logan	13	(100)	5	(83)	18	(95)
Hoke Smith	13	(100)	3	(50)	16	(84)
1957	**# of Reg. Meetings**		**# of Other Meetings**		**# of All Meetings**	
Jimmy Carter	12	(100)	2	(100)	14	(100)
J. W. Cheek	12	(100)	1	(50)	13	(93)
A. H. Jennings (c)	12	(100)	2	(100)	14	(100)
Howard Logan	12	(100)	2	(100)	14	(100)
Hoke Smith	12	(100)	2	(100)	14	(100)
1958	**# of Reg. Meetings**		**# of Other Meetings**		**# of All Meetings**	
Jimmy Carter	11	(92)	2	(100)	13	(93)
J. W. Cheek	10	(83)	1	(50)	11	(79)
A. H. Jennings (c)	9	(75)	2	(100)	11	(79)
Howard Logan	12	(100)	2	(100)	14	(100)
Hoke Smith	11	(92)	1	(50)	12	(86)
1959	**# of Reg. Meetings**		**# of Other Meetings**		**# of All Meetings**	
Jimmy Carter	12	(100)	5	(100)	17	(100)
J. W. Cheek	12	(100)	5	(100)	17	(100)
A. H. Jennings (c)	7	(58)	1	(20)	8	(47)
Howard Logan	12	(100)	4	(80)	16	(94)
Hoke Smith	11	(92)	5	(100)	16	(94)
1960	**# of Reg. Meetings**		**# of Other Meetings**		**# of All Meetings**	
Jimmy Carter (c)	12	(100)	5	(100)	17	(100)
J. W. Cheek	12	(100)	5	(100)	17	(100)
W. C. Cornwell	5	(83)	4	(80)	9	(82)
Henry Hart	11	(92)	4	(80)	15	(88)
Howard Logan (c)	6	(100)	0	(0)	6	(100)
Marvin McNeill	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)
Hoke Smith	12	(100)	2	(50)	14	(88)

Table 4.5. (cont'd)

1961	# of Reg. Meetings		# of Other Meetings		# of All Meetings	
Jimmy Carter (c)	12	(100)	7	(100)	19	(100)
J. W. Cheek	11	(92)	7	(100)	18	(95)
W. C. Cornwell	12	(100)	7	(100)	19	(100)
Henry Hart	12	(100)	7	(100)	19	(100)
Marvin McNeill	10	(83)	7	(100)	17	(89)
1962–1963*	**# of Reg. Meetings**		**# of Other Meetings**		**# of All Meetings**	
Jimmy Carter (c)	13	(100)	5	(100)	18	(100)
J. W. Cheek	6	(100)	5	(100)	10	(100)
W. C. Cornwell	13	(100)	4	(80)	17	(94)
Henry Hart	13	(100)	5	(100)	18	(100)
Marvin McNeill	12	(92)	5	(100)	17	(94)
Spencer Pryor	5	(71)	1	(100)	6	(75)

Percentages in parentheses; (c) denotes board chair; * includes Carter's first meeting and his last two meetings.

Source: Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education.

The data on board member attendance is provided on a year-to-year basis. It shows that for Carter's first year on the board, from December 1955 to December 1956, he had a perfect record. He attended each of the regular board meetings and each called meeting. A. H. Jennings, the board chair, also had perfect attendance.

The three other board members had less than a perfect record that year. Board member Howard Logan attended each of the regular meetings but missed one of the six called meetings. His overall attendance was 95 percent. Board member Hoke Smith attended each of the regular meetings, too, but he missed half of the called meetings. His overall attendance rate was 84 percent. Board member Johnny W. Cheek missed one of the thirteen regular meetings and missed two of the called meetings. Like Smith, his overall rate was also 84 percent.

In 1957, Carter and three of his colleagues (Jennings, Logan, and Smith) had perfect attendance. The other member only missed one of the year's fourteen meetings. The next year, in 1958, Logan was the only member who attended each regular and called meeting. Carter was absent once. Jennings, Cheek, and Smith missed two or more.

In 1959, his third full year on the board, Carter was back at 100 percent. He was joined by Cheek in attendance frequency. Logan and Smith missed one meeting. Chairman Jennings, who was struggling with health issues, missed more than half of the meetings. After many years of service to county schools, first as a member of the Thalean Board of Trustees and then as a school board member since 1941, his health circumstance prompted him to resign. Henry Hart was selected as his successor starting in January 1960; Logan became the new chair.[64]

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[64] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 5, 1960.

In 1960, Carter and Cheek attended all twelve regular meetings and the five called meetings. Prior to leaving office, Chairman Logan attended the first six regular meetings of 1960. In total, Logan completed fourteen years of service. In July, Carter replaced him as the chair. Woody C. Cornwell filled the vacancy on the board.[65] The following is from the board's minutes:

> July 5, 1960
> Mr. Hoke Smith made a motion to elect Jimmy Carter as our new chairman, to take the place of Howard Logan, whose term had expired. Mr. Johnny Cheek seconded the motion. Unanimously approved by Board.
>
> Mr. Jimmy Carter, our new chairman, welcomed the new member to our Board, Mr. W. C. Cornwell. The welcome was also extended by the other members of the Board.[66]

Cornwell attended 82 percent of his meetings. Board member Hart finished his first year with an attendance of 88 percent, and Smith finished his last year with 88 percent. He missed two of the four called meetings, including his last on December 8.

In 1961, three board members attended all nineteen meetings held: Carter, Cornwell, and Hart. Cheek attended all but one regular meeting, and McNeill, in his first full year, made it to all but two regular board meetings.

In his final year, from January 1962 to January 1963, Carter had another perfect year. He attended all eighteen meetings. Cheek and Hart matched Carter's attendance rate. Cornwell and McNeill each were absent for one meeting. Spencer Pryor, who succeeded Cheek in July, missed two regular meetings.

Making Motions and Offering a Second

Making motions and offering seconds to motions are key features of the basic parliamentary, legislative process and procedure. These activities are central to the proceedings; in this case, the monthly proceedings of the school board. The use of motions ensures proper order, deliberate action, and effective decision-making. It permits the board to conduct its business; directly address the concerns of the community it serves; and adopt, amend, or reject policies.

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[65] See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 7, 1960; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1960.

[66] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1960.

The minutes for the board only include main motions as opposed to subsidiary, privileged, and incidental motions. Specifically, main motions are policy-based motions; they introduce a matter for the board to consider or decide. Once a main motion is made by a member, a second is needed from another member for the motion to be considered by the whole board.

In terms of making motions and offering seconds to motions, Carter was an active member, and he demonstrated this early on and through his first year in office. In all, from December 1955 to December 1956, he made fifteen motions and seconded nineteen motions. Here are some examples of Carter's initial activities on the board.

Carter seconded his first motion at the December 6, 1955, meeting:

> December 6, 1955
> Motion was made by Hoke Smith, seconded by Mr. Carter that beginning January 1st, the salary of our clerk, Mrs. Beverly Burk be increased $25.00 per month.[67]

At his second meeting, on January 3, 1956, Carter proposed that the board make a visit to each of the county schools, white and black. The board accepted his suggestion:

> January 3, 1956
> Plans were made, upon suggestions by Mr. Carter, for visiting the schools in the county. The Supt. was asked to set the date and notify each member.[68]

At his third meeting, January 18, 1956, Carter submitted his first resolution and offered the main motion for its adoption:

> January 18, 1956
> A Motion was made by Mr. Jimmy Carter, seconded by Mr. Johnny Cheek, to adopt the following resolution.[69]

The resolution addressed the board's concern over declining student enrollment and the ADA in black county schools. On behalf of the board, he proposed that the Georgia Department of Education reallocate the building funds intended for two additional classrooms for each of the three proposed "colored" elementary schools (six classrooms in all) "to another project, or building, for the purpose of answering the needs of the white high school pupils of Sumter County, since these rooms are not needed in the negro schools." This resolution was then rescinded at the February monthly meeting. Howard Logan offered the main motion and Carter seconded it. [70]

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[67] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 6, 1955.

[68] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 3, 1956.

[69] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 18, 1956.

[70] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 18, 1956; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 7, 1956.

Carter made a second main motion later during the January 18 meeting to provide a monthly salary for a county staff member.

> January 18, 1956
> Motion was made by Mr. Carter, seconded by Mr. Cheek that the Board pay Miss Cooper $129.33 per month.[71]

As recorded in the minutes, there were many other actions taken by Carter during his first year on the board. These actions illustrate the range of decisions a school board member often make and the responsibilities a member possesses. They concern personnel hires and retentions, salaries, school equipment, infrastructure, classroom use, students with special needs, land acquisition, transportation, fire safety, the repurposing of school properties, and relations with the Americus city schools and the State of Georgia. The following are some sample decisions Carter made during the rest of his first year on the school board.

> February 7, 1956
> A Motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Mr. Cheek, to buy a duplicator for Anthony school.[72]

> April 3, 1956
> A Motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan, to buy shades for classrooms at Union High School.[73]

> May 1, 1956
> Motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan to approve the use of a classroom at Anthony school for a teacher of exceptional children, if it is not needed for the regular school program.[74]

> June 5, 1956
> Motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by J. W. Cheek to raise the salary of Roger Pollock, bus shop foreman, $25 per month.[75]

> July 3, 1956
> A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to purchase two acres from Mrs. R. D. McNeill, Sr. at $150 per acre to add to the school grounds at New Era School.

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[71] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 18, 1956.

[72] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 7, 1956.

[73] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 3, 1956.

[74] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 1, 1956; Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency*, 18.

[75] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 5, 1956.

A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to accept the resignation of Mrs. Daisy Isreal [*sic*], 1st grade teacher at Thalean. Upon the recommendation of the Trustees and Principal Mrs. Y. T. Sheffield was elected as 1st grade teacher for another year.

Motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to elect Mr. Buford H. Reese as Voc. Ag. Teacher for Plains High. His salary will be supplemented according to the scale already set up for this county.

Following a discussion on accepting more city students in our county schools, a motion was made by J. W. Cheek and seconded by Jimmy Carter that we keep the students that are already enrolled, but not accept any new ones, since this Board of Education receives no funds from any source for the education of those students.

Motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan to build a county school bus repair shop. Supt. Foy and Hoke Smith were authorized to take charge of the plans.[76]

August 7, 1956
A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to elect the bus drivers as follows for Anthony and Union High.[77]

Anthony:	Bill Whitaker	Union:	R. L. Bass
	Billy Clark		Fred Bass
			A. O. Cheek

September 4, 1956
A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to elect the following teachers.

Anthony School	Mrs. Joan Cordell
New Era School	Mrs. Jimmy Weaver
Thalean School	Mrs. Bobby Chappell
Plains High	Mr. Ralph Beasley
Union High	Mrs. Doris Rhyne
	Mrs. Curtis Stripling
	Miss Jeanette Young

A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan to continue Lamar Paul, maintenance man, on a full time [*sic*] basis at $250 per month plus $50 per month for travel.[78]

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[76] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 3, 1956.

[77] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 7, 1956.

[78] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 4, 1956.

October 2, 1956
A motion was made by Mr. Hoke Smith, seconded by Mr. Jimmy Carter to purchase a duplicator for New Era School.[79]

November 7, 1956
A motion was made by Jimmy Carter seconded by Howard Logan to buy a set of reference books for Anthony School.

Motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter for Hoke Smith and Supt. Foy to buy a truck for use at the bus shop, and some desk for teachers from the Surplus Warehouse whenever they were made available.

Motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to transfer from the capital Outlay account to the regular operating account the amount spent in the past for attorney fees, surveyor's fees, whenever this money is needed. . . .

Motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to hire a lawyer only when he is needed and not retain him on a full-time basis.[80]

December 4, 1956
A committee from the Shiloh community came before the Board and asked permission to lease or buy the Shiloh School for a community center. A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Hoke Smith, authorizing Supt. Foy to handle the arrangements for this as he saw best. Jimmy Carter and Howard Logan were asked to help him.

A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan to buy the necessary equipment, door locks, etc. for the schools in order that they will meet the requirements of the fire marshall [*sic*].[81]

Board decisions may also involve setting and revising academic standards for grading and grade advancement. This is an example from 1958, noting Carter's involvement in establishing a new grading system for the county:

June 11, 1958
A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan to use the following system for grading next term:

A	93–100
B	85–92
C	77–84
D	70–76
E	65–69 (Failing with privilege of making up at discretion of teacher)

[79] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 2, 1956.

[80] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, November 7, 1956.

[81] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 4, 1956.

This grading system will be used above 3rd grade.[82]

Sometimes members offer tribute to the service of a board colleague or to an administrator/teacher in the county system. For example, in March 1958, Carter offered a resolution acknowledging and commending the service of Miss Julia Coleman of Plains High School. He drafted the resolution, and it was then reviewed by Superintendent Foy.[83]

The board addressed matters of public health as well. Actions included improving the sanitary conditions of school lunchrooms and recommending vaccinations for all students. The following entry involves the polio vaccine:[84]

> July 2, 1957
> A Motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Hoke Smith to recommend that all school children have their polio shots before entering school in September.[85]

Building a Political Resume

In December 1955, Jimmy Carter joined the Sumter County Board of Education. He was now a politician.

Yet Carter was not a political outsider per se; as noted previously, he came from a political family. His father, Earl Carter, was a local politician who himself served on the school board for more than a decade and, months before his death, was elected to the Georgia State House in 1952. He was aligned with the conservative wing of the Democratic Party and the Eugene Talmadge faction in Georgia.

Like his father before him, Carter wanted to serve his community and make a difference. He did just this not long after he resigned from the US Navy and came back to Plains. In 1955, he was chosen by the local grand jury to fill a vacancy on the Sumter County Board of Education—the same seat his father once held.

Carter served as a member of the school board longer than any other political office. He served with distinction. He had a near-perfect attendance record, and he was an active member. He offered his share of main motions and seconded them. In 1960, he

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[82] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 11, 1958.

[83] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 4, 1958; "Copy of Jimmy Carter's Draft Resolution for Miss Julia Coleman," Jimmy Carter Papers—Pre-Presidential, 1962–1974, Chairman-Sumter County Board of Education, Box 22, Folder #1: "Correspondence, Reports, Minutes," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia; "Letter from W. W. Foy to Miss Julia Coleman," March 5, 1958, Jimmy Carter Papers—Pre-Presidential, 1962–1974, Chairman-Sumter County Board of Education, Box 22, Folder #1: "Correspondence, Reports, Minutes," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[84] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 3, 1958.

[85] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 2, 1957. In 1966, the board recommended the measles vaccine. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 1, 1966.

became its chair. From this position, he emerged as a countywide figure and spokesperson for educational reform. His policy interest and acquired expertise in public education was a motivating factor in his decision to seek a seat in the Georgia State Senate in 1962.

Serving on the school board was one of the credentials he usually cited when he sought higher political office, including his runs for governor of Georgia and for president of the United States. References can be found in his campaign materials. Carter's journey to the White House began here.[86]

The issue of race remained and loomed large. Carter became a member of the school board about eighteen months after the 1954 *Brown* decision and the beginning of the mass resistance from southern whites. Carter's political career was launched in the post-*Brown* segregated South. This was the particular and peculiar context of his school board years. The next chapter examines and explores this dimension of his first political experience.

[86] "Good News Carter's Comin'—Jimmy Carter for Governor," 1966 Campaign Brochure, JICA 1366 0002 Box 7, Folder 53: "Pamphlets Undated," Jimmy Carter National Historical Park, Plains, Georgia.

Document: Resolution of the Sumter County Board of Education on the Death of Earl Carter, August 4, 1953

Sumter County Board of Education Resolution August 4, 1953

With feeling of deepest regret and in view of the loss we have sustained, the Sumter County Board of Education must record the passing of one of its most distinguished members, our beloved and respected associate, J. Earl Carter, who died, July 22, 1953.

Realizing to the fullest extent the still heavier loss sustained by those nearest and dearest to him, and fully appreciating the benefits which our Board and the entire County have derived from the work of this public spirited man, and because of the warm personal feeling inspired in our hearts by his loyalty, kindness and unselfish service on this Board, be it

RESOLVED: That we inscribe upon our records this tribute to his memory, that future generations may know and appreciate his splendid Christian character, his many benevolent deeds, and the respect and esteem in which he was held, and

RESOLVED: That a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the family of our deceased associate, together with assurance of our sincere sympathy. May our Heavenly Father console them in their deepest sorrow, and may these words of appreciation and high regard be a solace in the years to come.
RESOLVED: That copy of this resolution be transmitted to local Press, Georgia Educational Association and spread on minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education.

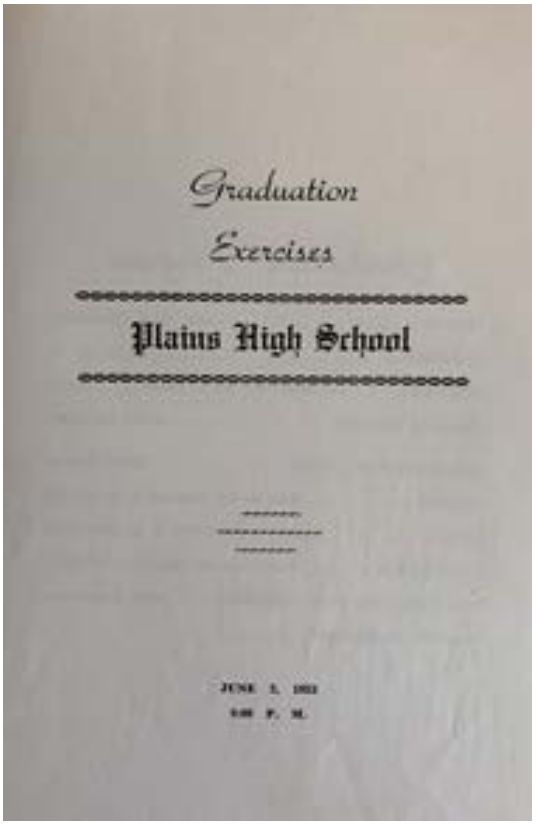
SUMTER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

A.H. JENNINGS	CHR.
A.L. CHEEK	MBE
HOWARD LOGAN	MBE
HOKE SMITH	MBE
W.W. FOY	CSS
SARA H. MIMS	SEC.

Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 4, 1953

Documents:
Governor Herman Talmadge and the 1953 Graduation Commencement at Plains High School

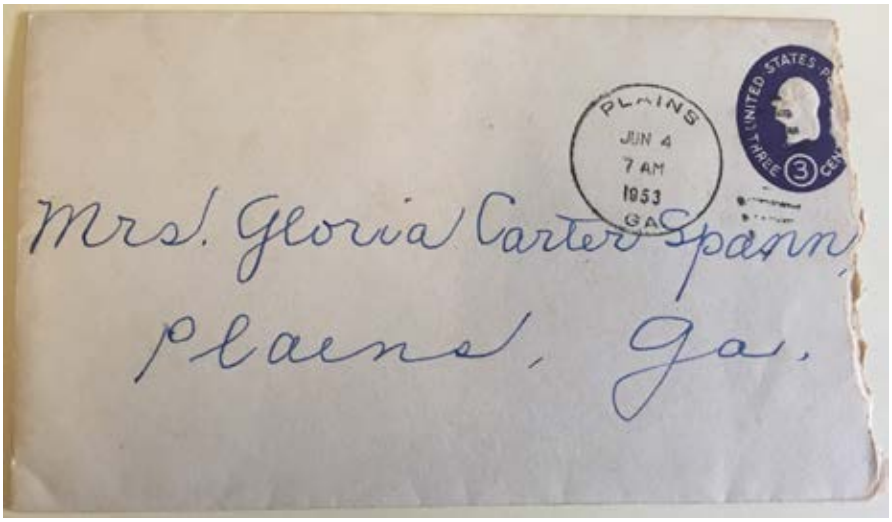
Figure 4.1. 1953 Plains High School graduation commencement program

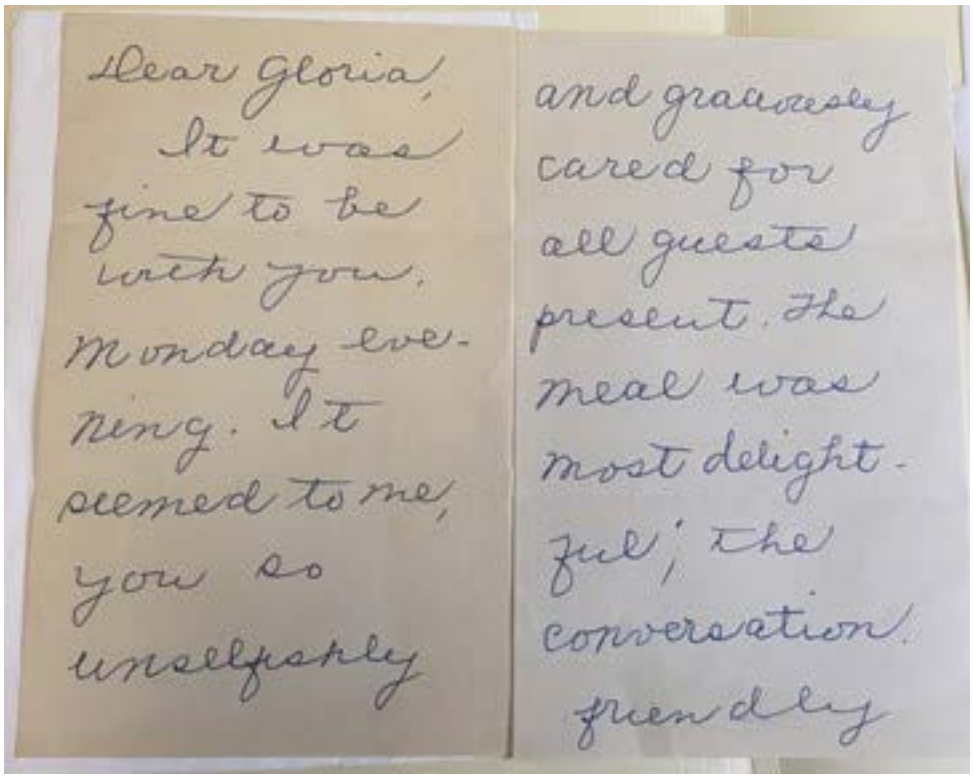




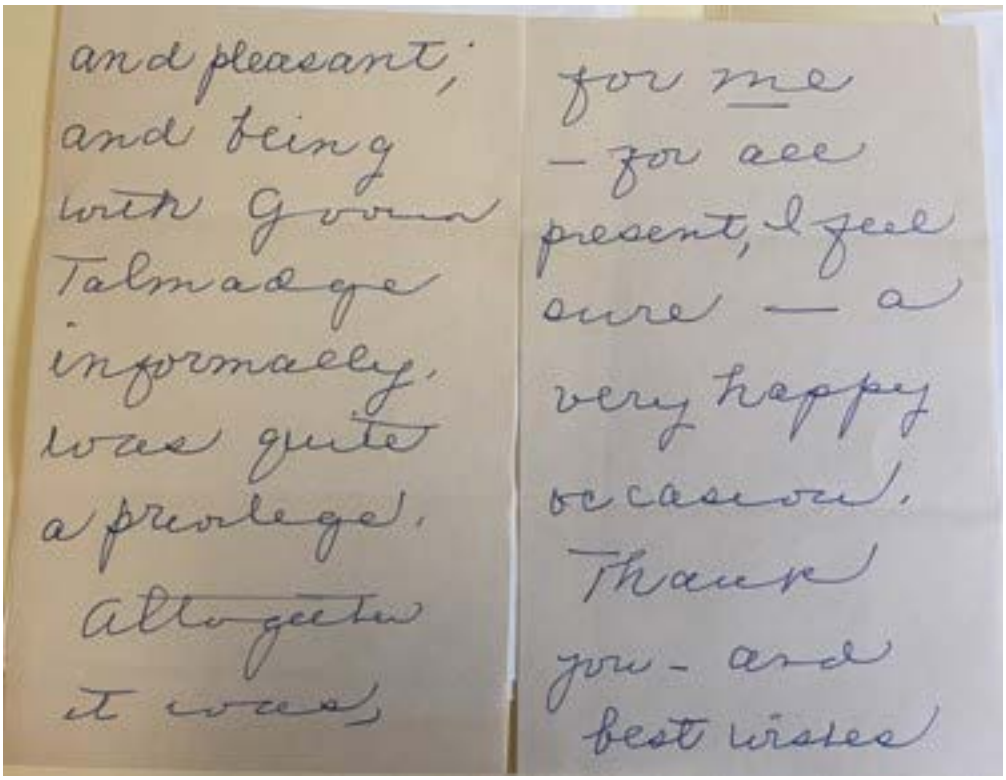
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 4.2. 1953 Letter from Miss Julia Coleman to Gloria Carter Spann



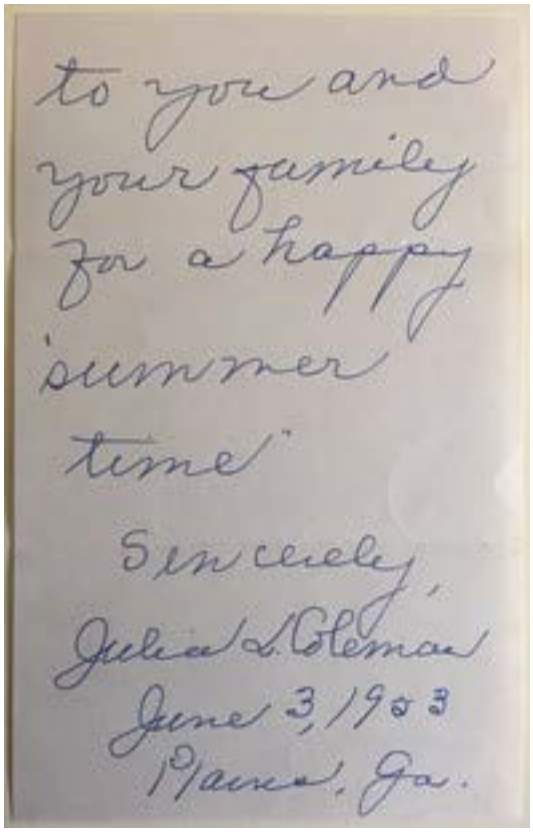


Jimmy Carter National Historical Park



and pleasant;
and being
with Gov.
Talmadge
informally.
was quite
a privilege.
altogether
it was,

for me
— for as
present, I feel
sure — a
very happy
occasion.
Thank
you - and
best wishes

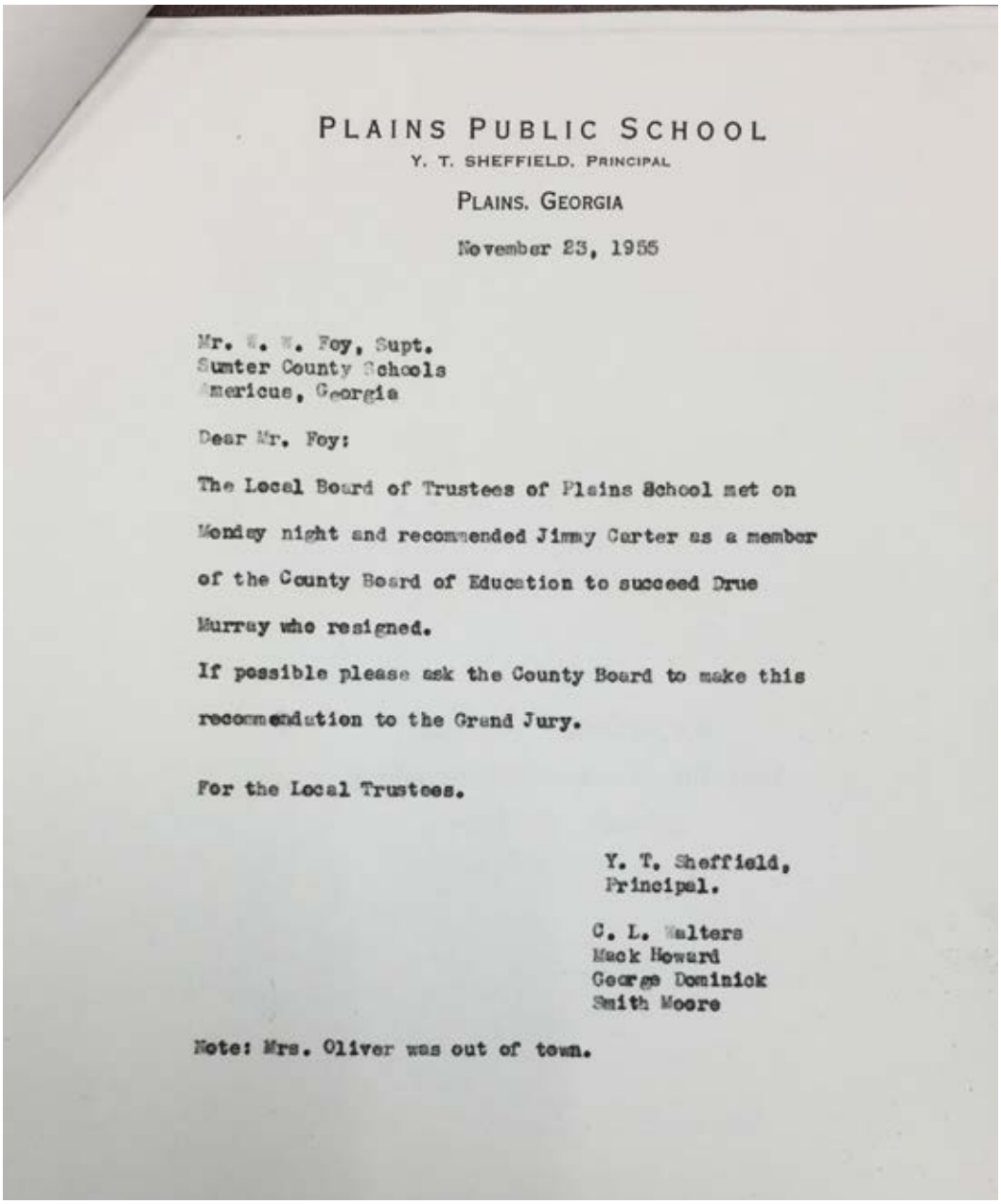


to you and
your family
for a happy
summer
time"

Sincerely,
Julia L. Coleman
June 3, 1953
Plains, Ga.

Document:
The Nomination of Jimmy Carter for the Sumter County Board of Education

Figure 4.3. Plains High School nomination of Jimmy Carter for the Sumter County School Board



PLAINS PUBLIC SCHOOL
Y. T. SHEFFIELD, PRINCIPAL
PLAINS, GEORGIA

November 23, 1955

Mr. [illegible]. W. Foy, Supt.
Sumter County Schools
Americus, Georgia

Dear Mr. Foy:

The Local Board of Trustees of Plains School met on Monday night and recommended Jimmy Carter as a member of the County Board of Education to succeed Drue Murray who resigned.

If possible please ask the County Board to make this recommendation to the Grand Jury.

For the Local Trustees.

Y. T. Sheffield,
Principal.

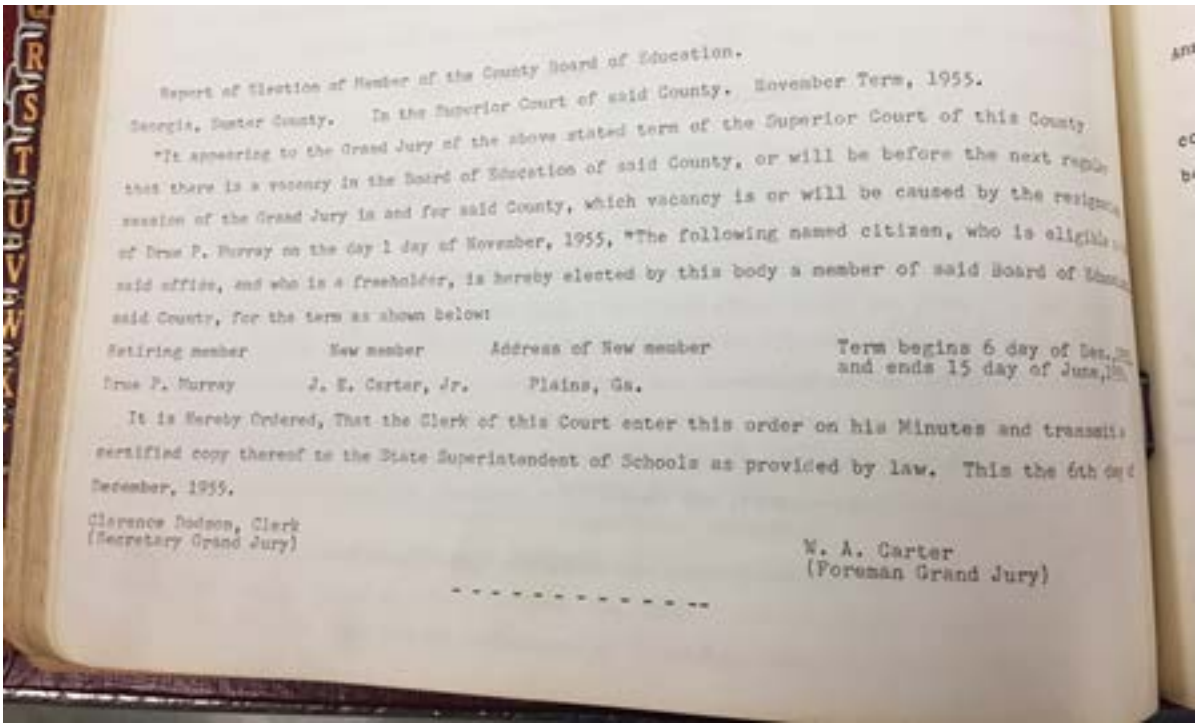
C. L. Walters
Mack Howard
George Dominick
Smith Moore

Note: Mrs. Oliver was out of town.

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum

Documents:
The Selection of Jimmy Carter for the Sumter County Board of Education

Figure 4.4. Minutes of the Sumter County Superior Court Grand Jury: Election for Sumter County School Board Member, December 1955



Report of Election of Member of the County Board of Education.

Georgia, Sumter County. In the Superior Court of said County. November Term, 1955.

"It appearing to the Grand Jury of the above stated term of the Superior Court of this County that there is a vacancy in the Board of Education of said County, or will be before the next regular session of the Grand Jury in and for said County, which vacancy is or will be caused by the resignation of True P. Murray on the day 1 day of November, 1955, "The following named citizen, who is eligible to said office, and who is a freeholder, is hereby elected by this body a member of said Board of Education said County, for the term as shown below:

Retiring member	New member	Address of New member	Term begins 6 day of Dec., and ends 15 day of June,
True P. Murray	J. E. Carter, Jr.	Plains, Ga.	

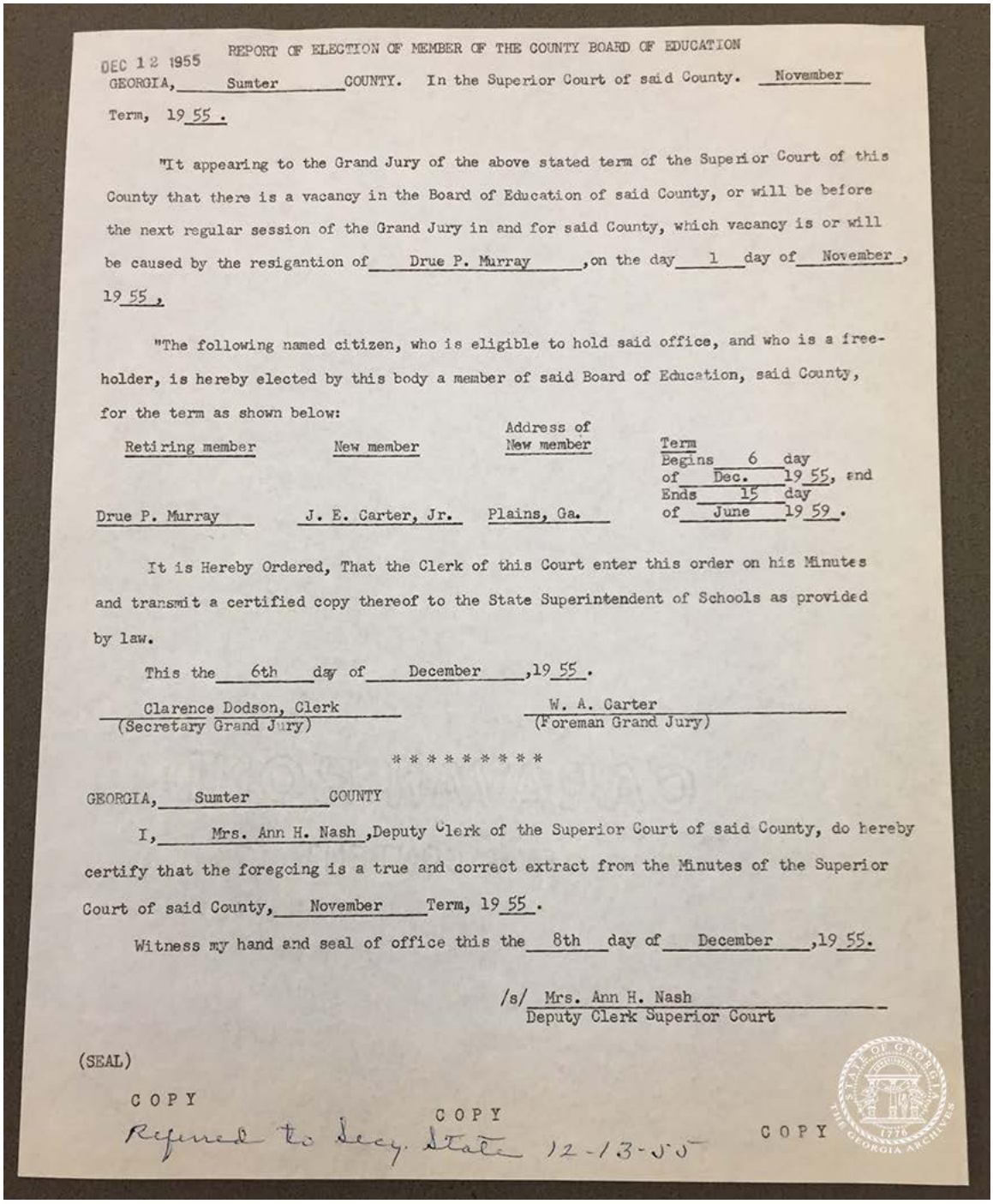
It is Hereby Ordered, That the Clerk of this Court enter this order on his Minutes and transmit a certified copy thereof to the State Superintendent of Schools as provided by law. This the 6th day of December, 1955.

Clarence Dodson, Clerk
(Secretary Grand Jury)

W. A. Carter
(Foreman Grand Jury)

Clerk of the Court, Sumter County, Georgia

Figure 4.5. Grand Jury Report of Election for Sumter County School Board Member



DEC 12 1955

REPORT OF ELECTION OF MEMBER OF THE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

GEORGIA, Sumter COUNTY. In the Superior Court of said County. November Term, 1955.

"It appearing to the Grand Jury of the above stated term of the Superior Court of this County that there is a vacancy in the Board of Education of said County, or will be before the next regular session of the Grand Jury in and for said County, which vacancy is or will be caused by the resigantion of Drue P. Murray, on the day 1 day of November, 1955,

"The following named citizen, who is eligible to hold said office, and who is a free-holder, is hereby elected by this body a member of said Board of Education, said County, for the term as shown below:

Retiring member	New member	Address of New member	Term
Drue P. Murray	J. E. Carter, Jr.	Plains, Ga.	Begins 6 day of Dec. 1955, and Ends 15 day of June 1959.

It is Hereby Ordered, That the Clerk of this Court enter this order on his Minutes and transmit a certified copy thereof to the State Superintendent of Schools as provided by law.

This the 6th day of December, 1955.

Clarence Dodson, Clerk
(Secretary Grand Jury)

W. A. Carter
(Foreman Grand Jury)

* * * * * * * * *

GEORGIA, Sumter COUNTY

I, Mrs. Ann H. Nash, Deputy Clerk of the Superior Court of said County, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct extract from the Minutes of the Superior Court of said County, November Term, 1955.

Witness my hand and seal of office this the 8th day of December, 1955.

/s/ Mrs. Ann H. Nash
Deputy Clerk Superior Court

(SEAL)

COPY

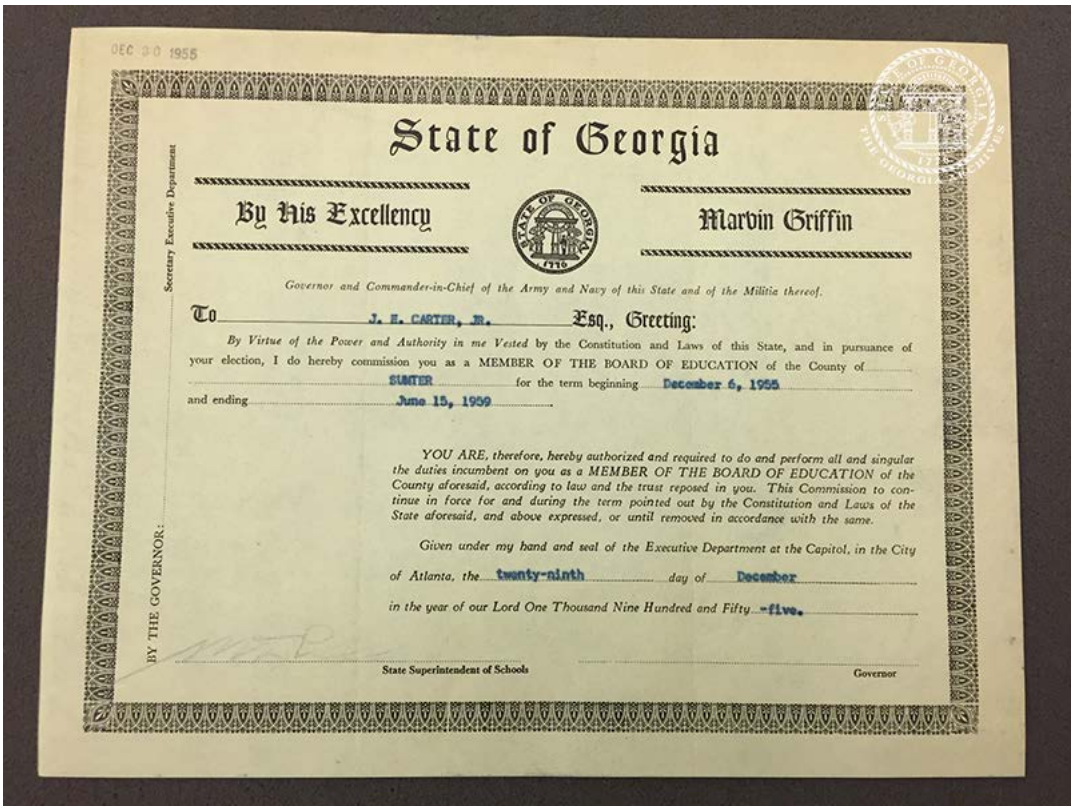
COPY

Refused to Secy. State 12-13-55

COPY

Georgia State Archives

Figure 4.6. Governor's Commission to Serve on Sumter County Board of Education



DEC 30 1955

State of Georgia

Secretary Executive Department

By His Excellency — Marvin Griffin

Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of this State and of the Militia thereof.

To J. E. CARTER, JR. Esq., Greeting:

By Virtue of the Power and Authority in me Vested by the Constitution and Laws of this State, and in pursuance of your election, I do hereby commission you as a MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION of the County of SUMTER for the term beginning December 6, 1955 and ending June 15, 1959.

YOU ARE, therefore, hereby authorized and required to do and perform all and singular the duties incumbent on you as a MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION of the County aforesaid, according to law and the trust reposed in you. This Commission to continue in force for and during the term pointed out by the Constitution and Laws of the State aforesaid, and above expressed, or until removed in accordance with the same.

Given under my hand and seal of the Executive Department at the Capitol, in the City of Atlanta, the twenty-ninth *day of* December

in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty -five.

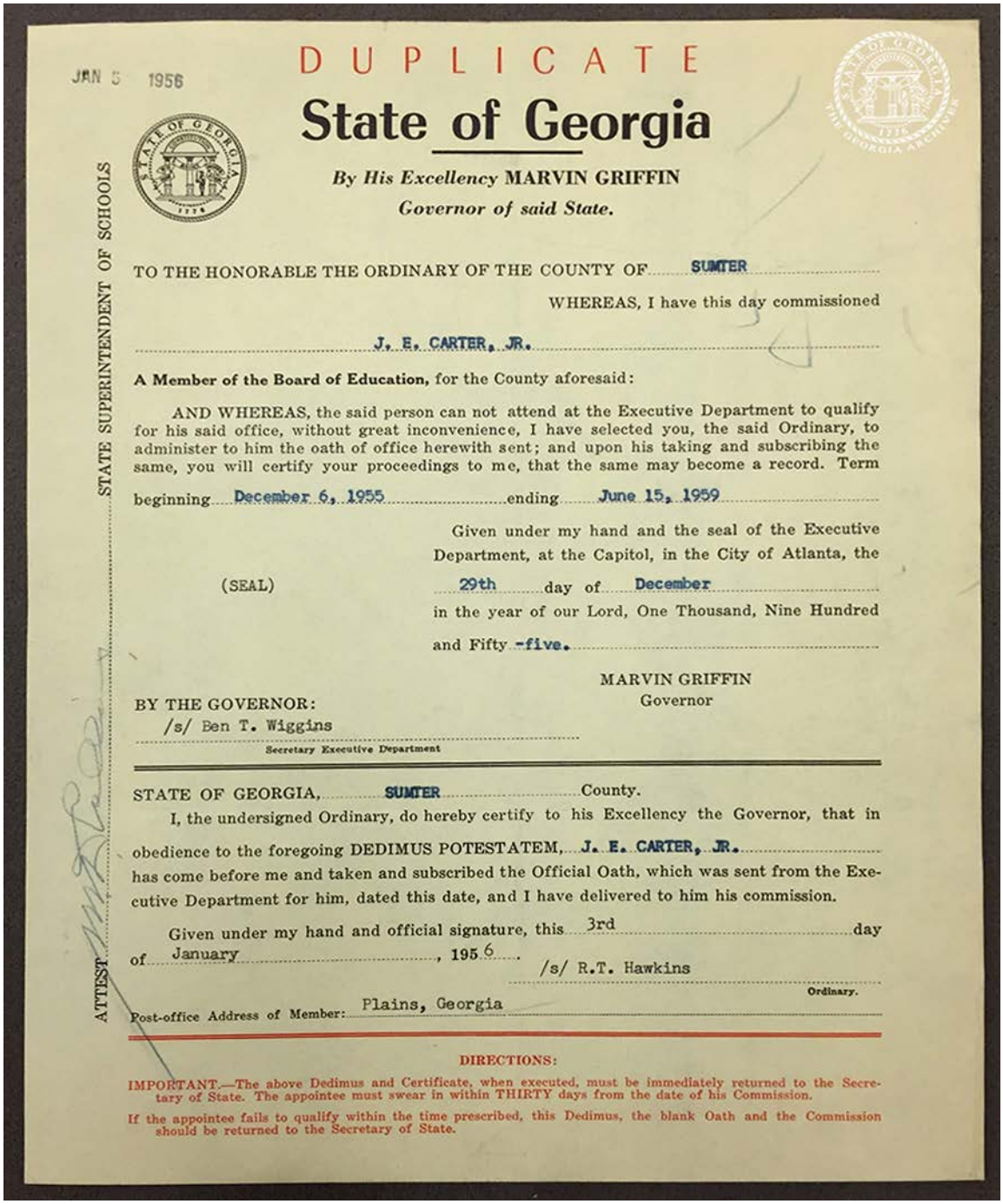
BY THE GOVERNOR:

State Superintendent of Schools

Governor

Georgia State Archives

Figure 4.7. Certification of Oath of Office for Service on Sumter County Board of Education



JAN 5 1956

DUPLICATE

State of Georgia

By His Excellency MARVIN GRIFFIN
Governor of said State.

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

TO THE HONORABLE THE ORDINARY OF THE COUNTY OF SUMTER

WHEREAS, I have this day commissioned

J. E. CARTER, JR.

A Member of the Board of Education, for the County aforesaid:

AND WHEREAS, the said person can not attend at the Executive Department to qualify for his said office, without great inconvenience, I have selected you, the said Ordinary, to administer to him the oath of office herewith sent; and upon his taking and subscribing the same, you will certify your proceedings to me, that the same may become a record. Term beginning December 6, 1955 ending June 15, 1959

Given under my hand and the seal of the Executive Department, at the Capitol, in the City of Atlanta, the

(SEAL)

29th day of December in the year of our Lord, One Thousand, Nine Hundred and Fifty-five.

MARVIN GRIFFIN
Governor

BY THE GOVERNOR:
/s/ Ben T. Wiggins
Secretary Executive Department

ATTEST

STATE OF GEORGIA, SUMTER County.

I, the undersigned Ordinary, do hereby certify to his Excellency the Governor, that in obedience to the foregoing DEDIMUS POTESTATEM, J. E. CARTER, JR. has come before me and taken and subscribed the Official Oath, which was sent from the Executive Department for him, dated this date, and I have delivered to him his commission.

Given under my hand and official signature, this 3rd day of January, 1956.

/s/ R.T. Hawkins
Ordinary.

Post-office Address of Member: Plains, Georgia

DIRECTIONS:

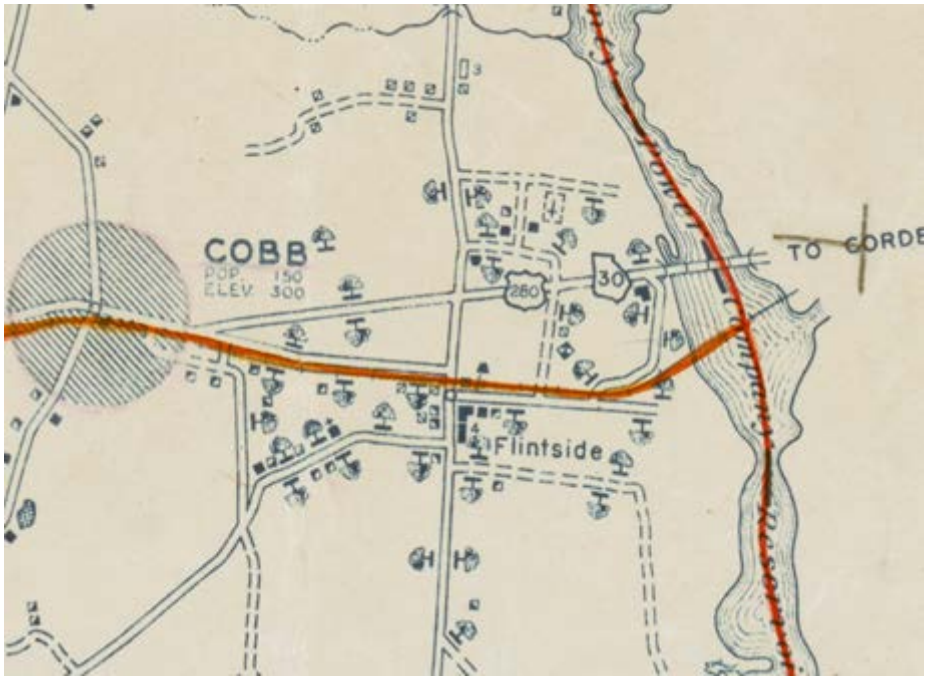
IMPORTANT.—The above Dedimus and Certificate, when executed, must be immediately returned to the Secretary of State. The appointee must swear in within THIRTY days from the date of his Commission.

If the appointee fails to qualify within the time prescribed, this Dedimus, the blank Oath and the Commission should be returned to the Secretary of State.

Georgia State Archives

Select Profiles of Black Sumter County Public Schools, 1955–1956

Figure 4.8. Flintside



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Cobb, Georgia
Proximity:	—
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	No
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	1 with 4 years of college
Classrooms:	1
Seating:	Benches
Total Enrollment, 1940–41	53 (31 boys, 22 girls)
School Grades, 1940–41	1–7
Public Transportation:	None

Figure 4.9. Mount Hope



1950 US Census Enumeration District Maps—Georgia—Sumter County

Location:	Americus, Georgia
Proximity:	Off Lamar Road and Brickyard Road
Lot Size:	2 acres
Building Type:	Wood frame
Running Drinking Water:	Yes
Toilet System:	Pit
Faculty:	2 with 4 years of college
Classrooms:	2
Seating:	Standard/patent desks
Total Enrollment, 1955–56	69 (37 boys, 32 girls)
School Grades, 1955–56	1–8
Public Transportation:	Yes (1 bus)

Figure 4.10. Mount Hope Christian Center



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 4.10 (cont'd). The Mount Hope church and school site is located off Lamar Road, heading south on Brickyard Road. This portion of the road is unpaved.

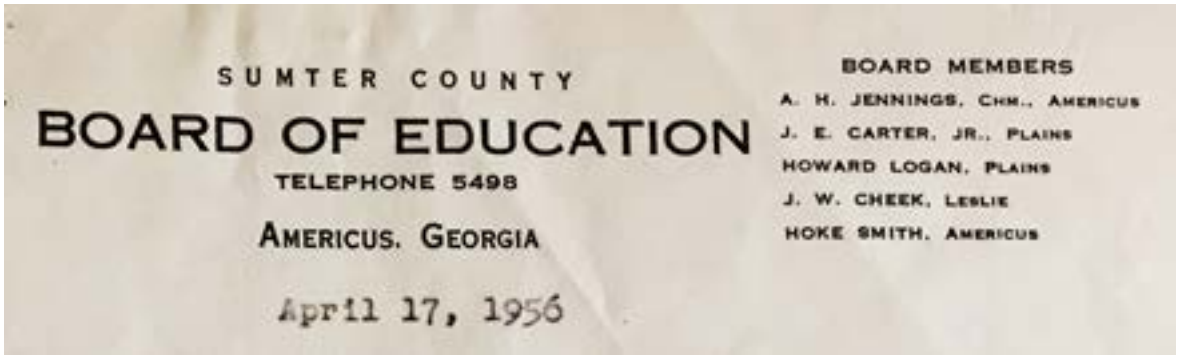




Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Document:
Sumter County Board of Education Letterhead with the Name of J. E. Carter, Jr.

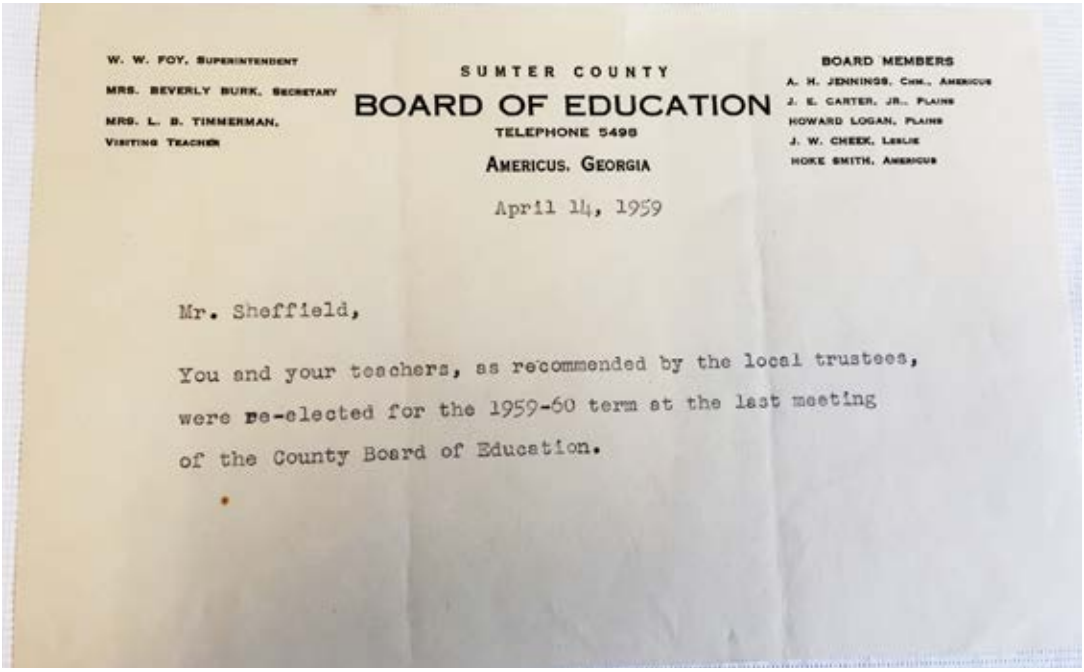
Figure 4.11. Sumter County Board of Education letterhead, 1956 and 1959



SUMTER COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION
TELEPHONE 5498
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

BOARD MEMBERS
A. H. JENNINGS, CHM., AMERICUS
J. E. CARTER, JR., PLAINS
HOWARD LOGAN, PLAINS
J. W. CHEEK, LESLIE
HOKE SMITH, AMERICUS

April 17, 1956



W. W. FOY, SUPERINTENDENT
MRS. BEVERLY BURK, SECRETARY
MRS. L. B. TIMMERMAN, VISITING TEACHER

SUMTER COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION
TELEPHONE 5498
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

BOARD MEMBERS
A. H. JENNINGS, CHM., AMERICUS
J. E. CARTER, JR., PLAINS
HOWARD LOGAN, PLAINS
J. W. CHEEK, LESLIE
HOKE SMITH, AMERICUS

April 14, 1959

Mr. Sheffield,

You and your teachers, as recommended by the local trustees, were re-elected for the 1959-60 term at the last meeting of the County Board of Education.

Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Documents:
The Retirement of Miss Julia Coleman, 1958

Sumter County Board of Education Resolution
March 4, 1958

A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Hoke Smith and passed to accept Miss Julia Coleman's resignation as teacher of Plains High School and name her "Teacher Emeritis" [sic] for the rest of this term with full pay. The following resolution was adopted:

WHEREAS, Our beloved teacher, Miss Julia Coleman, has served faithfully in our schools for fifty years and has taught us and our children with competence and with loving care; and

WHEREAS, She has earned the appreciation and respect, not only of this community, but of the entire state for her work with the youth of Georgia and;

WHEREAS, Miss Julia has now asked that she be permitted to protect her health by adopting a less strenuous work in retirement and;

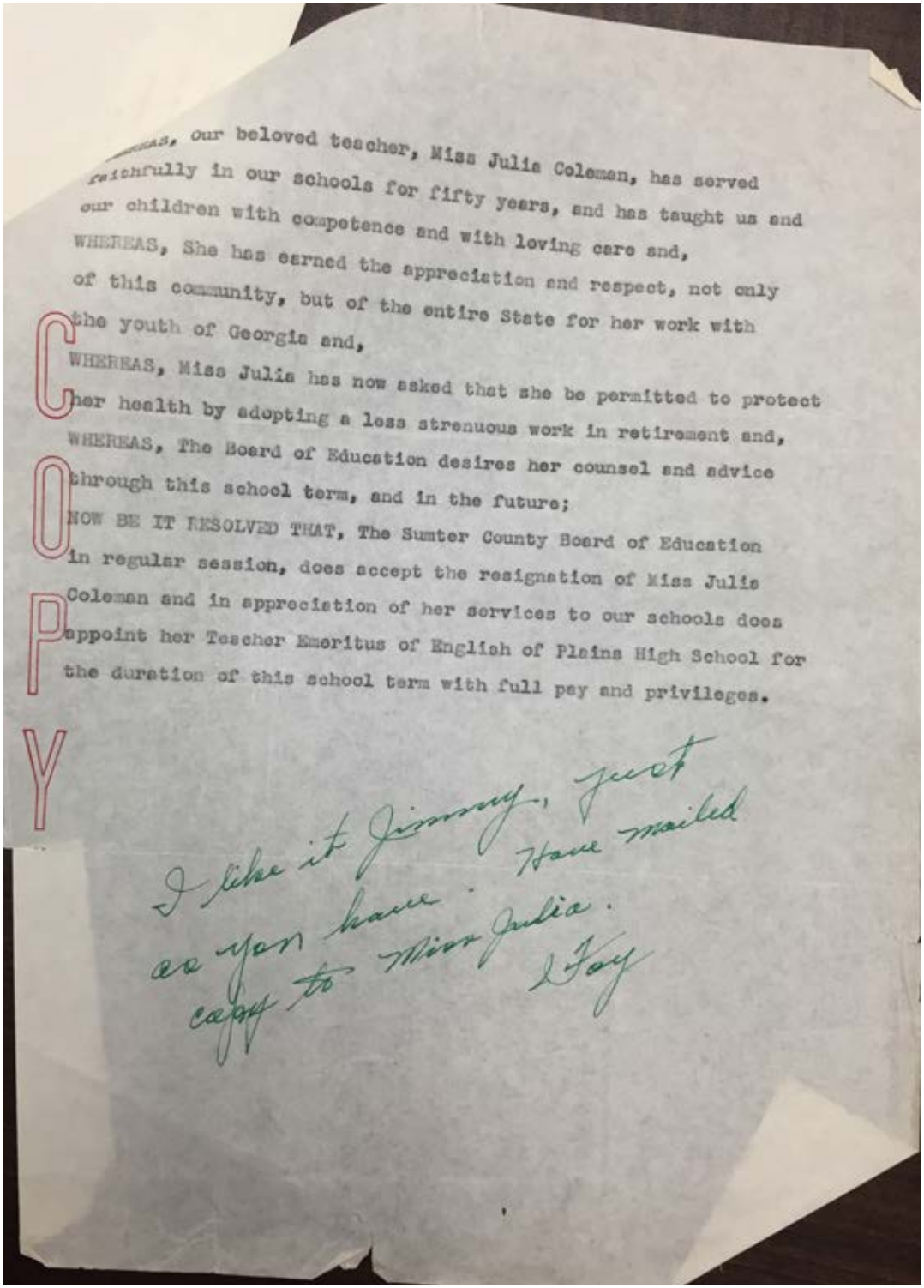
WHEREAS, The Board of Education desires her counsel and advice through this school term and in the future,

NOW BE IT RESOLVED THAT, The Sumter County Board of Education in regular session, does accept the resignation of Miss Julia Coleman and in appreciation of her services to our schools does appoint her "Teacher Emeritus" of English of Plains High School for the duration of this school term with full pay and privileges.

H. P. LOGAN	W. W. FOY
ACTING CHAIRMAN	SECRETARY

Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 4, 1958

Figure 4.12. Jimmy Carter's draft resolution for Miss Julia Coleman, 1958



COPY

WHEREAS, our beloved teacher, Miss Julia Coleman, has served faithfully in our schools for fifty years, and has taught us and our children with competence and with loving care and,

WHEREAS, She has earned the appreciation and respect, not only of this community, but of the entire State for her work with the youth of Georgia and,

WHEREAS, Miss Julia has now asked that she be permitted to protect her health by adopting a less strenuous work in retirement and,

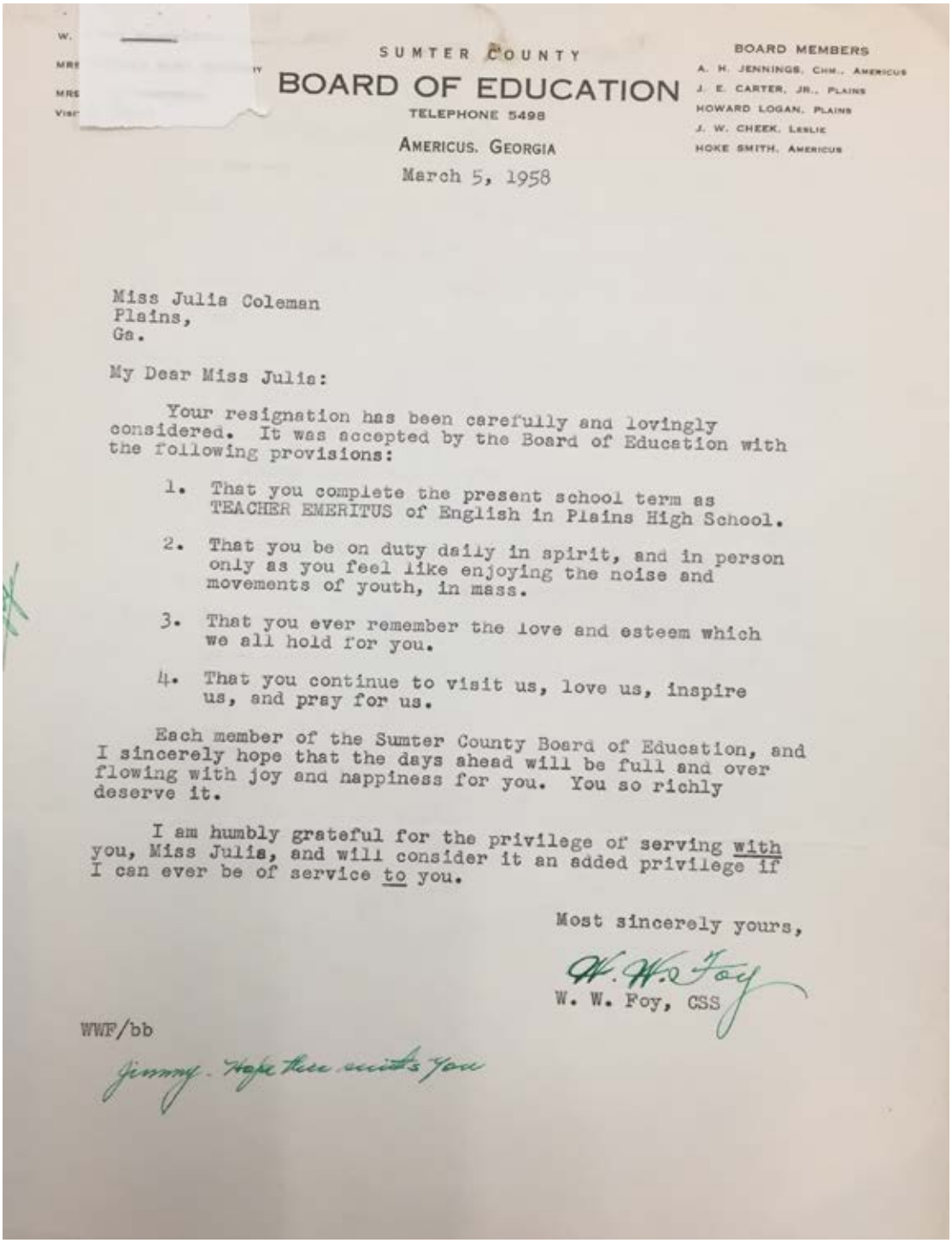
WHEREAS, The Board of Education desires her counsel and advice through this school term, and in the future;

NOW BE IT RESOLVED THAT, The Sumter County Board of Education in regular session, does accept the resignation of Miss Julia Coleman and in appreciation of her services to our schools does appoint her Teacher Emeritus of English of Plains High School for the duration of this school term with full pay and privileges.

I like it Jimmy, just as you have. Have mailed copy to Miss Julia.
Fay

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum

Figure 4.13. Letter from W. W. Foy to Miss Julia Coleman, 1958



SUMTER COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION
TELEPHONE 5498
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

BOARD MEMBERS
A. H. JENNINGS, CHM., AMERICUS
J. E. CARTER, JR., PLAINS
HOWARD LOGAN, PLAINS
J. W. CHEEK, LESLIE
HOKE SMITH, AMERICUS

March 5, 1958

Miss Julia Coleman
Plains,
Ga.

My Dear Miss Julia:

Your resignation has been carefully and lovingly considered. It was accepted by the Board of Education with the following provisions:

1. That you complete the present school term as TEACHER EMERITUS of English in Plains High School.

2. That you be on duty daily in spirit, and in person only as you feel like enjoying the noise and movements of youth, in mass.

3. That you ever remember the love and esteem which we all hold for you.

4. That you continue to visit us, love us, inspire us, and pray for us.

Each member of the Sumter County Board of Education, and I sincerely hope that the days ahead will be full and over flowing with joy and happiness for you. You so richly deserve it.

I am humbly grateful for the privilege of serving with you, Miss Julia, and will consider it an added privilege if I can ever be of service to you.

Most sincerely yours,

W. W. Foy

W. W. Foy, CSS

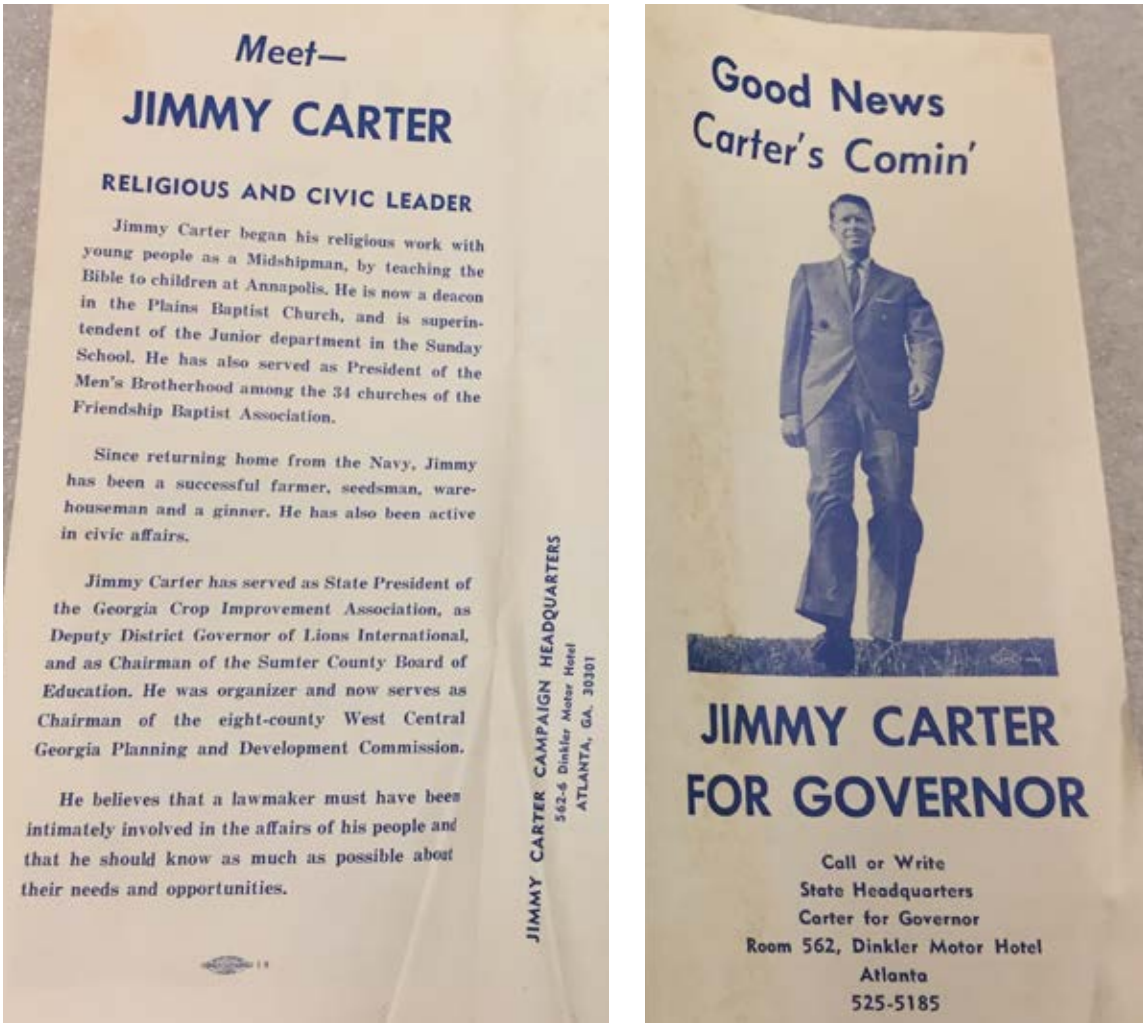
WWF/bb

Jimmy - Hope this suits you

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum

Document:
Jimmy Carter Gubernatorial Campaign Brochure, 1966

Figure 4.14. Acknowledging his school board service—Jimmy Carter campaign brochure for governor, 1966



Meet—

JIMMY CARTER

RELIGIOUS AND CIVIC LEADER

Jimmy Carter began his religious work with young people as a Midshipman, by teaching the Bible to children at Annapolis. He is now a deacon in the Plains Baptist Church, and is superintendent of the Junior department in the Sunday School. He has also served as President of the Men's Brotherhood among the 34 churches of the Friendship Baptist Association.

Since returning home from the Navy, Jimmy has been a successful farmer, seedsman, warehouseman and a ginner. He has also been active in civic affairs.

Jimmy Carter has served as State President of the Georgia Crop Improvement Association, as Deputy District Governor of Lions International, and as Chairman of the Sumter County Board of Education. He was organizer and now serves as Chairman of the eight-county West Central Georgia Planning and Development Commission.

He believes that a lawmaker must have been intimately involved in the affairs of his people and that he should know as much as possible about their needs and opportunities.

JIMMY CARTER CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS
562-6 Dinkler Motor Hotel
ATLANTA, GA. 30301

Good News
Carter's Comin'

JIMMY CARTER
FOR GOVERNOR

Call or Write
State Headquarters
Carter for Governor
Room 562, Dinkler Motor Hotel
Atlanta
525-5185

Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

CHAPTER FIVE

Jimmy Carter, School Equalization, and Post-*Brown* Challenges for the Sumter County School Board

As detailed in the previous chapter, Jimmy Carter's first political office was on the Sumter County Board of Education. In December 1955, he was one of five white men on the board and its newest member. They were serving at a controversial and consequential time. Carter and the county board served in the immediate post-*Brown* era, right in "the thick of the segregation issue." This was a pivotal moment in politics, race, and education in Georgia, the South, and the United States. It was a political time when massive resistance reigned. It was state policy. Arguably, the state motto was "No, not one."[1]

About eighteen months before Carter joined the school board, on May 17, 1954, the US Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that mandating separate public schools for white children and separate public schools for black children was no longer permissible. State-sponsored segregation created and sustained a racial hierarchy and this, through the Fourteenth Amendment, was ostensibly unconstitutional. Although the 1954 case has been widely praised as a historic decision and a pivotal moment in the history of race and equality in the country, very little in fact changed.[2]

The task for states and school boards, according to the Court in *Brown II*, was to move "with all deliberate speed" to desegregate the county's public schools. However, white southerners, including the members of the Americus city and Sumter County boards of education, were not ready to comply during the decade or so after *Brown*. Make improvements to or equalize black schools in their school districts, perhaps yes. Make moves to desegregate and integrate schools, Georgia and the South cried out a resounding no.[3]

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[1] The "thick of the segregation issue" quote from Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 43. Carter's years on the board and the years of massive resistance almost perfectly overlapped. According to Tim Boyd, the period of massive resistance in Georgia was from 1954 to 1962. In his 1958 bid for governor, Ernest Vandiver made the "no, not one" promise. It was a promise he could not keep. See Tim S. R. Boyd, *Georgia Democrats, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Shaping of the New South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 91–92; Harold Paulk Henderson, "Ernest Vandiver Jr. (1918–2005)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021; James F. Cook, *The Governors of Georgia, 1754–1995* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 268.

[2] *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 US 483 (1954); Carter, *Faith: A Journey for All* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 157; *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.* (Brown II), 349 US 294 (1955).

[3] Quote from *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.* (Brown II), 349 US 294 (1955).

It was a time of mass resistance and white backlash. Even those who were prepared to accept gradual change and align themselves more with the national mainstream, as the border states were doing, paused, reevaluated, and in some cases even retreated. As white resistance intensified and turned increasingly violent, some white political leaders who at one point were considered moderate or even progressive for their time regarding race underwent a dramatic transformation. How about Jimmy Carter? Was he a racial liberal at the time? A racial conservative? Or was he somewhere in between? This chapter looks at some of the challenges faced by the county school board and some of the actions taken by Carter and the board in this post-*Brown* environment. One key focus is school equalization—that is, the board's efforts to materially equalize the county white and black schools.

May 1954—The Supreme Court Strikes Down School Segregation

In 1954, the year before Carter became a member of the Sumter County school board, the US Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Shawnee County, Kansas (Brown I) that state-sponsored racial segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. The Court held that "separate but equal" violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. "No State shall. . .deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." It was the required racial separateness that made it wholly unequal and impermissible to continue.[4]

Brown was a landmark decision, and it was a moment of great expectation. Change was coming. Newspapers across the country declared that the Court banned racial segregation in school. In this landmark decision, the Court overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and a series of Court cases that upheld racial segregation in public schools and the state power to enforce it.[5] Writing for the 9–0 Court, Chief Justice Earl Warren asked, "Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities?" Being unmistakably clear, Warren said, "We believe that it does."

The Court was convinced that the academic literature at midcentury consistently showed that racial segregation was psychologically damaging to black children. It had a "detrimental effect" because it created a lower sense of self-worth, diminished enthusiasm for learning, and fostered feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Furthermore, the Court

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[4] *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 US 483 (1954)

[5] These other cases included *Cumming v. Board of Education of Richmond County* (1899), *Berea College v. Commonwealth of Kentucky* (1908), and *Gong Lum v. Rice* (1927). Significantly, the *Lum* decision was unanimous, and its opinion was written by Chief Justice William Howard Taft, a former president of the United States.

reasoned, the negative consequences were magnified when segregation was supported by the government. Using their doll test, psychologists Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Clark found that black children often identified the darker doll with negative associations and tended to identify it as the one that most looked like them. In contrast, the children often made positive associations with the white doll. The Clarks argued that racial segregation had deleterious effects on self-esteem and self-worth.[6]

As such, belated state efforts to equalize the schooling between the races were insufficient and ultimately immaterial. The building of modern schools, the raising of teacher salaries, the purchasing of new textbooks, the improving of core curriculum and course offerings, and the providing of school buses could not erase the indelible markings of second-class citizenship wrought by enforced segregation. Because public education has become "the very foundation of good citizenship" and the gateway to career possibility, education "must be made available to all on equal terms." In fact, Warren asserted, "[i]n these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education." In conclusion, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote, "in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."[7]

Despite the common usage, *Brown* was not actually one case but five. *Brown* was the lead case. It was named for Rev. Oliver Brown, who advocated on behalf of his daughter Linda Brown to attend an all-white school much closer to home. He attempted to enroll her in the all-white school and was rebuffed.[8] These cases were consolidated to highlight the fact that "separate but equal" public education was not confined to a certain set of facts or to a certain part of the United States. The cases came from the Deep South, Peripheral South, Border States, and non-South.[9]

---

[6] See "Interview with Dr. Kenneth Clark," Eyes on the Prize Interviews, November 4, 1985, http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eop/eopweb/cla0015.0289.020drkennethclark.html, accessed April 3, 2021.

[7] Even before Brown, the Court recognized that "separate but equal" educational facilities could never be truly equal. Unequal facilities inevitably produce unequal opportunities and experiences. See *Sweatt v. Painter* 339 US 629 (1950) and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* 339 US 637 (1950).

[8] Linda Brown passed away at age seventy-five in March 2018. See Neil Genzlinger, "Linda Brown, Symbol of Landmark Desegregation Case. Dies," *New York Times*, March 26, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/26/obituaries/linda-brown-symbol-of-landmark-desegregation-case-dies.html, accessed March 26, 2018.

[9] The other cases decided in the same unanimous opinion as *Brown* were *Briggs v. Elliott* (Clarendon County, South Carolina), *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (Virginia), and *Gebhart et al. v. Belton et al*. (Delaware). The other case, *Bolling v. Sharpe*, involved the District of Columbia. Since DC is not a state, the Court could not rely on the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Instead, it used the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment. This decision was also unanimous. Chief Justice Warren wrote, "In view of our decision that the Constitution prohibits the states from maintaining racially segregated public schools, it would be unthinkable that the same Constitution would impose a lesser duty on the Federal Government. We hold that racial segregation in the public schools of the District of Columbia is a denial of the due process of law guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution." See *Bolling v. Sharpe* 347 US 497 (1954).

At the time of the decision, seventeen states formally authorized racially segregated public schooling. This is known as *de jure segregation*. Where segregation exists without the official state sanction, this is known as *de facto segregation*. The Court in 1954 only struck down *de jure segregation. De facto segregation* remains and has been a much more difficult problem to remedy. In 1974, the Court recognized this challenge.[10]

All eleven southern states that once belonged to the Confederacy, including Georgia, mandated racial segregation, along with the border states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, and West Virginia (Figure 5.1). The District of Columbia, the capital seat of the United States, also required racial segregation in education. Four states (Arizona, Kansas, New Mexico, and Wyoming) permitted local options on the issue. Each school district could decide the matter for itself. In the case of *Brown*, the Topeka school district established separate elementary schools for whites and blacks.[11]

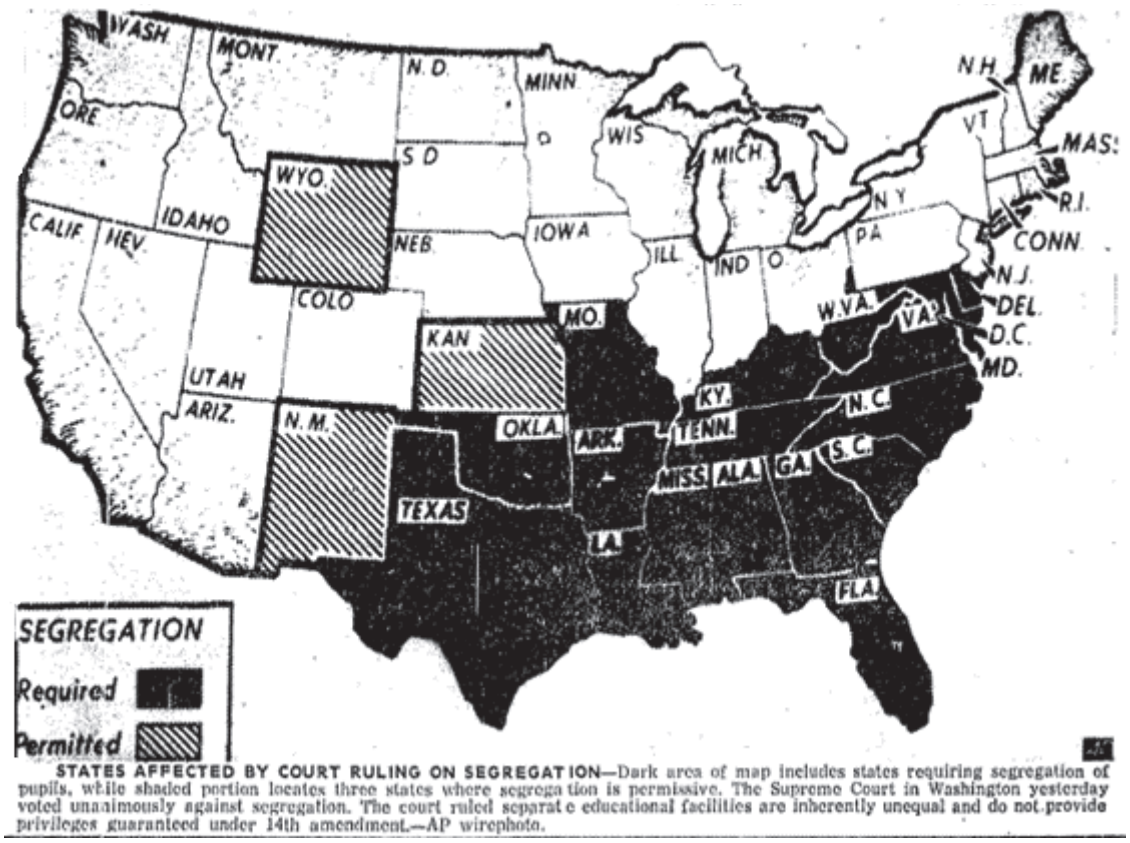
When the Court handed down its historic ruling, most states in the Northeast and the Midwest prohibited racially segregated schools. Other states, such as Maine and California, did not have laws one way or the other. These states simply had no formal position. In total, of the forty-eight states in the Union in 1954, twenty-seven states did not officially sanction racially separate schooling. Even so, de facto segregation most certainly existed throughout the country. Most white schoolchildren and most black schoolchildren in the United States learned in environments without the other.

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[10] Jeffrey A. Raffel, *Historical Dictionary of School Segregation and Desegregation: The American Experience* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 233–34. See *Milliken v. Bradley* 418 US 717 (1974).

[11] The Confederacy consisted of eleven states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Robert J. Cottrol, Raymond T. Diamond, and Leland B. Ware, *Brown v. Board of Education: Caste, Culture, and the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 128–29; James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiv–xvi, 9.

Figure 5.1. Public school segregation at the state level, 1954



STATES AFFECTED BY COURT RULING ON SEGREGATION—Dark area of map includes states requiring segregation of pupils, while shaded portion locates three states where segregation is permissive. The Supreme Court in Washington yesterday voted unanimously against segregation. The court ruled separate educational facilities are inherently unequal and do not provide privileges guaranteed under 14th amendment.—AP wirephoto.

AP wirephoto accompanying an AP report written by Herb Altschull

The *Brown* case is a much-celebrated court decision. However, it did not really change things for most black children in the South. If anything, across the region, it galvanized a fierce resistance to desegregation. For example, a decade after Brown, only 1.2 percent of all black children attending public school attended a desegregated school. As Gerald Rosenberg explained, "That means that for nearly 99 of every 100 African-American children in the South a decade after Brown, the finding of a constitutional right changed nothing." It was as if the Court had not ruled at all on the matter. In fact, it was not even until 1961 that the first schools in Georgia began to desegregate. That year, the University of Georgia desegregated. Also, at the secondary level, four high schools in Atlanta initiated the process. State and national media praised the development. Later in the day, at a presidential news conference inside the State Department Auditorium, John F. Kennedy congratulated Georgia governor Ernest Vandiver, Mayor William B. Hartsfield, the Atlanta police, and school superintendent for a successful first day. He then urged others to take their own bold steps to desegregate their public schools: "I strongly urge the officials and citizens of all communities which face this difficult transition in the coming weeks and months to look closely at what Atlanta has done, and to meet their

responsibilities, as have the officials and citizens of Atlanta and Georgia, with courage, tolerance, and, above all, respect for the law." In 1963, Savannah, Athens, and Brunswick took their first steps.[12]

Carter was the chair of the county school board at that time of those remarks. But no progress was in sight. Change in Americus was still another three years away. It was five more years for Sumter County.

Georgia and Sumter County React to *Brown*

All across the South, word spread and the reaction among whites was either swift to anger or one of caution but not yet panic. Massive resistance, including intimidation and violence, would come soon enough. Reaction among blacks was one of elation, optimism, and hope. Change was surely coming. Perhaps surprising to some, a few school districts were ready to initiate desegregation—for example, in parts of Arkansas and Texas.[13]

The top headline for the May 17, 1954, edition of the *Americus Times-Recorder* was, "Segregation Is Denied." State and local public officials were quick to state that things were not changing. One official with the Georgia Democratic Party declared, "This decision strikes down segregation. But there is no doubt in my mind that the people of Georgia will find a way to continue operation of our schools on a segregated basis."[14]

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[12] See Gerald Rosenberg, "Substituting Symbol for Substance: What Did Brown Really Accomplish?" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (April 2004): 205–9; Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 50, 52; Charles S. Bullock III and Ronald Keith Gaddie, *Georgia Politics in a State of Change* (New York: Longman-Pearson Education, 2010), 181; Denise S. Mewborn, "Public Education," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021; James C. Cobb, *Georgia Odyssey* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 63–64. For a discussion of the school desegregation process in Atlanta, see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 131–60. For August 30, 1961, four high schools were involved in the initial desegregation effort. They were Murphy, Brown, Northside, and Henry Grady. John F. Kennedy, "Remarks at the President's News Conference," *American Presidency Project*, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 30, 1961, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-209. The day, however, was not as tranquil and successful as the media and the president presented. For the few black students who braved the experience of attending white Atlanta high schools on that day and the days ahead, desegregation was anything but peaceful or easy. Hostility and ostracism were common. See Kruse, *White Flight*, 156–60.

[13] Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 205–6; Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*, xiii–xiv, 88–90; Catherine M. Lewis and J. Richard Lewis, eds., *Race, Politics, and Memory: A Documentary History of the Little Rock School Crisis* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), xviii–xxi; Cherisse Jones-Branch, "Segregation and Desegregation," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* (online), April 2021. Even before *Brown*, racial desegregation in the South was underway. In 1948, the University of Arkansas became the first public university in the South to admit its first black student.

[14] "State Leaders Thinks Decision Brings Issues," *Associated Press*, published in the *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 17, 1954, 1, 6.

The next day, it was becoming evident that the *Brown* decision would not lead to immediate desegregation in Georgia. Defiance became the watchword. The *Times-Recorder* headline for May 18 was "State Officials Hint at Open Defiance of Decision Outlawing Segregation." This came from the highest level.[15]

Governor Herman Talmadge was very vocal in his opposition to the Court's opinion. Indeed, he was the first southern governor to declare that his state would not comply with the Court. As other southern governors would later do, he invoked the states' rights protections of the Tenth Amendment to the US Constitution. In prepared remarks, Talmadge vowed a continuance of segregated schools: "The court has thrown down the gauntlet before those who believe the Constitution means what it says when it reserves to the individual states the right to regulate their own internal affairs.... The people of Georgia believe in, adhere to and will fight for their right under the United States and Georgia Constitution to manage their own affairs. They cannot and will not accept a bald political decree without basis in law or practicality which overturns their accepted pattern of life."[16] Talmadge appealed to an authority even higher than the federal and state constitutions. He claimed that God willed racial segregation.[17]

Furthermore, the governor proposed a constitutional amendment to the state's constitution to end public schooling throughout Georgia. Instead of requiring students to attend state schools, all students would have school choice. They could go to any private school of their own choosing using taxpayer dollars to pay the tuition. Of course, these private schools could establish their own racial admissions policies. Thereby, segregation would continue without the direct, explicit orders coming from Atlanta.[18]

In Sumter County, the local newspaper reported mixed views on the *Brown* case. Charles Burgamy, the solicitor-general for the Southwest Judicial Circuit, said, "I don't care what the Supreme Court says, schools in the state of Georgia will always be segregated regardless of what it says."[19]

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[15] Several articles were published below the May 18 headline describing state and local reaction to the Court's school ruling.

[16] Quote from "Talmadge Most Outspoken on Segregation Plan," *Associated Press*, published in the *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 18, 1954, 1, 6; for Talmadge reaction, see also Thomas V. O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling: Public Education in Georgia, 1900–1961* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 101–2.

[17] Cobb, *Georgia Odyssey*, 57.

[18] "Talmadge Most Outspoken on Segregation Plan."

[19] "Local Leaders Show Mixed Reaction to Court Outlawing of Segregation," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 20, 1954, 1.

Georgia state representative Sherrard Horne of Sumter County urged calm. He recognized that people were understandably upset by the decision. He believed it was possible for Georgia "to find a plan to maintain separate schools." This is what both races want anyway, he figured. "I think it would be more acceptable to both white and colored to keep segregation."[20]

W. C. Mundy, the principal of Americus High School, expressed his hope that "our representatives and state officials will be able to maintain segregation while having equal school facilities." Mundy added that he believed that the Court ruling will only serve to impede the "tremendous strides" being made in the South. Additionally, in his mind, he was not sure if "the Negro wishes to do away with segregation."[21]

Georgia state representative Jack Murr (D-Americus) of Sumter County said the issue was "not whether white or colored will the same schools, but rather a titanic struggle for sovereignty of states." The *Brown* decision, he believed, was undemocratic because it thwarted the will of the people. For Murr, the unprecedented decision was a form of "creeping socialism."[22]

And the Carters? According to Rosalynn Carter, they heard the news on the radio and took the decision in stride. They feared how the community might react. She wrote, "[N]ews immediately swept through Plains." It was an uneasy time, "wherever two or more were gathered together, integration was the primary and, more often than not, heated topic of conversation."[23]

Classifying Post-*Brown* Segregationist Political Leaders

After winning a special election in 1948 and an election in 1950 for a full term, Governor Talmadge was term-limited and ineligible for a second full term in 1954. He would, however, prepare for and win a US Senate run in 1956. This provided an opening for another to lead the state charge against segregation.

The following week after the Court's decision, Lieutenant Governor Marvin Griffin announced his candidacy for governor and emphatically stated his opposition to the ruling. His reaction was "acerbic." According to the classification framework established by Earl Black in his 1976 study of southern governors and viable southern gubernatorial candidates (those receiving a minimum of 10 percent of the statewide vote in Democratic

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[20] "Local Leaders Show Mixed Reaction to Court Outlawing of Segregation," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 20, 1954, 1.

[21] "Local Leaders Show Mixed Reaction to Court Outlawing of Segregation," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 20, 1954, 1.

[22] Rudy Hayes, "Sovereignty of States Real Issue in Decision," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 25, 1954, 1, 8.

[23] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 42; Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 95.

primaries and "competitive" Republicans running in general elections), Griffin ran as a "strong segregationist." He claimed that the Court aimed for something much greater than desegregated schools. The Bainbridge native said that it desired nothing less than a complete mixing of the races, so that "the hearts and minds of white and Negro children should beat in unison." In the end, the candidate who would go on to win the governor's race in 1954 said, "That means only one thing—intermarriage. We shall not tolerate this vile and despicable tommyrot in Georgia." Indeed, Griffin declared that segregation would remain in place "come hell or high water." He kept that campaign promise.[24]

The other four Democratic candidates for governor in 1954 also affirmed their support for public school segregation. The lack of support for school desegregation was the hard reality of post-*Brown* southern politics. It was "virtually non-existent." According to Black's study, during the 1950s, there was only one "nonsegregationist" Democratic candidate vying for governor in the eleven states that constituted the 1861 Confederacy. The one and only appeared in 1958 when state senator Henry B. Gonzalez, a gubernatorial candidate in Texas, finished a distant second to Price Daniel, the incumbent, in the primary.[25]

In *Turning Point*, Carter recalled the 1954 gubernatorial election. It was their first since they returned home to Plains. He wrote that he and Rosalynn were unimpressed with Griffin. However, they did not agree on a choice. Carter backed Fred Hand of Camilla, Georgia, and Rosalynn voted for State Representative Charlie Gowen of Brunswick, Georgia. Carter's choice was not based on issues, race or otherwise, but a "shared family history." However, it should be noted that Hand was aligned with the Talmadge faction. Both candidates ran far behind Griffin in the September 8th gubernatorial primary. The lieutenant governor triumphed despite falling far short of a popular majority. Georgia's county unit system magnified Griffin's 36 percent of the popular vote and transformed it into an election landslide of nearly 74 percent of the unit votes. At the county level, he was consistently the strongest candidate in the crowded field. Carter recalled:

> In 1954…Rosalynn and I had participated in our first gubernatorial campaign after our return to Georgia and met several of the candidates who came to a large political rally in Plains. We finally decided to back different candidates. I voted for former Speaker of the House Fred Hand from Camilla, primarily because my grandfather had worked with his father in the timber and turpentine business late in the nineteenth century. I had enjoyed talking to him about this shared family history and promised to support him. Rosalynn voted for a

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[24] "Griffin Starts Campaign with Blast at S. Court," *Associated Press*, published in the *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 25, 1954, 1; Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940–1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 99; Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 66–67, 348; Scott E. Buchanan, "Marvin Griffin (1907–1982)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), April 2021. Griffin ran again for governor in 1962 as a "strong segregationist," but he lost in the Democratic primary to Carl Sanders. See Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 177–81.

[25] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 347–50; Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope*, 78–79.

> relatively progressive attorney, Charlie Gowan [*sic*], from Brunswick. However, Marvin Griffin, the segregationist candidate, was elected governor with the required clear majority of county unit votes but only 36 percent of the popular votes.[26]

Black classified Speaker Hand as a "strong segregationist" and Gowen as a "moderate segregationist."[27] According to Black's scheme, to be a "strong segregationist" or "militant segregationist," a candidate must satisfy at least one of three criteria he proposed.[28] The three criteria he established were:

> 1) The candidate expresses unambiguous, emphatic, and more or less unqualified opposition to racial desegregation and support for racial segregation. No countervailing values (for example, the duty to comply with federal court orders) that would dilute this commitment to the maintenance of a caste system are recognized.
>
> 2) The candidate makes his defense of racial segregation (or opposition to desegregation, HEW guidelines, and so on) a leading campaign theme. The segregation issue is discussed incessantly and can be traced in most campaign speeches.
>
> 3) The candidate appeals to racial prejudice (for example, designating an opponent as the NAACP candidate) to discredit his opposition.

Based on these criteria, during the 1950s and 1960s, Black counted Georgia governors Herman Talmadge, Ernest Vandiver, and Lester Maddox alongside Griffin as "strong segregationists."[29]

To be considered a "moderate segregationist," Black put forward these three criteria:

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[26] Jimmy Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 25–26. The Talmadge connection is noted in Cook, *The Governors of Georgia, 1754–1995*, 260. Although he did not command a majority of the popular vote in the Democratic primary, Griffin earned a landslide tally of 302 out of the 410 county unit votes. Former governor Melvin Thompson was second with 56 unit votes and 25 percent of the popular vote. Tom Linder, the state's commissioner of agriculture, was third. Fred Hand, Carter's choice, finished fourth with 22 unit votes and 12 percent of the popular vote. Charlie Gowen. Rosalynn's pick for governor, was fifth. He took only 4 unit votes and 11 percent of the statewide vote. For county-by-county popular vote totals, see Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Elections: County and Precinct Data*, *1950–1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 96–99. For an extended discussion of Georgia's county unit system, see Albert B. Saye, "Georgia's County Unit System of Election," *Journal of Politics* 12, no. 1 (February 1950): 93–106; William G. Cornelius, "The County Unit System of Georgia: Facts and Prospects," *Western Political Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (December 1961): 942–60; Patrick Novotny, *This Georgia Rising: Education, Civil Rights, and the Politics of Change in Georgia in the 1940s* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 14–26; Scott E. Buchanan, "County Unit System," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), April 2021.

[27] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 348. Black also classified Thompson as a "moderate segregationist" and Linder as "strong segregationist."

[28] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 13.

[29] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 348.

> 1) The candidate favors racial segregation and opposes desegregation, but these preferences are usually qualified by other values and commitments. While promising to do his best to preserve segregation or limit desegregation, he often expresses his intention to respect decisions of the federal judiciary.
>
> 2) The candidate does not make the defense of racial segregation a leading campaign theme. Racial segregation is supported primarily as a matter of regional tradition, a commitment routinely expected of serious office seekers. References to segregation tend to be brief and perfunctory; campaign speeches typically focus on nonracial issues.
>
> 3) The candidate avoids appealing to racial prejudice to discredit his opposition. On the contrary, more militant opponents may be attacked for race baiting.

Based on these criteria, for the time examined by Black, Georgia governors Melvin Thompson and Carl Sanders were determined to be moderates. Howard "Bo" Callaway, the Republican nominee for governor in 1966, was also identified as a "moderate segregationist." Black's three criteria can be useful for understanding Carter's politics on the school board and in assessing his legacy.[30]

The Reemergence of Southern Hardliners

Politically speaking, *Brown* emboldened the racial hardliners in the region. For them, the day the Court handed down its decision became known as "Black Monday." In his work, Black showed that strong segregationists became regular candidate-types in Democratic gubernatorial primaries. In fact, he found, "militant segregationists were elected governor of every southern state at some point after the Brown decision." It even encouraged or incentivized some of the moderates to adopt a tougher stance in opposition and support legislative proposals to interfere with or interpose the ruling. Tony Badger put it this way: "[A]fter Brown, racially moderate politicians ran for cover, became closet moderates, or were sometimes defeated. Candidates were elected instead who most vigorously pronounced their loyalty to segregation." Running against the Court was a pathway to power or to hold it. Names of state governors like George Wallace, John Patterson, Orval Faubus, and Ross Barnett became forever linked with southern political defiance and racial invective. Meanwhile, Confederate battle flags became omnipresent signs of resistance, white southern solidarity, and unofficial campaign symbols of the most obdurate of politicians. In

[30] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 14–15.

early 1956, Georgia formally added the battle emblem to occupy two-thirds of its state flag not coincidentally during the same legislative session when the state's General Assembly passed its "Interposition Resolution."[31]

Wallace was one of those who underwent a political transformation on race. The "fighting" circuit judge from Clio became a hardliner after losing the 1958 Democratic primary for Alabama governor to Patterson, the state's attorney general who campaigned as "the most extreme segregationist in the 1958 primaries" and who openly courted the support of the Ku Klux Klan. Wallace was originally considered one of the two strongest candidates in the race. Former state senator Jimmy Faulkner was the other. It was expected that he would at least qualify as one of the top two candidates for the general primary runoff and would likely win a plurality of the vote in the initial primary. He ran a campaign that downplayed race and highlighted the importance of good schools, good roads, and economic development. But voters were not enthusiastic about infrastructure. In his election postmortem, Wallace believed he lost because he was outdone by his opponent on race. He subsequently recalibrated his stance. In 1962, he ran hard on segregation and preserving the southern way of life. Furthermore, he imitated Patterson's approach to acquire the support of extremists. He won and became governor, the first of four terms in office. His wife, Lurleen Wallace, running as his surrogate in 1966, won another.[32]

Governor Faubus of Arkansas devolved into a hardliner, too. Because of the good-will he had shown at times to the state's black community during his first term through gesture and the governor's appointment powers, his opponents characterized him as some sort of "crypto-Communist" and race traitor. He became intransigent on race after being challenged for renomination in the 1956 Democratic primary by a candidate who made segregation the issue. Jim Johnson, a state senator, Dixiecrat, and state leader of the White Citizens' Council, was the lead challenger. He linked the governor with all that was detestable: "forced integration, mongrelization of the races, a treasonous Supreme Court, and

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[31] Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope*, 78; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 14. Reed Sarratt, *The Ordeal of Desegregation* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), 1–27, 363; Tony Badger, "Brown and Backlash," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, edited by Clive Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39–55; quote from 45–46; John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 137–38, 151, 154; Edwin L. Jackson, "State Flags of Georgia," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), April 2021; James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 290–91; Arthur Krock, "Georgia Builds Case Against Integration," *New York Times*, February 12, 1956, E3.

[32] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 52–55; Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York: Meridian-Basic Books, 1977), 57; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 90–96 (1958 campaign), 104–9 (1962 campaign).

the Communist plan to destroy the southern way of life." Faubus was "fighting for his political life" in 1956, and the fight for segregation in his second term reinvigorated his political standing.[33]

Although he won the party nomination for a second time with a comfortable margin, Faubus was determined going forward that he would not be so vulnerable or outflanked by a rival on race again. In the fall of 1957, he proved this at Little Rock's Central High School. In the name of preserving public peace, he ordered in the state's National Guard to halt the admission of nine black students. The students came to be known as the "Little Rock Nine." It took direct intervention from the federal government to get the students admitted.[34]

For the next two elections, 1958 and 1960, Faubus was the undisputed "strong segregationist" running for governor. His infamous reputation on race emerged from this particular period of his twelve-year tenure. Probably unknown to many, Faubus modified his tone again on race in 1962 and 1964. In those races, Black coded him as a racial moderate.[35]

Also in 1956, nearly the entire southern delegation in the US Congress signed the "Declaration of Constitutional Principles" to protest the action of the Supreme Court in *Brown* as an "unwarranted exercise of power" that was "destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races." Of the region's twenty-two US senators, nineteen were signatories, all Democrats, including Georgia's Walter George and Richard Russell. The three senators who did not support it were Lyndon Johnson, Estes Kefauver, and Al Gore Sr. On the morning of March 12, Senator George introduced the more commonly known "Southern Manifesto" on the floor of the US Senate. Over in the House, eighty-two individuals, mostly Democrats, put their names to the document. Among them were all ten of Georgia's representatives—nine white men (Prince Preston, John Pilcher, E. L. Forrester,

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[33] For coverage of Faubus, the issue of race in his first term, and the significance of the 1956 election for Arkansas governor, see Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 159–81. The quotes are from pages 163 and 173. Johnson later served on the Arkansas Supreme Court (1959–66) and was the Democratic gubernatorial nominee in 1966. However, he lost to Republican Winthrop Rockefeller in the general election. See also Marie Williams, "James Douglas 'Justice Jim' Johnson (1924–2010)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* (online), April 2021. Last quote from Lewis and Lewis, *Race, Politics, and Memory*, xxii.

[34] Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of An American Prodigal*, 177, 180–81. The nine students were Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls.

[35] Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 98–104.

Jack Flynt Jr., James Davis, Carl Vinson, Henderson Lanham, Phil Landrum, and Paul Brown) and one white woman (Iris Blitch). Later in the day, Rep. Howard W. Smith of Virginia introduced the anti-*Brown* statement in the House.[36]

Through his many writings, Carter suggested that he fully understood the limits of *Brown*. In his 1992 book, *Turning Point*, he said, "[W]ith the political system heavily dominated by rural white votes, politicians and school officials in the South were free to condemn and then largely ignore this decision." He then added, "Early in 1955, for instance, the Georgia General Assembly passed a 'states' rights' law that forbade the use of state funds by any school system that dared to integrate its classrooms." It was an example of interposition. Soon to be a county school board member, Carter recognized the political environment he inhabited. Being in favor of desegregation and integration was not yet a viable option for an emerging, pragmatic, and ambitious politician in southwest Georgia.[37]

There was incredible pressure to join the local chapter of the White Citizens' Council. In reaction to *Brown*, organizations sprouted throughout the southern states to create and sustain a mass resistance to federal intervention. Carter resisted. He repeatedly but politely rejected requests to join. As pressure mounted, he became more impatient. On one occasion, he told a White Citizens' Council (WCC) recruiter, "I am not going to join the White Citizens' Council." Carter's decision illustrated he was not embracing the racial hardline. Conceivably, it revealed he was at least "tolerant about race."[38]

School Equalization in Sumter County, Georgia

In December 1955, Carter joined the five-member Sumter County Board of Education. It was his first political position, and there were many challenges. Whether spoken or not, the Court's decision in *Brown* was a central concern for the Sumter County school board and

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[36] US Congress, Senate, March 12, 1956, 102 Congressional Record, 4459–61 (Statement by Sen. Walter George), https://www.congress.gov/bound-congressional-record/1956/03/12/senate-section; US Congress, House, March 12, 1956, 102 Congressional Record, 4515–16 (Statement by Rep. Howard Smith), https://www.congress.gov/bound-congressional-record/1956/03/12/house-section; John Kyle Day, *The Southern Manifesto: Massive Resistance and the Fight to Preserve Segregation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 122–28. At least in terms of the Congress, the South was still the "solid South" in the 1950s. Every US senator from the region was a Democrat. In the other chamber, there were very few southern Republicans serving in the House at the time the Southern Manifesto was adopted. There were only seven in 1956 and none were from the Deep South states. Two Republican House members were from Virginia, two were from Tennessee, and one from North Carolina, Florida, and Texas. Of the seven, four were from mountain Republican districts, and three were from the South's emerging suburbs. See Nicol C. Rae, *Southern Democrats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 40–45; Merle Black, "The Transformation of the Southern Democratic Party," *Journal of Politics* 66, no. 4 (November 2004): 1001–17; Nelson W. Polsby, *How Congress Evolves: Social Bases of Institutional Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 75–108.

[37] Carter, *Turning Point*, xix–xx, 44.

[38] Carter, *Turning Point*, 21–23; Jim Auchmutey, *The Class of '65: A Student, a Divided Town, and the Long Road to Forgiveness* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 40. According to biographer Jonathan Alter, there are variations of this story. Alter, His Very Best: *Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 114.

for school districts across the region. At each board meeting, it was the proverbial elephant in the room as the board continued to make policy decisions for a segregated system. Carter acknowledged, "There was certainly no equality between black and white students." This was the stark and immovable reality of Carter's seven years on board.[39]

In *Turning Point*, Carter wrote, "Without doing anything heroic or economically suicidal, we school board members tried in every way possible to improve the county's school system, for children of both races."[40] "Improve" meant to materially equalize the schools—or, at the very least, minimize some of the material inequality between the "white" and the "negro" schools. While the board's actions were not exactly part of the massive resistance, it was not minimum compliance either. There is no evidence that Carter as a school board member or as school board chair ever urged compliance with *Brown*. In his very first political office, he waded in segregation politics and was baptized in its waters. At times, Carter suggested that the board did the best it could for the time period, that they simply "felt powerless to act," or that "his hands were tied."[41]

School equalization was a national effort after World War II. Too many Americans were inadequately educated. To address this matter, in Georgia, the General Assembly approved a reform measure known as the Minimum Foundation Program of Education (MFPE) as a way to reduce the educational disparities among the different parts of the state and among economic classes. Educated in a dilapidated, two-room school, Governor Herman Talmadge supported the effort. In office for a little more than six years, investment in public education was one of his legislative priorities. A state sales tax was approved to fund the reforms. The introduction of such a tax was a first for the state. Governor Griffin also backed the equalization of schools. The push for equalization assumed the continuation of racial segregation. If schools were more equal, perhaps Jim Crow schooling could be saved after all. In all, between 1952 and 1962, approximately 1,200 schools were built under the management of the State School Building Authority. More than half were white

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[39] Carter, *Turning Point*, 42. In his comprehensive biography of Carter, Jonathan Alter wrote, "Several months after the Brown decision, Jimmy accepted an appointment to follow in his father's footsteps and sit on the all-white, seven-member Sumter County Board of Education." The board had five members. See Alter, *His Very Best*, 106.

[40] Carter, *Turning Point*, 44.

[41] "White" and "Negro" were the racial terms used in the 1955–56 and 1956–57 Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education. Previously, the terms used in the reports were "White" and "Colored." Quotes from Alter, *His Very Best*, 112–13. Alter also wrote, "As a moderate, Carter believed in the rule of law and objected to outright resistance to federal court decisions, but he was in no hurry to urge compliance." Then he wrote, "Even as chairman of the county school board, Carter did nothing directly to implement the law of the land: the *Brown* decision." See Alter, *His Very Best*, 106, 113.

schools. Between white and black schools, there was about a 60/40 split in new construction. In Sumter County, a new Thalean school opened in August 1957 at about the same time as the new high school for black students.[42]

Table 5.1 shows the list of county schools during Carter's second year on the board. As in the previous year, there were still five white schools and twenty-four black schools. All of the white schools were public community schools. Among the black schools were eight church schools, five historic Rosenwald schools, and eleven public community schools. The data was fairly similar to the prior year. There were some variations in terms of student enrollment, average daily attendance, and the number of classrooms in use.[43]

Historically, absenteeism had been a serious problem at black schools. White political and business leaders did not see tremendous value in it and, therefore, did not invest much in it. Education was encouraged to the degree that it trained black boys and girls to become more productive laborers. To accomplish this, an abbreviated school year was all that was needed. Too much education was considered frivolous, a waste of time and resources that could be redirected to white schools. Worse still was the view that quality education beyond teaching domestic skills, agriculture, or the industrial arts promoted idleness, political activism, or hostility to whites. Many young black laborers were simply in high demand and were expected to work. In the rural South, this mostly meant agricultural work. Young laborers were especially needed during the fall harvest. In Georgia, for example, school attendance was not compulsory until 1916, and even then, black students were often exempted from that requirement.[44]

Absenteeism remained a severe problem for black schools in Sumter County in the 1950s. In Carter's first full school year on the board, the 1956–57 school year, only 58.1 percent of blacks enrolled attended class on a regular basis. The issue was pretty consistent across the three types of schools—60.6 percent for the church schools, 59.6 percent for the historic Rosenwald schools, and 55.4 percent for the community schools. For some schools, like Mt. Carmel (47.1 percent), East Point (45.2 percent), and Paradox (30.0

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[42] O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling*, 53–60; Cook, *The Governors of Georgia, 1754–1995*, 264; Scott E. Buchanan, "Herman Talmadge (1913–2002)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021; Steven Moffson, "Equalization Schools in Georgia's African-American Communities, 1951–1970," Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, September 20, 2010, 6–9, https://www.dca.ga.gov/sites/default/files/equalization_schools_in_georgia_0.pdf; Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, Georgia, 1915–1961," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1915_1961.htm.

[43] Alter identified forty-two schools when Carter joined the board in 1955. He stated that there were "five white schools" and thirty-seven "colored schools." Alter, *His Very Best*, 107. It is true that there were five white schools, but there were actually thirteen fewer black schools at that time. As in other chapters, the church school classification is based upon the coding used in the Sumter County Superintendent's annual reports to the state.

[44] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 96, 101, 154.

percent), the daily attendance was less than half of total enrollment. In contrast, the daily average for the white schools was 88.1 percent of those enrolled. For Plains High School, it was 91.1 percent.

Carter acknowledged that absenteeism was a chronic problem and a challenge for the board. He identified the main reason as the failure to enforce attendance, due to the fact that "many children had to work in the fields during school months." He also attributed the problem to "illiterate" parents who had not finished school themselves and thus "saw no benefits from classroom teaching." Of course, other parents drew the opposite conclusion and were motivated to ensure that their children would receive the very best education available.[45]

One fascinating yet devastating fact reported that year—excluding the church schools—was that each of the forty-three classrooms in the black schools was identified as "sub-standard." With this designation, there was no distinction among the three types of schools. By comparison, there were only three classrooms in the white schools deemed "sub-standard": one at New Era and two at Plains. Of the forty-eight classrooms in the white schools, including science labs, home economic labs, typing instructional rooms, and agricultural shops, only 6 percent were deemed deficient. Each of the white schools also had an auditorium and a cafeteria. Plains and Union had a gymnasium. Such amenities were not part of the black school experience. The data here show that separate and unequal was documented well by school authorities. A partial remedy was near. In terms of school facilities, the equalization schools for the county's black students would open the next school year, and at least in material terms, the school environment for white and blacks became more similar.[46]

Table 5.2 shows that Carter and the other board members presided over the sustained improvement of teaching in black schools. Of the fifty-four teachers serving the county's black schools, forty-seven (87 percent) had at least a four-year college education. At thirty-seven to one, the enrolled student-teacher ratio remained problematic.

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[45] Jimmy Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 78. The board did attempt to address this problem by appealing to the Judge of the Juvenile Court of Sumter County to enforce the state's compulsory attendance law. Poor attendance cost the school district money, because "state school funds are allotted to our system on the basis of average daily attendance of all pupils." See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 3, 1957.

[46] See Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1956–1957, FLAT-1702, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

Table 5.1. Sumter County Public Schools—White and Black, 1956–1957: Grades, Student Enrollment, ADA, and Buildings/Classrooms

White Schools (5)	Type	Grades	Enrolled	ADA	# Buildings/ Classrooms
Anthony	Public	1–8	131	107	2/5
New Era	Public	1–9	162	140	3/7
Thalean	Public	1–9	132	113	3/6
Plains High	Public	1–12	350	319	3/15
Union High	Public	1–12	313	280	5/15
Black Schools (24)	**Type**	**Grades**	**Enrolled**	**ADA**	**# Buildings/ Classrooms**
Andersonville	Church	1–9	75	50	1/1
Corinth	Church	1–7	36	23	1/1
East Point	Church	1–6	31	14	1/1
Flintside	Church	1–7	36	21	1/1
Mt. Carmel	Church	1–7	51	24	1/1
Piney Grove	Church	1–7	24	15	1/1
Pleasant Grove	Church	1–7	32	21	1/1
Shipp Chapel	Church	1–6	27	21	1/1
Nunn Industrial	Rosenwald	1–10	175	100	2/5
Plains	Rosenwald	1–10	287	197	1/7
Seay	Rosenwald	1–7	65	36	1/2
Shady Grove	Rosenwald	1–10	241	122	1/5
Shipp Training	Rosenwald	1–10	139	86	1/4
Antioch	Community	1–5, 7	38	27	1/2
Davis Grove	Community	1–8	61	35	1/2
DeSoto	Community	1–9	94	52	1/2
Leslie	Community	1–8	107	81	1/3
Mt. Hope	Community	1–6, 8	65	34	1/2
Paradox	Community	1–6	60	18	1/1
Spring Hill	Community	1–7	24	18	1/1
Union Grove	Community	1–7	39	21	1/1
Union Oak Grove	Community	1–5, 7	45	24	1/1
Wards Chapel	Community	1–7	130	56	1/2
Welcome	Community	1–10	119	67	1/3
Church Total			312	189	8/8
Rosenwald Total			907	541	6/23
Community Total			782	433	11/20
White Total			1,088	959	16/48
Black Total			2,001	1,163	25/51
County Total			3,089	2,122	41/99

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1956–1957, Georgia State Archives.

Table 5.2. Sumter County Public Schools—White and Black, 1956–1957: Teachers, Student-Teacher Ratios, and Level of Teachers' Education

White Schools (5)	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratios*		Level of Education of Teachers		
				4–5 yrs	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Anthony	5	26:1	21:1	5	0	0
New Era	7	23:1	20:1	7	0	0
Thalean	5	26:1	23:1	3	2	0
Plains High	17	21:1	19:1	12	5	0
Union High	14	22:1	20:1	8	6	0
Black Schools (24)	**# of Teachers**	**Student-Teacher Ratios***		**Level of Education of Teachers**		
Church				*4–5 yrs*	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Andersonville	2	38:1	25:1	2	0	0
Corinth	1	36:1	23:1	1	0	0
East Point	1	31:1	14:1	1	0	0
Flintside	1	36:1	21:1	1	0	0
Mt. Carmel	1	51:1	24:1	1	0	0
Piney Grove	1	24:1	15:1	1	0	0
Pleasant Grove	1	32:1	21:1	1	0	0
Shipp Chapel	1	27:1	21:1	1	0	0
Rosenwald						
Nunn Industrial	5	35:1	20:1	4	1	0
Plains	8	36:1	25:1	7	1	0
Seay	2	33:1	18:1	1	1	0
Shady Grove	5	48:1	24:1	5	0	0
Shipp Training	4	35:1	22:1	4	0	0
Community						
Antioch	2	19:1	14:1	2	0	0
Davis Grove	2	31:1	18:1	2	0	0
DeSoto	3	31:1	17:1	3	0	0
Leslie	3	36:1	27:1	3	0	0
Mt. Hope	2	33:1	17:1	2	0	0
Paradox	1	60:1	18:1	0	1	0
Spring Hill	1	24:1	18:1	1	0	0
Union Grove	1	39:1	21:1	1	0	0
Union Oak Grove	1	45:1	24:1	0	1	0
Wards Chapel	2	65:1	28:1	0	2	0
Welcome	3	40:1	22:1	3	0	0
Church Total	9	35:1	21:1	9	0	0
Rosenwald Total	24	38:1	23:1	21	3	0
Community Total	21	37:1	21:1	17	4	0

Table 5.2. (cont'd)

White Total	48	23:1	20:1	35	13	0
Black Total	54	37:1	22:1	47	7	0
County Total	102	30:1	21:1	82	20	0

*Ratios are based on enrollment and average daily attendance. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1956–1957, Georgia State Archives.

Like the year before, bus transportation continued to be available to black students in 1956–57. There were nine county-owned, mostly Blue Bird buses (eight regular and one spare) that served the "negro pupil" population. The buses' model years ranged from 1947 to 1951 for body and chassis. This was an improvement over the previous year, when the newest bus was a 1949 make. There were eight bus routes to the black schools. They were (1) Mt. Hope and Welcome, (2) Shady Grove and Staley, (3) Cobb and Flintside, (4) Plains and Staley, (5) Wards Chapel, Seay, and Shipp Training, (6) Nunn, Mt. Carmel, and Staley, (7) Leslie, and (8) Plains. The first six routes included two morning trips for the driver.[47] Although a city school, Staley was a destination for county students seeking an education beyond the tenth grade.

After the new schools opened, the Board initiated the process to sell off the older black school properties, as documented in the board's minutes. At the meeting for February 4, 1958, Carter introduced a motion to approve a resolution to initiate the sale of the older black school properties. These properties were declared "vacant" and deemed "not necessary or convenient for school purposes." The resolution primarily affected the community schools and the old Rosenwald schools.[48]

The properties listed in the February 4 board resolution were:

Leslie Negro Elementary School
DeSoto Negro Elementary School
Paradox School
Seay School
Shipp Industrial School
Vacant Lot—Brady Road and Hooks Road
Tabernacle School
Antioch School
Corinth School
Shady Grove School
St. Paul's East Point School
Union Grove School
Welcome School

[47] See Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1956–1957, FLAT-1702, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[48] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 4, 1958; See also Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 4, 1958.

The following are a few other examples from board minutes:

November 5, 1957
A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by J. W. Cheek to hire a lawyer to check all the deeds to school property and determine what this Board can do with the property.[49]

June 11, 1958
It was decided that the old Plains colored school building should be disposed of as soon as possible.[50]

March 14, 1959
A request by Woodrow Clements, who has purchased the old Welcome School Building, for an extension of time for removing the building was granted and the deadline of August 1, 1959 was set.[51]

An Attempt to Delay the Construction of Leslie-DeSoto School

As he considered running for the Georgia state senate in 1962, Carter assessed his chances in the newly designed seven-county district. He liked what he heard about the contours of it.

Naturally, he thought he would do well in Sumter County. The same was true for Webster, where "most of our family farmland was." He imagined he would be competitive in Steward and Terrell counties because "we also had some farmer customers" there. He said he "didn't know much about Randolph or Chattahoochee," although he acknowledged that he had family history connections with Randolph involving both Carter and Gordy ancestors. He dismissed Quitman as being too much of a factor, but he liked his chances because one of Rosalynn's cousins was that county's top school official.[52]

But Sumter was not necessarily a lock for Carter. He worried about the race issue. "We had some real concerns in our own county. There was overt animosity among segregationist leaders about the relatively liberal reputation of our family." He seems to attribute being perceived as "relatively liberal" to his involvement with the school consolidation campaign in 1961. It turned out that Sumter was not the problem he feared. Once the votes

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[49] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, November 5, 1957.

[50] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 11, 1958; see also Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 5, 1958.

[51] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 14, 1959.

[52] Carter, *Turning Point*, 56–57.

(and revotes) were in, the county came in solidly for Carter. Despite the referendum loss in July 1961, the 1962 state senate campaign illustrated that he was an emerging political force in the county.[53]

Using Black's model, Carter was not militantly in favor of segregation. That was never his signature policy issue. Yet there is evidence that he took public stands that likely inoculated him from being viewed as suspect on race. He got along because he "went along." If there was any doubt as to Carter's position on segregation, it was answered in September 1956. From a position of political power, school board member Carter "supported segregation as did other whites in Sumter County." For a white political leader in the rural South, rural southwest Georgia, to be otherwise would have been politically unviable. To illustrate this, one of the most significant issues involving race that he had to address during his time on the board emerged in 1956. This was during the time the county was preparing for its most significant consolidation of nonwhite schools for the purpose of "equalizing" all public schools.[54]

According to Board minutes for a called meeting held on September 24, 1956, a delegation of angry, concerned white citizens from Leslie and DeSoto showed up to protest the location of the new elementary school for black children in the eastern part of the county. They argued that the black school would be too close to the white school, and they worried about interaction between the two races. They requested that a new site be found.[55]

The Board had previously approved the site of the school in 1952, and there were no objections from the community at the time. There was a "lengthy discussion" on the matter.

For his part, Carter took a lead role. He introduced a written resolution for the purpose of "holding up" the construction of Leslie-DeSoto Elementary Negro School "until a new site is selected." This school was one of several equalization schools being constructed in the county to improve the educational opportunities for nonwhite children.

Carter's motion was seconded by Howard Logan and then approved by the full board. The board feared the location of the black equalization school was in the "wrong place" and could incite racial strife. The board contended that this happened because of the likely interaction of "negro and white children" on their way to their respective schools. As such, it requested school construction to cease in order "to avoid the possibility of future trouble between colored and white people in these communities."

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[53] Carter, *Turning Point*, 57, 99, and 169.

[54] "Went along" phrase from Betty Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1980), 78. Second quote from Laughlin McDonald, *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65. Bruce Mazlish and Edwin Diamond wrote, "By no stretch of the word did he favor integration then; he wanted, he said, only to make some school facilities more 'equal' so they could remain 'separate.'" See Bruce Mazlish, *Jimmy Carter: A Character Portrait* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 129.

[55] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 24, 1956.

Citing the costs of delay and relocation, the State of Georgia rejected Carter's proposal. At its October 5 called meeting, Carter and the board, however, "assured the people from both towns, Leslie and DeSoto, that it would do everything in its power to minimize simultaneous traffic between white and colored students in route to and from school." In terms of policy, it may be viewed as a defeat for Carter and the board. Be that as it may, the board appeared to prioritize the racial concerns of certain white residents. It was important to assuage their fears. For his part, Carter may have earned some credit and trust from segregation's more ardent defenders. Alternatively, perhaps Carter and the board merely tried to keep the peace between the races. Given the times and the intensity of the issue, preventing violence was a reasonable goal for political leaders.[56]

Equalization Schools Open

During the 1957–58 school year, the older black education system in Sumter County finally came to an end. As part of a statewide reform program, the remaining church schools, community schools, and those that earned their reputation as Rosenwald schools closed their doors by January 1958. The twenty-four black schools that existed during Carter's first two years on the school board were consolidated into four modern schools with modern conveniences like "cafeterias serving hot lunches and having central heat and flush toilets." Built with many metal-framed windows, the classrooms and hallways were well-lit and ventilated. The Northeast school alone absorbed ten schools. The other two new elementary schools equally divided the remainder. At its February 1958 meeting, the school board declared the consolidation process for the twenty-four black schools "completed" and the new school buildings "now occupied."[57]

This level of consolidation put the county's black schools more in line with the white schools. All forty-three substandard classrooms that were in use were replaced. There were no more one-room, one-teacher schools. There were eleven such schools in 1956–57, like Pleasant Grove, Shipp Chapel, and Spring Hill. Students no longer met in multigrade classrooms. In the previous year's report, a school like Andersonville had nine grades in one room, Corinth. Flintside and Mt. Carmel were among those that had seven grades in one room (Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

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[56] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 5, 1956; Deanna L. Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 17. Alter noted that a similar issue occurred in Plains when "white businessmen on Main Street" demanded a bus stop for black students be relocated from their view. When asked by his housekeeper to intervene, Carter chose not to, explaining it was futile. See Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 108.

[57] Alan Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercounty-history.com/history/BlackHx.htm; Moffson, "Equalization Schools in Georgia's African-American Communities, 1951–1970," 7–14, 19–21; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 4, 1958.

Like Anthony, New Era, and Thalean, three of the new schools were uniformly set to serve grades 1–8 and were established across the county (Table 5.3). They were named Northeast, Southeast, and Westside. The Northeast school was located off Upper River Road in Americus, the Southeast school was at Bagley Street and Black Smith Road in DeSoto, and the Westside school was in Plains, adjacent to the site of the Plains Rosenwald school. These were comparatively large schools with enrollments ranging from 518 to 739 students. Westside was the largest by enrollment and ADA. None of the white schools came close to the enrollment or ADA sizes of the equalized black schools. Moreover, with equalization, absenteeism declined. Although not to the level of white schools, Northeast had a daily average of 69.0 percent of its enrollment, Southeast had 75.1 percent, and Westside had 71.0 percent. For white schools, the figure was 85.9 percent. Measurably speaking, various features were becoming more equal.[58]

The fourth school was a high school. Known as Sumter County High School, Sumter High School, or "Colored High," this school was historic. It was the first public high school for black students in the county system. It served grades 10–12 and was located on W. Rucker Street in Americus. It had an enrollment of 271 and an ADA of 221. For its inaugural year, the percentage of those attending Sumter High on a daily basis was 81.5 percent.[59]

Table 5.3. Sumter County Public Schools—White and Black, 1957–1958: Grades, Student Enrollment, and ADA

White Schools (5)	Type	Grades	Enrolled	ADA
Anthony	Public	1–8	130	104
New Era	Public	1–8	153	137
Thalean	Public	1–8	131	104
Plains High	Public	1–12	367	326
Union High	Public	1–12	323	277
Black Schools (4)	**Type**	**Grades**	**Enrolled**	**ADA**
Northeast	Public	1–8	607	419
Southeast	Public	1–8	518	389
Westside	Public	1–8	739	525
Sumter High	Public	10–12	271	221
White Total			1,104	948
Black Total			2,135	1,554
County Total			3,239	2,502

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1957–1958, Georgia State Archives.

[58] Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1957–1958, FLAT-1489, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[59] See select volumes of *Miller's Americus City Directory* (Asheville, NC: Southern Directory Company), Juanita S. Brightwell Special Collections Room, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia. Available years are 1959–60, 1961–62, and 1963–64.

As for the teachers, sixty-one were enlisted to serve the four new black schools (Table 5.4). Westside had eighteen teachers, Northeast and Southeast had fifteen teachers each, and Sumter High had thirteen. Sixty of the sixty-one teachers had at least two years of college, and only one had just a permit. In fact, fifty-four of the sixty-one (88.5 percent) had four years or more of college. This figure was superior to that of the white schools. While all forty-four teachers in Sumter's white schools had at least two years of college, only thirty-three of the forty-four (75 percent) had four-plus years of college.

Equalization improved the student-teacher ratios in the black schools and, when using the ADA figures, made them competitive with the white schools. With the ADA figures, Sumter High was 17:1, Southeast was 26:1, Northeast was 28:1, and Westside was 29:1. The ADA student-teacher ratio for the four black schools combined was 25:1, a competitive number to the 22:1 for the five white schools.

The Americus system was also impacted by the changes. The old McCay Hill closed in January 1957, and the new Eastview school opened on Ashby Street in Americus. It served grades 1–6. In 1958–59, it had an enrollment of 1,151, with an ADA of 919 and a faculty of 27, all of whom had 4–5 years of college. These facts gave the school an enrolled student-teacher ratio of 43:1 and an ADA ratio of 34:1. Staley lost its status as a high school and was demoted to serve the city's seventh and eighth grade, along with the ninth grade for both school systems. It had an enrollment of 464 students and an ADA of 360, with a faculty of 14. Each teacher had 4–5 years of college.[60]

Table 5.4. Sumter County Public Schools—White and Black, 1957–1958: Teachers, Student-Teacher Ratios, and Level of Teachers' Education

White Schools (5)	# of Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratios*		Level of Education of Teachers		
				4–5 yrs	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Anthony	5	26:1	21:1	5	0	0
New Era	6	26:1	23:1	6	0	0
Thalean	5	26:1	21:1	3	2	0
Plains High	15	25:1	22:1	11	4	0
Union High	13	25:1	21:1	8	5	0
Black Schools (4)	**# of Teachers**	**Student-Teacher Ratios***		**Level of Education of Teachers**		
				4–5 yrs	*2–3 yrs*	*1 yr*
Northeast	15	40:1	28:1	14	1	0
Southeast	15	35:1	26:1	13	2	0
Westside	18	41:1	29:1	14	3	0
Sumter High	13	21:1	17:1	13	0	0

[60] Alan Anderson, "Local Black History Chronology," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercounty-history.com/history/BlackHx.htm; Moffson, "Equalization Schools in Georgia's African-American Communities, 1951–1970," 15–19; See Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1958–1959, FLAT-1492, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia; Alan Anderson, "History of A. S. Staley High School," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/StalyHigh.htm.

Black Total	61	35:1	25:1	54	6	0
White Total	44	25:1	22:1	33	11	0
County Total	105	31:1	24:1	87	17	0

*Ratios are based on enrollment and average daily attendance. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 and higher rounded up.

Source: Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1957–1958, Georgia State Archives.

Equalization and Continued Inequality

Over the years, some of Carter's harshest critics have claimed that throughout his career he had a "race problem," going all the way back to his years on the county board of education. The Ford and Reagan campaigns collected articles on it as part of their opposition research. The Carters insist that they did the best they could under the constraining political circumstances in the South.[61]

Others take a more sympathetic view. Compared to most southern whites, some Carter biographers and observers depict Carter as a racial liberal and champion of civil rights. Biographer Julian Zelizer is an example: "Carter never forgot what he learned about the injustices of southern racism from his upbringing in Archery, his mother's progressive views, and the camaraderie he developed while working with African Americans in the close quarters of a submarine."[62]

Rosalynn Carter offered the view that she and Jimmy were different from most other whites. In her memoir, *First Lady from Plains*, she wrote:

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[61] Hans A. von Spakovsky, "Jimmy Carter's Race Problem," *National Review*, September 18, 2009. Available at http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/187446/, accessed May 7, 2017; Steven F. Hayward, *The Real Jimmy Carter: How Our Worst Ex-President Undermines American Foreign Policy, Coddles Dictators, and Created the Party of Clinton and Kerry* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2004), 27–28; Neil Maxwell, "In '50s, Carter Was Ahead of Pack—But, Oh, What a Pack!" (news article), March 23, 1976, President Ford Committee Records, 1975–76, Research Office: General Subject File, 1973–76, Box H45, Folder: "Carter Clippings—Gubernatorial Campaign," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Copies from Ralph Stanley to Ed Meese, Rich Williamson, Tony Dolan, Dave Gergen, and Ed Gray—Neil Maxwell, "Jimmy Carter on the School Board" (news article), March 25, 1976, Ed Meese Files, 1980 Campaign Papers, Subject File—Carter Administration, Box 26, Folder 1 of 4; Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California; Copies from Ralph Stanley to Ed Meese, Rich Williamson, Tony Dolan, Dave Gergen, and Ed Gray—Robert Adams, "Carter, As State Senator, Opposed Integration, Open Accommodations" (news article), May 23, 1976, Ed Meese Files, 1980 Campaign Papers, Subject File—Carter Administration, Box 26, Folder 1 of 4; Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California; Copies from Ralph Stanley to Ed Meese, Rich Williamson, Tony Dolan, Dave Gergen, and Ed Gray—Phil Gailey, "Carter's Record on Civil Rights Not Spotless" (news article), September 21, 1980, Ed Meese Files, 1980 Campaign Papers, Subject File—Carter Administration, Box 26, Folder 1 of 4, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California.

[62] Ari Berman, "How Jimmy Carter Championed Civil Rights—And Ronald Reagan Didn't," *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0906-berman-carter-civil-rights-20150906-story.html, accessed May 7, 2017; Julian E. Zelizer, *Jimmy Carter* (New York: Times Books, 2010), 13.

> Though we were both raised in the South and had accepted segregation as children, Jimmy and I had traveled enough to see a different way of life. In the Navy, Jimmy had lived and worked on an equal basis with blacks and could not go home and support the same old status quo. The racial issue had always been a sore subject with Jimmy and his father, who believed sincerely that segregation was best for everyone. The two had a mutual agreement to avoid the issue completely during the brief times Jimmy was home on leave. But Miss Lillian had nursed whoever needed her, black or white, and Jimmy was very influenced by her. And I turn was influenced by him.[63]

Jimmy agreed. He said, "Rosalynn and I supported in a relatively unobtrusive way the evolutionary process of ending the more oppressive elements of racial distinctions in our community." When compared to others, the Carters claimed that they had a relatively "progressive attitude" on racial issues. Although he recognized the political limits of pushing too fast and too far, as a member of the school board, Carter said he aimed "to equalize educational opportunities as much as possible."[64]

The minutes for the Sumter County Board of Education reflect this desire of Carter and the other members to appropriate more funds for black schools. The purpose of this section is to provide some examples that illustrate the sort of actions taken to equalize the schooling experience between county whites and blacks. In addition, it is important to provide examples of where the board continued unequal practices.

Here are some examples of equalization from Carter's first few years on the board. These show actions taken to enhance further the new "colored" schools. Sometimes, the actions involved additional expenditures, the acquisition of new equipment, or the transfer of existing or used equipment.

> January 2, 1957
> A study was made of possible means of providing transportation for colored pupils next fall upon the completion of the new buildings. It was estimated that at least 12 additional buses would be needed. The purchase price of a bus is about $3300. Maintenance, service and operation amounts to approximately $2400 per year, per bus.
>
> A county survey of all colored students is being made showing possible bus routes. It is hoped that some help can be obtained from the State Dept. for the purchase price of the buses. Maint. & operation will be a local problem.[65]

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[63] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 42.

[64] Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*, 77.

[65] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 2, 1957.

April 2, 1957
The following resolution was adopted on a motion made by Howard Logan and seconded by Jimmy Carter. Copies were sent to Mr. John Sims and Stevens & Wilkinson, Architects.

RESOLVED, That the Sumter County Board of Education does hereby request the State School Building Authority to execute to the Georgia Power Company an easement to erect an electric power line at:

Improvement No. 143–1, Sumter County Colored High School
Improvement No. 143–5, Leslie-DeSoto Elem. Negro School
Improvement No. 143–6, Thalean White Elem. School
Improvement No. 143–7, Northeast Colored Elem. School {Line Struck}
Improvement No. 143–8, Plains Colored Elem. School[66]

November 5, 1957
A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Hoke Smith to enter into a contract with the Georgia Power Company on the five year replacement plan for an electric refrigerator for the homemaking department in the new colored high school and to transfer the electric stove in the Dept. from the Plains colored Jr. High school when it is no longer needed there.[67]

January 7, 1958
A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by J. W. Cheek, to add three more colored teachers in the county, if the A. D. A. qualifies the system for them and salaries will be paid by the state.[68]

March 4, 1958
A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Hoke Smith and passed to purchase a second hand piano for the colored high school, but they are to take care of the mimeograph. . . .

A motion was made by J. W. Cheek, seconded by Hoke Smith, and passed, to leave the purchasing of the tools for Vocational Dept. at the colored high school with Mr. Foy.[69]

October 7, 1958
A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan to purchase material to be used for curtains in the Westside colored elementary school.[70]

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66 Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 2, 1957.

67 Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, November 5, 1957.

68 Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 7, 1958.

69 Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 4, 1958.

70 Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 7, 1958.

> March 3, 1959
> A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to purchase equipment requested by Col. Voc. Ag. Dept., provided we can but on a 50–50 matching basis with the State Dept.[71]

> September 1, 1959
> Request was made by Colored H. S. to help them pay for a duplicator for their school. The school has paid $60 and they owed a $100 more. Jimmy made a motion to pay half of the amount, which was $80.[72]

> February 2, 1960
> Request was made by Westside for piano. They had $350 to pay on it. Jimmy made a motion to pay $125 on the piano and to have the purchase approved by Mr. Foy.[73]

Jim Crow endured despite these efforts. Entries from the Sumter County school board minutes periodically highlight the ongoing inequalities and the preservation of segregation. Take the start date of the school year for the county's white students and black students. Historically, white schools started earlier than black schools. This practice remained evident in Sumter County's post-*Brown* era:

> August 21, 1957
> Registration day for the county white schools was set for Sept. 3rd. This will also be counted as first school day. The colored schools will open on Sept. 16.[74]

The following entry illustrates the continued need for a Jeanes supervisor in the county system. Jeanes supervisors were black teachers, typically women, who served rural schools in the South. The program that sponsored these supervisors was the Negro Rural School Fund or Jeanes Fund. It was established in 1907 by Anna T. Jeanes, a white philanthropist and Quaker from Philadelphia. These teachers played a vital role at a time when the educational opportunities for most southern blacks were quite limited. The racial desegregation of the schools rendered their positions obsolete.[75]

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[71] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 3, 1959.

[72] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 1, 1959.

[73] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 2, 1960.

[74] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 21, 1957.

[75] See Ann Short Chirhart, "Jeanes Teachers," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021; Juanie Noland, "Jeanes Supervisors," *Encyclopedia of Alabama* (online), May 2021; Cherisse Jones-Branch, "Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teachers," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* (online), May 2021; Carol Sears Botsch, "Jeanes Teachers," *South Carolina Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021.

> June 2, 1959
> A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by J. W. Cheek to elect Mrs. L. B. Timmerman as Visiting Teacher, and Dorothy Bozeman as Jeane [*sic*] Supervisor for the 1959–60 term.[76]

By 1960, Georgia faced increased pressure from the federal judiciary to end school segregation. For example, US District Judge Frank Hooper of the Northern District of Georgia, a Truman appointee and an Americus native, had determined that ongoing racial segregation in the Atlanta schools was unconstitutional. He decided to delay the decision so that state and local officials could prepare. At the behest of Governor Vandiver and his chief of staff Griffin Bell, the Georgia state legislature created the General Assembly Committee on Schools, popularly referred to as the Sibley Commission after its chairperson John Sibley of Atlanta. State Representative and future governor George Busbee (D-Albany) introduced the matter in the House. The purpose of this effort was to hold hearings around the state, in each of the ten congressional districts, listen to testimony, collect data, and gauge public opinion on school desegregation and integration. The committee would then report its findings to state leaders.[77]

Americus, located in the Third Congressional District, was the first site for the hearing. It was held at the Sumter County Courthouse on March 3. After Sibley delivered his prepared remarks laying out the purpose of the commission and the two school options under consideration, guests were invited to offer their opinions. Among the those who spoke were Charles F. Crisp, a prominent local banker; Clay Mundy, the superintendent of the Americus schools; and George Matthews, a Sumter County commissioner. In total, sixty-six individuals spoke, and most preferred closing the public schools and then privatizing education versus going with the local option of allowing school districts to decide the matter themselves, with the possibility of a few deciding to integrate even on a limited, local basis. In short, the takeaway from the Americus hearing was, "Segregation at all costs!" This sentiment was reflected across southern Georgia. The few black speakers at the Americus hearing also preferred the preservation of segregated schools. Hardly anyone voiced support for other alternatives.[78]

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[76] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 2, 1959; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 7, 1957.

[77] Christopher Allen Huff, "Sibley Commission," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021; O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling*, 176–79.

[78] Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 99–108. A few years earlier, in 1957, some of these same speakers visited Clarence Jordan at Koinonia pressuring him and his community to leave town. Crisp led the delegation. See Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*, 100; Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency*, 20–21; William Bailey Williford, *Americus through the Years: A Story of a Georgia Town and Its People, 1832–1975* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing, 1975), 354.

Though in attendance, Carter did not address the audience. Rosalynn, who joined him, described the scene this way: "John Sibley, an Atlanta lawyer appointed by the legislature to assay the sentiment of Georgians throughout the state, came to Americus to speak. Jimmy and I crowded into the courthouse with hundreds of others as he quietly said we could either abide by the law or close the schools. The crowd was polite and well mannered, but the sentiment was uncompromising."[79]

A month before the Sibley hearing, the entry below provides an instance where the county board entertained defenses of racial segregation. The defenses came from area political leaders and from neighboring Webster County's school board:

> February 2, 1960
> A Resolution signed by representatives and senators from the southwest district and also one prepared by the Webster County Board of Education concerning segregation of the races in our schools was read to the Board upon request of Senator Sherrard Horne.[80]

By the end of April 1960, Sibley essentially recommended to the governor the local option that individual school districts rather than the state should decide whether or not to initiate the desegregation process and to what degree. At a minimum, it allowed at least "token level" change. It made it clear that abandoning public education was not the way forward. This signaled a victory of sorts for Atlanta and other urban leaders. It permitted the state to backpedal from the massive resistance approach of "never." Sibley received many accolades for charting a middle path.[81]

Despite the Court's ruling in *Brown*, looking at the Sumter County school board minutes, it was as if nothing had happened. The racialized language of "white" and "colored" were recurring descriptions in board minutes even five years after the landmark decision. Here are several examples of this from 1957 to 1960. Three of them involve teenage pregnancies and requests to return to school. Those who married were permitted back, but the unwed were not. Presumably, unwed mothers attending school set the wrong example for others. Although school transportation was now available for black students, another entry noted that the county still had buses designated as "Negro."[82]

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[79] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 46.

[80] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 2, 1960. At the time of the *Brown* decision, Horne was a member of the Georgia House of Representatives.

[81] Roche, Restructured Resistance: *The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia*, 190–91; O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling*, 180–81; Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 215–16.

[82] Alter noted that Carter supported the readmission of this young wed mother to Sumter High School. See Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life*, 114. However, he also supported her remaining on probation. In other cases, Carter opposed the readmission of mothers who did not marry.

June 4, 1957
A motion was made by Howard Logan, and seconded by Jimmy Carter to eliminate all coke machines, ice cream machines or vending machines of all kins [*sic*] from both the white and colored schools in the county. This becomes effective Sept., 1957.[83]

October 1, 1957
Permission was granted for Nanearl Wylly, Colored Home Demonstration Agent, to attend school on Sat.[84]

April 1, 1958
A motion was made by J. W. Cheek, seconded by Hoke Smith to elect the following colored Principals for the 1958–59 term.[85]

Sumter Colored High James Bozeman
Westside Col. Elem. Annie B. Floyd
Southeast " " Kelsie Daniels
Northeast " " Theodore London

May 6, 1958
The colored teachers were re-elected for another year, as recommended by the Supt., for Westside, Northeast, Southeast Elementary schools.[86]

June 3, 1958
The teachers for the Sumter County Colored High School were re-elected for another term. This motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Howard Logan.[87]

May 5, 1959
A motion was made by Hoke Smith, seconded by J. W. Cheek to purchase $50 worth of fence post for the colored football field.[88]

May 21, 1959
The colored teachers were elected as recommended by the Supt.[89]

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[83] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 4, 1957.

[84] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 1, 1957.

[85] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 1, 1958.

[86] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 6, 1958.

[87] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 3, 1958.

[88] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 5, 1959.

[89] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 21, 1959.

June 2, 1959
A motion was made by Jimmy Carter, seconded by Hoke Smith to transfer 4 typewriters from the white high schools to the col. high school for use in the commercial dept.

Mary Kate Fishe, who dropped out of the colored high school in October, 1959 [sic] due to pregnancy, appeared before the Board requesting permission to re-enter school in the fall. She stated that after leaving school she married in November. The baby was born 2 months ago and she wants to complete her 12th year next term. Since she is a senior, an A student with no discipline troubles, her request was granted with the following provisions: 1. County records verify her claim of marriage, 2. she shall remain on probation so long as she is in school. . .

A motion was made by J. W. Cheek, seconded by Hoke Smith granting permission for buses to be used to take children to 4-H camp, both white and colored, provided a regular driver drives the bus.[90]

July 14, 1959
A motion was made by J. W. Cheek, 2nd and passed to spend $1500. for science equipment in the schools. $750. in white schools and $750 in the colored schools.

Request was made from the principal of the colored High School to get enough used typewriters to be able to have a class. The Supt. Was asked to attend to this; 6–8 used machines were suggested.[91]

August 25, 1959
Five colored teachers were elected.[92]

September 1, 1959
Three colored students, requested permission to return to High School: Lorene Sanders, Johnnie Maye Engram, and Neppie Hubbard (Jackson). Mr. Logan made a motion to allow Neppie from Staley to be accepted if her recommendations from Staley were O. K., since she was married. The other two were turned down, because they were unwed mothers.[93]

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[90] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 2, 1959.

[91] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 14, 1959.

[92] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 25, 1959.

[93] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 1, 1959.

> November 3, 1959
> James Bozeman, principal of Colored H. S., met with the board to answer any questions concerning his record keeping, and discrepancies as related in auditor's report. Prof. Bozeman was given a final warning by the Board for (lunchroom) funds in the future.
>
> Colored girls: Glover Dean Moye, 11th grade and Idema, 10th grade. These girls dropped out of school for maternity reasons. Their request were declined.[94]

> January 5, 1960
> Negro bus coming from Andersonville to Americus has too many children. The bus is already making two trips. Mr. Foy recommended adding a bus at Northeast for two or three months with a teacher as driver. It was decided by Board to leave the transportation problem up to Mr. Hoke Smith and Mr. Foy.[95]

At times, the board seemed to be concerned that equalization actually made the black schools in some ways materially better than some of the white schools. Thus it appropriated additional funds or acquired additional equipment to assuage potential white jealousies and rectify white disparities. For instance, each of the new black schools had brand new cafeterias. Known as a cafetorium, these could even double as auditoriums. One of the following examples documents the board approving new investments in the "white lunchrooms" as the equalization era began. Other examples reported here include the acquisition of new window shades for the New Era school, new typewriters for "white high schools," new sinks for "white lunchrooms," and new student desks for "all white schools"

> November 5, 1957
> Supt. Foy reported that the following equipment has been ordered for the white lunchrooms in the county through the State School Building Authority to be paid for with the savings made by purchase of equipment in new schools in carload lots by the Authority. This equipment is that requested by the Principals and approved by this Board at its October 1st meeting.
>
> A steam table for Anthony and Union High
> An Electric range for Anthony, New Era, Thalean
> A deep freeze for Union High.
> A hot serving counter for Plains High and New Era.
> Eight folding lunchroom tables for Plains High.[96]

> January 7, 1958
> A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Hoke Smith, and passed, to purchase window shades for the New Era School.

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[94] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, November 3, 1959.

[95] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 5, 1960.

[96] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, November 5, 1957.

> The Board approved the painting of the windows of all the new colored schools with a plastic paint. This will cut down the glare and prevent the buying of shades or blinds.[97]
>
> June 3, 1958
> Mr. Foy and Mr. Carter were authorized to purchase new typewriters for white high schools.[98]
>
> July 1, 1958
> A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by J. W. Cheek to request approval of the Building Authority for sinks for white lunchrooms; also, typewriters for the commercial departments. This money will come from the balance in our contingency fund. The rest of this money will be held until further notice.[99]
>
> August 5, 1958
> A motion was made by Howard Logan, seconded by Jimmy Carter to purchase as many desks as are needed for white schools. This will complete the furnishing of new desks for all white schools.[100]

Carter and the Koinonia Farm

During his tenure as chair of the Sumter County school board, one key issue Carter confronted involved students from the Koinonia Farm, a local Christian community located off GA Hwy 49 a few miles from the Americus city center. Named after the Greek word for fellowship, Koinonia was founded as a Christian farming commune in 1942 by Clarence Jordan, his wife Florence, and Martin and Mabel England. When Clarence first viewed the location in Sumter County as the possible site of the communal experiment, he exclaimed, "This is it."[101]

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[97] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, January 7, 1958.

[98] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 3, 1958.

[99] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 1, 1958.

[100] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 5, 1958.

[101] Quote from Dallas Lee, *The Cotton Patch Evidence: The Story of Clarence Jordan and the Koinonia Farm Experiment (1942–1970)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011; originally published in 1971), 33.

In 2018, Carter wrote a letter about his long admiration for Koinonia. He praised Jordan and his "unwavering prophetic voice." A few years earlier, he identified Jordan as a great man, a man in the same league as Anwar Sadat and Nelson Mandela. Like the other inhabitants of the surrounding area, Carter's relationship with Koinonia was one of evolution.[102]

In the 1950s, Carter kept a careful distance. He limited his contacts and associations with Koinonia. For a businessman and an emerging and ambitious young pol, the economic and political risks were simply too great. His safety and that of his family were probably a compelling factor as well. It was clear, Carter once wrote, that "these Christians were an irritant to the southern white status quo of Sumter County." One would not be paranoid to fear serious reprisal. Americus and Sumter County were not kind places to whites who were tagged as race traitors. Warren Fortson, a well-connected Sumter County attorney and Americus resident who helped Carter win his state senate race in 1962, later found that out after he endorsed "freedom-of-choice" efforts to desegregate the Americus city schools. He and his family were effectively run out of Americus in 1965.[103]

Clarence Jordan viewed Jimmy Carter as a politician, through and through. His nephew, Hamilton, who would later serve as a key advisor and chief of staff to the future president, once asked his uncle Clarence what he thought of his neighbor from Plains. The response was "He is a nice fella, Hamilton, but he is just a politician." That was in the late 1960s.[104]

The apostolic church depicted in the New Testament inspired Koinonia to create a community where believers lived and worked together in peace and productivity. The group's mission statement is as follows: "We are Christians called to live together in intentional community sharing a life of prayer, work, study, service and fellowship. We seek to embody peacemaking, sustainability, and radical sharing. While honoring people of all backgrounds and faiths, we strive to demonstrate the way of Jesus as an alternative to

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[102] "Letter from President Carter," Koinonia Farm, March 29, 2018, https://www.koinoniafarm.org/blog/letter-from-president-carter/, accessed April 2, 2021; Bob Allen, "Jimmy Carter fetes Clarence Jordan," *Baptist News Global*, October 11, 2012, https://baptistnews.com/article/jimmy-carter-fetes-clarence-jordan/#.YGfkT8-SnIU, accessed April 2, 2021.

[103] Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 41, 226–27; Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*, 99–100; Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House*, 84; E. Stanly Godbold Jr., *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter: The Georgia Years, 1924–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 88–90, 104; Alter, *His Very Best*, 109–112. Carter quote from "Foreword" to Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons*, edited by Dallas Lee (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005). For references to Warren Fortson, see "Racial Peacemaker Who Failed Quits Hostility of Americus, Ga.," *New York Times*, September 16, 1965; Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 149–50; Williford, *Americus through the Years*, 369–371.

[104] Hamilton Jordan, *A Boy from Georgia: Coming of Age in the Segregated South*, edited by Kathleen Jordan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 217.

materialism, militarism and racism." For the South of the 1940s, it was an unbelievably audacious move. Community members called it a "demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God."[105]

The members' belief in racial equality and support for integration alienated them from most outsiders. At first, outsiders generally considered them strange and mostly left them be. As time passed and as issues of race became more intense, Koinonia was viewed as subversive, un-American, and communistic. Many citizens boycotted their farm products. Carter said he maintained some business contact with them and was fair to them when he served on the school board. In his book *Turning Point*, he wrote, "Although most local merchants boycotted Koinonia Farm, we sold them our certified seed peanuts, and we processed their seed in our shelling plant. Also, as a member of the Board of Education, I did everything possible to guarantee equal services to the Koinonia students in the public school system."[106] Presumably, this meant that Koinonia students were permitted to attend the county system schools and, upon request, would be able to transfer to the city system schools if so desired. This was board policy. The following entry from a board meeting in 1958 is illustrative of this:

> May 6, 1958
> All high school students wishing to attend Americus High next term must register with this office by June 1, 1958.[107]

It turned out that "all" did not mean all. It did not even mean "all" whites.

In the 1950s and 1960s, federal judges, both circuit and district, were among the "unlikely heroes" to advance the cause of civil rights and equal justice under the law. Carter acknowledged this. He specifically mentioned the significant role of Elbert P. Tuttle. He said Judge Tuttle was "one of our family's heroes." William A. "Gus" Bootle was another one of the federal judges who made a difference and helped end the region's racist policies.[108]

Judge Bootle, who was nominated by President Dwight Eisenhower to the US District Court for the Middle District of Georgia, gained notoriety in January 1961 for issuing the original order to desegregate the University of Georgia. Just months before, he also addressed the matter concerning the Koinonia students.[109]

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[105] Statement from "About—A Brief History," Koinonia Farm, https://www.koinoniafarm.org/about-koinonia-farm/; quote from "Brief History," Koinonia Farm, https://www.koinoniafarm.org/brief-history/.

[106] Carter, *Turning Point*, 16, 21.

[107] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 6, 1958.

[108] Jack Bass, *Unlikely Heroes* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 136, 217–18; Carter, *Turning Point*, 30–32.

[109] O'Brien, *The Politics of Race and Schooling*, 186–89; Keith Hulett, "William Bootle (1902–2005)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021.

Because Americus High School was perceived to be a better college preparatory school than Plains High School, three students from Koinonia petitioned the Americus city school board in 1960 to transfer in from the county system. The students, all white, were Lora Browne, Jan Jordan, and Billy Wittkamper. In addition, Americus was considered to be a more tolerant learning environment than Carter's alma mater. There had been prior ugly incidents at Plains involving students from Koinonia. Clarence Jordan's oldest boy, Jim, attended Plains for just one school day and did not return. Homeschooling became an alternative for some.[110]

The city board, however, denied their request without a specified cause. The transfer request was not at all unusual. Since the early 1950s, there had been intersystem transfer students. The two school boards had a "gentleman's agreement," and both had been accommodating to the other's elementary and high school students. In fact, that year, in 1960, twenty-seven county-to-city transfer requests had been approved by the board. These students came from four of the five county schools—Anthony, New Era, Plains, and Thalean. Only three requests—the three from Koinonia—were rejected, despite approval from the county. In the few cases where a transfer request was denied by the city, it was because the request was submitted too late in the summer or after the new school year was already underway.[111]

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[110] Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 59; Andrew S. Chancey, "Clarence Jordan (1912–1969)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (online), May 2021. The Jordans had two girls (Eleanor and Janet) and two boys (James and Frank). See Sumter County Superintendent W. W. Foy's testimony on the harassment Jim Jordan received at Plains High School, *Wittkamper v. Harvey*, Hearing on Preliminary Injunction, September 28, 1960, Civic Action No. 486, File Unit: William Wittkamper, et al. v. James Harvey, et al. and the School Board of Americus, Georgia, Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685–2009, Series: Civil Case Files, 1939–1981, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/3285740, digital pages 38–40 of 449.

[111] Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 59–60; Alan Anderson, "Koinonia Farms," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/Koinonia.htm; Sumter County Superintendent W. W. Foy described the process for transfer requests and the general transfer student agreement between the two school systems in *Wittkamper v. Harvey*, Hearing on Preliminary Injunction, September 28, 1960, Civic Action No. 486, File Unit: William Wittkamper, et al. v. James Harvey, et al. and the School Board of Americus, Georgia, Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685–2009, Series: Civil Case Files, 1939–1981, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/3285740, digital pages 14–25, 31–37, 40–41, 47–48 of 449. The student transfer list comes from digital page 437. The county had rejected some city students requesting a transfer because of poor academic performance. Some transfer students were given preference. Carter once suggested this: "Ones making new application were not to be approved, except two (2) for the special class for the retarded and two (2) who are moving into the county when new home is completed." See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 6, 1960.

There was some expressed concern that the students could "infect" the Americus High student body with their more inclusive racial views, as if they were viral. After all, racial equality was perhaps Koinonia's "most radical" principle. The community took seriously the view that God is no respecter of persons and has no racial favorites. The board evidently deemed such sentiments as an intolerable threat.[112]

Board members were also probably concerned about the sort of trouble that could follow the Koinonia students. For it was well-known that in the immediate post-*Brown* years, the Christian farming community faced verbal harassment and threats, vandalism, agricultural boycotts, ostracism, and sprees of gunshots on their cars and homes. It was also a frequent target of terror acts. For instance, its roadside farm store was dynamited, causing serious damage. Later, on another occasion, it was "blown to bits." These actions served as warnings to not only Koinonia but also anyone who might support them or conduct business with them. Fearing repercussions was reasonable. Whites were warned. Blacks were warned. Stay away from Koinonia or you could get hurt.[113]

The minutes from the Sumter County Board of Education reference the controversy. The following excerpt is from a called meeting at the end of August 1960. By this time, Carter was the board chairman. The county board regretted the city's decision but, out of mutual respect for self-governance, would not contest it. "Each member" of the Sumter County board was satisfied that they did all that they could in providing "equal opportunity to all County students" seeking a transfer for the 1960–61 school year.

> August 26, 1960
> Americus City Board rejected students from Koinonia Farm: A report was given to the Board by the Supt. on 3 students who were turned down by the City Board of Education. These students are from the Koinonia Farm. The report was received with regret, but each member feels that this Board has fulfilled its responsibility and provided equal opportunity to all County students who requested permission to attend the Americus schools with the state ADA following the child. Under the agreement between, the two Boards, neither

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[112] Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 60; Anderson, "Koinonia Farms," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/Koinonia.htm; Andrew S. Chancey, "Race, Religion, and Agricultural Reform: The Communal Vision of Koinonia," in *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in the Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865–1950*, edited by John C. Inscoe (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 249.

[113] Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 61; Lee, *The Cotton Patch Evidence*, 105–42; Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 81–98. The issue of "peace and tranquility" was discussed in *Wittkamper v. Harvey*, Hearing on Preliminary Injunction, September 28, 1960, Civic Action No. 486, File Unit: William Wittkamper, et al. v. James Harvey, et al. and the School Board of Americus, Georgia, Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685–2009, Series: Civil Case Files, 1939–1981, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/3285740, digital pages 9–11 of 449. Mr. Mike Jones, the former principal of Thalean Elementary School, testified that the three students from Koinonia were not troublemakers whatsoever while they attended Thalean, but good students both in their studies and conduct.

> Board of Education attempts to force a student upon the other; but those students whose parents request it, are released to the other system along with all state funds.[114]

Days later, the parents of the three Koinonia students sent a letter to the Georgia State Superintendent of Schools Claude L. Purcell to ask for help. Then, on September 6, a few of the Koinonia parents came to the county board meeting, requesting the board to pressure the city to admit their children to school. Carter and the board he led adamantly dismissed the effort.[115]

> September 6, 1960
> A group of people, including Mr. Jordan, Mr. Brown, and Mrs. Wittkamper, from the Koinonia Farm met with Board, concerning the same matter which had been discussed at the called meeting, August 26, 1960: Their children not being accepted in the city system. Their wish seemed to be for this Board to agree with them in condemning the Americus Board for not accepting the students and writing a letter to the City Board, urging reconsideration. Members of this Board disagreed strongly with this attempt to involve the County and City Board in disagreement over their agreed policy of releasing students.[116]

With no resolution of the matter, Koinonia, backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, brought the issue to federal court. A hearing on a preliminary injunction before Judge Bootle was held on September 28 in Macon, Georgia. Meanwhile, at its October 4 meeting, county board members expressed their concern that the Koinonia students had not been in school during the legal fight with the city.

> October 4, 1960
> Koinonia Farm—(High School students out of school). A letter was presented to the Board for its approval, which had been written to the families at the Koinonia Farm concerning non-attendance of the High School students, along with a notice which is sent to all parents who fail to comply with the attendance law. Mr. W. C. Cornwell make a motion to approve the letter and send it to the families. Mr. Hoke seconded. Passed unanimously by Board.[117]

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[114] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 26, 1960.

[115] Will W. Wittkamper, Margaret Wittkamper, Conrad Browne, Ora Browne, Florence Jordan, and Clarence Jordan to Dr. Claude Purcell, August 30, 1960, Civic Action No. 486, File Unit: William Wittkamper, et al. v. James Harvey, et al. and the School Board of Americus, Georgia, Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685–2009, Series: Civil Case Files, 1939–1981, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/3285740, digital pages 1–2 of 449; Godbold, *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter: The Georgia Years, 1924–1974*, 89; Ansley L. Quiros, *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 177.

[116] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 6, 1960.

[117] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 4, 1960.

County Superintendent W. W. Foy testified at the September 28 hearing that to his knowledge the three Koinonia students were not enrolled at Plains, their designated county high school. Carter was subpoenaed to testify for the complainants but was not called.[118]

In late October 1960, Judge Bootle issued his judgment. He overturned the Americus board decision and had the students admitted to Americus High School. It was a clear victory for Koinonia. The three students could attend the high school of their choice. But was it truly a free choice? Only one of the three students graduated from Americus High School. Billy and Lora left the school and the state. Enduring "the slings and arrows," Jan was a member of the senior class of 1964. For one last indignity, her name was not even announced at the ceremony as one of the graduates.[119]

Carter as a Moderate Segregationist

In May 1954, the US Supreme Court issued its unanimous ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that state-sanctioned racially segregated public schools were unconstitutional. The following year, the Court called upon states to end segregation "with all deliberate speed." The white South resisted.

Then, in September 1958, in *Cooper v. Aaron*, the Court made another unanimous decision stating that state and local officials were bound by its rulings and did not possess the right to nullify or interpose them. The supremacy clause and oath clause of Article VI of the US Constitution, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the principle of judicial review required compliance with *Brown*. Therefore, no political official at the state and local level "can war against the Constitution." The upholding of segregated schools by any level of government "through any arrangement, management, funds, or property" was at odds with constitutional requirements. In this matter, if the Constitution was to prevail, "the obedience of the States" was determined to be "indispensable."[120]

Even so, a decade after *Brown*, public schools throughout the South had virtually remained unchanged. In the short term, the Court's ruling provoked massive resistance, defiance, and the reemergence of southern political hardliners—strong or militant segregationist figures like George Wallace and Orval Faubus. It was not an easy time to be moderate on the matter, let alone liberal.

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[118] For Sumter County Superintendent W. W. Foy's testimony on the enrollment question, see *Wittkamper v. Harvey*, Hearing on Preliminary Injunction, September 28, 1960, Civic Action No. 486, File Unit: William Wittkamper, et al. v. James Harvey, et al. and the School Board of Americus, Georgia, Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685–2009, Series: Civil Case Files, 1939–1981, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/3285740, digital pages 37–38 of 449. Carter's civil subpoena appears on digital page 426.

[119] Auchmutey, *The Class of '65*, 92–94; Anderson, "Koinonia Farms," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/Koinonia.htm.

[120] *Cooper v. Aaron*, 358 US 1 (1958).

Nearly two decades before he would declare his candidacy for president, this was the racialized political context where Jimmy Carter politically embarked upon his journey. When he joined the Sumter County Board of Education in December 1955, the county system was noncompliant with *Brown*. That remained true throughout his tenure on the board, including the years he was board chair.

On the school board, Carter was a segregationist in the 1950s and early 1960s, as his father Earl Carter had been when he served in the 1940s and until his death in 1953. But that was where all viable and ambitious white politicians in the South were at the time. As Earl Black documented in his 1976 study, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, all relevant and meaningful gubernatorial candidates during Carter's school board years were either "strong segregationists" (or "militant") or "moderate segregationists." Black's categories remain quite useful. Viable candidates advancing desegregation with the goal of fully integrated public schools were simply nonexistent in the South. And for a young politician whose father had been so clearly affiliated with the Talmadge faction in Georgia, being a segregationist in the immediate post-*Brown* years was the only available stance.

The issue then is whether Carter was a "strong segregationist" or not. According to available primary and secondary sources, there is no evidence from his school board years that he was among the "strong segregationists." According to the criteria Black established, Carter did not regularly express "unambiguous, emphatic, and more or less unqualified opposition to racial desegregation and support for racial segregation." It was not a "leading" matter for him. Nor did he discuss it "incessantly" or engage in "race baiting." The fact that Carter was silent at the Sibley commission hearing in March 1960 reinforces the point here. Had he been a militant, there would have been no question about where he stood. He could have used the moment to make "appeals to racial prejudice" and build a political following on it. He fully recognized that others had made it a "demagogic issue." He chose not to pursue that course. In this regard, he was more like "Big Jim" Folsom of Alabama, LeRoy Collins of Florida, and Terry Sanford of North Carolina. All three were southern governors at some point when Carter served on the school board, and they also steered toward a "moderate" course on segregation.[121]

Yes, occasionally Carter responded to the concerns of white constituents on race matters. The resolution he introduced in September 1956, calling for the relocation of a proposed black school site in Leslie-DeSoto in order to minimize interracial interactions, was such an occasion. He lost and had the resolution rescinded soon thereafter. From there on, the matter died. Carter proved he was a segregationist, but not a rabid one. This was an example of a segregationist act that was "brief and perfunctory."

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[121] Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*, 80; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 347–50.

In the next chapter, it is demonstrated further that Carter's involvement in the county-city school consolidation effort placed him squarely with the more moderate forces in segregation's arena. Indeed, he led the pro-consolidation campaign—his first electoral campaign and his first electoral defeat. It was also during this campaign that he made more than a few political enemies who suspected he was much more liberal on race than he publicly let on. Perhaps, opponents charged, he was a racial integrationist all along.

Documents: Reactions of Southern Members of the US Congress to the *Brown* Decision

Remarks by E. L. "Tic" Forrester US Representative, D-Leesburg, Georgia

US House of Representatives, Washington, DC May 18, 1954

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under special order heretofore entered, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. Forrester] is recognized for 30 minutes.

Mr. FORRESTER. Mr. Speaker, for some time I have contended that the greatest threats to our Republic and the American way of life come not from overseas, but are in our midst at home. While the internationalists are riding over the world trying to sell their plans to the world, at taxpayers' expense, the same crowd is destroying everything in America that made us great and everything that can be expected to sustain us in our hour of peril, which hour may be closer than many of us think.

It is completely apparent to me that the aim of the left-wingers and the un-American groups in this country is the destruction of the Anglo-Saxon race. We, in the South, recognized that danger long ago and we have tried to alert our people, only to be hooted at and condemned. My people cannot understand an individual who has no pride in race; in fact, we cannot understand anyone who has no pride in his or her heart.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the United States Supreme Court shed all pretense of construing the law and took upon itself the right to change our law, even om; Constitution, and was brusque enough to virtually say they were so doing. The Chief Justice went out of his way to say that the defendants in the case decided yesterday were asking that Court to turn back the clock. The Chief Justice and that Court were completely mistaken. What the defendants were asking was that the Court keep its hands off the clock. The Supreme Court has never been charged with the duty of keeping time for the citizens of America, nor to construe the seasons, nor to legislate these powers being expressly reserved to the Congress and the people.

It is completely amazing that nine men should be so intoxicated with power that they should rule that they are to set the clock, yet that is exactly what the Court said. Other than that observation, which is completely without basis in law, these decisions were purely political and completely sterile so far as law was concerned, for that Court had no law whatever to ground its decisions upon. No country can be greater than its Judiciary. The people were entitled to a higher court that would eliminate political considerations and construe the law and Constitution as they were written. I agree that more care should have been exercised in the appointment of the Judges to that Court, and I agree that both parties, Democratic and Republican, have been guided by political philosophies rather than legal qualifications for membership upon that Court. We sowed to the wind and we have reaped the whirlwind.

Yesterday, the Supreme Court by edict, but completely without legal basis, wiped out every vestige of states' rights. It is disgusting now to hear so many claim they believe in the rights of the states. It is apparent that our President approves these terrible decisions, for his Attorney General demonstrated his partisanship by filing a brief asking that our previous adjudications be set aside, demonstrating that his thoughts were purely political, and after demonstrating partisanship in an outstanding degree had the gall to ask Congress to give him complete control of wiretapping in this country. I am sure that Mr. Truman approves the decisions of yesterday, and his former Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, was quoted in the Evening Star last night as saying it was a great and statesmanlike decision. Adlai Stevenson will greet this judicial murder with open arms; yes, both major political parties are kowtowing to the minority groups to such an extent that our country itself is in jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, the Evening Star of last night quotes one in the present Republican administration as saying that these decisions of yesterday would alleviate Russia's criticisms toward us. He did not discuss the law, nor the basis of those decisions, but rendered an opinion purely on a political basis. I am tired of hearing the argument that we have appeased Russia. If that is our object, then why not dismantle our Armed Forces and let our boys come back home. If it is appeasement and not victory that we seek. Appeasement can be done without bloodshed. The decisions of yesterday mean only this: The old-fashioned Yankee and the old-fashioned southerner whose ancestors won this country and preserved this country are without rights. The object is nothing less than the mongrelizing of the races. Mongrelization has always produced people without stamina and without conviction. Under these decisions of yesterday a man can claim that he is entitled to go to a girls' school by simply contending that the girls' school offers some subject that men's schools do not offer. These decisions mean that all laws prohibiting mixed marriages will be annulled as fast as these matters can be brought before that Court. These decisions

mean that there can be no exclusive residential section in the United States. These decisions mean that no hotel, boarding house, or public place can be the judge of whom they will take as a paying guest.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that an FEPC [Fair Employment Practice Committee] provision has been offered in a committee of this Congress, which would provide an FEPC in interstate commerce.

Mr. Speaker, these decisions of yesterday have created an intolerable condition upon my people. In my own State we have pledged our future credit, over many years, and have spent millions of dollars trying to bring schools to the Negroes in the South. These moneys naturally will be almost entirely paid by the white people of my State. We did this because for 88 years the Supreme Court of the United States has held equal but separate facilities completely constitutional. The South has done more for the Negro in 200 years than all the rest of the world has done for the Negro in 5,000 years. The whites and the Negroes in my State have been, and are, happy together. The Negroes in Georgia know they have lost much for they know that the South has been honest with them. The Negroes in Georgia know that we have been better to them than any northern or eastern State has ever tried to be. The Negro teachers in Georgia are alarmed over this miscarriage of the law and the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, my people are awake to the dangers within our gates. Mr. Speaker, my people believe that in this country there are checks and balances upon every portion of this Government. My people do not believe that the President, or any public servant can withhold information from the Congress they have elected, or from the people because it is the people who must do the dying in time of war. My people are against czars. My people repudiate the theory that any person whosoever is above the law of this country. My people see the grave danger hidden in such philosophy and in behalf of my people I tell it now, we spew it out of our mouths. This statement is not to be construed as applying to any individual case, for it is a statement that permeates our thinking, and bless God it is America. We are confirmed in that view although the President, by written order, demonstrates he thinks otherwise.

Congressional Record, U.S. House of Representatives, page 6777

The Southern Manifesto: Declaration of Constitutional Principles

Introduced by Walter F. George (D-Georgia), US Senate, and Howard W. Smith (D-Virginia), US House of Representatives, 84th US Congress, Second Session, March 12, 1956

The unwarranted decision of the Supreme Court in the public school cases is now bearing the fruit always produced when men substitute naked power for established law.

The Founding Fathers gave us a Constitution of checks and balances because they realized the inescapable lesson of history that no man or group of men can be safely entrusted with unlimited power. They framed this Constitution with its provisions for change by amendment in order to secure the fundamentals of government against the dangers of temporary popular passion or the personal predilections of public officeholders.

We regard the decisions of the Supreme Court in the school cases as a clear abuse of judicial power. It climaxes a trend in the Federal judiciary undertaking to legislate, in derogation of the authority of Congress, and to encroach upon the reserved rights of the States and the people.

The original Constitution does not mention education. Neither does the 14th Amendment nor any other amendment. The debates preceding the submission of the 14th Amendment clearly show that there was no intent that it should affect the system of education maintained by the States.

The very Congress which proposed the amendment subsequently provided for segregated schools in the District of Columbia.

When the amendment was adopted in 1868, there were 37 States of the Union. Every one of the 26 States that had any substantial racial differences among its people, either approved the operation of segregated schools already in existence or subsequently established such schools by action of the same law-making body which considered the 14th Amendment.

As admitted by the Supreme Court in the public school case (*Brown v. Board of Education*), the doctrine of separate but equal schools "apparently originated in *Roberts v. City of Boston* * * * (1849), upholding school segregation against attack as being violative of a State constitutional guarantee of equality." This constitutional doctrine began in the North, not in the South, and it was followed not only in Massachusetts, but in Connecticut, New York, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other northern states until they, exercising their rights as states through the constitutional processes of local self-government, changed their school systems.

In the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 the Supreme Court expressly declared that under the 14th Amendment no person was denied any of his rights if the States provided separate but equal facilities. This decision has been followed in many other cases. It is notable that the Supreme Court, speaking through Chief Justice Taft, a former President of the United States, unanimously declared in 1927 in *Lum v. Rice* that the "separate but equal" principle is "within the discretion of the State in regulating its public schools and does not conflict with the 14th Amendment."

This interpretation, restated time and again, became a part of the life of the people of many of the States and confirmed their habits, traditions, and way of life. It is founded on elemental humanity and commonsense, for parents should not be deprived by Government of the right to direct the lives and education of their own children.

Though there has been no constitutional amendment or act of Congress changing this established legal principle almost a century old, the Supreme Court of the United States, with no legal basis for such action, undertook to exercise their naked judicial power and substituted their personal political and social ideas for the established law of the land.

This unwarranted exercise of power by the Court, contrary to the Constitution, is creating chaos and confusion in the States principally affected. It is destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there has been heretofore friendship and understanding.

Without regard to the consent of the governed, outside mediators are threatening immediate and revolutionary changes in our public-school systems. If done, this is certain to destroy the system of public education in some of the States.

With the gravest concern for the explosive and dangerous condition created by this decision and inflamed by outside meddlers:

We reaffirm our reliance on the Constitution as the fundamental law of the land.

We decry the Supreme Court's encroachment on the rights reserved to the States and to the people, contrary to established law, and to the Constitution.

We commend the motives of those States which have declared the intention to resist forced integration by any lawful means.

We appeal to the States and people who are not directly affected by these decisions to consider the constitutional principles involved against the time when they too, on issues vital to them may be the victims of judicial encroachment.

Even though we constitute a minority in the present Congress, we have full faith that a majority of the American people believe in the dual system of government which has enabled us to achieve our greatness and will in time demand that the reserved rights of the States and of the people be made secure against judicial usurpation.

We pledge ourselves to use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.

In this trying period, as we all seek to right this wrong, we appeal to our people not to be provoked by the agitators and troublemakers invading our States and to scrupulously refrain from disorder and lawless acts.

Signed by:

Members of the United States Senate:

Walter P. George; Richard B. Russell; John Stennis; Sam J. Ervin, Jr.; Strom Thurmond; Harry F. Byrd; A. Willis Robertson; John L. McClellan; Allen J. Ellender; Russell B. Long; Lister Hill; James O. Eastland; W. Kerr Scott; John Sparkman; Olin D. Johnston; Price Daniel; J. W. Fulbright; George A, Smathers; Spessard L. Holland.

Members of the United States House of Representatives:

Alabama: Frank W. Boykin; George M. Grant; George W. Andrews; Kenneth A. Roberts; Albert Rains; Armistead I. Selden, Jr.; Carl Elliott; Robert E. Jones; George Huddleston, Jr.

Arkansas: E. C. Gathings; Wilbur D. Mills; James W. Trimble; Oren Harris; Brooks Hays; W. F. Norrell.

Florida: Charles E. Bennett; Robert L. F. Sikes; A. S. Herlong, Jr.; Paul G. Rogers; James A. Haley; D. R. Matthews; William C. Cramer.

Georgia: Prince H. Preston; John L. Pilcher; E. L. Forrester; John James Flynt, Jr.; James C. Davis; Carl Vinson; Henderson Lanham; Iris F. Blitch; Phil M. Landrum; Paul Brown.

Louisiana: F. Edward Hébert; Hale Boggs; Edwin E. Willis; Overton Brooks; Otto E. Passman; James H. Morrison; T. Ashton Thompson; George S. Long.

Mississippi: Thomas G. Abernethy; Jamie L. Whitten; Frank E. Smith; John Bell Williams; Arthur Winstead; William M. Colmer.

North Carolina: Herbert C. Bonner; L. H. Fountain; Graham A. Barden; Carl T. Durham; F. Ertel Carlyle; Hugh Q. Alexander; Woodrow W. Jones; George A. Shuford; Charles R. Jonas.

South Carolina: L. Mendel Rivers; John J. Riley; W. J. Bryan Dorn; Robert T. Ashmore; James P. Richards; John L. McMillan.

Tennessee: James B. Frazier, Jr.; Tom Murray; Jere Cooper; Clifford Davis; Ross Bass; Joe L. Evins.

Texas: Wright Patman; John Dowdy; Walter Rogers; O. C. Fisher; Martin Dies.

Virginia: Edward J. Robeson, Jr.; Porter Hardy, Jr.; J. Vaughan Gary; Watkins M. Abbitt; William M. Tuck; Richard H. Poff; Burr P. Harrison; Howard W. Smith; W. Pat Jennings;

Congressional Record—US Senate, pages 4459–61
Congressional Record—US House of Representatives, pages 4515–16

Document: Sumter County Board of Education Resolution on Proposed Location of Leslie-DeSoto Elementary Negro School (Southeast), September 24, 1956

Sumter County Board of Education Resolution September 24, 1956

WHEREAS, The white citizens of the Leslie & DeSoto communities appeared before us this day and voiced their objection to the site for the location of the proposed negro school in that community, pointing out the fact that negro and white children will be walking to and from school together and begging of the Sumter County Board of Education that a new site be considered before construction begins, and

WHEREAS, This Board of Education is anxious not to locate the negro school building in the wrong place so that friction might arise later and so as to avoid the possibility of future trouble between colored and white people in these communities,

THIS BOARD RESPECTFULLY REQUESTS that the State Board of Education and the State School Building Authority hold up the construction of this one project 143-5, known as the Leslie-DeSoto Elementary Negro School, until a new site is selected but that the other projects in the Sumter County Building Program be continued at full speed.

Note: Jimmy Carter introduced this motion, and it was approved by the board at the September 24th meeting. After the State of Georgia rejected the request for a delay, Carter introduced a motion at the October 5th meeting to repeal the prior measure. The Board approved the motion to repeal.

Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 24, 1956

Document:
Sumter County Board of Education Resolution on the Equalization of White Schools, October 1, 1957

Sumter County Board of Education Resolution
October 1, 1957

WHEREAS, There is a balance of $5,434.18 in the equipment budget of Sumter County, Project #143, and The Board of Education of Sumter County, Georgia, has completed the construction of new buildings for the instruction and education of negro students;

WHEREAS, sufficient equipment is already installed or ordered for the new colored schools, and

WHEREAS, the lunchrooms in the five (5) white schools are poorly equipped – inferior to the new schools,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that a request be made of the State School Building Authority for the purchase and installation of equipment for the white lunchrooms of Sumter County with the balance of said equipment funds, as listed for the individual schools.

Note: Jimmy Carter and the other board members approved the resolution at the October 1st meeting. At the November 5th meeting, county school superintendent W. W. Foy announced to the board that the equipment requested for the white lunchrooms was ordered. The equipment included a steam table for the Anthony school and Union High School; an electric range for the Anthony, New Era, and Thalean schools; a deep freezer for Union High School; a hot serving counter for Plains High School and the New Era school; and eight folding lunchroom tables for Plains High School.

Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, October 1, 1957

Document:
Sumter County Board of Education Resolution on the Elimination of the Older Black Schools, February 4, 1958

Sumter County Board of Education Resolution
February 4, 1958

WHEREAS, The Board of Education of Sumter County, Georgia, has completed the construction of new buildings for the instruction and education of negro students;

AND WHEREAS, these schools are adequate to handle and afford competent instruction for all negro students in Sumter County;

AND WHEREAS, these school buildings are now occupied and being used by said negro students, and the buildings and properties heretofore used by then (them?) are vacant;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that all properties heretofore used for negro school purposes, excepting Plains Negro Junior High School, now being vacant, they are hereby declared not necessary or convenient for school purposes, and that such persons as hold reversionary interest in said properties may make claim thereto, the same having been abandoned for school purposes, and that the following properties to which the Board of Education holds the fee simple title shall be sold upon sealed bids and conveyed to the purchasers by quitclaim deed after advertisement in the Times-Recorder newspaper once a week for two weeks, provided, however, that the Board of Education shall reserve the right to reject or accept bids in its sole discretion and to sell and convey such properties to whomever it shall elect the same as if such sale were private. . . .

Note: Jimmy Carter moved to approve this resolution, and it was approved by the board at the February 4th meeting. The resolution represents the Sumter County School Board's commitment to sweeping away the remnants of the older black school order to better equalize conditions.

Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, February 4, 1958

Documents and Images: Reactions from Sumter County and Southwest Georgia to the US Supreme Court Ruling on Racial Segregation in Public Schools

Figure 5.2. Local Reaction to *Brown*, 1954



Weather

Americus Times-Recorder

AMERICUS
THE GEM OF GEORGIA

AMERICUS, GEORGIA, MONDAY, MAY 17, 1954

PRICE FIVE CENTS

SEGREGATION IS DENIED

Moultrie Killer Of Four Persons Taken In Swamp

Negro Hurried To State Prison For Safekeeping

Big Group Asked At Milk Meeting To Discuss Prices

More Argument This Fall On How, When To Start

By PAUL M. YOST

STATE LEADERS THINKS DECISION BRINGS ISSUES

Dien Bien Phu Survivors Relate Fall Of Fortress

Ordered to Fight Long as Possible

STEVENSON LEAVES THE HOSPITAL

101 Local Pupils Suffering Illness In Schools Today

Happy Tietjen Gets Scholarship

Weather
Cloudy and Mild

Beaten Atlanta Writer Wins First-Place Award

Clarence Graddick First In Sports

Bad Check Artist Caught In City

Chamber Groups Report Progress

French Might Resume Bombing Airstrip at Fort

Negro Is Killed, Two Are Injured In Local Wreck

Americus Negro Shot Early Today

Leslie Swimming Pool Will Open

Methodist Men's Club Meets Tonight

Urgent Appeal Is Made For Blood Donors Here

Mrs. Susie H. Lee Passes On Sunday

Schools Budget Session Tonight

BULLETIN

Ike Bars Gov. Officials From Telling Probers About Army Row Knowledge

Americus Times-Recorder, May 17, 1954, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 5.2. (cont'd)



Weather

Americus Times-Recorder

AMERICUS
THE GEM OF GEORGIA

AMERICUS, GEORGIA, TUESDAY, MAY 18, 1954

PRICE FIVE CENTS

State Officials Hint At Open Defiance Of Decision Outlawing Segregation

RIFLE EXAMINED

Southern Leaders Working On Issue

Talmadge Most Outspoken On Segregation Plan

11 More Cases Reported Today In Epidemic Here

CHAMPION NEWS WRITERS

Governor Recalls Earlier Occasion State Made Dare

Negro Admits Killing Two White Benefactors

Milking Chores Caused Murders

Raids Resumed On Road Route For Red Wounded

Perfect Record For 26 Lions

Superior Court To Open Monday

Groups Appointed To Study Budget

Farmers Urged To Return Cards

Court Decision Confronts States With Big Problems

Local Cancer Unit Education Program Planned

Segregation End Still Far Away

U.S. Sure Moscow To Blame For New Costa Rican Chaos

Cloudy and Mild

Move Started To Re-elect Herman

James L. Suttles Will Be Honored

4-H Pig Scramble Planned Here At Livestock Barn

Smith Third In Grazing Contest

Civic Clubs Hear Appeals For Blood

Little Prospect That Ike Will Change Order Which Led To Hearings Halting

Predicted Sessions Will Never Resume

Vietminh Charge French Sabotaged Troop Plans

For the Removal Of Wounded From Fallen Fortress

Americus Times-Recorder, May 18, 1954



Local Leaders Show Mixed Reaction To Court Outlawing Of Segregation

The Supreme Court ruling this week abolishing segregation in the nation's schools received a calm to cool reception in this Southwest Georgia section.

To many staunch Southerners it might have appeared "too calm", however it was the general feeling of most of the citizenry that a "wait and see" attitude should be adopted, pending the final ruling of the hight court tribunal this Fall or even months and years later.

At any rate, no formal action has been taken by either white or colored officials here to map plans on the resulting opinion.

Local public officials readily voiced their opinions on the topic when queried.

Said James W. Smith, judge of the Americus City Court: "The Supreme Court cannot seem to pass on anything in which politics is not included. If they (justices) can over-rule a Supreme Court decision which has been the law for 50 years then they should over-rule their action of this week.

"If they don't, then we should do away with Congress and let the Supreme Court be Congress and the Supreme Court both.

And from Charles Burgamy, solicitor-general of the Southwest Judicial Circuit: "I think it (the ruling) is strictly a political decision and the Supreme Court does not have the right to make laws which in this case they are trying to do.

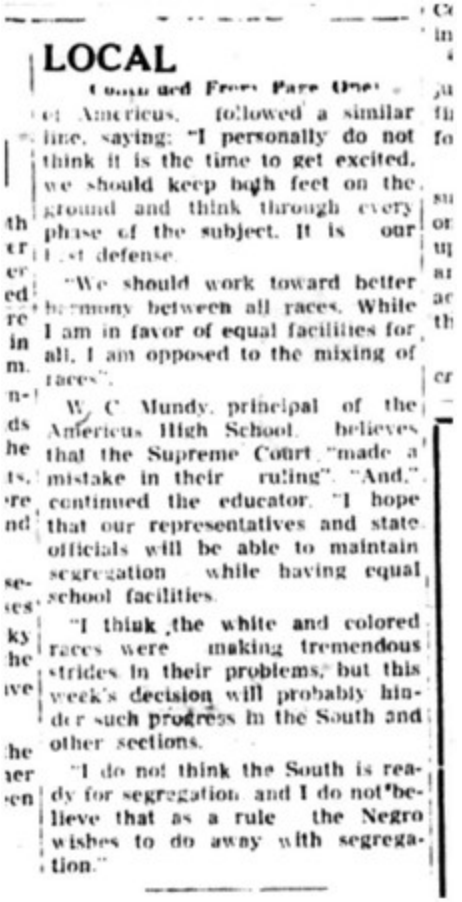
"I don't care what the Supreme Court says, schools in the state of Georgia will always be segregated regardless of what it says.

"The court is trying to take away the states' rights by making such a rule which they have no right to do."

Rep. Sherrard Horne stated: "I think the decision has upset everyone, but we must keep a level head and try to find a plan to maintain separate schools. I think it would be more acceptable to both white and colored to keep segregation."

George Tesford, mayor pro-tem

(Continued On Page Five)



LOCAL

Continued From Page One

of Americus, followed a similar line, saying: "I personally do not think it is the time to get excited, we should keep both feet on the ground and think through every phase of the subject. It is our best defense.

"We should work toward better harmony between all races. While I am in favor of equal facilities for all, I am opposed to the mixing of races".

W. C. Mundy, principal of the Americus High School, believes that the Supreme Court "made a mistake in their ruling". "And," continued the educator, "I hope that our representatives and state officials will be able to maintain segregation while having equal school facilities.

"I think the white and colored races were making tremendous strides in their problems, but this week's decision will probably hinder such progress in the South and other sections.

"I do not think the South is ready for segregation and I do not believe that as a rule the Negro wishes to do away with segregation."

Americus Times-Recorder, May 20, 1954

Figure 5.2. (cont'd)



Griffin Starts Campaign With Blast At S. Court

Charges Justices Want Intermarriage

ATLANTA (AP)—Lt. Gov. Marvin Griffin has set off his formal campaign for the governorship with a verbal blast at the U. S. Supreme Court and a charge that the justices want racial intermarriage.

Griffin announced his candidacy yesterday. He promised to defend and preserve school segregation and the county unit system.

The lieutenant governor, who declared weeks ago that he would be a candidate for governor, charged that the Supreme Court has adopted the views of Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

He said White thinks racial intermarriage is "the only answer to the segregation problem."

Griffin said the Supreme Court's statement in the segregation cases indicates the justices believe "the hearts and minds of white and Negro children should beat in unison." He added: "That means only one thing—intermarriage. We shall not tolerate this vile and despicable [illegible] in Georgia."

The gubernatorial announcement was televised by stations in Atlanta, Albany, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, Rome, Savannah Chattanooga Jacksonville Anderson S. C., and Greneville, S. C.

Mrs. Griffin and their 18-year-old son, Sam, appeared on the program with the lieutenant governor.

Speaking of the county unit system, Griffin said: "I will fight this summer to preserve this great tradition against those who would destroy it."

He said he will work for better schools in Georgia and will seek to create an authority to finance farm-to-market roads.

The 46-year-old editor and publisher of the Bainbridge Post-Searchlight, first was elected lieutenant governor in 1948, when he carried 157 of the state's 159 counties. He was re-elected in 1950, carrying 155 counties.

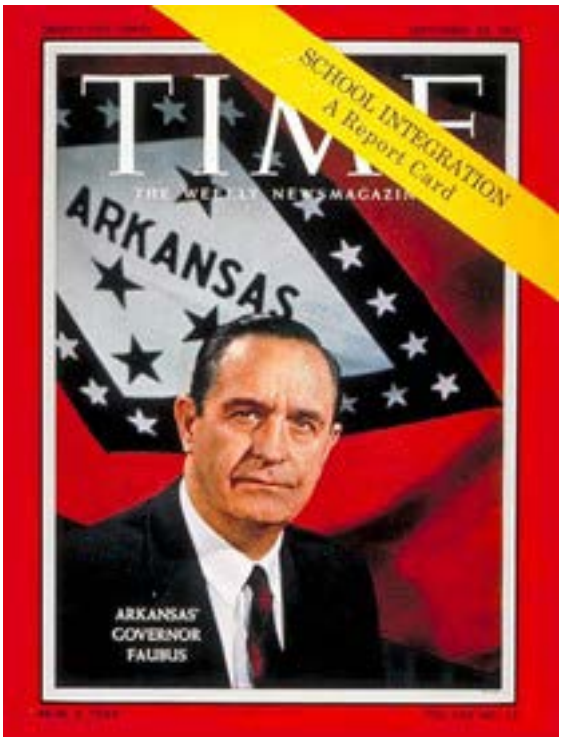
Griffin served in the House of Representatives from Decatur County and later was executive secretary to Gov. E. D. Rivers.

After four years of military service—part of it in Pacific combat—he became adjutant general.

Americus Times-Recorder, May 25, 1954

Documents:
1957 Crisis in Little Rock: *Time* Magazine Covers

Figure 5.3. Massive Resistance to Brown: The Little Rock Nine and School Desegregation in Arkansas



Front Cover of *Time* magazine,September 23, 1957

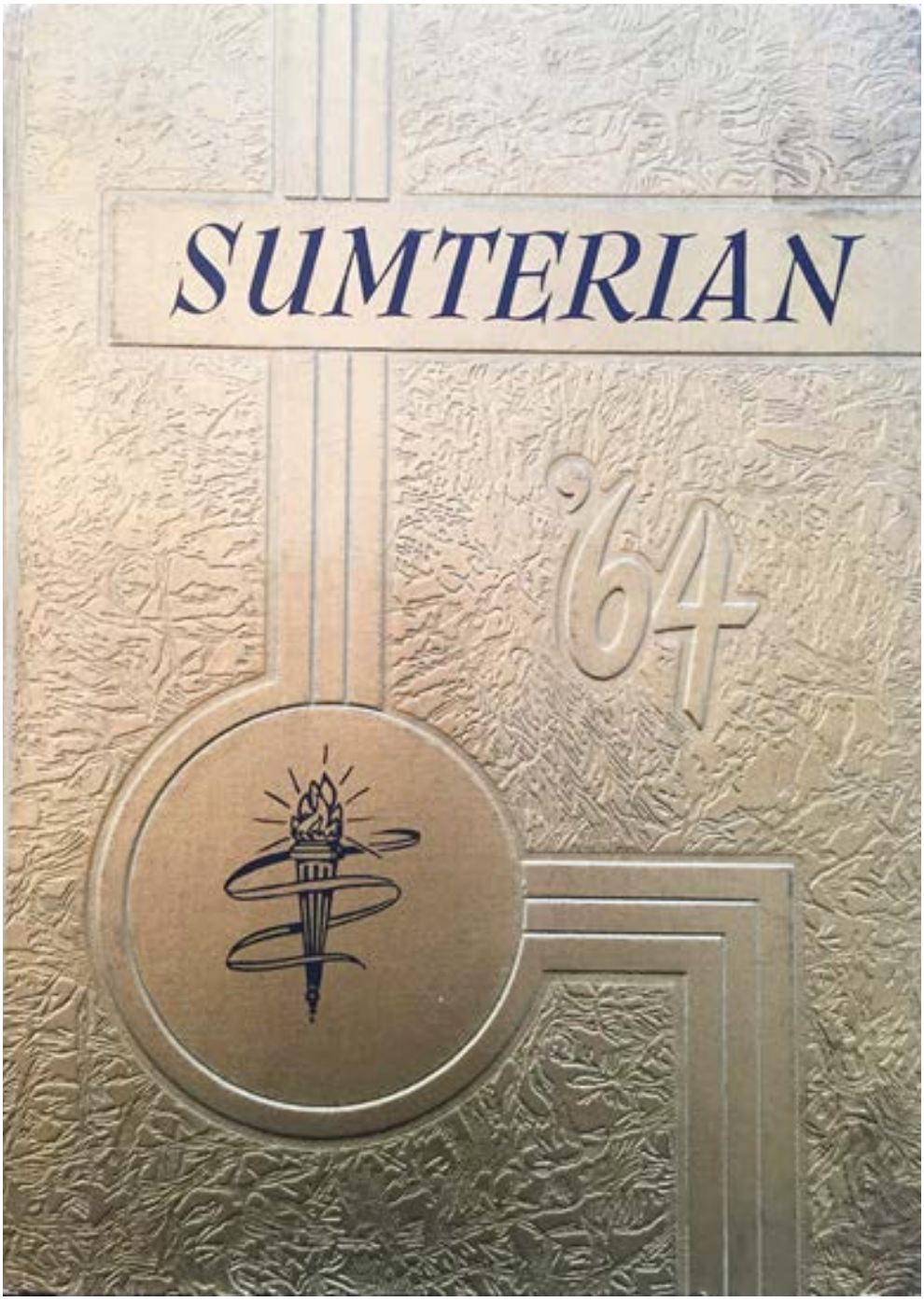


Front Cover of *Time* magazine, October 7, 1957

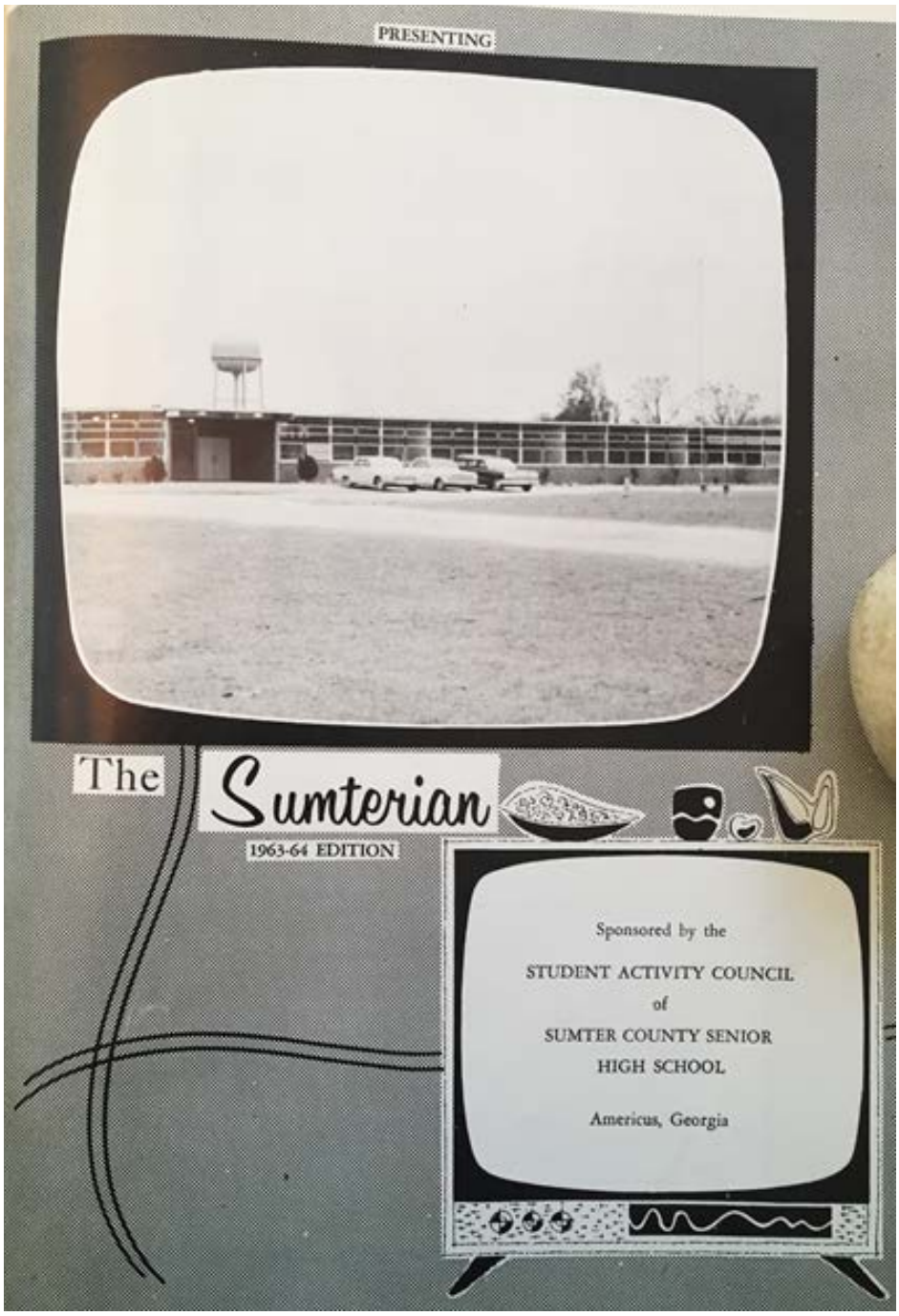
Figure Gallery

Figure 5.4. Yearbook Images: Ten Years after *Brown*—Sumter High School, 1963–1964

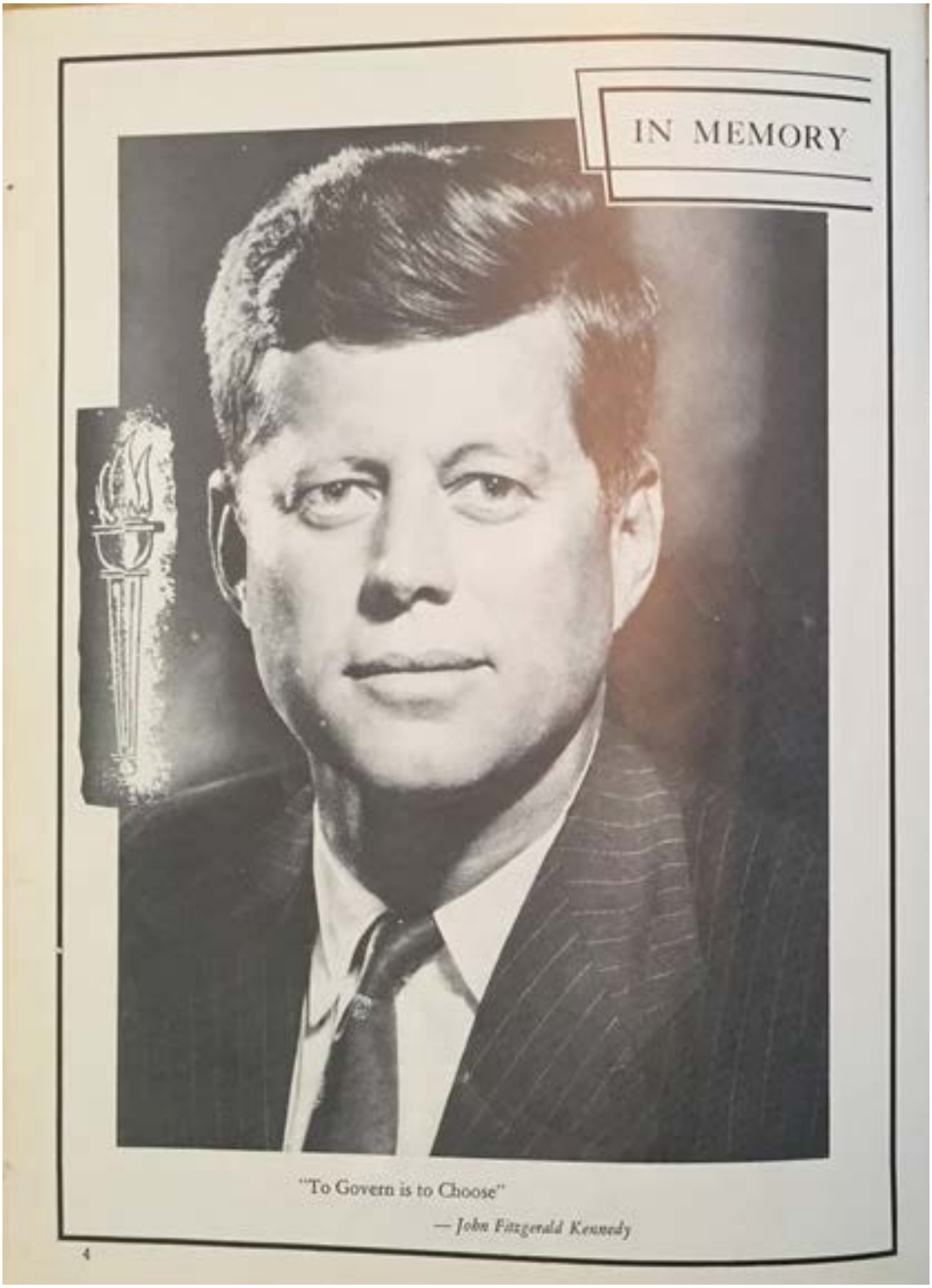
1963–1964 Sumter High School Annual



Courtesy of William Powell


PRESENTING
The Sumterian
1963-64 EDITION
Sponsored by the
STUDENT ACTIVITY COUNCIL
of
SUMTER COUNTY SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL
Americus, Georgia

In Memory of John F. Kennedy





PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

Those who contributed to this book are to be congratulated. It reflects in many ways accomplishments resulting from the type of training that we are trying to give you.

Our charge and responsibilities are to see that all children of all people are educated, that the worth and dignity of every child is recognized and that respect for constructive learning and scholarship is maintained. We maintain a determination that you will face your future with heads held high and with minds that are free.

J. L. BOZEMAN

Sumter High School Faculty, 1963–1964—Legacies of the HBCUs



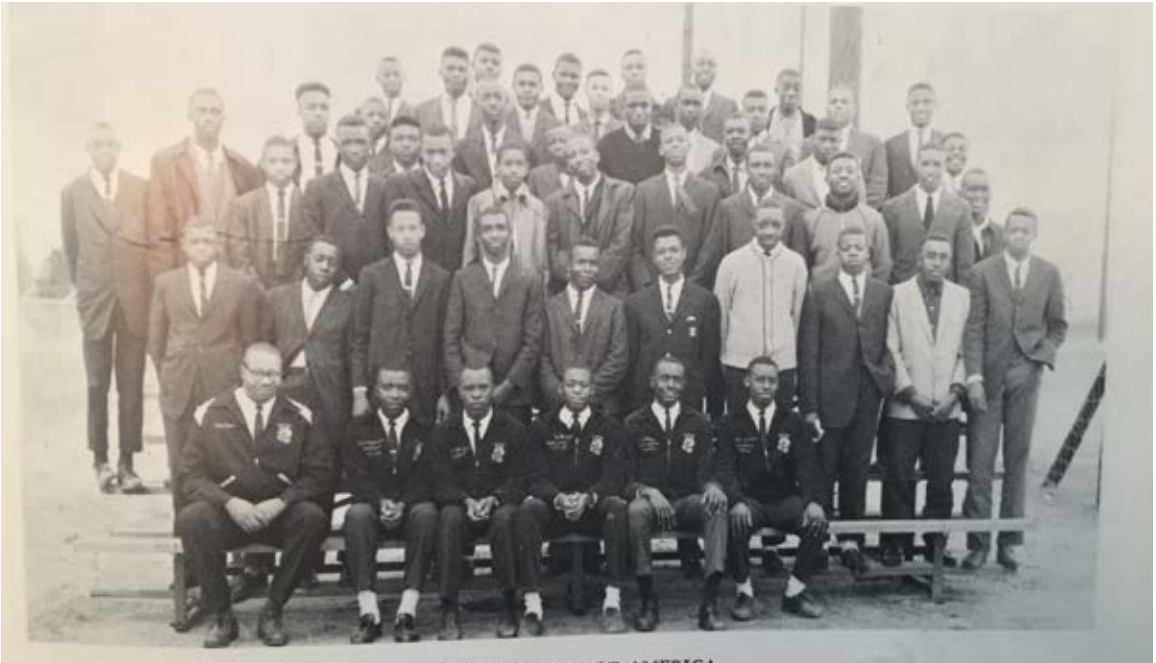
*ALBANY STATE
*ATLANTA
*CLARK
*DELAWARE STATE
*FORT VALLEY STATE
*HAMPTON
*MOREHOUSE
*NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE
*SAVANNAH STATE
*SPELMAN
*TUSKEGEE

Sumter High School—New Homemakers of America



NEW HOMEMAKERS OF AMERICA
Mrs. Ann Gibbons, Advisor

Sumter High School—New Farmers of America

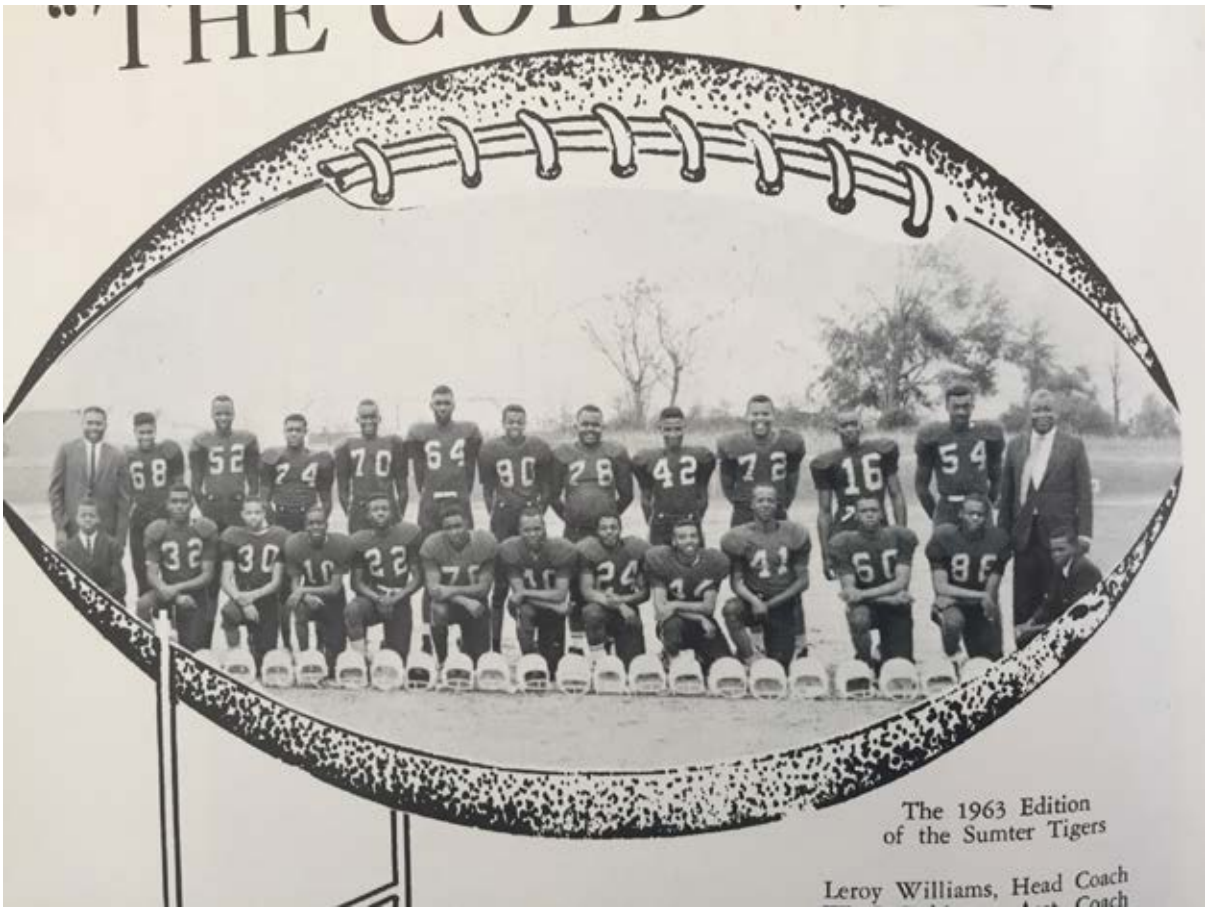


NEW FARMERS OF AMERICA

Officers (seated) Mr. Harden Ragin, advisor; Tommy Brown, president; Tommy Dodson, vice-pres.; Johnny Hawkins, watchman; Phillip Walton, reporter; and Thomas Jordan, treasurer.

35

Sumter High School Football, 1963

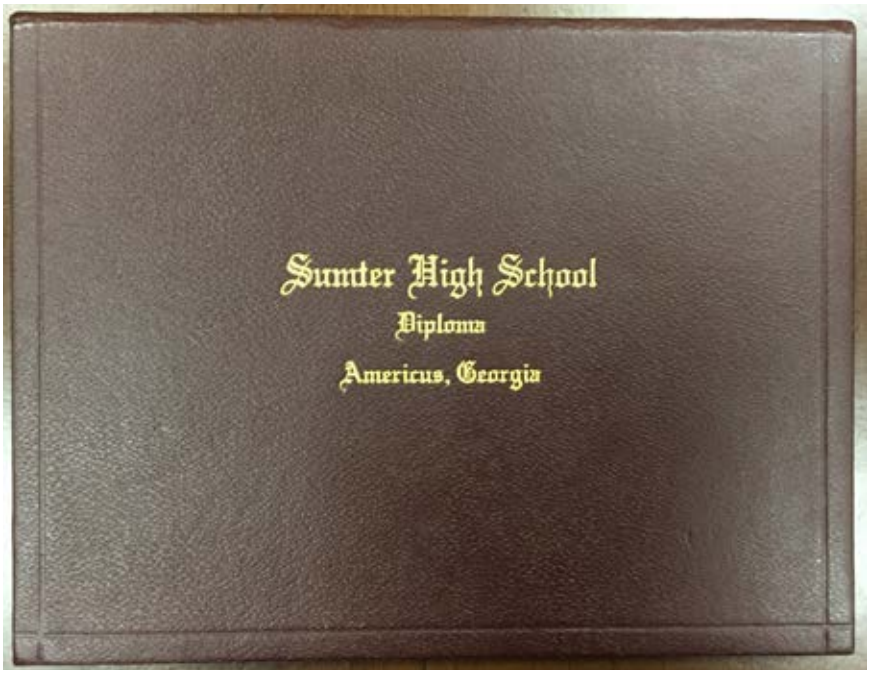


Sumter High School Senior Class of ’64—Surnames J to S



Figure 5.5. Sumter High School Graduation Artifacts

1962 Sumter High School Diploma



Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard

1962 Sumter High School Diploma, Signed by Jimmy Carter



Sumter

High School

Americus, Georgia

This Certifies That

Lillie Belle Mayes

Has satisfactorily completed a Course of Study prescribed for Graduation from this School and is therefore awarded this

Diploma

Given this fifth day of June, nineteen hundred and sixty-two.

STATE OF GEORGIA ACCREDITED SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 1776

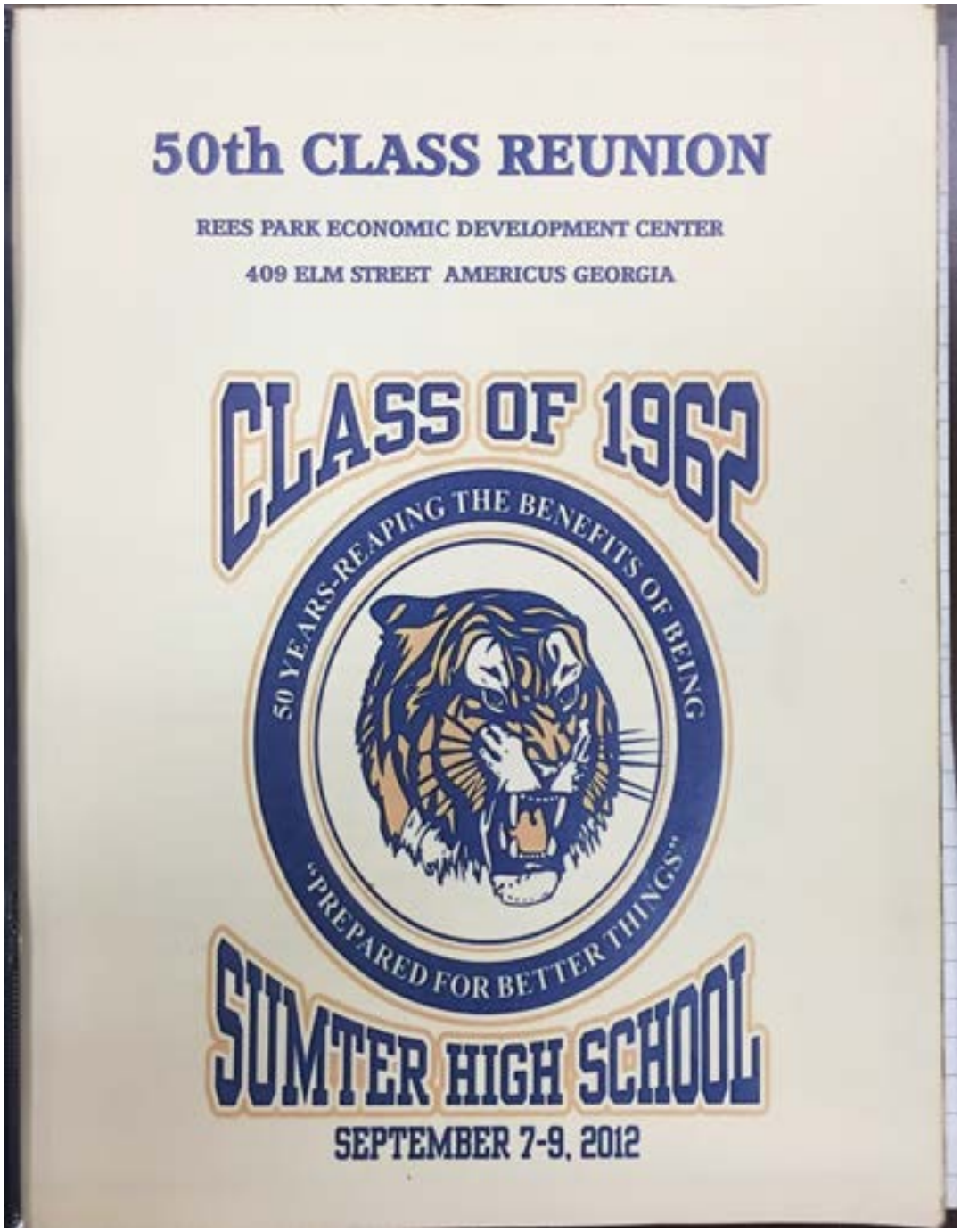
W. A. Fay
Superintendent

Jimmy Carter
Chairman of Board

J. L. Bozeman
Principal

Secretary of Board

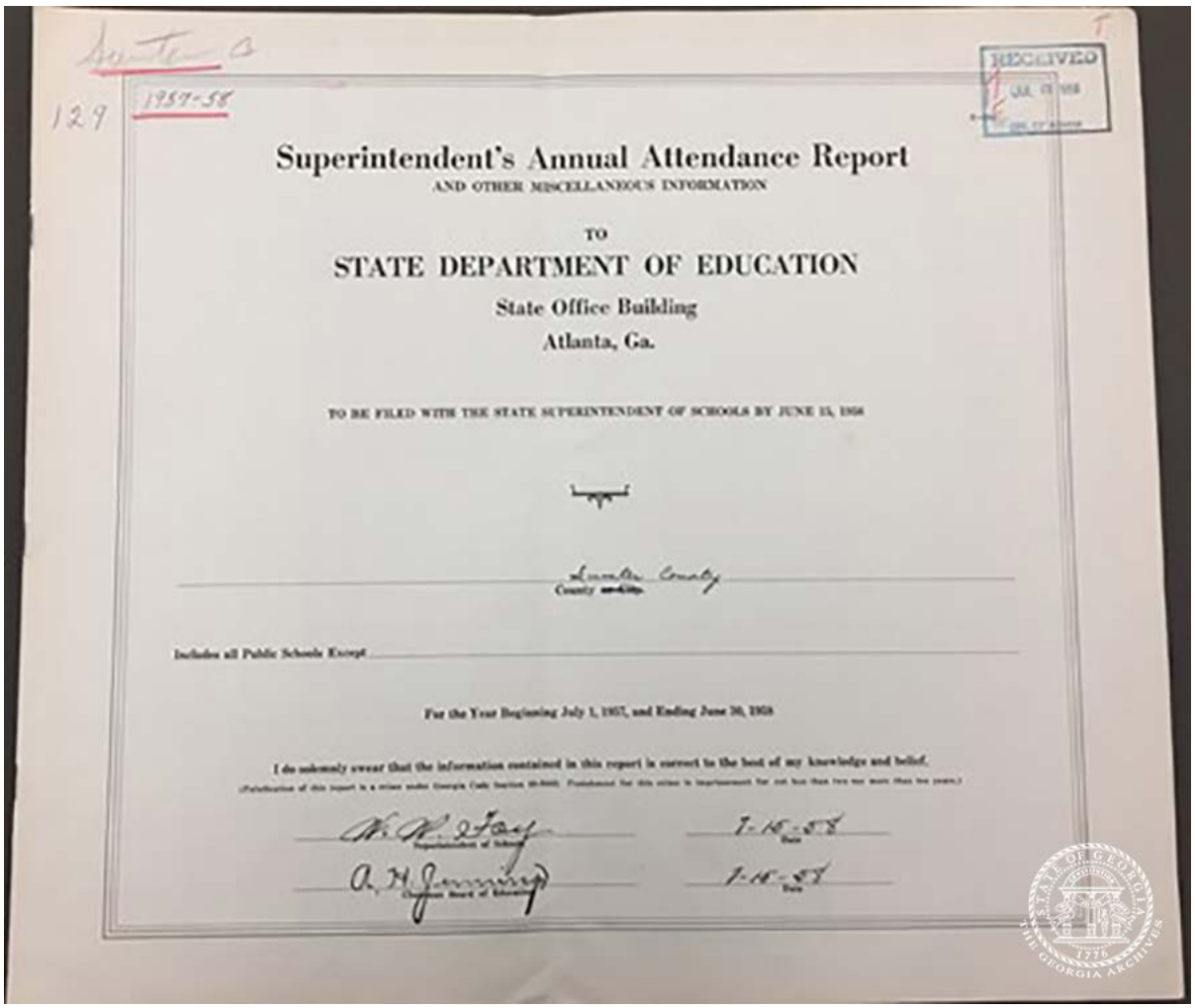
Sumter High School Class of '62: 50-Year Reunion Program



Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard

Figure 5.6. Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to Georgia State Department of Education, 1957–1958— Select Data from the "White Schools" and "Negro Schools" Sections

Title Page of the Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report, 1957–1958



Sumter Co
127 1957-58

RECEIVED
JUL

Superintendent's Annual Attendance Report
AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

TO

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
State Office Building
Atlanta, Ga.

TO BE FILED WITH THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS BY JUNE 15, 1958

Sumter County
County

Includes all Public Schools Except

For the Year Beginning July 1, 1957, and Ending June 30, 1958

I do solemnly swear that the information contained in this report is correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

W. R. Fay — 1-16-58
Superintendent of Schools — Date

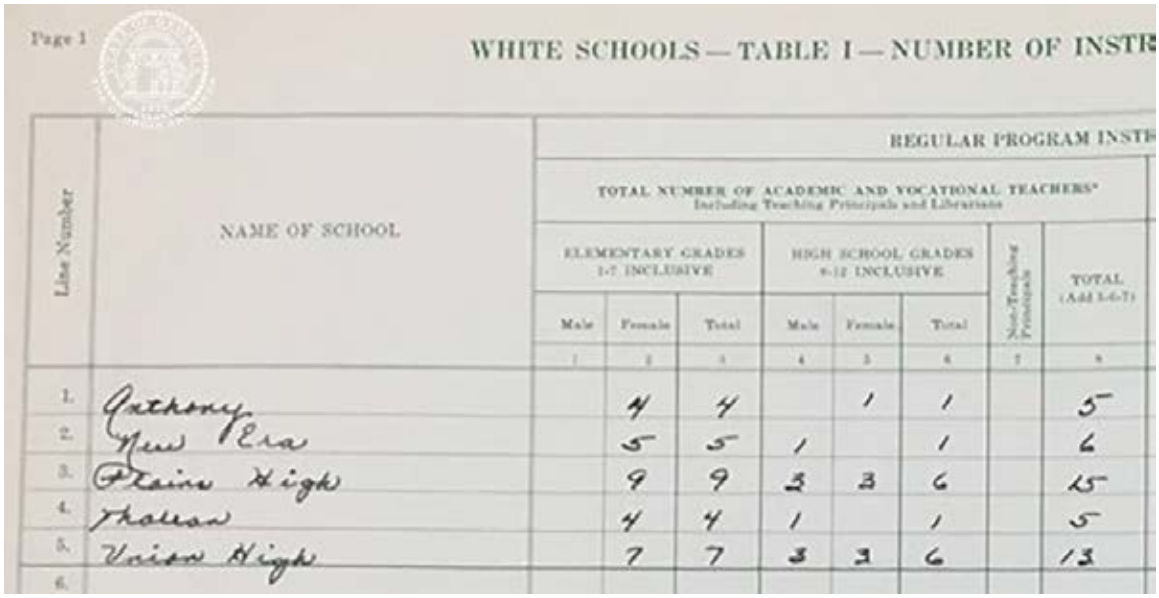
A. H. Jennings — 1-16-58
Chairman Board of Education — Date

THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES 1776

Georgia State Archives

Equalization Era: List of Sumter County "White Schools" and "Total Number of Teachers," 1957–1958

For the 1957–58 school year, there were five "white schools" in the Sumter County school system. Anthony, New Era, and Thalean served grades 1–8. Plains High School and Union High School served grades 1–12. There were forty-four faculty members.



Page 1

WHITE SCHOOLS — TABLE I — NUMBER OF INSTR

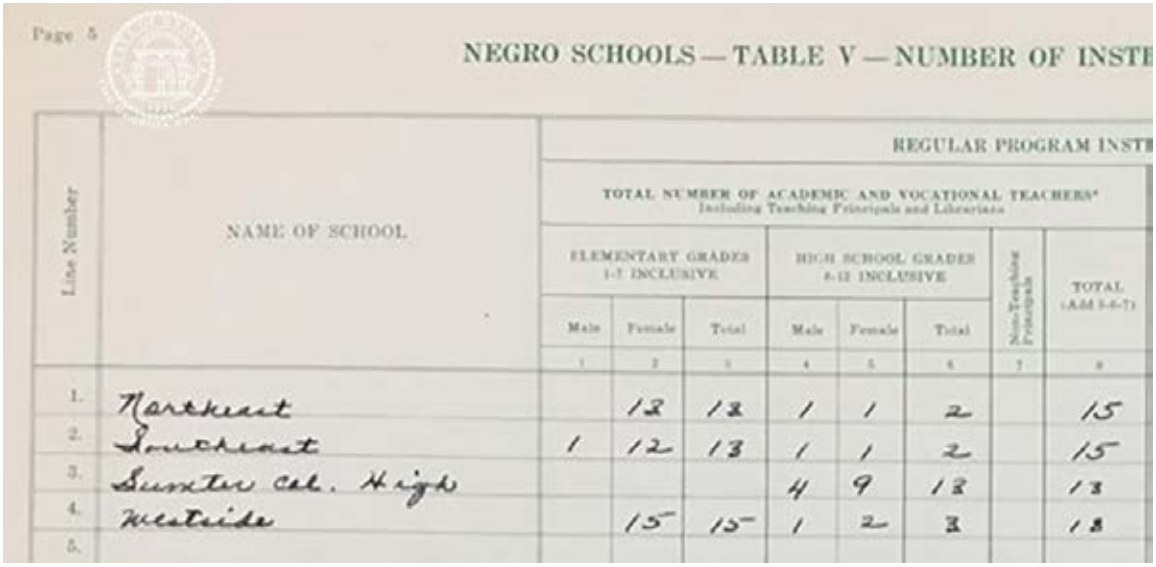
REGULAR PROGRAM INSTR

Line Number	NAME OF SCHOOL	TOTAL NUMBER OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL TEACHERS* Including Teaching Principals and Librarians							
		ELEMENTARY GRADES 1-7 INCLUSIVE			HIGH SCHOOL GRADES 8-12 INCLUSIVE			Non-Teaching Principals	TOTAL (Add 3-6-7)
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Anthony		4	4		1	1		5
2.	New Era		5	5	1		1		6
3.	Plains High		9	9	3	3	6		15
4.	Thalean		4	4	1		1		5
5.	Union High		7	7	3	3	6		13
6.									

Georgia State Archives

Equalization Era: List of Sumter County "Negro Schools" and "Total Number of Teachers," 1957–1958

For the 1957–58 school year, the twenty-four "negro schools" in the Sumter County school system were consolidated into just four schools. Northeast, Southeast, and Westside served grades 1–8. Sumter High School served grades 10–12. The Staley school in the city system serviced all ninth graders in the city and the county. There were sixty-one faculty members.



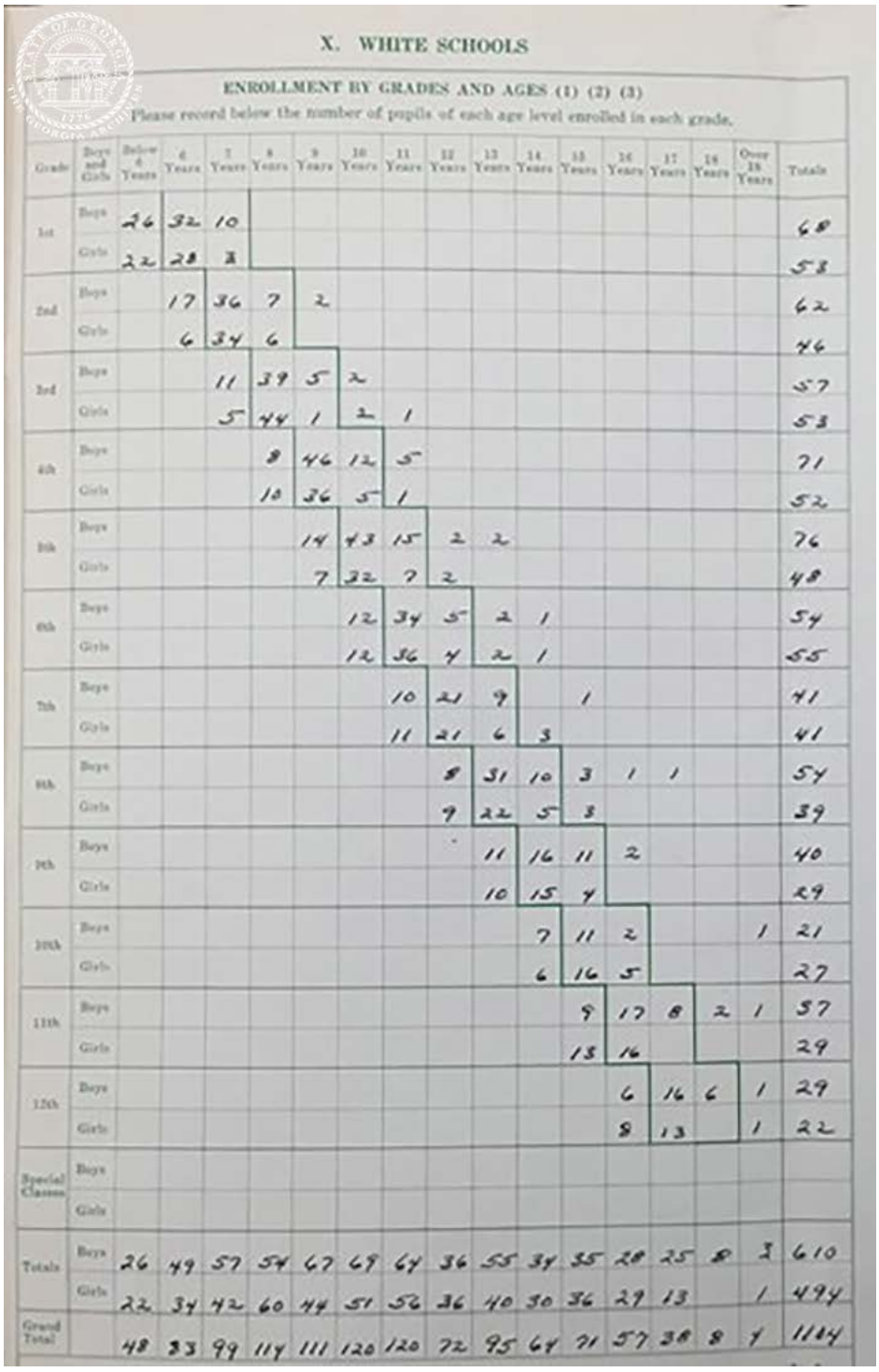
Page 5

NEGRO SCHOOLS — TABLE V — NUMBER OF INSTR

Line Number	NAME OF SCHOOL	REGULAR PROGRAM INSTR							
		TOTAL NUMBER OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL TEACHERS* Including Teaching Principals and Librarians							
		ELEMENTARY GRADES 1-7 INCLUSIVE			HIGH SCHOOL GRADES 8-12 INCLUSIVE			Non-Teaching Principals	TOTAL (Add 3-6-7)
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Northeast		12	13	1	1	2		15
2.	Southeast	1	12	13	1	1	2		15
3.	Sumter Cath. High				4	9	13		13
4.	Westside		15	15	1	2	3		18
5.									

Georgia State Archives

"Normal Pupil Progress" for "White Schools"— Student Enrollment by Grades and Ages, 1957–1958



X. WHITE SCHOOLS

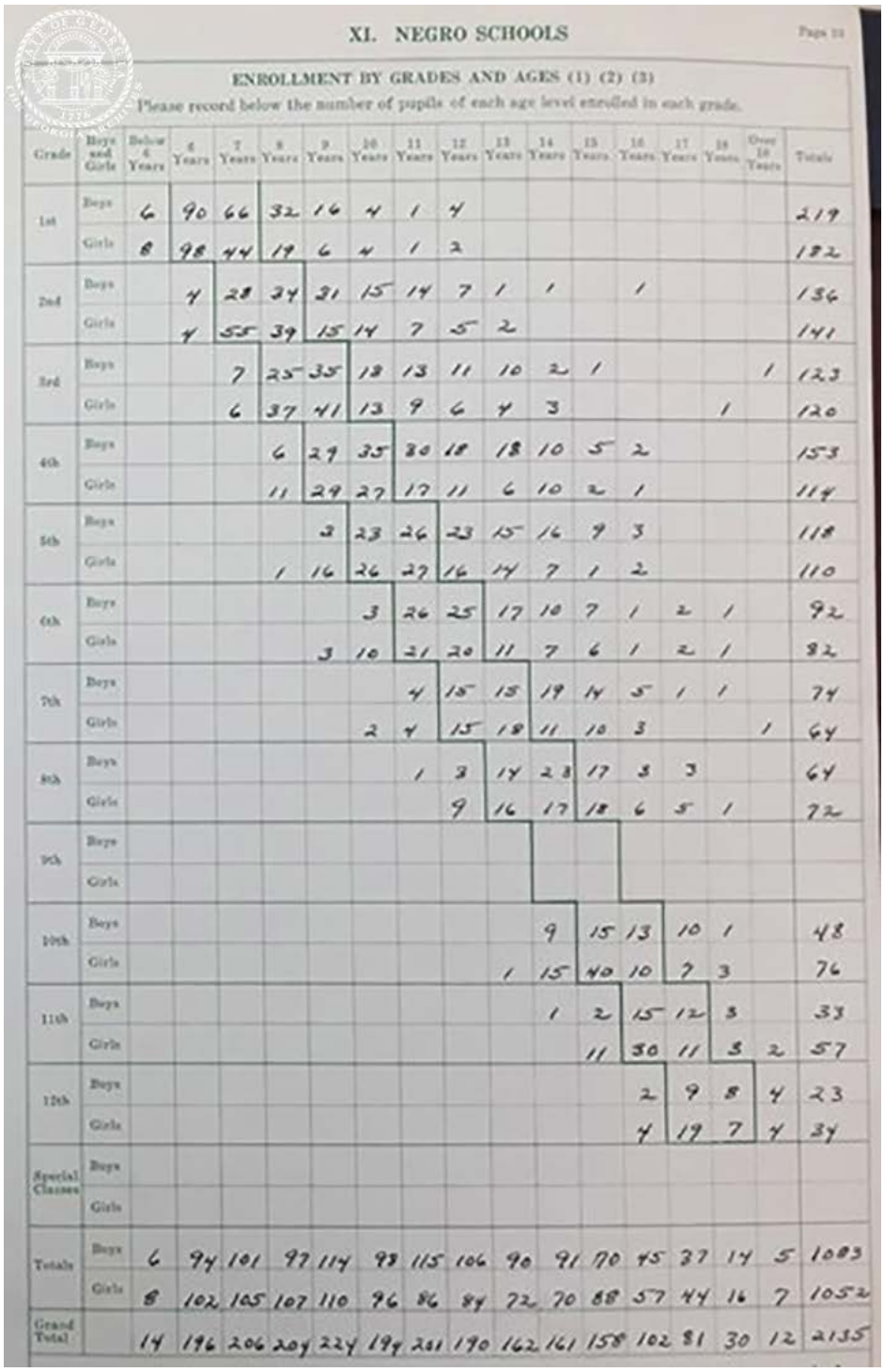
ENROLLMENT BY GRADES AND AGES (1) (2) (3)

Please record below the number of pupils of each age level enrolled in each grade.

Grade	Boys and Girls	Below 6 Years	6 Years	7 Years	8 Years	9 Years	10 Years	11 Years	12 Years	13 Years	14 Years	15 Years	16 Years	17 Years	18 Years	Over 18 Years	Totals
1st	Boys	26	32	10													68
	Girls	22	28	8													58
2nd	Boys		17	36	7	2											62
	Girls		6	34	6												46
3rd	Boys			11	39	5	2										57
	Girls			5	44	1	2	1									53
4th	Boys				8	46	12	5									71
	Girls				10	36	5	1									52
5th	Boys					14	43	15	2	2							76
	Girls					7	32	7	2								48
6th	Boys						12	34	5	2	1						54
	Girls						12	36	4	2	1						55
7th	Boys							10	21	9		1					41
	Girls							11	21	6	3						41
8th	Boys								8	31	10	3	1	1			54
	Girls								9	22	5	3					39
9th	Boys									11	16	11	2				40
	Girls									10	15	4					29
10th	Boys										7	11	2			1	21
	Girls										6	16	5				27
11th	Boys											9	17	8	2	1	57
	Girls											13	16				29
12th	Boys												6	16	6	1	29
	Girls												8	13		1	22
Special Classes	Boys																
	Girls																
Totals	Boys	26	49	57	54	67	69	64	36	55	34	35	28	25	8	3	610
	Girls	22	34	42	60	44	51	56	36	40	30	36	29	13		1	494
Grand Total		48	83	99	114	111	120	120	72	95	64	71	57	38	8	4	1104

Georgia State Archives

"Normal Pupil Progress" for "Negro Schools"— Student Enrollment by Grades and Ages, 1957–1958



XI. NEGRO SCHOOLS

ENROLLMENT BY GRADES AND AGES (1) (2) (3)

Please record below the number of pupils of each age level enrolled in each grade.

Grade	Boys and Girls	Below 6 Years	6 Years	7 Years	8 Years	9 Years	10 Years	11 Years	12 Years	13 Years	14 Years	15 Years	16 Years	17 Years	18 Years	Over 18 Years	Totals
1st	Boys	6	90	66	32	16	4	1	4								219
	Girls	8	98	44	19	6	4	1	2								182
2nd	Boys		4	28	34	31	15	14	7	1	1		1				136
	Girls		4	55	39	15	14	7	5	2							141
3rd	Boys			7	25	35	18	13	11	10	2	1				1	123
	Girls			6	37	41	13	9	6	4	3				1		120
4th	Boys				6	29	35	30	18	18	10	5	2				153
	Girls				11	29	27	17	11	6	10	2	1				114
5th	Boys					2	23	26	23	15	16	9	3				118
	Girls				1	16	26	27	16	14	7	1	2				110
6th	Boys						3	26	25	17	10	7	1	2	1		92
	Girls					3	10	21	20	11	7	6	1	2	1		82
7th	Boys							4	15	15	19	14	5	1	1		74
	Girls						2	4	15	18	11	10	3			1	64
8th	Boys							1	3	14	23	17	3	3			64
	Girls								9	16	17	18	6	5	1		72
9th	Boys																
	Girls																
10th	Boys										9	15	13	10	1		48
	Girls									1	15	40	10	7	3		76
11th	Boys										1	2	15	12	3		33
	Girls											11	30	11	3	2	57
12th	Boys												2	9	8	4	23
	Girls												4	19	7	4	34
Special Classes	Boys																
	Girls																
Totals	Boys	6	94	101	97	114	93	115	106	90	91	70	45	37	14	5	1083
	Girls	8	102	105	107	110	96	86	84	72	70	88	57	44	16	7	1052
Grand Total		14	196	206	204	224	189	201	190	162	161	158	102	81	30	12	2135

Georgia State Archives

Figure 5.7. County Equalization School—Westside (Plains): Aerial view



Sumter County Tax Assessor's Office, qPublic.net

Figure 5.7 (cont'd). County Equalization School—Westside (Plains): Inside a classroom





Photos by Caleb Daffron

Figure 5.7 (cont'd). County Equalization School—Westside (Plains): Inside the auditorium



Photos by Caleb Daffron

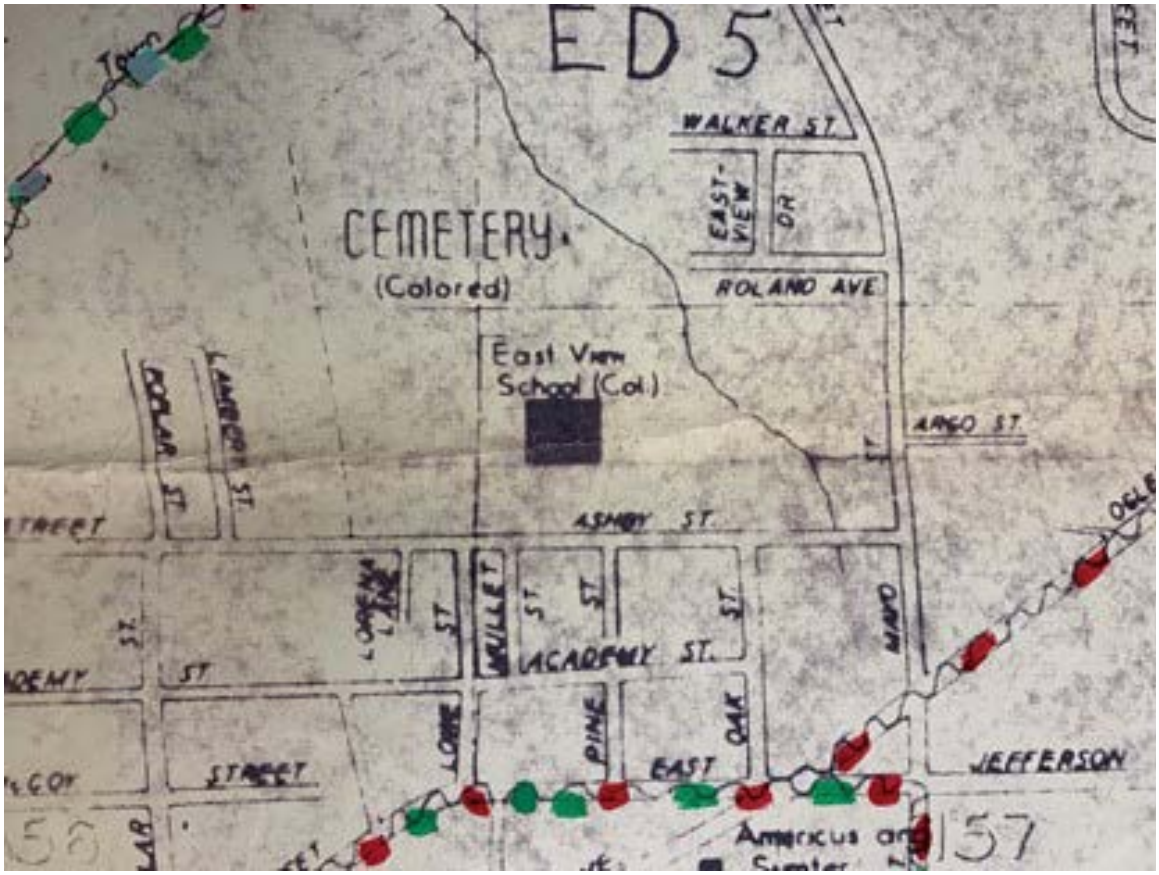
Figure 5.7 (cont'd). County Equalization School—Westside (Plains): Inside the restroom





Photos by Caleb Daffron

Figure 5.8. City Equalization School—Eastview (Americus): Map view of Eastview school site, 802 Ashby Street, Americus, Georgia



Official Map of the City of Americus, 1968
Sumter County Miscellaneous Maps
Juanita S. Brightwell Special Collections Room
Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 5.8 (cont'd). City Equalization School—Eastview (Americus): Classroom interior



Georgia Public Broadcasting

Figure 5.8 (cont'd). City Equalization School—Eastview (Americus): Aerial view



Sumter County Tax Assessor's Office, qPublic.net

Figure 5.9. Staley as a Junior High School: Selected articles from the May 1962 issue of the school newspaper, *Staley Hi-Lights*



STALEY HI-LIGHTS

VOLUME A—NUMBER 2 THE VOICE OF A. S. S. JR. HIGH May, 1962

Staley Welcomes A New Teacher

Miss E. J. Mills

Miss Mills' hobbies are the following: sewing, listening to music, and dancing. Her favorite colors are blue and yellow. Her favorite foods are chicken, ice cream, and cake.

We hope that the students of Staley will make her stay a pleasant and enjoyable one.

Recipe For Success

500 cups of determination
100 tablespoons of willingness to succeed
1000 cups of education
75 cups of good grades — a few dashes of personality
50 cups of reading knowledge
Combine the determination and willingness to succeed.
Sift together the education and

(Continued on Page Six)

STALEY HOLDS POPULARITY CONTEST

The members of the newspaper staff held a popularity contest. There were ten categories and the results are the following:

Most Popular Boy—Marcellus Hayes
Most Popular Girl—Selma Smith
Most Handsome Boy—Milton Gooch
Most Attractive Girl—Brenda Morgan
Most Studious Boy—Alvin Finch
Most Studious Girl—Jane Moore
Most Talented Boy—Allen Smith
Most Talented Girl—Mary Calloway
Neatest Boy—James Collins
Neatest Girl—Annie K. Brown
Most Humorous Boy—William Brown
Most Humorous Girl—Inez Leverette
Best Dressed Boy—James Collins
Best Dressed Girl—Mary Simpson
Best Boy Athlete—Marcellus Hayes
Best Girl Athlete—Willie M. Smith
Best All-Around Boy—Alvin Finch
Best All-Around Girl—Brenda
Most Talkative Boy—William Brown
Most Talkative Girl—Mary Calloway

When the winners of the popularity were interviewed, they told

(Continued on Page Six)

From The Principal's Desk

As we approach the end of this school year I wish to commend those students who have remained in school, and who have made outstanding achievements scholastically as well as in the various activities. I wish to congratulate the charter members of the National Junior Honor Society, and those students who were chosen as officers of the student council.

Within the next few weeks we will pull down the curtain on another school year. And as you leave for your summer vacations, I sincerely hope that you will

(Continued on Page Six)

WINNERS

PLANS OF THE SENIORS

The seniors of Hunter High School were interviewed to see what they plan to do next September. Here are some of their interesting answers:

President of Senior Class — Melvin Douglas — I plan to attend Albany State College and study business administration.
Vice-President — Johnny B. Perry — My plans are to attend Savannah State College and major in Secondary English.
Secretary — Alfie Wade — I plan to go to Grady Hospital in Atlanta. I would like to become a nurse.
Chaplain — Ola M. Champion — I plan to attend Monroe Vocational School to become a beautician.
Historian — Gloria Wise — I

Delores Bonnigal — Asst. Sec.

(Continued On Page Six)

Staley Celebrates Career Month

By LEE EDDIE BALDWIN

Career month was observed at Staley. The faculty members placed a table in the hall with information pertaining to many careers and occupations.

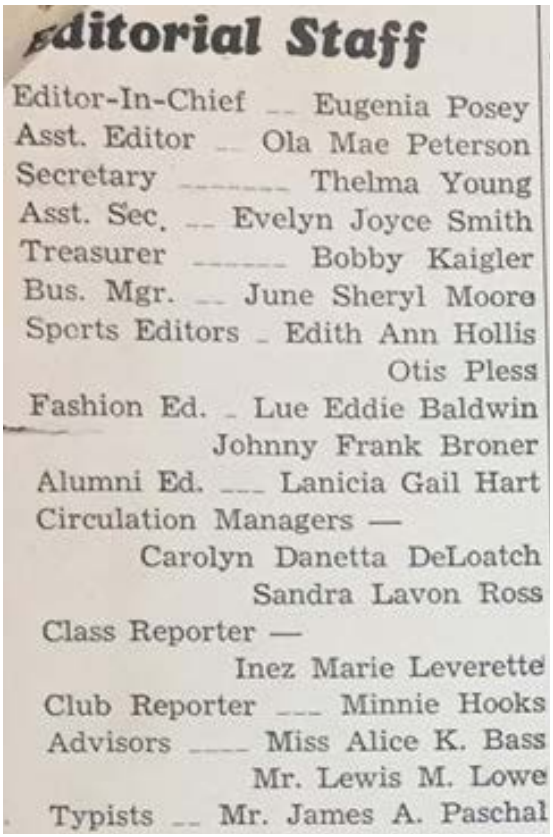
The table found in the hall had pamphlets and book covers pertaining to many vocations and job aspects for the future. Students were encouraged by their counselors and the librarian to secure information about the career in which they were interested.

Ninth Grade English Students wrote reports on the careers in which they were interested. They later gave oral reports to their fellow classmates.

We all hope that the occupations chosen by you will be very successful and enjoyable. If you haven't chosen a career, we hope that you will give it much consideration.

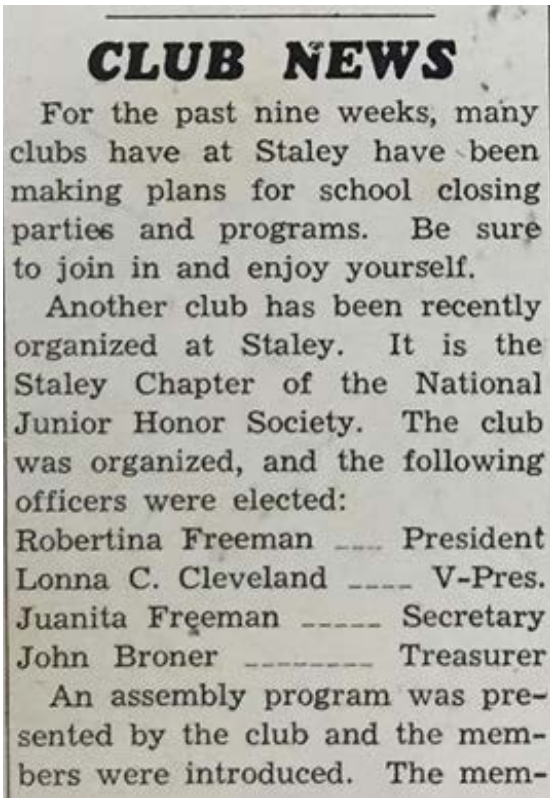
Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard

Figure 5.9. (cont'd)



Editorial Staff

Editor-In-Chief __ Eugenia Posey
Asst. Editor __ Ola Mae Peterson
Secretary _____ Thelma Young
Asst. Sec. __ Evelyn Joyce Smith
Treasurer _____ Bobby Kaigler
Bus. Mgr. __ June Sheryl Moore
Sports Editors _ Edith Ann Hollis
Otis Pless
Fashion Ed. _ Lue Eddie Baldwin
Johnny Frank Broner
Alumni Ed. ___ Lanicia Gail Hart
Circulation Managers —
Carolyn Danetta DeLoatch
Sandra Lavon Ross
Class Reporter —
Inez Marie Leverette
Club Reporter ___ Minnie Hooks
Advisors ____ Miss Alice K. Bass
Mr. Lewis M. Lowe
Typists __ Mr. James A. Paschal



CLUB NEWS

For the past nine weeks, many clubs have at Staley have been making plans for school closing parties and programs. Be sure to join in and enjoy yourself.

Another club has been recently organized at Staley. It is the Staley Chapter of the National Junior Honor Society. The club was organized, and the following officers were elected:

Robertina Freeman ___ President
Lonna C. Cleveland ____ V-Pres.
Juanita Freeman _____ Secretary
John Broner _____ Treasurer

An assembly program was presented by the club and the members were introduced. The mem-

A HINT TO THE WISE

In this world of ours, today's youth are confronted with many problems. They cannot challenge these problems without completing school. Their highest aim should be succeeding by accomplishing the highest goal of life.

Youth are on the "new frontier" of life. They are facing complicated problems that can only be solved by using and exerting all of their potential knowledge. All good jobs employ those persons who are best qualified. The unqualified youth will be lost on this "new frontier."

Most of our success can be found by remaining in school and doing our very best. Work with a firm determination and many of our problems will be solved.

Lunchroom Participation Increases

By OLA MAE PETERSON

Staley has been most grateful with the success of lunchroom participation during the last two months. Each class has its choice of menus every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Many tasty meals were prepared by our cooks, Mrs. Pinky Linder and Mrs. Bennie Bell.

One of the tasties-meals prepared was Barbecued Pork on Buns, Green Peas, Carrot Salad, Jello, Plain Cake, and milk. Most of the students have given commendable cooperation during this period. Before it is complete, we would like to have 100% eating in our lunchroom. We are grateful for the participation and hope it continues.

FACULTY SAYINGS

Mrs. L. Barber: "Study hard and do your best."
Miss C. Traylor: "If you don't be quiet, you will be in here until 4:00 o'clock."
Miss E. Richardson: "All right! Cut that out."
Mrs. P. Thomas: "If you don't sit down, I'll knock you down."
Rev. R. Freeman: "There it is now, miss it today."
Mrs. M. Alexander: "Be quiet."
Miss D. Jones: "It isn't a big thing, but it might grow."
Mr. O. Carter: "I guess so."
Mrs. M. Napier: "You'll be here next year."
Miss A. Bass: "Don't use that incorrect English in here!"
Mr. L. Lowe: "Hello, friends."
Mr. J. Paschal: "Have you read a good book lately?"
Miss Mills: "Please, be quiet."
Mr. D. DeLoatch: "May I help you?"

FASHIONS FOR BOYS

By McFARLEY and SAMPSON

Try these outfits and watch your step.

Our Algebra Class

Figure 5.10. County White Equalization School—Thalean (Americus): Aerial view

Not all equalization schools were black schools. About 40 percent of them were white. One of those schools was Thalean. It reopened in August 1957. Like Northeast, Southeast, Westside, and Eastview, the new Thalean was a modern school. For increased natural lighting, there were many rows of steel windows that could be opened to permit access to natural airflow. Classrooms were spacious and teachers had access to large horizontal chalkboards. These new schools also came with indoor plumbing, including restroom sinks, toilets, and urinals. The new Thalean school was located just to the north of the old school site. Both sites are located within the property boundaries below. The images on the subsequent pages are of the remaining 1957 structure, located on the west side of GA Highway 49 and to the north of Salters Mill Road.



Aerial view of Thalean school sites, Sumter County Tax Assessor's Office, qPublic.net

Figure 5.10 (cont'd). County White Equalization School—Thalean (Americus): School entrance





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 5.10 (cont'd). County White Equalization School—Thalean (Americus): Inside hallway and classroom





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 5.10 (cont'd). County White Equalization School—Thalean (Americus): Inside classroom





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

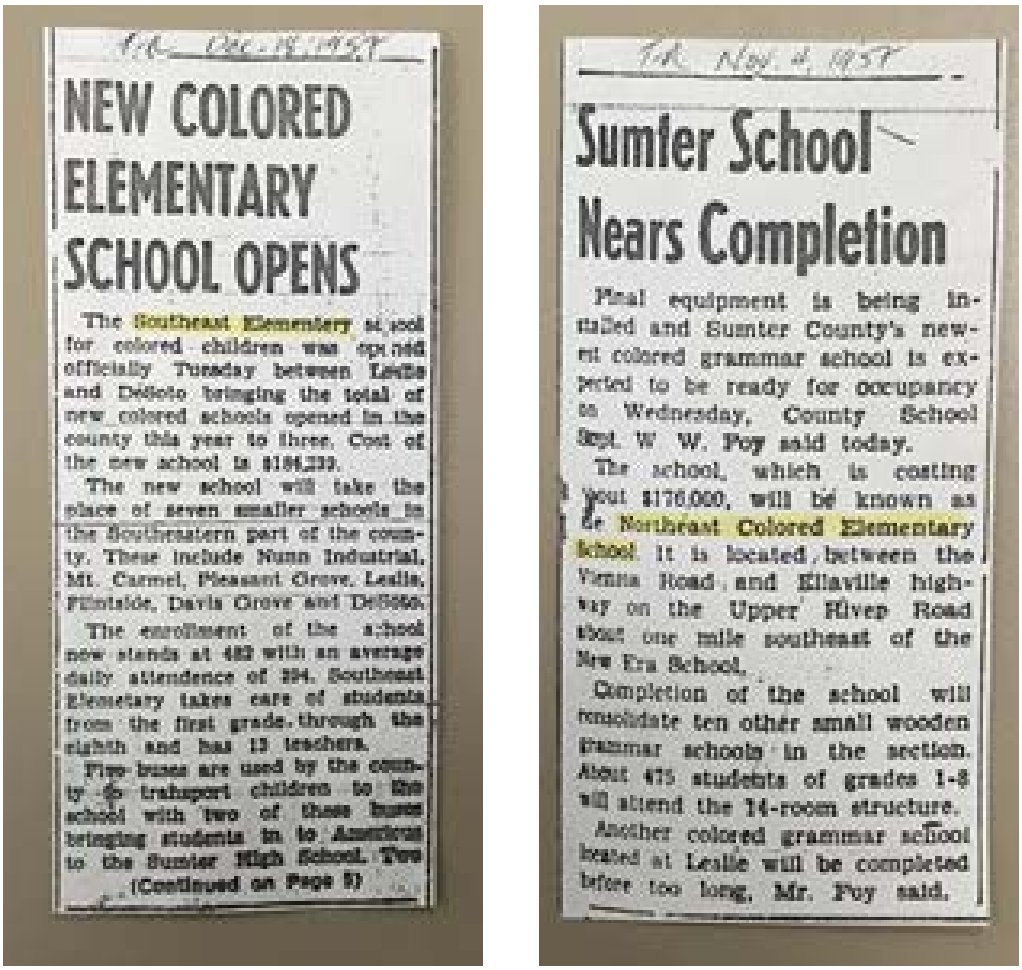
Figure 5.10 (cont'd). County White Equalization School—Thalean (Americus): Inside restroom





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 5.11. Implementing equalization in Sumter County, Georgia. In the fall of 1957, the *Americus Times-Recorder* reported the opening of two of the newly constructed schools: Southeast and Northeast.



T-R Dec. 15, 1957

NEW COLORED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OPENS

The Southeast Elementary school for colored children was opened officially Tuesday between Leslie and DeSoto bringing the total of new colored schools opened in the county this year to three. Cost of the new school is $186,239.

The new school will take the place of seven smaller schools in the Southeastern part of the county. These include Nunn Industrial, Mt. Carmel, Pleasant Grove, Leslie, Flintside, Davis Grove and DeSoto.

The enrollment of the school now stands at 482 with an average daily attendence of 394. Southeast Elementary takes care of students from the first grade through the eighth and has 13 teachers.

Five buses are used by the county to trahsport children to the school with two of these buses bringing students in to Americus to the Sumter High School. Two

(Continued on Page 5)

T-R Nov. 4, 1957

Sumter School Nears Completion

Final equipment is being installed and Sumter County's newest colored grammar school is expected to be ready for occupancy on Wednesday, County School Supt. W. W. Foy said today.

The school, which is costing about $170,000, will be known as the Northeast Colored Elementary School. It is located between the Vienna Road and Ellaville highway on the Upper River Road about one mile southeast of the New Era School.

Completion of the school will consolidate ten other small wooden grammar schools in the section. About 475 students of grades 1-8 will attend the 14-room structure.

Another colored grammar school located at Leslie will be completed before too long, Mr. Foy said.

Americus Times-Recorder, "Sumter County Files," Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 5.12. Sumter High School, a black equalization school in Sumter County. Map view, 208 W. Rucker Street, Americus, Georgia.



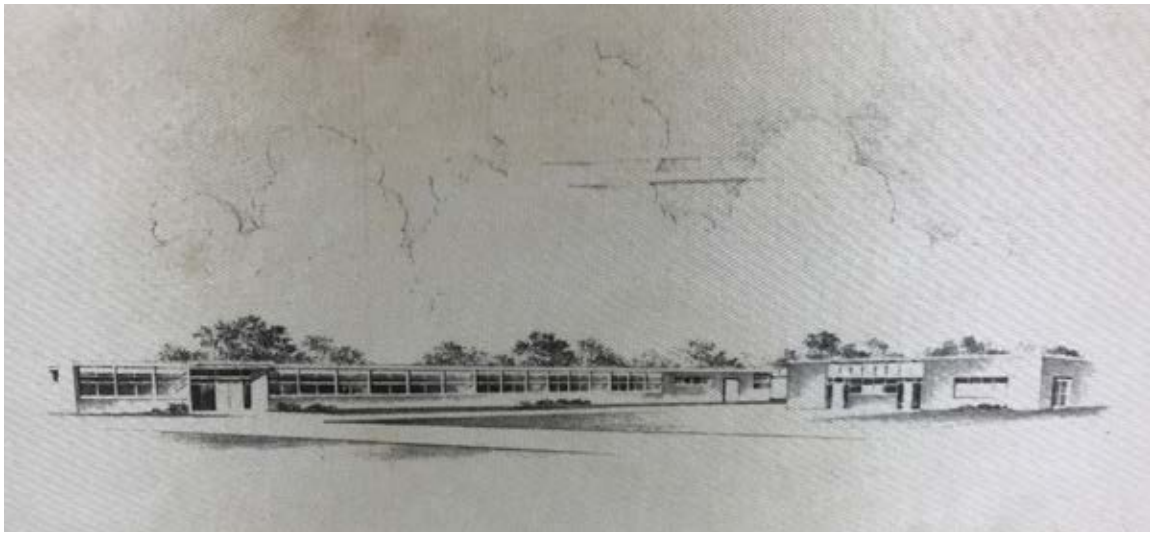
Official Map of the City of Americus, 1968
Sumter County Miscellaneous Maps
Juanita S. Brightwell Special Collections Room
Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus

Figure 5.12 (cont'd). Sumter High School, a black equalization School in Sumter County. Arial view, 208 W. Rucker Street, Americus, Georgia.



Sumter County Tax Assessor's Office, qPublic.net

Figure 5.12 (cont'd). Sumter High School, a black equalization School in Sumter County. Image of school building from Sumter High School diploma, June 5, 1962.



Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard

Figure 5.13. County Equalization School—Northeast (Americus): Front views





Photos by D. Jason Berggren





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 5.13 (cont'd). County Equalization School—Northeast (Americus): Side and rear views





Photos by LaDarria Williams

Figure 5.14. County Equalization School—Southeast (Leslie-DeSoto): Front view



Photos by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 5.14 (cont'd). County Equalization School—Southeast (Leslie-DeSoto): Side and back view





Photos by D. Jason Berggren

CHAPTER SIX

1961: Jimmy Carter's First Political Defeat

Carter's first election defeat was not the decisive, landslide loss to Ronald Reagan in 1980. It was not the narrow loss to Lester Maddox and Ellis Arnall in the 1966 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Carter came in a close third in that race, just shy of qualifying for the primary runoff. Carter wrote about both defeats and the emotional pain of losing he and Rosalynn felt. Of the 1966 loss to Maddox, for instance, he said he was filled with "anger and disillusionment," and his religious faith was severely shaken. The 1980 landslide, Carter wrote, was an "incomprehensible political defeat."[1]

But those elections were not Carter's first losses. His first election defeat occurred five years earlier in 1961 when he was on the county board of education. It was a referendum vote on the consolidation of the Sumter County and City of Americus public schools. It was a political fight his father, J. Earl Carter, fought in the months just before he died in July 1953. Following in his father's footsteps, Jimmy Carter vigorously led the "yes" campaign. He was the chair of the county board and he presented the pro-consolidation perspective in person and in a series of articles in the local newspaper.[2]

The election result was a heartbreaker for Carter. By the slimmest of margins, in July 1961, voters in the county, including in his hometown of Plains, rebuffed his principal education reform effort. The defeat was a personal blow, and it caused him to rethink his service on the board. He subsequently redirected his political career. It was one of several major factors in his decision a year later to seek a position in the Georgia State Senate that ultimately put him on a path that would take him to the governor's mansion and then all the way to the White House.[3]

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[1] Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1998; originally published in 1996), 26; Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 92; Hugh Carter with Frances Spatz Leighton, *Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot: My Life with the Carter Family of Plains, Georgia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 117; Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter, *Everything to Gain: Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995; originally published in 1987), 2, 4–6.

[2] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 16, 1953, March 23, 1953, and May 27, 1961.

[3] Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*, 81. It is not unusual for presidents to have experienced previous election defeats before ultimately winning the presidency. To illustrate, consider Carter's three immediate presidential successors. Before his election in 1980, Reagan had lost in two prior presidential bids. He failed to win the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 1968 and 1976. In Texas, George H. W. Bush had two losing US Senate campaigns in 1964 and 1970. He also lost to Reagan in the 1980 Republican presidential primaries. Bill Clinton lost in his first campaign. He ran for the US Congress in 1974 and came up short. In 1980, two years after he was elected governor of Arkansas at age thirty-two, he lost re-election. He won back the position in 1982.

School consolidation was a defining political issue for Carter. It was this issue that showcased the young pol's deep interest in public policy and his talent for studying and mastering it. It presented him a chance to take a political risk; stand on the side of reform; and, even if unpopular, challenge community traditions. It was arguably the first example of his determination to pursue "the politics of the public good." As with other issues, he was ahead of his time. The Americus and Sumter County schools eventually consolidated in the mid-1990s.[4]

School consolidation was also an issue that put Carter squarely at odds with hard-core segregationists. It clearly placed him on the opposite side of those who racially demagogued an education issue. On this occasion, he was clearly a moderate on the race question and, perhaps for the first time, a political outsider—an outsider even in Plains.

Modernization through School Consolidation

School consolidation, the issue that brought about Carter's first political loss, has a long history. Well before his failed campaign to merge schools in Sumter County and the City of Americus, communities throughout the country had debated, rejected, or embraced efforts to consolidate schools, bringing about one of the greatest transformations in American education. In 1910, there were 200,000 school districts nationwide. By 1970, there were only 20,000. Efforts to "consolidate" or "unify" schools involved the consolidation of either two or more one-room schoolhouses into one school, the consolidation of two or more school districts—or both. This movement started during the mid-nineteenth century, when districts accomplished consolidation by investing in horses and wagons to transport children to school. Consolidation accelerated during the Progressive Era with the advent of the school bus and paved roads.[5]

School consolidation was part of a broader movement to reform and modernize schools that included the standardization of curricula, buildings and equipment, and compulsory school attendance laws. Reformers were motivated by many goals, including the expansion of opportunities for educational attainment, the improvement of school facilities, the application of industrial principles of order to schools, and the achievement of economies of scale. In addition, reformers involved in the Country Life Movement worked to improve schools in order to stem the outflow of people from rural communities

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[4] Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 1–6, 13–23. According to Alan Anderson, the two school systems finally consolidated in December 1994. The following month, Edith Ann Hollis became the first woman and the first African American to chair Sumter County's school board. See "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, Georgia, 1962–2006," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1962_2006.htm.

[5] William A. Fishel, "Neither 'Creatures of the State' nor 'Accidents of Geography': The Creation of American Public School Districts in the Twentieth Century," *University of Chicago Law Review* 77, no. 1 (2010): 177–199.

by ameliorating life in rural areas. After World War II, school consolidation in rural areas became a way to address the education needs of children in small and depopulating school districts and expand access to high school education.[6]

Whenever and wherever it has been proposed, school consolidation has always been hotly debated and often resisted. At the turn of the twentieth century, in the midst of efforts to consolidate schools in several Georgia counties, for example, a school official argued that many parents opposed their children having to travel any distance to attend school. The typical parent preferred "a poor school at his back door to a good one two miles distant."[7]

Nevertheless, consolidation took place in many of Georgia's counties throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The building of Plains High School and Leslie's Union High School in Sumter County was the result of a consolidation plan after World War I. Between 1942 and 1952, the number of school districts in Georgia decreased from 222 to 187; increased to 198 in 1962; then fell by one, to 197, by 1970. Proposals to consolidate schools were particularly contentious in southern states during the civil rights era, in the 1950s to 1960s. Many white southerners who opposed the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, which declared school segregation unconstitutional, viewed consolidation efforts as just another circuitous route to school desegregation. It was feared that once a district's white schools consolidated, the next move was to then consolidate the remaining white schools with the remaining consolidated black schools. That was exactly the situation in Sumter County.[8]

Carter's failed attempt to restructure the county's education system began in July 1960, when he became chairman of the school board. He assumed the lead position after the more senior members retired or rotated off the board. As he told it, school consolidation was the most significant education issue during his time as chairman. In 1961, at the time of the referendum vote, the other board members were Johnny W. Cheek, Henry Hart

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[6] For viewing school consolidation as part of a broader movement, see Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 120. See also, Tracy L. Steffes, "Solving the 'Rural School Problem': State Aid, Standards, and Supervision of Local Schools, 1900–1933," *History of Education Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (May 2008): 181–220; David R. Reynolds, *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 36. For a discussion of post–World War II school consolidation in rural areas, see Wanda Rushing, "School Segregation and Its Discontents: Chaos and Community in Post-Civil Rights Memphis," Urban Education (2015); Calvin R. Ledbetter Jr., "The Fight for School Consolidation in Arkansas, 1946–1948," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 49.

[7] William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 1880–1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 274.

[8] For a discussion of school consolidation in Georgia, see *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta: Foote and Davies, Department of Education, 1922), 103, 127; US Department of Commerce, *State and Local Government Special Studies: Public School Systems in 1960*, G-SS, No. 44, 1960, 8; Deanna L. Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 16, 29.

Jr., Woody C. Cornwell, and Marvin McNeill. The Board was taking up the question of consolidation at the same time the state was reconsidering its official stance of massive resistance to the *Brown* decision.[9]

In 1954, after the *Brown* decision, Georgia lawmakers, like those in most southern states, passed laws to resist desegregation, including amending the state constitution to authorize the governor to deny state funding or shut down any schools that allowed desegregation. The state also mandated that African American teachers who were members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) either leave the organization or lose their teaching licenses. But the state of Georgia was forced to reconsider massive resistance when a US District Court Judge ordered the desegregation of Atlanta's public school system in 1959. A year later, the General Assembly Commission on Public Schools, or Sibley Commission, urged the state to retreat from its official opposition to the *Brown* decision and instead let counties and localities work out their own responses to the school desegregation order.[10]

Carter and the other members of the Sumter County School Board did not take on the question of desegregation. After *Brown*, the county schools remained segregated for the rest of the 1950s. The board supported the consolidation of black schools in 1957–58, and now it backed it for the white schools. Instead of implementing the Court's order, Carter and the board focused on consolidation and decided to submit the matter to the voters for their consideration. While the vote was not formally binding, it was instructional and thus was sometimes characterized in the news as a straw vote. Since the reform measure involved two school systems, the referendum vote had two vote counts on school consolidation to consider. It was, in effect, "two elections in one." There was a city vote and a county vote. One vote was held in Americus, the county seat and largest city in Sumter County. The other vote was held in the rest of the county. For the consolidation plan to go forward, it was deemed that the ballot measure had to be approved in both jurisdictions. If it passed in one jurisdiction, but not in the other, the proposal would be defeated. The county and city boards desired a clear consensus to proceed.[11]

The referendum vote held in the county and the city were largely set up under ordinary election rules and used the same polling sites as used in regular elections, such as the city halls in Americus, Plains, Leslie, and Andersonville. The polls for the special election were held at the normal hours of 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. All registered voters were

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[9] Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976; originally published in 1975), 88.

[10] James C. Cobb, *The Brown Decision, Jim Crow, and Southern Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 49; Clayborne Carson et al., *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African-American Struggle for Freedom* (Lincolnwood, IL: Legacy, 2003); Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

[11] Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker*, 22–23; Clarence Graddick, "Sumter Citizens Decide Tuesday on Merger Plan," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 17, 1961, 1, 4; Jimmy Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 59.

eligible to participate. At the time, based on a newspaper count, there were 6,182 registered voters in the whole county. One of the main modifications was for voters who lived on the outskirts of the Americus city limits. These voters were to vote at a different site than voters within city limits, and their votes were to be counted as part of the countywide vote total rather than the city vote total.[12]

Another difference involved absentee ballots. Voters in the county could cast an excuse-based absentee ballot if they were out of the county on Election Day, but voters living within the city limits of Americus were not provided this same convenience. Requests for absentee ballots were to be sent to the office of the county school superintendent, W. W. Foy. To be counted, they had to be received by his office before polls closed.[13]

Like Father, Like Son

The merging of the two school systems had been previously proposed. In March 1953, when Earl Carter was on the county board, the issue of county-city school consolidation was up for consideration. The county board unanimously recommended the creation of one county high school for white students and one county high school for black students "in or near Americus," along with the creation of one county school board of seven members, chosen by a grand jury. Voters would have an opportunity to approve or reject the proposal at a later date. The city board, however, rejected the plan for the unified board. City board members contended that the City of Americus would be underrepresented in a consolidated district. Without an agreement, it was jointly decided that "further plans for consolidation of the two systems be discontinued."[14]

In December 1953, after the grand jury recommended a renewal of consolidation negotiations, in a joint meeting of the county and city boards, it was agreed that the voters of Sumter County be given the opportunity to decide the question in a "straw ballot election" to be held on Friday, January 8, 1954. The Sumter County Commission and the City

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[12] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1961; "Absentee Ballots Only Available in the County," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 11, 1961, 1; "Two Changes Listed in Polling Sites for School Merger Straw Vote Tuesday," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 15, 1961, 1; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1961; Graddick, "Sumter Citizens Decide Tuesday on Merger Plan," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 17, 1961, 4.

[13] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1961; "Absentee Ballots Only Available in the County," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 11, 1961, 1; "Two Changes Listed in Polling Sites for School Merger Straw Vote Tuesday," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 15, 1961, 1.

[14] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 3, 1953. The county reiterated its support for consolidation the next month. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 7, 1953, and April 8, 1953. Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 23, 1953. According to the minutes, "the Americus Board of Education was unwilling to give up its [1873] charter without an equal number of City and County Board members and was unwilling to accept the County's proposal that the Board be appointed by the Grand Jury and have 4 members from the County and 3 members from the 27th district which includes Americus, Thalean and New Era."

of Americus would share the election costs. But the proposal was voted down. The local news headline was "School Consolidation Vote Defeated by County." According to election returns, countywide, the measure earned majority approval, 1,083 to 881, 55 to 45 percent. In Americus, voters overwhelmingly supported it, 670 to 212, 76 to 24 percent. In contrast, county voters rejected it. Opposition was concentrated in Leslie and Plains where two county high schools existed. The vote in Plains was 189 (93 percent) to 14 (7 percent) in opposition. In 1961, the Sumter County Board of Education and the Americus Board of Education decided to revisit the issue.[15]

At a called meeting held on July 6, 1961, the City Board unanimously backed the merger. The Board stated: "The City Board of Education at a called meeting Thursday night unanimously adopted a resolution reaffirming its approval for consolidation of the city and county school systems and also requested the Mayor and City Council of Americus to call and hold an election on July 18 so the citizens in the City of Americus may vote on the consolidation of the two systems."[16]

The mayor of Americus, J. Frank Myers, and the members of the city council supported the education measure. Mayor Myers asserted, "I feel that the plan would provide better schools for both city and county children and that through it Americus and Sumter County would get the most for their tax dollar." The *Americus Times-Recorder* and the Sumter County Grand Jury additionally favored approval of the reform plan.[17]

Leading the "Yes" Campaign

Like his father eight years earlier, Carter enthusiastically supported the system merger, and as the chair of the county board, he directed the "yes" campaign. On behalf of the two boards of education, he drafted articles for publication explaining the many benefits of merging the two school systems. He had them ready for the county board at the June 6 meeting. The city board received them and the plan for publication at the June 12 joint

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[15] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, December 1, 1953, and December 21, 1953; Rudy Hayes, "Majority Voters Favor Proposal, But Plan Loses," *Americus Times-Recorder*, January 9, 1954, 1, 6. It would take another thirty years before the two school systems finally merged. It finally happened in December 1994. See Alan Anderson and Rebecca Wise, "Chronology," in *History of Plains, Georgia*, compiled by the Plains Historical Preservation Trust (Fernandina Beach, FL: Wolfe Publishing, 2003), 62.

[16] Clarence Graddick, "City Education Board Urges Merger with County Schools," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 7, 1961, 1, 6.

[17] Graddick, "City Education Board Urges Merger with County Schools," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 7, 1961, 1, 6; "Sumter Grand Jury Reads Presentments," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 30, 1961, 1, 8; James R. Blair, "Our Children's Education," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 14, 1961, 1.

meeting. In total, there were five articles published in the *Americus Times-Recorder* the week ahead of the vote. The first one appeared on Monday, July 10, and the last one appeared on Friday, July 14.[18]

In the articles, Carter made the following five main points for the pro-consolidation side:

- School consolidation would provide the best educational opportunities for all public school students countywide.

Carter argued that consolidation would benefit everyone. He wrote, "The foundation on which this school merger rests is that the people of the city and county will be treated equally in all respects. The sole intention is that all the people of Sumter County will work together in harmony to provide the best possible education for children." Of course, this point was being advanced with racial segregation remaining firmly in place.[19]

- School consolidation would result in fair, equal representation for both Sumter County and the City of Americus on the new unified board of education.

With the creation of a unified city-county board of education, there would be seven board members. Three members would represent the city and would be chosen by the Americus City Council. Three other members would represent the county and would be chosen by the Sumter County Commission. The seventh member would serve at large and would be chosen by the other six board members. Under this format, Carter argued, the causes of division between county and city that derailed the 1953–54 merger effort "no longer exists."[20]

- With consolidation, one county high school "at a central location" would be established for all "city and county students."

The education proposal involved consolidating the three white high schools in Sumter County into one. The white schools were Americus High School, Plains High School, and Union High School. If approved, Americus would become the one centralized,

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[18] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 27, 1961; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 6, 1961; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education and City of Americus Board of Education, June 12, 1961. The five articles were: "Reasons Outlined for Merger of School Systems," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 10, 1961, 1; "New School Board Would Direct Merged Systems," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 11, 1961, 1; "What's Expected Cost of Merger?" *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 12, 1961, 1; "Pro, Con on School Merger," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 13, 1961, 1; "School Merger Advantages Given," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 14, 1961, 1, 6.

[19] "New School Board Would Direct Merged Systems," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 11, 1961, 1.

[20] The Sumter County School Board had originally proposed having seven members chosen in the following manner: two members chosen by the Sumter County Commission, two members chosen by the Americus City Council, two members chosen by grand jury (one from the county and one from the city), and one member by the other six school board members. Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, May 27, 1961. This proposal, however, was dropped in favor of a proposal offered by Warren Fortson of the Americus school board at a joint meeting of the two boards. It was unanimously approved. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education and City of Americus Board of Education, June 12, 1961. Quote "no longer exists" from "Pro, Con on School Merger," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 13, 1961, 1.

consolidated high school for whites. The black high school, Sumter High School, would remain separate. Furthermore, four grammar schools would be retained in the county: Plains, Leslie-DeSoto, New Era, and Thalean.

Carter empathized with the loss of Plains as a high school should the plan be executed. He was aware that this prospect troubled many. "Most of the opposition to the school merger," he said at the time, "naturally comes from those who are faced with the loss of a school from their community." "This," he added, "is a real and justifiable feeling and no one should be criticized for being interested in his local school and wanting his children to be educated near home."[21]

As a Plains alumnus, Carter knew firsthand the value of a small high school setting and a community-based school. He knew how the (white) citizens of Plains loved their high school. It was a multigenerational source of pride. The citizens of Plains were his neighbors, his customers, his friends, and his family. He went to school and church with many of them. He certainly was cognizant of the fact that voters in Plains and Leslie wished to preserve their prized community institutions where, in many ways, the social life of the surrounding area revolved around them. Preserving Plains High and Union High aroused intense feelings and emotions. Although Carter may have empathized with this, he also may have underestimated its impact on the vote.[22]

- School consolidation would be more cost-effective and prudent in the use of resources.

In the years ahead, it was estimated that both the county and city schools needed major and minor infrastructure improvements. Consider county needs. At opposite ends of the county, Plains High and Union High each needed a new building for approximately three hundred pupils. Of Plains, Carter said this: "Three substandard classrooms are in use at Plains, and although this building is in better condition than at Union, it is also about forty years old and repairs are becoming ever more costly." Union "urgently" needed a new lunchroom and also had "three substandard classrooms." Additionally, in order to compete with other school districts across the state, the two county high schools for whites needed "extensive laboratory facilities for physics, chemistry and biology" and "electronic language facilities." Both schools lacked complete vocational programs. As such, he explained, "Vocational shops for electricity, electronics, auto mechanics, agriculture, home economics, business education and other vocations should be provided. Most of these do not now exist." He recognized that the schools for black children had a few pressing needs

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[21] "Pro, Con on School Merger," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 13, 1961, 1.

[22] Such feelings could be sensed many years later from those who attended Plains High School and returned for reunions. One was held on September 8–9, 2017. See "Back to School at Plains High," *Americus Times-Recorder*, September 6, 2017, A1–A2. However, when the school closed in 1979, Plains High School was a shadow of its former self. The *New York Times* reported that Plains was a "crumbling school." See Wayne King, "Crumbling School in Plains Mired in Consolidation Drive," *New York Times*, January 28, 1979.

as well. For example, he wrote, "Recreational facilities [gymnasium] are needed at both the city [Staley] and county [Sumter High] colored schools." However, the county black schools in 1961 were virtually brand new and were the result of an extensive school consolidation. A survey of the county schools described the school buildings as "well kept." Implicit in the school consolidation proposal advanced by Carter and the county-city boards was that the white schools in several respects were falling behind the black schools. Put differently, the 1961 school consolidation effort was effectively about equalizing the white schools.[23]

Carter conceded that unifying the school systems may not dramatically save on new construction and repair costs: "The plans which would cost least are to merge the two systems or to leave them as they are now, with three separate high schools for white children." Still, he argued, consolidation would prevent the "duplications of costs for two separate systems" and would free up more monies to use for curriculum expansion. Given a choice, he said, there is one "overriding question.... Which plan is best for our children?"[24]

On December 12, 1974, the future president made a very similar closing argument in his campaign announcement speech for the presidency of the United States at the National Press Club in Washington, DC.[25] He explained that it was a question first posed to him by Admiral Hyman Rickover when he served as a submarine officer in the US Navy:

> Our government can express the highest common ideals of human beings—if we demand of it standards of excellence.
>
> It is now time to stop and to ask ourselves the question which my last commanding officer, Admiral Hyman Rickover, asked me and every other young naval officer who serves or has served in an atomic submarine.
>
> For our Nation—for all of us—that question is: "Why not the best?"

"Why not the best?" was also the title of his 1976 campaign autobiography.[26]

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[23] "What's Expected Cost of Merger?" *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 12, 1961, 1. In 1960, the county school board commissioned a study of county schools. This included an assessment of school plants, pupil transportation, building maintenance, and instructional programs. The study was conducted by a seven-person committee of school officials from outside the county. Carter likely referred to this study in preparing this article. A copy of the original survey with his signature on the front cover is available at the Carter Presidential Library. See "Survey Report to Sumter County Board of Education on School Plant Needs, Building Maintenance and Instructional Program Survey of the Sumter County Schools," October 25, 1960, Jimmy Carter Papers—Pre-Presidential, 1962–1974, Chairman-Sumter County Board of Education, Box 22, Folder: "Correspondence, Reports, Minutes [1]," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[24] "What's Expected Cost of Merger?" *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 12, 1961, 1, 6. The difference was about $20,000 over a ten-year period. Estimated building costs for two separate school systems was $1.38 million versus $1.36 million for one school system.

[25] Carter, "Address Announcing Candidacy for the Democratic Presidential Nomination at the National Press Club in Washington, DC," December 12, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77821.

[26] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 6.

- School consolidation would provide for a comprehensive course curriculum and athletic program.

The school merger would offer county-city students a more comprehensive course curriculum than was being offered at Americus, Plains, and Union high schools. One quality central high school could offer a greater diversity of courses, including more electives, more advanced classes, college-preparatory course work, and special education courses. Overall, students would have much more choice. It would provide students added reasons to stay in school and not drop out.

Carter claimed that this was, in fact, the "major advantage" of a merger. Proposed courses included Analytic Geometry, Trigonometry, Biology, Speech, Journalism, Drama, Georgia History, World History, Geography, Economics, Sociology, Spanish, and French. Opportunities for studying music, drama, and the arts would be enhanced, along with a full array of vocational opportunities. In terms of athletics, it was projected that a consolidated school system could offer varsity "football, basketball, track, tennis, swimming and diving, wrestling and gymnastics." It was also said that a related benefit of an expanded and more complete course curriculum would be the hiring of more teachers and staff.[27]

Carter publicly presented the case for the merger to audiences around the county. A "yes" vote, Carter argued, would create "a superlative system for all our children" and "one of the finest educational opportunities in the nation." Rosalynn Carter actively joined her husband in the reform effort. She said the referendum effort was their "first venture into politics." In *First Lady from Plains*, she wrote, "Jimmy made speeches throughout the county, trying to sell the plan to skeptical audiences, while I and other supporters made telephone calls, wrote letters, and raised money for newspaper and radio advertisements." For both Jimmy and Rosalynn, 1961 was a good trial run for the state senate campaign to come the very next year in 1962 and then his first run for Georgia governor in 1966.[28]

The Referendum Results

The referendum was held on Tuesday, July 18, 1961. The sample ballot, as printed in the *Americus Times-Recorder*, contained two vote choices: a vote "for Merger of City and County School Systems" or a vote "against Merger of City and County Systems."[29]

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[27] "Pro, Con on School Merger," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 13, 1961, 1; "School Merger Advantages Given," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 14, 1961, 6. See also Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 45; James R. Blair, "Our Children's Education," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 14, 1961, 1.

[28] "Carter Urges Merged System," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 14, 1961, 1; Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 45.

[29] "Sample Ballot," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 17, 1961, 1. See also Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1961.

"Merger Beaten, Boards to Proceed with Plans" was the headline of the next day's edition of the *Americus Times-Recorder*. Voters in the City of Americus, the county seat, overwhelmingly endorsed consolidation. The reported vote total there was 786 "for" (82 percent) and 172 "against" (18 percent). It was a stronger vote for the merger than it had been in 1954. However, it was barely rejected in the county vote by 84 votes. The vote was 586 (54 percent) against to 502 (46 percent) for. Seven years earlier, the county vote against the merger was 669 (62 percent) to 413 (38 percent)—a difference of 256 votes.[30]

Voter turnout was generally light. Of Sumter's registered voters, 2,046 cast votes. Approximately 33 percent participated in the special election. By another measure, the turnout in the whole county was about 63 percent of that in the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon contest.[31]

The day after the vote, on behalf of the Sumter County School Board, Chairman Carter released a public statement on the election outcome. It was published in the *Americus Times-Recorder*.[32] He acknowledged the disappointing loss and pledged that the county would proceed to consider school improvement plans consistent with the popular will:

> The school merger which was endorsed by our County Board of Education has been refused by the people.
>
> Although many of our citizens are disappointed, we believe that the interest of everyone in better schools has been awakened, and that through democratic procedures and with the cooperation and good will of all our communities, many improvements can still be made.
>
> A meeting of County and local officials will be held this week at which possible courses of action commensurate with the desires of our people will be discussed.

The failed referendum vote was Carter's first political defeat. He described the loss as a "stinging disappointment." In his 1976 presidential campaign autobiography, *Why Not the Best?*, Carter wrote about his tenure on the county education board and referenced the 1961 plebiscite:

> I was also appointed to fill a vacancy on the Sumter County School Board, and education became a major interest of mine. After a thorough analysis of our school system, we recommended a major consolidation program which

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[30] Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education Meeting with Principals and Local Trustees of the County, August 1, 1961; Rudy Hayes and Clarence Graddick, "Merger Beaten, Boards to Proceed with Plans," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 19, 1961, 1, 8.

[31] "Voting Light in School Election," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 18, 1961, 1.

[32] Hayes and Graddick, "Merger Beaten, Boards to Proceed with Plans," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 19, 1961, 8.

> required a voter referendum to implement. As chairman of the School Board I made speeches around the county in support of the proposal, which finally lost in the rural areas of the county by 88 votes [*sic*].
>
> It was my first real venture into election politics and campaigning, and the failure of my effort was a stinging disappointment. My own community of Plains would have lost one of its schools, and my neighbors voted overwhelmingly against the school merger proposals. There was considerable bitterness in Plains because of my support of the consolidation proposal.[33]

As Carter explained, the merger was largely defeated by the county's rural voters, namely by the voters in Plains and Leslie. Voters in Plains and Leslie decisively rejected the merger plan. In Plains, the vote was 201 against (86 percent) and only 33 for (14 percent). In Leslie, it was 213 against (80 percent) and 52 for (20 percent). Plains and Leslie combined were able to overcome the solid support the consolidation plan received in the rest of the county, 417 for (71 percent) to 172 against (29 percent).[34]

Understanding the Referendum Loss

Why was the vote in Plains and Leslie so lopsided against consolidation? It is quite probable that voters in Plains simply did not want to lose their beloved Plains High School and voters in Leslie did not want to lose Union High School. The schools were sources of local pride, institutions that instilled a sense of place and community. They were homestyle schools. When their teams played at home, they truly were at home and the hometown's undisputed team. Consolidation, it was feared, irrevocably harmed all that.

But, arguably, the issue of race was a major reason, if not the sole reason, for the referendum's failure. In his book, *Turning Point*, Carter explained that issues of race and school segregation played a key role in the election outcome. He said that some of his friends, neighbors, customers, and fellow church members at Plains Baptist Church harbored hard feelings towards him for his leadership role in promoting consolidation. Some of those who vehemently opposed his efforts would not speak to him for a while. It appears, then, that the public perception of Carter was that he was minimally a moderate on race and possibly even favored a gradual integration of the schools.[35]

During the campaign, there apparently were personal attacks on Carter. He was even called a "race mixer" and a "nigger lover." In *Turning Point*, he stated that preserving racial segregation was central to the "no" vote: "The next morning [after the vote] when I went down to our warehouse, there was a sign nailed across our door, COONS AND

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[33] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 88.

[34] "How They Voted," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 19, 1961, 1.

[35] Carter, *Turning Point*, 59; Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 45.

CARTERS GO TOGETHER. This was a clear indication that much of the opposition had come from the fervent segregationists. Nevertheless, there was no doubt in my mind that I had been on the right side of the issue."[36]

Rosalynn was very troubled by the racial dimension to the vote and the extent to which the referendum failed so in Plains. She said that Tuesday night the family was attending a basketball game at Plains High when election returns were reported. Their oldest son Jack Carter was playing. She remembered the moment she and Jimmy found out defeat was at hand. Victory was so close yet so far: "The results were announced in the gymnasium, and the crowd burst into loud applause. . . . Many had quietly supported us while those opposed were outspoken. It was small comfort. I sat there at the ball game with my chin up while everyone gloated over our loss, but I was crying inside."[37] That election night, Plains was not Carter Country.

Carter said the use of the race card was "one of [the opposition's] most effective arguments" against school consolidation. The fear was that consolidation was "just another surreptitious effort to integrate black and white students." One political ad, for instance, entitled "Disadvantages of Proposed Merger," that was put out by the "no" campaign specifically charged that consolidation "could lead to rapid integration." Throughout the South, debates over school consolidation were bound up with opposition to desegregation. For example, in the cases of both Nashville, Tennessee, which merged with Davidson County, and Charlotte, which merged with Mecklenburg County, opponents argued that the movement compromised their local autonomy for the sake of civil rights. They balked at consolidation and the long bus rides that it often necessitated, even though the busing of schoolchildren had a relatively long history in North Carolina, "the school busingist state in the nation." Many white families in Charlotte had come to accept earlier consolidation and busing because they believed it would bring educational advantages to their children. But when it came to using busing to bring about equality for black and white children, some parents were opposed.[38]

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[36] Kenneth E. Morris, *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 118–19; Carter, *Turning Point*, 58; Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 46.

[37] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 46.

[38] Quote from Carter, *Turning Point*, 58. The political ad appeared in the *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 17, 1961, 2. For examples of the link between race and opposition to school consolidation, see Rushing, "School Segregation and Its Discontents," 6–7; Davison M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing & Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 145.

The Carter family was divided on the 1961 school measure. Though usually a political ally and advisor, Carter's first cousin, Hugh Alton Carter (1920–99), Plains High School Class of 1937, led the opposition to the consolidation plan in Plains.[39]

Perhaps Cousin Hugh's opposition was predictable. His father, William Alton Carter, was a renowned segregationist in Plains. (He was "Uncle Buddy" to Jimmy Carter.) Like his brother, Earl Carter, Alton Carter was a recognized community leader, local politician, and was in fact "the leader of the Carter family in Plains." He served as the mayor of Plains for twelve years (1941–53). After Earl's death in 1953, "Uncle Buddy" was "sort of a father substitute" for Jimmy. He mentored his nephew in the local world of business and politics.[40]

When interviewers asked him about the schools or churches in Plains, Alton Carter did not conceal his racial consciousness or racial animus.[41] According to one reporter who interviewed him in 1976 when she was down in Plains covering his nephew's presidential run, "Uncle Buddy" said, "I don't like the nigguhs much, but we put up with 'em though." He further explained that Plains Baptist Church remained segregated. "No, Jimmy didn't go to a nigguh church. They still go separately. Ain't no nigguhs go with the white folk. White folk go to the Baptist Church uptown. Don't allow no nigguhs. Wouldn't let 'em in. Never have. Never will."[42]

Y. T. Sheffield was another prominent opponent to consolidation. He was the principal of Plains High School. He was well-respected at the time and well-remembered in the present. Behind only Miss Julia Coleman, Sheffield was the most influential educator at Plains High. He taught mathematics and coached basketball and baseball. He was, in Carter's words, the school's "ultimate disciplinarian." He was beloved by the Plains community, at least by the white community. In November 1955, he recommended the senior student he once paddled in April 1941 for skipping school for the county school board.[43]

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[39] William Patrick O'Brien's Special History Study for the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District, November 1991, 49; Carter, *Turning Point*, 59. In later years, Hugh Carter succeeded Jimmy Carter to the Georgia State Senate (1967–1981) and became his legislative floor leader when Jimmy served as governor. Hugh Carter said, "Jimmy and I have always worked side by side in politics." This was a glaring exception. Hugh Carter with Frances Spatz Leighton, *Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot*, 3.

[40] James E. Bagwell, "Mayors," in *History of Plains, Georgia*, compiled by the Plains Historical Preservation Trust (Fernandina Beach, FL: Wolfe Publishing, 2003), 132–33; "History of Plains," published by the churches of Plains (Americus, GA: Gammage Print Shop, October 1976), 50; Hugh Carter with Frances Spatz Leighton, *Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot*, 4–5; Jimmy Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 133, 257.

[41] Duane Hutchinson, *Jimmy Carter's Hometown: People of Plains* (Lincoln, NE: Foundation Books, 2003), 79–80.

[42] Kandy Stroud, *How Jimmy Won: The Victory Campaign from Plains to the White House* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1977), 36.

[43] Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, 212–14, 217–19.

Sheffield argued that county schools, like Plains High, provided a sound education and should be encouraged and strengthened by the school board. He explained, "County schools are always being ridiculed. If they were built up in the minds of the people, more people would want to come to the county schools. We should try to help our communities and their schools."[44]

But there was another reason. Sheffield was a staunch segregationist. One writer described his role as one of the leaders of the "hostile opposition" to the school proposal. Indeed, he retired in early 1966, prior to the first African Americans began attending the school in the fall. Like other opponents, he feared that school consolidation was a major step toward consolidation with the all-black Sumter High School. In September 1967, a year after retirement, the longtime principal of Plains High School died unexpectedly at age sixty-three.[45]

1962: The Turning Point

Though disappointed with the election loss, Carter was not deterred. He remained committed to reforming the Sumter County schools and making educational improvements to the area, including making Georgia Southwestern College a four-year school. What the loss taught him was that change might have to come from a different level of politics. That is, a "bottom-up," local approach might have to be replaced by a more "top-down," state, or federal approach. Carter made his move the following year to seek higher ground.[46]

Rosalynn was not surprised by her husband's response to the referendum setback. She knew how competitive and tenacious he was: "Jimmy was never one to take defeat lying down, and instead of being discouraged by the school votes, he decided to take on a bigger

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[44] "How They Voted," *Americus Times-Recorder*, July 19, 1961, 1; Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education Meeting with Principals and Local Trustees of the County, August 1, 1961.

[45] Keith Wishum, "A Brief History of Plains High School," in *History of Plains, Georgia*, 95. Principal Sheffield submitted his resignation to the school board at its regular March 1966 meeting, and the board accepted it with regret. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, March 1, 1966. His death was an apparent suicide. The *Americus Times-Recorder* did not identify the cause of death. See "Area is Saddened by Death of Sheffield," *Americus Times-Recorder*, September 22, 1967, 1, 6. Hugh Carter said it as a suicide. He wrote, "It was Miss Julia who brought Sheffield, who was so important in Jimmy's and my life, to our town. There is a tragic note to his story. Sheffield retired in 1965 and took his own life two years later. It was a sad ending for the man who was at one time considered the number one high school basketball coach in all of Georgia." See Hugh Carter with Frances Spatz Leighton, *Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot*, 55. Though the reason is not exactly known, some we spoke to contend that Principal Sheffield shot himself because he was so deeply disturbed by the racial desegregation of Plains High School. In his 2020 biography, Jonathan Alter also wrote that it was a suicide. He hinted it may have been due to the former principal's opposition to the admission of black students at Plains. He wrote, "Sheffield grew impassioned and said that the institution he loved would be integrated 'over my dead body.' (Shortly after integration in the 1970s, he committed suicide.)." See Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 113. In the 1990s, Peter Bourne also attributed the "over my dead body" quote to Sheffield. See Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency* (New York: A Lisa Drew Book-Scribner, 1997), 107.

[46] Carter, *Turning Point*, 60.

challenge." If the opportunity presented itself, he was ready to take the education fight to Atlanta to improve public education for grades 1–12 and to elevate the status of Georgia Southwestern. That opportunity came the following year: 1962 was a significant turning point in Carter's political career.[47]

On October 1, 1962, on his thirty-eighth birthday, Jimmy Carter, chair of the Sumter County School Board, decided to become a candidate for the Georgia State Senate.[48] Ten years earlier, his father had run for the Georgia State House and won. He now believed that the time had come for him to take his political game to the next level as his father had done and expanded his message of school reform to include reforming Georgia politics. For Carter, Georgia needed more political outsiders, noncareer politicians who were committed to challenging the political status quo and established ways, as he had done in the school consolidation fight. He drove to Americus to declare his candidacy for Senate District 14 and have his candidate announcement published in the *Americus Times-Recorder*. Mrs. Carter was not aware of his election plans, but soon enough, she found herself helping with the campaign.[49]

Carter offered several reasons as to why he pursued a position in the Georgia General Assembly. He wanted to be part of John Kennedy's "new generation" of political leaders, "to be part of the new openness and reform in the life of my state and nation that was being promised." He was motivated to bring honesty and a sense of morality into politics. He once asked a preacher who was skeptical of his entry into politics, "How would you like to be the pastor of a church with eighty thousand members?"[50]

Carter also believed the timing was right for him. Legal challenges to Georgia's electoral system, namely the county unit system, provided an opening for political newcomers in 1962. In *Baker v. Carr*, the US Supreme Court ruled in a landmark case that state elections and the decennial redistricting process should be based on the principle of political equality—"one man, one vote"—and that such political matters were justiciable. The 6–2 majority decision effectively overturned the 1946 case *Colgrove v. Green*, which stated that these matters were "political" and therefore not the responsibility of the courts to intervene where legislators were in a better position to address. The problem was that too often states, like Georgia, instituted electoral arrangements and practices that advantaged rural, conservative areas and interests. Under pressure from federal courts, Georgia reapportioned its state legislative districts in the fall of 1962 and required new legislative

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47 Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 46; Carter, *Turning Point*, 175–76.

48 Carter, *Turning Point*, xxiii, 55–56.

49 Carter, *Turning Point*, 66.

50 Carter, *Turning Point*, xix, 63.

elections to be held. The county unit system met its end the next year in 1963 when it was declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in *Gray v. Sanders* for violating the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.[51]

But perhaps most importantly, Carter's decision to run for the state's upper chamber involved the 1961 referendum. He said as much in a commencement speech he later delivered at Union High School in Leslie: "You may not realize it, but the last speech I made here on your campus was indirectly responsible for my being a senator now, when you were freshmen or sophomores, I went to all the communities in the county, as chairman of the Sumter County School Board, to explain a survey team recommendation that our county schools be consolidated. The reception to my speech was such that I decided I would rather be in the Senate than to stay on the school board in Sumter County."[52]

Carter's decision to seek higher political office and his successful candidacy saved him for what lay ahead for the Sumter County and Americus school boards. Within two years, in 1964, the racial desegregation of the public schools would be underway. It began first in the Americus school system, and then, two years later in 1966, it expanded to the Sumter County school system. By leaving the school board, Carter, perhaps fortuitously, was able to avoid direct involvement with the issue. As a state senator, the responsibility to desegregate the Sumter County schools was no longer his. This preserved his electoral viability among both racial conservatives and racial progressives. To win, he would need votes from both sides in his pursuit of becoming governor in 1970 and president in 1976. Continued service on the Sumter County School Board was fraught with political risks, especially for someone who was politically ambitious. As it was, the campaigns of future opponents collected evidence from Carter's school board tenure and were prepared to attack his record on race and education, particularly if he or his campaign attacked Republicans on their civil rights positions. Republicans knew this was a vulnerability, but perhaps this would provide immunity to them if Carter's post-*Brown* school board years could be exploited.[53]

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[51] Carter, *Turning Point*, xxii–xxiii. One electoral arrangement that violated the "one person, one vote" standard was Georgia's county unit system. In terms of the number of seats, this system gave rural counties, like Sumter County, disproportionate representation over more urban and high-growth counties, like Fulton County, in the Georgia legislature and in the election of statewide officials, such as for governor. See Carter, *Turning Point*, 9–11.

[52] Carter, "Commencement Address at Union High School in Leslie, Georgia," n.d., Carter Family Papers, Jimmy Carter's Speech File, Box 62, Folder #1: "Graduation Speech—Leslie High School," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[53] Former Alabama governor George Wallace made this point. In a 1992 interview, he said, "These New South Governors all were elected after the race question was settled, and they didn't have to face it. But if they had run when I ran and had had to face it, they wouldn't have been elected." See "Interview: Confessions of a Former Segregationist," *Time*, March 2, 1992, 11–12. Carter accused Reagan of "playing the race card" when the former California governor held a post-convention campaign event in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and affirmed a belief in "states' rights." Carter charged that the use of such language was a deliberate appeal to racial conservatives. After all, Philadelphia, the county seat of Neshoba County, was the site of the murders of three civil rights organizers in June 1964: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. See Carter, *Turning Point*, 192.

CHAPTER SIX SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Figure Gallery

Figure 6.1. Americus City Board of Education endorses school consolidation



WEATHER
PARTLY CLOUDY AND WARM THROUGH SATURDAY WITH SCATTERED AFTERNOON AND EVENING THUNDERSHOWERS. EXTREMES 66 TO 96

Americus Times-Recorder

VOLUME 82—NUMBER 169 — AMERICUS, GEORGIA, FRIDAY, JULY 7, 1961 — PRICE FIVE CENTS

CITY EDUCATION BOARD URGES MERGER WITH COUNTY SCHOOLS

Plan Also Endorsed By Mayor, Council

By CLARENCE GRADDICK

The City Board of Education unanimously adopted a resolution reaffirming its approval of the mergers of the city and county school systems at a called meeting of the body Thursday night.

The County Board of Education has already gone on record recommending the merger, also with a unanimous vote. In addition the Mayor and City Council of Americus passed a resolution at a special meeting Thursday night endorsing the plan without a dissenting vote.

Both boards have jointly called for an election by straw-vote to be held on July 18 so that the people of the city and county may express their opinion on the matter. The vote, though not legally binding, will be conducted under the same conditions as a regular election.

In this type of election, whether by legal or straw ballot, the city and county vote separately and the majority vote in both places it is defeated. The county plans to have all the regular polling places open on that day as does the city. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

There will be one difference in the city voting in that since the City District comprises both city and county citizens those who live in the county will have to vote separately from those who live in the city. Also the city will not furnish absentee ballots whereas the county will mail absentee ballots on request.

The exact statement of the city board passed Thursday night is as follows:

The City Board of Education at a called meeting Thursday night unanimously adopted a resolution reaffirming its approval for consolidation of the city and county school systems and also requested the Mayor and City Council of Americus to call and hold an election on July 17 so the citizens of City of Americus may vote on the consolidation of the two systems.

The County Board of Education plans a series of statements on the merger giving in detail its stand on the question. The county board has also held meetings in the various communities in the county explaining and discussing the move with the people of the county.

Mayor J. Frank Myers hailed the proposed consolidation as a tremendous step in elevating the educational standards of Americus and Sumter County.

"I feel that the plan would pro-

(Continued On Page Six)

RED DEADLINE DEMAND SEEN OVER KUWAIT

By A. I. GOLDBERG

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. (AP) — The Soviet Union is expected to demand that the Security Council set a deadline for Britain to withdraw her troops from Kuwait.

Soviet delegate Platon D. Morozov made plain he would seek to amend a British resolution calling on the United Nations to guarantee the independence of the desert sheikdom claimed by Iraq.

The Soviet diplomat charged the British resolution was a maneuver to justify the presence of British troops in the oil-rich little Persian Gulf territory until the Iraqiite forces there for an indefinite period of time."

In the council Thursday Britain again prevailed to remove her troops from her former protectorate. Kuwait's ruler, Sheik Abdullah as-Salim as-Sabah considers Iraq's threat to take over his sheikdom has been removed.

Sheik Abdullah has appealed to the British for further protection. The Kuwait education director, Abdel Aziz Hussein, representing the Kuwait delegation, declared he said Kuwait would ask the British to withdraw only after the U. N. admits Kuwait's independence, declares Iraq has no valid claim and admits Kuwait to U. N. membership.

At the council headed for a vote on the British resolution this afternoon, at least three members—Liberia, Chile and Turkey—indicated they felt the Kuwait-Iraq dispute should be left to the Arab League to settle.

However, a British delegation source said he was confident there were enough votes in the 11-member council to put over the resolution as a first step.

The move to have the dispute in the Arab League drew a warning from King Saud that there can be no mediation unless Iraq drops its claim of sovereignty over the rich neighbor.

The Saudi Arabian monarch, who has vast troops to help the small Kuwait, said Arab League Secretary-General Abdel Khalek Hassouna "the issue is one of independence, and not to a Kuwaiti's independence which has been recognized by all."

Henderson Infant Services Held

Graveside rites were held at Oak Hill Cemetery Saturday at 4:30 p.m. for Iris Elizabeth Vinson Henderson, infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Henderson (21 E. Hill St., who died Thursday at the Americus-Sumter County Hospital. The baby was born Wednesday.

The Rev. L. Leopard, pastor of First Baptist Church, officiated.

Survivors, in addition to the parents, include the paternal grandmother, Mrs. Jessie Wadsworth, Bainbridge, and the paternal great-grandmother, Mrs. Ida B. Henderson, Americus. The mother is the former Frances Wadsworth of Bainbridge.

Americus Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Shiloh Baptist Revival To Open

Revival services will begin at Shiloh Baptist Church Sunday with homecoming day also to be observed that day.

The Rev. Homer G. Fowler of Griffin, will lead the revival services.

Following the 11 a.m. service Sunday church members will have dinner on the church grounds. A large number of guests are expected in addition to members.

Horace Johnson will serve as song leader and Miss Ann Cordell, pianist. Services will be held each night at 8 o'clock. The Rev. A. S. Given is church pastor. The revival continues through July 23.

Cloudy and Warm Through Saturday

Partly cloudy and warm weather is predicted through Saturday for Americus and vicinity with widely scattered thunderstorms. The low tonight is expected to be about 70 with the high Saturday in the

No Ill Effects Suffered By Young Caroline

BOSTON (AP)—A young mother who rescued 3-year-old Caroline Ann Kennedy when she fell into water over his head at a private pool says "any of the mothers standing around could have done the thing I did."

Caroline, daughter of President and Mrs. Kennedy, apparently suffered no ill effects from her ducking in 6 or 8½ feet of water at a posh Hyannis Port section of Barnstable, Mass. home of Mr. and Mrs. Newton I. Steers Jr. Mrs. Steers is the daughter of Mrs. Kennedy's stepfather, Hugh D. Auchincloss.

The White House confirmed the incident after the Washington Evening Star told about it in a story by society columnist Betty Beale.

The rescuer was Mrs. William Saltonstall, daughter-in-law of U.S. Sen. Leverett Saltonstall, R-Mass. Mrs. Saltonstall, 26, who is expecting a third child in the early fall, was at the children's party with her 3-year-old daughter Cheley.

She told the Boston Traveler

(Continued On Page Six)

Atlanta Offers $500 Reward In Bomb Arrests

ATLANTA (AP)—A reward of up to $500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons responsible for a wave of bombings in the city has been offered by the City of Atlanta.

Lt. Clinton Chafin, head of a new squad assigned exclusively to the bombings, said his men had developed several leads which could bring an early arrest in our rash bombing.

Chafin and four detectives were assigned to investigate bombings exclusively as Police Chief Herbert Jenkins asked the city you for help and rewards for valid information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons responsible for bombings and arson burnings.

Jenkins noted in a letter to Mayor William B. Hartsfield that there have been a dozen bombings and a dozen arson burnings in Atlanta in recent months.

"As you know this is a most difficult type of harassment to cope with," the letter said. "I believe we have made it clear that such violence will not be tolerated here.

"The rabble-rousing element has gone underground and strikes us

(Continued On Page Six)

Jaycees Discuss Proposed Projects

Americus Jaycees discussed several proposed civic projects and methods of carrying them out at the club's regular weekly meeting at George's Restaurant Thursday night.

Dean Mooney, chairman of the club hosting team, gave a report on the Civic League Banquet to be held tonight at the Country Club.

Club President D. S. Short announced that the Sumter Board meeting will be held in Savannah in August and asked members to attend.

Din Greets Nomination Of Hoffa as Union Head

By NORMAN WALKER

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP)—A din of horns, bells and sirens today greeted the nomination of James R. Hoffa for a new five-year term as president of the Teamsters Union.

"Do you know it's a real in this country with more guts?" English asked. "If you do, tell me. I'd like to know."

Hoffa, 48, veteran secretary-treasurer, reached off a 25-minute demonstration at the Teamsters convention by accepting Hoffa as "the man with the most guts in America."

"Do you know it's a real in this country with more guts?" English asked. "If you do, tell me. I'd like to know."

Hoffa's nomination theme song—"Hoffa is all." Hoffa said, while greeting delegates back in their seats.

A band launched into "When the Saints Go Marching In" as Hoffa's nomination theme song.

English—reminded the convention that Hoffa had won Teamsters fat wage increases and other gains while fighting off a steady barrage of court charges and investigations during the past four years.

The name of Walter J. Lee, president of a 4,000-member New York, N.J., local, was put in nomination by James Lukens of Local

CAROLINE AND RESCUER

Mrs. William Saltonstall, right, was disclosed to have rescued Caroline Kennedy from drowning when the child got in water over her head in a swimming pool. Mrs. Saltonstall, wife of the son of Massachusetts Sen. Leverett Saltonstall, holds dabbed although she is expecting a child in September. Incident occurred in a Maryland suburb near Washington. (AP Wirephoto)

PROBERS MUM ON TREATMENT OF 'RIDERS'

JACKSON, Miss. (AP)—[illegible] investigation of Mississippi's treatment of so-called "freedom riders" appeared at an end today but two Minnesota officials returned to make a recording of their findings.

The governors of both states have apparently asked for the statement be made after Governor Ross Barnett met in Jackson with Gov. Elmer Andersen.

Minnesota Asst. Atty. Gen. Allen Casey Jr., and Mr. Wright Brooks, chairman of the Minnesota Commission, represented Andersen in the talks.

They conferred [illegible] Barnett, [illegible] Mississippi's penal institutions, Hughes.

Mrs. Brooks, [illegible] City of Hattiesburg, [illegible] the amount and duration of [illegible] welfare payments were defended by city officials today as morally sound and financially [illegible] sary.

But critics said the regulations were illegal, inhumane and [illegible] on anti-Negro prejudice.

Three were the opposing arguments recalled for a hearing before members of the State Social Welfare Board on the Newburgh issue, which has become a focal point for broad debate on the entire scope of public welfare.

City Manager Joseph Mitchell

(Continued On Page Six)

Despite Nuclear Ban

AEC Tunnel Plan For Newest Bomb?

YUCCA FLATS, Nev. (AP) — Despite the 32-month ban on nuclear tests, the Atomic Energy Commission is busy building a sprawling complex of underground tunnels at its Nevada test site.

The AEC simply says it is preparing for the day if and when disarmament talks end—in discord. But some experts say the subterranean labyrinth 20 miles northwest of Las Vegas someday may be the site for testing of an ultimate weapon. The neutron bomb.

The neutron device, years away from the testing stage, is even touted as a weapon which would destroy people but spare property.

Scientists theorize that the bomb, triggered above ground by a small blast, could loose a deadly rain of radioactivity, penetrating several feet of earth or concrete to kill or maim. But it would leave factories and farms virtually unscathed—apparently a desirable goal for any theoretical victor in a thermonuclear war.

The AEC refuses to comment about the neutron bomb, but there is speculation that research on the project is going on at the nuclear [illegible]

(Continued On Page Six)

Officials Defend Plan To Limit Welfare Payments

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP)—Attorneys of the city of Newburgh to limit the amount and duration of some welfare payments were defended by city officials today as morally sound and financially necessary.

But critics said the regulations were illegal, inhumane and founded on anti-Negro prejudice.

Three were the opposing arguments recalled for a hearing before members of the State Social Welfare Board on the Newburgh issue, which has become a focal point for broad debate on the entire scope of public welfare.

City Manager Joseph Mitchell

(Continued On Page Six)

Board Rejects Student Appeals

ATLANTA (AP) — The Atlanta Board of Education has turned down appeals of 28 Negro students seeking school desegregation transfers and an appeal by a white girl seeking to transfer from a school slated for integration this fall.

Attorneys for the Negroes and the white girl's father said they would appeal the decision.

The Negro attorneys were not present when the board announced its decision last night, but attorney D. L. Hollowell, contacted later, said the next step would be a motion for reconsideration before the board. Should this fail, it [illegible]

(Continued On Page Six)

Big Contracts Awarded Firm

Work contracts for low-cost [illegible] housing units totaling more than a million dollars have been awarded E. A. Jones and Sons officials of the local concern said today.

Two projects are involved. The local construction company will build 100 units in Dublin at a contract price of $510,000 and 60 units in Sinclair at a cost of $305,000. Work will begin immediately.

'From Human Point'

Eichmann Concedes He Felt Guilt for Deaths

By THOMAS A. REEDY

JERUSALEM (AP) — Adolf Eichmann conceded under rigid cross-examination today that guilt is incurred, so far as my participation is concerned, I must point out that I do not consider myself guilty from the legal point of view. I was only carrying out my superiors' orders. If the Jews who were deported by me found their death, then the legal aspect has to be examined."

[illegible] and in one of his first questions, Eichmann replied, "So far as personal guilt is concerned, so far as my participation is concerned, I must point out that I do not consider myself guilty from the legal point of view. I was only carrying out my superiors' orders. If the Jews who were deported by me found their death, then the legal aspect has to be examined."

After Crisis Rekindling

No Troop Buildup In East Germany

By FRED L. HOFFMAN

WASHINGTON (AP) — The rekindled Berlin crisis appeared by has sparked no Soviet military buildup in East Germany — at least not yet.

Informed sources say that, except for normal personnel movements, there have been no major troop shifts in that area since Premier Khrushchev [illegible] Soviet divisions there have been divisions run to around 15,000 men each.

In addition, the East Germans have six divisions of [illegible] division, quality Czechoslovak Pact and Czechoslovakia, two satellites adjoining East Germany, count 14 divisions each. These units are believed below full strength.

There has been speculation the United States may send another division to join the five already deployed in West Germany, and perhaps take other steps to [illegible] U.S. determination to [illegible] last on Berlin.

French President Charles de Gaulle has indicated that one or more French divisions may be brought back from Algeria if [illegible] perhaps shipped to West Germany where three other French [illegible] are based.

And there has been talk the British may [illegible] fighter planes now based in England, to West Germany where three British divisions are posted at the [illegible]

(Continued On Page Six)

Jimmie McClinton Leaves Americus

Jimmie McClinton, well known local businessman and owner of J&M Trucking Co., said he was [illegible] today from Americus back to Montgomery, Ala. He will maintain a home here.

McClinton moved here in 1953 to open the trucking line which grew to a weekly payroll of $10,000.

Operations are now being closed here, however, and most of the trucks and equipment will be transferred to the [illegible] Montgomery headquarters.

Buck Jackson will remain as district manager of operations at the local [illegible]

McClinton said he has great faith in the industrial potential of Americus and Sumter County, and he urged local leaders to [illegible]

NEW NOTE ON BERLIN READY FOR NIKITA

WASHINGTON (AP) —The United States has framed a new [illegible] Premier Khrushchev, in effect, that there is not much profit in negotiating over Berlin unless he comes up with more reasonable ideas. It probably will go to Khrushchev next week.

The point is understood to be made with diplomatic indirection by:

a) Saying this country is always ready to negotiate for a solution of the problem when a reasonable basis for negotiations exists, and

b) Refraining from making any specific proposal for talks.

The communication, being put into final form in consultations with Britain, France and West Germany, will respond to the memorandum Khrushchev gave President Kennedy at the end of their Berlin talks in Vienna a month ago.

Similar notes from London, Paris and Bonn are expected to follow the U.S. communication to Moscow.

Khrushchev demanded that Berlin, a Western outpost inside Communist East Germany, be made a

(Continued On Page Six)

Easements Requested

Council Approves Plans For Town Creek Project

By RUDY HAYES

Plans for the proposed $255,000 Town Creek Flood Control Project were were unanimously approved by the Mayor and City Council of Americus at a called meeting Thursday night.

Meeting with three representatives from the Mobile, Ala., District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who prepared the plans, Council members heard the project detailed and gave full authorization for the project to proceed.

Mother Jailed For Contempt By State Court

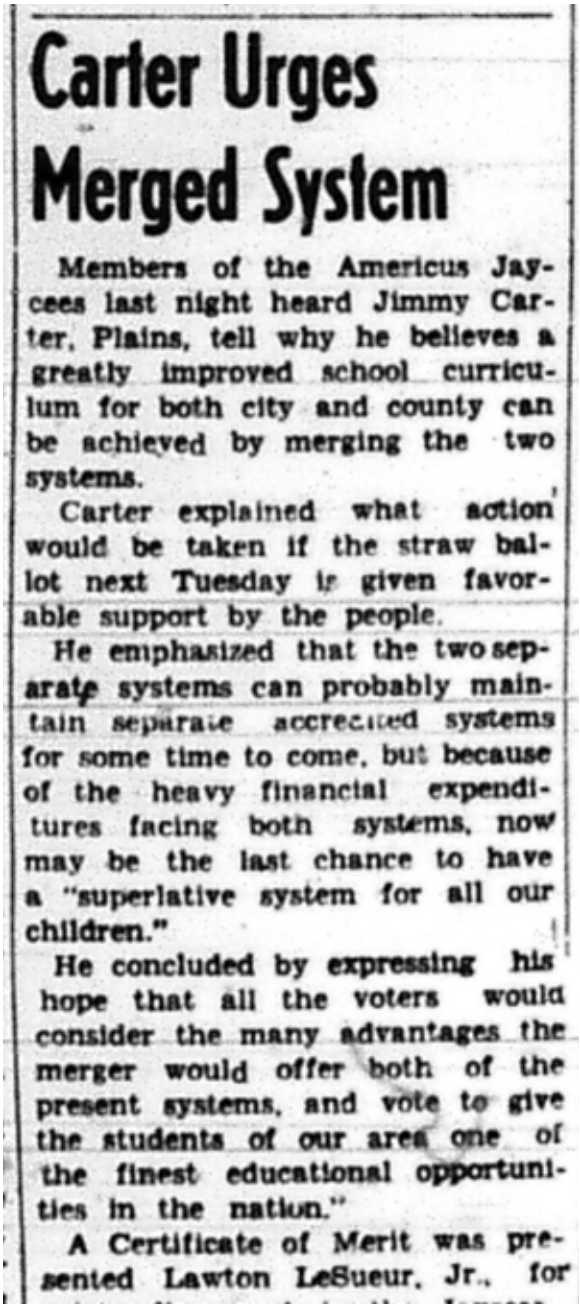
LAWRENCEVILLE (AP) — A pretty, blonde Georgia Navy Civil Service employee was ordered to be jailed today, charged with contempt of court because she failed to give custody of her children to their father.

Mrs. Shirley Ann Hix, 23, Ga., [illegible] was ordered into custody by Superior Court Judge Sidney Tye. [illegible] Mrs. Hix's attorney, Wade Cox, [illegible] would be appealed.

(Continued On Page Six)

Americus Times-Recorder, July 7, 1961, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 6.2. News coverage of the 1961 School Consolidation Referendum—Jimmy Carter's lead role



Carter Urges Merged System

Members of the Americus Jaycees last night heard Jimmy Carter, Plains, tell why he believes a greatly improved school curriculum for both city and county can be achieved by merging the two systems.

Carter explained what action would be taken if the straw ballot next Tuesday is given favorable support by the people.

He emphasized that the two separate systems can probably maintain separate accredited systems for some time to come, but because of the heavy financial expenditures facing both systems, now may be the last chance to have a "superlative system for all our children."

He concluded by expressing his hope that all the voters would consider the many advantages the merger would offer both of the present systems, and vote to give the students of our area one of the finest educational opportunities in the nation."

A Certificate of Merit was presented Lawton LeSueur, Jr., for

Americus Times-Recorder, July 14, 1961, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 6.3. Pro-school consolidation articles written by Jimmy Carter



Boards Unanimous in Views

Reasons Outlined For Merger Of School Systems

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sumter County Board of Educa tion and the City Board have both by unanimous vote decid ed to recommend to the people that the school systems o Sumter County and Americus be merged into one system Through a series of news articles the two boards' reasons fo the recommendations and their attempts to outline the pre sent and future status of schools will be presented. The city and county will vote separately on July 18th on the issue and the results of this referendum will determine whether th two systems will be merged.

As a result of recent state legislation, survey groups went into each school system in the state last year to look over physical facilities of the system, to determine to what extent the enrollment is increasing or decreasing so that state build ing funds can be allotted and to make recommendations con cerning the building, transportation and financial plans of the system.

This group found that enrollment in Sumter County schools has been approximately the same for many years, bu that, because of a lower birth rate and population movement away from the farms, enrollment will decrease considerably during the next five years. It also found substandard class rooms in use at Plains, Union and at Thalean and major re pairs needed at Union. Their recommendations were that:

(a) Elementary schools be continued permanently a Plains, Leslie-DeSoto and at New Era, that necessary repair be made on these buildings, and that Anthony and eventually Thalean no longer be used as county schools;

(b) A new high school be built in or near Americus fo county students, so that through increased enrollment a more complete curriculum could be offered. This survey group al so recommended that in the future the city and county sys tems be merged and the new county building be used as Junior high school building.

PROSPECTIVE DECREASE

Because of a prospective decrease in white school at tendance from 975 in 1958-59 to 829 in 1964-65, the coun ty system qualifies under the state law for only $50,000 dur ing the next 20 years for building purposes. This means tha any building would have to be financed almost entirely from any local bonds to be paid for by county people.

There are several reasons why the county Board of Ed ucation decided not to follow these recommendations:

First, spending approximately $450,000 for a buildin which would not be a permanent high school center was no considered advisable, and it is very doubtful if the peopl would support a bond issue for this purpose.

Second, most of the inconvenience and dissatisfactio always caused by the loss of a school would be realized in th Plains, Leslie, DeSoto, Thalean and Anthony communitie without obtaining a school large enough to permit a full, com prehensive educational program. There is now a combined average daily attendance (ADA) at Plains and Union of 24 students in grades nine through twelve.

If all the county students now attending the city hig school were required to return to the county system there would still be a total of only about 320 students. Enrollmen trends would further decrease this number in years to come The minimum student body which can support a complet school program, is considered to be 500 students, with at leas 100 in each graduating class.

DUPLICATION SEEN

Third, high school facilities in Sumter County would b duplicated, with the city and county people each having t finance and support administrative personnel, libraries, labora tories, vocational programs, gymnasiums and other athleti facilities, and specialized instructors.

Fourth, the primary purpose of this survey group was t consider the buildings and bther physical plant needs, where as for long range planning purposes the educational progra itself should be the major consideration.

PROBLEMS DISCUSSED

After receiving the recommendations of this state survey group the County Board of Education met with the Cit Board to discuss mutual problems and plans.

Because of a desire to base future action primarily on th welfare of children and the provision of the best educatio possible for them, the county board decided to ask a group distinguished educators for assistance. This group, headed b Dr. Doyne Smith, came from the State Department of Edu cation and from the colleges of Georgia, and made an exten sive investigation into the city and county school program

After completing their work, Dr. Smith and his grou submitted their recommendations to the two Boards of Educa tion and to the public at meetings held on March 28.

Since that time the County Board has met with commun ity groups at Anthony, Leslie-DeSoto, Thalean, New Er Plains and Shiloh to explain these recommendations and take part in discussions with the people of the communitie

The proposals, which will be outlined in the next articl have been endorsed by the County Board of Education an by the City Board, and will be put into effect if a favorab vote is obtained in the coming referendum.

Fair Representation

New School Board Would Direct Merged Systems

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sumter County Board of Education and the City Board have both by unanimous vote decided to recommend to the people that the school systems of Sumter County and Americus be merged into one system. Through a series of news articles the two boards' reasons for the recommendations and their attempts to outline the present and future status of schools will be presented. The city and county will vote separately on July 18th on the issue and the results of this referendum will determine whether the two systems will be merged.

One Board of Education will be appointed and its policies will govern the combined school system if the July 18 merger is approved.

Three members of this board will be selected from the county by the County Commissioners and three members will be selected from the city by the City Council. These six members will then select the seventh member by majority vote, either from the city or county as the members chose.

The supt. of schools will be chosen and employed by the Board of Education. These provisions concerning the board of education and the superintedent will be put into effect by a constitutional amendment, while other legal changes can be made by the two Boards or by an act of the state legislature.

Permanent grammar schools will be maintained at Plains, Leslie-DeSoto, and at New Era, and it is expected that the school at Thalean will be continued in use for several years, depending upon enrollment trends and other circumstances faced by the new Board of Education.

A high school building will be built in a central location to house city and county students, and will be financed in part by state funds and in part by local bonds. The school buildings now located in Americus will be continued in use for grammar school and junior high school pupils.

City and county citizens will be taxed alike to continue financing school programs, with county valuations of property being used throughout as the basis for school tax millage.

The foundation on which this school merger rests is that the people of the city and county will be treated equally in all respects. The sole intention is that all the people of Sumter County will work together in harmony to provide the best possible education for children.

Next article: School building and operation costs.

Americus Times-Recorder, July 10–14, 1961, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

VOLUME 82 — NUMBER 173

For City, County Systems

What's Expected Cost of Merger?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sumter County Board of Education and the City Board have both by unanimous vote decided to recommend to the people that the school systems of Sumter County and Americus be merged into one system. Through a series of news articles the two boards' reasons for the recommendations and their attempts to outline the present and future status of schools will be presented. The city and county will vote separately on July 18th on the issue and the results of this referendum will determine whether the two systems will be merged.

Many questions have been asked about how much a merger of the school systems will cost the people of Sumter County.

The city and county are faced now with the need for extensive repairs, improvements and construction of new facilities. At Union, a new lunchroom is urgently needed and three substandard classrooms are being used there. The school building itself is about forty years old and is approaching the end of its useful life unless frequent extensive repairs are made.

Three substandard classrooms are in use at Plains, and although this building is in better condition than at Union, it is also about forty years old and repairs are becoming ever more costly.

The New Era building is in relatively good repair and should last for at least ten more years, but an additional classroom is needed to house the seven grades there. Five classrooms at Thalean are new, but two substandard rooms are still in use. Recreational facilities are needed at both the city and county colored schools.

The City of Americus is also contending with a shortage of classrooms and with old buildings on which repair costs are high.

It should be apparent that, regardless of whether or not the two school systems are combined, the cost of repairs and new construction over the next ten years is going to be high.

Even if new buildings are not erected at Plains and Union extensive laboratory facilities for physics, chemistry and biology should be provided for county students. Electronic language laboratories are needed also if children are to be educated as well as others.

Vocational shops for electricity, electronics, auto mechanics, agriculture, home economics, business education and other vocations should be provided. Most of these do not now exist. It will be very costly to provide these and other needed facilities and the teachers to staff them at two or three different schools in Sumter County, but the boards do not want children to suffer because of these needs, regardless of the additional cost involved.

Here is a tabulation of expected building costs in Sumter County during the next ten years. These are all estimates, but maximum costs which may be expected have been given.

I. Costs if two systems remain as they are:

COUNTY	
New building at Plains for 300 pupils	$215,000.00
New building at Union for 300 pupils	215,000.00
Classroom at New Era	12,000.00
Lunchroom at Union	20,000.00
Gymnasium at Colored High	100,000.00
Total	562,000.00
CITY	
Classrooms at Staley	$75,000.00
Gymnasium at Staley	70,000.00
Grammar schools, East Americus	175,000.00
Gymnatorium for white students	225,000.00
16 additional rooms, next 10 years	275,000.00
Total	820,000.00
Total, County and City during next 10 years	$1,382,000.00

II. Costs if City remains independent, and a Countywide rural High School is built:

COUNTY	
County High School Gymnasium	$460,000.00
Grammar School at Plains	130,000.00
Grammar School at Union	130,000.00
Classroom at New Era	12,000.00
Gymnasium, Colored High	100,000.00
Total	832,000.00
CITY	
Same as listed in I. above	$820,000.00
Total, County and City during next 10 years	$1,652,000.00

III. Costs if two systems are merged:

County High school and Gymnasium	$650,000.00
Grammar School at Plains	130,000.00
Grammar School at Union	130,000.00
Classroom at New Era	12,000.00
Gymnasium, Colored High	100,000.00
Gymnasium at Staley	70,000.00
Grammar School Classrooms, city	270,000.00
Total, County and City, during next 10 years,	$1,362,000.00

The city and county now have available from state and local funds a total of about $320,000 which may be

(Continued On Page Six)

Voters Must Dec[illegible]

Pro, C[illegible] On School Merger

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sumter County Board of Education and the City Board have both by unanimous vote decided to recommend to the people that the school systems of Sumter County and Americus be merged into one system. Through a series of news articles the two boards' reasons for the recommendations and their attempts to outline the present and future status of schools will be presented. The city and county will vote separately on July 18th on the issue and the results of this referendum will determine whether the two systems will be merged.

In any controversial matter such as the merger of school systems, reasonable arguments can be advanced both for and against the proposal.

In the first place it is always easier to maintain the status quo than to make a change. A lot of hard work and planning will have to come before a successful merger of the city and county school systems can be made. It will take the combined efforts of school teachers and officials, the Board of Education, PTA groups and the people of the county to realize the full benefits of an improved school system.

Some people point out that there is a closer relationship between pupil, teacher and parent in a small school, that the problems and special desires of the child can better be understood and accommodated.

On the other hand, there is no place in the small school faculty for especially trained counselors, and the small teaching staff prevents special instruction for other than the average or the very talented children. The curriculum and school activities must of necessity be planned and carried out for the average child, and few provisions can be made for students who wish to specialize in a particular college preparatory field or who may plan to begin work in one of the vocations immediately after graduation.

It is possible that disciplinary problems may be more acute in a large student body, and administrative duties would be more complicated. Many educators believe, though, that if a program can be arranged for problem children which will suit their interests, desires and abilities, they will be better satisfied in school and less restless and mischievous. Then, if properly planned, a centralized administration for schools can better coordinate instruction for the children from one grade to the next, divided authority can be eliminated, and the schools can be operated more efficiently.

Some people of the county feel that the Board of Education will be dominated by representatives from the city and that over a period of time the rural children will not receive equal consideration. This feeling is undoubtedly a result of ill will generated during the school controversy of 1954, when the city and county boards of education could never agree on combined school board representation. This problem no longer exists.

As explained in a previous article, an equal number of Board members will come from the city and from the county, and these members will, by majority vote, select one additional member. This means that the city and the county will have an equal representation as it is possible to arrange.

Most of the opposition to the school merger actually comes from those who are faced with the loss of a school from their community. This is a real and justifiable feeling, and no one should be criticized for being interested in his local school and wanting his children to be educated near home. Everyone is in favor of better education. As Dr. Doyne Smith pointed out at a public hearing, he never finds anyone opposed to consolidation, but only to the location of the new school in another community.

The major advantage which will come from merging the city and county school systems is the chance to provide for children a greatly expanded and improved course of instruction and it is primarily for this reason that both Boards favor this plan.



70 Units Would Be Offered

School Merger Advantages Given

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last in a series of five articles prepared by the County and City Boards of Education concerning the proposed merger of the two school systems which will be voted on Tuesday. Both boards have unanimously recommended the merger as in the best interest of education for Americus and Sumter County students.

A comparison of the present high school program in the county and the program which is proposed for the new merged high school will show most of the advantages expected if the city and county school systems are merged.

Stated very briefly, there will be approximately seventy units of instruction offered, compared to less than thirty now included in the high school curricula at Plains and Union. These are outlined below for an average year.

MATHEMATICS

NOW OFFERED: Business or general Math; Algebra I-II; Plane Geometry.

PROPOSED: Business Math; Shop Math; Algebra I-II; Plane Geometry, Solid Geometry, Analytic Geometry; Trigonometry.

SCIENCE

NOW OFFERED: Biology; Chemistry; Physics; General Science.

PROPOSED: General Science; Physical Science; Biology; Physics; Chemistry; Advanced Science.

LANGUAGE ARTS

NOW OFFERED: English I-IV

PROPOSED: English I - IV; Speech; Journalism; Dramatics; Remedial Reading; Development Reading*

*Non-credit course

SOCIAL STUDIES

NOW OFFERED: Civics; American Government; American History; Pychology.

PROPOSED: Civics; Georgia History; American History; World History; Geography; Political Science; Economics; Sociology; Psychology; Problems of Democracy.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

NOW OFFERED: Latin I

PROPOSED: Latin I, II; Spanish I, II, III, IV; French I, II, III, IV.

VOCATIONAL

NOW OFFERED: [illegible]

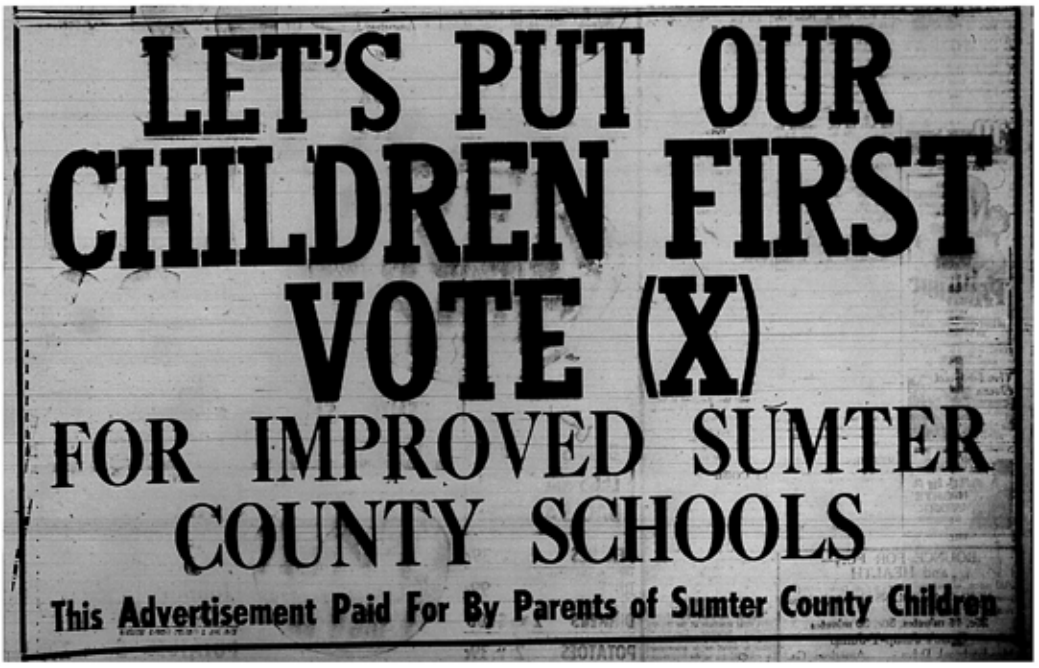
PROPOSED: [illegible]; Home Economics I-IV; Typing I, II; Shorthand I, II; General Business; Bookkeeping; Office Practice; Vocational Office Training; Industrial Arts; Mechanical Drawing; General Metalwork; Carpentry; Woodworking; [illegible]; Basic Electronics; [illegible]

ART

NOW OFFERED: None

(Continued On Page [illegible])

Figure 6.4. 1961 School Consolidation Referendum: Campaign advertisements in the *Americus Times-Recorder*



LET'S PUT OUR CHILDREN FIRST

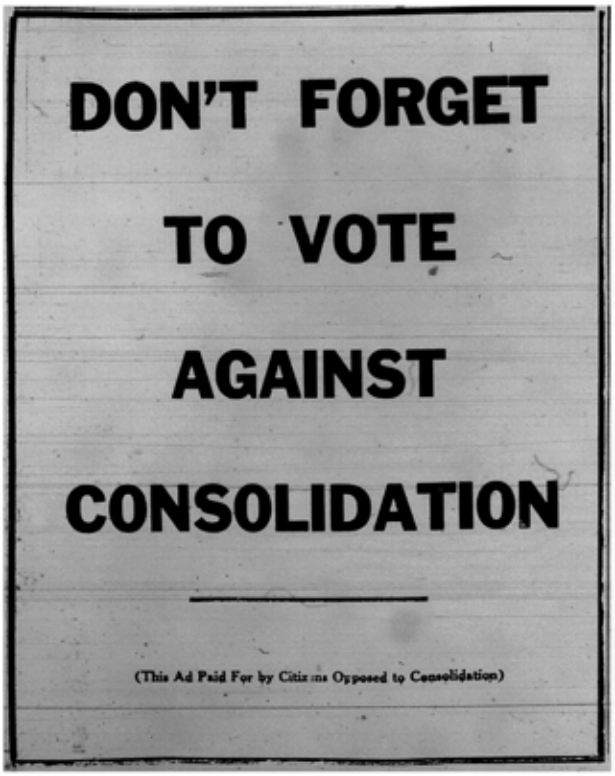
VOTE (X)

FOR IMPROVED SUMTER COUNTY SCHOOLS

This Advertisement Paid For By Parents of Sumter County Children

Americus Times-Recorder, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 6.4. (cont'd)



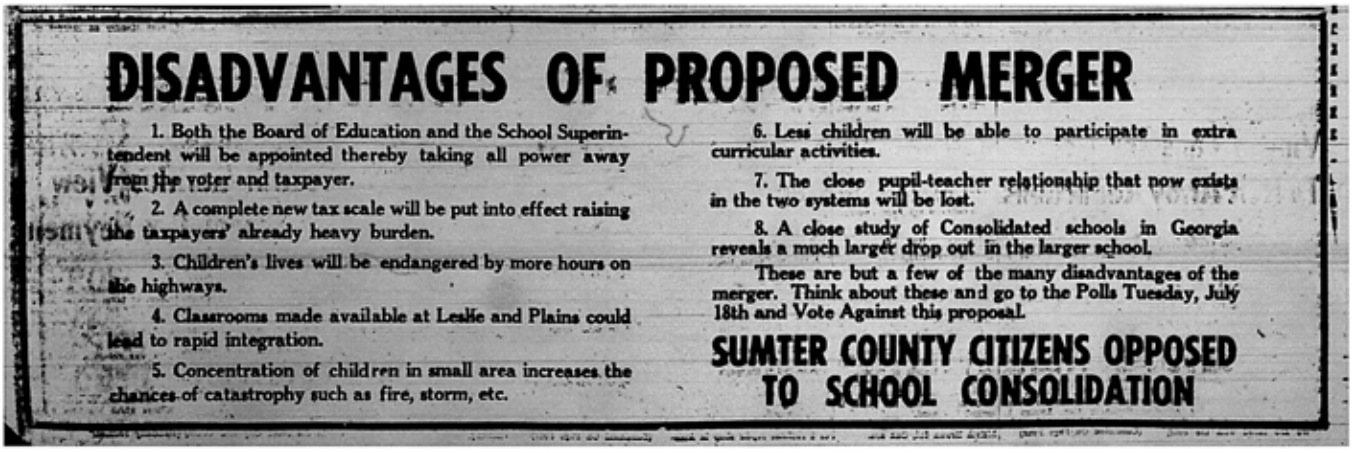
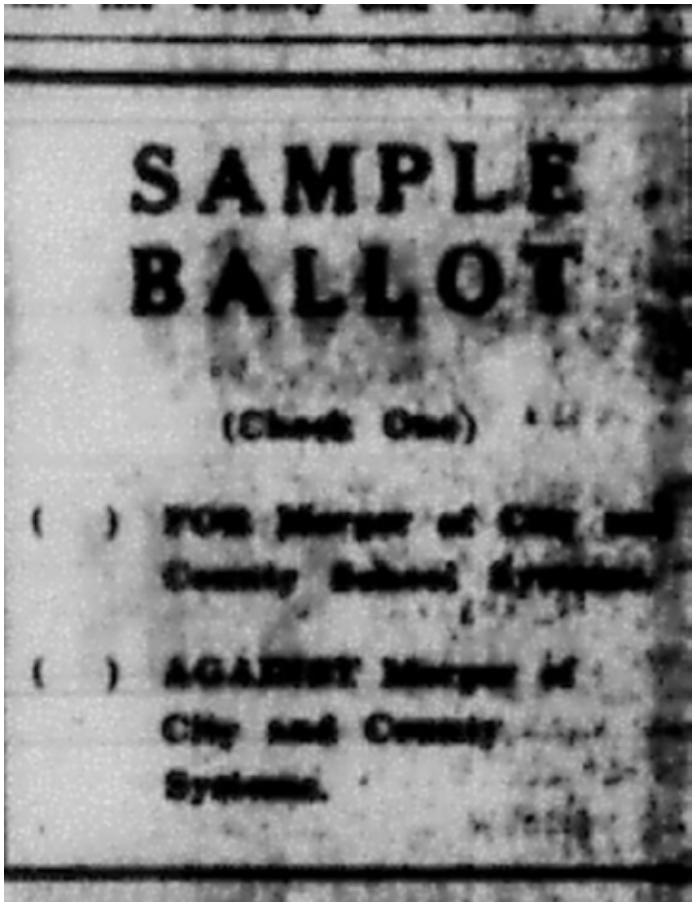


Figure 6.5. Sample ballot for 1961 Sumter County school consolidation vote



Americus Times-Recorder, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia

Figure 6.6. News coverage of the 1961 School Consolidation Referendum results



WEATHER

Americus Times-Recorder

Vote In School Referendum Tuesday

VOLUME 62—NUMBER 179 AMERICUS, GEORGIA, WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 1961 PRICE FIVE CENTS

HOUSES COLLAPSE, TRAPPING RESIDENTS

FIRE ON PLANES ORDER GIVEN BY TUNISIANS

MERGER BEATEN, BOARDS TO PROCEED WITH PLANS

School Proposal Loses By Slim 84-Vote Margin In County; OK'ed in City

By RUDY HAYES and CLARENCE GRADDICK

REFUGEES JAM RECEPTION CAMP

Within 10 Minutes of Firing

U.S. Space Shot 'Scrubbed,' Next Try Scheduled Friday

Trying to 'Fry' Him Eichmann Tells Prosecution

INDIANA CAVE YIELDS BODIES OF EXPLORERS

Vandiver Sets 'Fireside Chat'

Appeals to Russia

Decision Due On Calling Troops

Georgia Pilot Who Flew Raid Dies

Short Course On Cotton Scheduled

Percue Receives 5-Year Sentences

Barron Speaks At Rotary Meet

HOW THEY VOTED

	FOR	AGAINST
	52	213
	20	13
	35	17
	21	29
	33	201
	18	53
	264	49
	32	4
	27	7
	502	586
	786	172

AHS Teachers To Attend Conference

Few Still Have Hope

JFK's School Education Bill Reduced to Rubble

BULLETIN

Additional Police Move Into Race Trouble Area

Civilian Troop Charter Renewed

Friendship Church Planning Revival

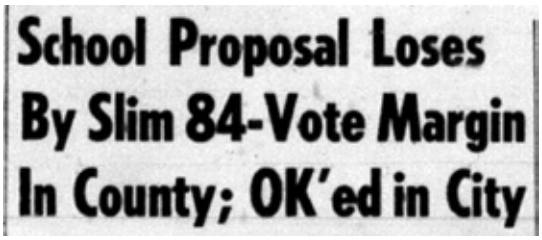
Partly Cloudy And Warm Tonight

Distinguished Record

General Chappell, Local Native, Leaving Service

Americus Times-Recorder, July 19, 1961, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia


MERGER BEATEN, BOARDS TO PROCEED WITH PLANS


School Proposal Loses By Slim 84-Vote Margin In County; OK'ed in City

HOW THEY VOTED

PRECINCT	FOR	AGAINST
15th Leslie	52	213
Old 16th Huntington	20	13
New 16th Sumter City	35	17
17th Thompson	21	29
Old 26th Plains	33	201
New 26th Concord	18	53
27th (Outside Americus)	264	49
28th Chambliss	32	4
29th Andersonville	27	7
TOTALS Sumter Co.	502	586
City of Americus	786	172

CHAPTER SEVEN

Desegregation and Integration at Plains High School and in Sumter County

Less than a decade after it first opened, Westside Elementary School had emerged as a center of community life for black residents in Plains. Though it was at least ten miles away from Plains, Staley High School also became a second home for many high school students from Plains and throughout Sumter County. Towering educators like Annie B. Floyd set high standards for their students' academic achievement. Just as importantly, they demanded respectable conduct and high moral standards for young people in a nurturing environment.

Yet, for all the faith and pride they had in their own institutions and school traditions, black residents of Sumter County and Americus knew that their separate schools were not funded equally. Although black people made up 52.5 percent of the county's 24,641 residents in 1960, officials continued to use the bulk of taxes paid by black and white taxpayers to support schools that barred black children from attendance. Moreover, black students did not enjoy the same opportunity as white students to compete in statewide competitions, such as the Beta Club. They could not take part in 4-H programs on the national level. They missed out on opportunities for scholarships, awards, and college tours that white students could take for granted. Symbolically, their exclusion from the most imposing and stately buildings in their communities was a constant lesson to black children in Plains, Leslie, and Americus that white people did not value them as members of the community. Even though they had separate schools over which they had greater control, they still endured the demeaning experience of exclusion from community life.

With aspirations for a better future and equal society, young people in Americus and Sumter County joined the groundswell of students throughout the South in demanding their fair share of educational opportunities available in their communities. In Sumter County and Americus, there were two distinct phases of school desegregation during the 1960s and 1970s that dismantled some of the social and economic barriers to genuine equality. Sumter County and Americus offer a window onto the promising potential and disappointing long-term outcome of school desegregation. The quest for desegregation did not achieve the desired effect of forging an equitable future for black Sumter County

residents. Yet the desegregation of schools in Sumter County and Americus was one of many changes in society that started the unfinished work of transforming social, political, and economic relations.

Of course, the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling in 1954 outlawed school desegregation, but it also unleashed an impossible cross-current of massive resistance among many white southern officials and citizens. The pace and ease of desegregation varied wildly. No two places experienced the struggle the same way. Some southern school districts readily complied with desegregation almost immediately following the Brown decision. The "Little Rock Nine" entered Central High School with an onslaught of violence and under the glare of the national spotlight. In Prince Edward County, Virginia, local authorities shut down public schools entirely between 1959 and 1964 rather than abide by the *Brown* decision. It took another Supreme Court ruling, in *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, before the county reopened its schools.[1]

In Georgia, the governor, lawmakers, and school board members took a slow, defiantly resistant approach to school desegregation. As of December 1964, only 11 of the 196 school districts in Georgia had desegregated, and the total number of black students attending schools with white students was only 1,337—less than one-half of one percent.[2] Atlanta only desegregated after two court cases and admitted black students through a foot-dragging "grade-a-year" plan. Legislators continued to pass massive resistance laws banning race-mixing in schools. In addition to Atlanta, other districts in the state's largest metropolitan areas, such as Savannah, Columbus, Albany, Macon, and Brunswick, enacted similar plans for token desegregation. It took the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to light a bit more of a fire under school systems throughout the South. Under the act, the federal government denied financial assistance to school districts that remained segregated.[3]

Americus joined other Georgia cities in enacting token desegregation in 1964. The school board announced a freedom of choice plan. Under this scheme, the system of separate black and white schools remained intact, but black students had the option of choosing to attend the white school in their area, putting the onus of desegregating schools entirely on them. Four black students entered Americus High School for the first time at the start of the 1964–65 school year. The Americus Four were David Bell Jr., Robertiena Freeman, Dobbs Wiggins, and Minnie Wise. Their courageous first days at Americus High

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[1] Brian J. Daugherity and Brian Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them: A Documentary Account of the Struggle for School Desegregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 2–4.

[2] Thomas V. O'Brien, "Defiance, Protest, and Compromise: The Struggle to Implement *Brown* in Georgia, 1950–1973," in *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing* Brown v. Board of Education, Brian J. Daugherity and Charles C. Bolton, eds. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008), 105.

[3] "Civil Rights Act of 1964," July 2, 1964; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789–; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

did not attract the national attention of the Little Rock Nine, but they experienced similarly hateful assaults, including having their fellow students pelt them with bottles, rocks, and toilet paper, and having their teachers look the other way. Their parents contended with threats of economic retaliation for sending their children there. The unwelcoming reception they endured was similar to the treatment Greg Wittkamper, a white student whose family lived and worked at the interracial Koinonia Farm, endured. When he started attending Americus High School in 1964, students assaulted him, spat on him, and accused him of being a traitor to his race. Wittkamper remained and eventually graduated from Americus High School, as did Freeman, but Bell, Wiggins, and Wise decided to leave and go to the all-black high school within weeks of first setting foot in Americus High School. The climate there was just too dangerous and inhospitable.[4]

Ending school segregation amounted to merely one strand of the larger civil rights movement in Americus. One of the most far-reaching achievements of the "Americus Movement" was to take aim at racist hiring practices that barred black people from equal employment opportunities and decent pay. Mary Kate Bell, a local activist, and John Perdew, a leader with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, organized domestic workers to protest for an end to the ban on hiring black women at the Manhattan Shirt Company in Americus. Since the factory opened during the 1930s, its eight hundred–woman workforce had remained all-white, with the limited exception of janitorial positions. Perdew and Winnie Ragins, a domestic worker and activist, threatened to lead a strike of black household workers, a move that would have left the white women who worked at Manhattan Shirt Company without childcare. As a result, the company started hiring more black people. At the same time, more and more opportunities were opening up to black people at Dayton Veneer, Shiver Lumber, and Marlette Coach Company, and other mobile home manufacturers that had opened factories in the county during the 1950s. The opening up of industrial employment to black workers not only benefited African Americans in Americus but also those in Plains and rural parts of Sumter County. As Sumter County farmers continued to invest in machinery that reduced the demand for farm workers and virtually ended the institution of sharecropping, displaced farm workers welcomed the opportunity to compete for manufacturing jobs.

Young activists in Americus led numerous protests to demand that public spaces become equally accessible to black people. Local law enforcement officers and vigilantes met their challenges with numerous episodes of violence. Other Americus black residents engaged in smaller-scale, quieter protests. Black women who cooked and cleaned for white

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[4] "Integrating Americus High School," https://www.crmvet.org/tim/tim64c.htm#1964americushigh, accessed December 8, 2020; Jim Auchmutey, *The Class of '65: A Student, a Divided Town, and the Long Road to Forgiveness* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015). Sumter County adopted its freedom of choice plan in September 1965. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 8, 1966.

families sought to end the practice of riding in the back seat of their white employers' cars during their daily rides to and from work. In short, their goal was to participate in community life on a basis of equality and to gain respect as full citizens.[5]

Activism outside of Americus was less dramatic but no less urgent. Local people throughout Sumter County drew on a decades-long history of working to dismantle the unequal structure of Jim Crow. Beginning with calls for salary equalization for teachers, black people throughout Sumter County had worked for years to expand educational opportunities for black children. The establishment of the interracial Koinonia Farm in 1942 represented another significant milestone in the struggle for civil rights. Though it wasn't a "civil rights" protest, even the small-scale strike for higher wages among African Americans who worked for Earl Carter and other local farmers represented important efforts to fight for decent treatment.[6]

"If They Want to Go, Let Them Go"

The impetus to desegregate Plains High School came from both parents and students. Josephine Thomas (nee Gardner) recalled, "It was a group of parents that got together and decided that we would do it. That's how it happened. They asked us did we want to do it and we said, 'Yes.' They were parents with children who attended Westside School. Some of them lived within the city limits of Plains while others lived 'down in the country.'"[7] Betty Blackman remembered receiving a paper about the freedom of choice plan at school. She filled it out and turned it in. When she was fifteen years old, Blackman and her four siblings had moved from Hartford, Connecticut, to Plains to live with their grandparents after their mother died. "A few days later, I came home and my grandmother and grandfather asked me, 'What did you do? They came by here fussing at us about you going to Plains High," Blackman remembered. "I left that alone. I scared my grandparents. We left it alone but my brother went instead of me. . . . He was the first one to come."[8]

As the reaction of Blackman's grandparents shows, the prospect of token integration at Plains High School posed great risks, known and unknown. Black people in Plains knew the costs that people in nearby towns and outside of their state had paid for simply insisting on their civil rights: losing their jobs for membership in the NAACP and other

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[5] Bobby Fuse, interview with Jason Berggren, May 17, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[6] Jimmy Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 56.

[7] Josephine Thomas, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 16, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[8] Betty Blackman et al., interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 8, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

organizations, being evicted from farms where they lived and worked, bombing of their homes, or being run out of town. Right up the road in Americus, young people involved in the movement were targets of unspeakable crimes. A known white supremacist abducted and raped fifteen-year-old Annie B. Hayes in 1963. Months later, teenage girls were imprisoned in cages, detained in inhumane conditions. They knew about the mob of white students and other residents who threw rocks at the Americus Four when they entered Americus High School.[9]

Because of these risks, parents least vulnerable to economic reprisals from white landlords, merchants, and other employers were more likely to support their children in their quest to desegregate the schools than parents whose economic circumstances were more precarious. As Eugene Edge explained, the threats were too great for most African Americans who lived and worked on white people's farms: "The Blacks on the other side of the county, most of them lived on these people's places, and they wasn't going to say too much."[10]

Mary Minion, whose daughter, April Wright, was one of the Plains 17, also noted the pressure and threats parents endured: "There was a lot of parents sent their kids up there, but they were threatened by the white. . . people that was living with us." Minion and her husband, Leonard Wright, were not independent landowning farmers, but they felt secure in encouraging their daughter to pursue this risky path. They rented a farm from Jimmy Carter. "Carter never said anything to us," Minion said. "We were living on his place, but he said, 'If they want to go, let them go.'"[11]

Parents who had jobs off the farm also felt more secure in assuming the risk of sending their children to Plains High School. Josephine Thomas, who entered Plains High School in 1966, along with her sister, Edna Laster, remembered that parents who "were working for someone else" did not send their children. "See, my daddy was working at Champion," she said. "He wasn't working for anyone else. I mean, he was, but it was not like farming." The children whose parents farmed either owned their own land, or had employers who did not object, like Jimmy Carter and Julia Coleman.[12]

Although Judson Edge was not an independent farmer, he enjoyed a trusted position with Miss Julia. Edge was determined that his oldest daughters, Beverly and June Edge, would finish their education at Plains High School. No one could deter him. Mrs. Floyd, the principal of Westside School, expressed her concern about his plan. Why didn't he just

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[9] "The Movement," Americus-Sumter County Movement Remembered Committee Inc., http://theamericusmovement.org/the-movement.html.

[10] Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, July 18, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[11] Mary Minion, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan, May 26, 2007, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[12] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

send the girls to Westside, she wondered. "Annie B. Floyd came to me," Edge recalled. "She said, 'Well, I guess you're the only one in Plains can do that.' She said, 'Frankly, I'm afraid.'" His brother, Eugene Edge, recalled an effort to discourage his brother from sending his daughters to the school. "I remember, at one time, we were planting a crop, during the time when they were talking segregation," recalled. "A group of white guys came out to talk to him, upset about it, don't think that they should all be in the same school, and that kind of stuff. And they were trying to persuade him to talk to the Blacks about not going, OK? He said, no, I'm not going to do that."[13]

Judson Edge's own difficulty obtaining his education likely influenced his determination to send his daughters to Plains High School. "Well, we had to work on a farm until the crops were gathered, OK?" his brother, Eugene Edge, explained. "And sometimes, it would throw you late for going to school, being a male, but the girls could go. And that caused me to miss a grade one time. The grades were good, but the days wasn't there, didn't have enough days." Judson Edge faced the same challenge with absences from school and missed lessons. While Eugene Edge ultimately earned his GED, Judson Edge's school days ended after he completed seventh grade.[14]

From then on, he worked full-time for Miss Julia's sister and her husband. Since he was younger, he'd mowed the lawn and performed other tasks for Miss Julia's sister, Jessie, and her husband, Henry Rufus McGee. With the need to help his family, he assumed increasing responsibility working for McGee, who ran the farm and was its presumed owner. Edge later learned that the actual owner was Miss Julia, who had saved the farm from foreclosure during the Great Depression. After the deaths of Henry McGee, Edge, his wife, whose name was also Julia, and their children began working for Jessie McGee. When her health started to falter, Edge started driving Miss Julia back and forth to school and running her on errands, a task her sister could no longer do. Edge also took Miss Julia on out-of-town trips to meetings in Atlanta and to see family members in Alabama. After Jessie McGee's death, Edge and his family started working exclusively for Miss Julia, an arrangement that lasted until the end of her life. Edge recalled in a 1994 interview that Miss Julia treated him with respect. "She would often tell me, 'Don't you ever tell anybody you work for me. Tell them we work together,'" Edge remembered. Judson Edge banked on years of hard work and goodwill for Miss Julia's family when his daughters joined the group of students desegregating Plains.[15]

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[13] Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, July 18, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[14] Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, July 18, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[15] Judson Edge, interview with Bonnie Blayford, April 26, 1993, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

The First Day

The first day of school for the Plains 17 did not provoke the blatant physical attacks and verbal assaults that students in Americus and elsewhere endured. That first morning, the students who lived on the other side of the train tracks from Plains High School boarded the school bus at Westside School and made the quick trip to their new school. Yet, when they arrived, they entered a different way from the rest of the students. Rather than the bus driver bringing them to the front entrance of the school, they were dropped off at the back of the school.[16] Surely, behind the scenes, there had undoubtedly been delicate negotiations between the superintendent, parents, school board members, and others to make this test-run in desegregation go as smoothly as possible. Judson Edge recalled one of these secret discussions. While most members of the Plains 17 took the bus on the first day, Beverly and June Edge arrived by car. "I carried my children first day," Judson Edge said. "They went through the front door." Apparently, white parents, teachers, and administrators, many of whom had taken it for granted that Edge would drop off Miss Julia at the front door, did not take kindly to him dropping off his daughters at the same entrance. Even though black students made their historic entry into the school, they were expected to hold onto the demeaning separate and unequal customs of Jim Crow. The superintendent tried to appease those who objected to the Edge girls arriving through the main entrance. "Will you let your children ride back on the bus and you bring them in the morning?" he asked Edge. While Edge did not agree, he proposed a compromise. His insistence on his daughters' right to walk through the front door of the school paid off for all of the students. The bus driver started dropping the black children off at the front.

Unwelcome Reception

Even though the Plains 17 never faced the type of public violence and outrage that other desegregation pioneers experienced, they endured daily acts of bullying and disrespect during this period of token integration. For twelve-year-old Michael Coley, going to school with white children was nothing new. Coley spent part of his early childhood in Hartford, Connecticut. He volunteered to attend Plains because he was "used to going to school with white kids coming from Hartford." But nothing at Hartford had prepared him to be the first and only black student in his seventh-grade class at Plains High School. He was pleased that Plains High School had "new books, nicer things" than he had seen at Westside School. However, during recess on the first day, someone tore up his books and

[16] Judson Edge, interview with Bonnie Blayford, April 26, 1993, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

set them outside the classroom. His white classmates taunted him every day, and one of his teachers even threatened to give him a failing grade: "Students didn't really want us here… the teacher told me if you don't go back to the black schools I'm gonna flunk you."[17]

Josephine Gardner (now Josephine Thomas) was in her freshman year when she participated in desegregating Plains High School, and she noticed a difference between her white male and female classmates. "We would get spat upon and we would get kicked, she said.… It was the guys that were doing it." The boys' taunts and aggressive behavior never happened in class on in front of teachers. "It was always done in a way where they would not get caught, but we still learned," she remembered. "It would be just your word against theirs if you said anything." [18] One of the sneaky things they would do was to spit on the black students as they were walking upstairs.[19]

Her white female classmates, in contrast, just disregarded her altogether. "The girls, they wouldn't talk to you, but they wouldn't say anything ugly to you either. It was mostly the guys that would do it," Thomas recalled. She and some of the black students experienced social ostracism during lunch and recess, too: "If we would go to lunch, we would always have to sit by ourselves. After lunch, when you finished your lunch, you could go to gymnasium for a while, and of course, we would sit in there by ourselves, too, a lot."[20]

What was jarring for some of the students was that they couldn't even socialize with white students whom they'd known all their lives. They were the children and grandchildren of white people for whom their mothers and grandmothers had cooked, cleaned, and babysat. For instance, Ms. Minion said her "grandmamma would wash and iron for the Watsons and the Carters; she washed and ironed for the Carters. I think she got a dollar and half a week for washing the family, washing on hand, because we didn't have washing machines then." How could people with whom their families had been so familiar treat them like strangers? Edna Gardner (now Edna Laster), a year younger than her sister, Josephine, recalled that Jeff Carter, son of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, and his cousin, Connie, would speak to her in passing, "but as far as a real conversation, mm-mm, because if they did, they would get ostracized." Looking back, she understands. "You're a child, I

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[17] Michael Coley and Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren, June 29, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[18] Josephine Thomas, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 16, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[19] Mary Minion, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan and Leila Weinstein, May 26, 2007, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[20] Josephine Thomas, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 16, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

mean, you're only 13, 14, 15 years old, so your friends, that's everything." She also appreciated that the white kids she knew never stooped to name-calling and other mean behavior of some of their peers.[21]

Even though most of the white girls were not openly mean, they engaged in more passive forms of torment. Laster remembered an incident after physical education. "It was me and another black girl," she said. "I think it was just two of us in that class. And we had gone and did our P. E., and back then you dressed out, you changed up, you changed. And then we went back to the restroom, and I could remember for some reason, those girls wouldn't let us back in the restroom to change. They were so mean. They would not let us back in to change." Luckily, Laster and the other black student felt comfortable turning to Ms. Margaret Rogers, a teacher and native New Yorker whose family owned a dairy in Plains. "So, we went to her. . .and she marched us right back over there," Laster said. "She told those girls to let us in that bathroom, don't ever do anything like that again, and to let us get our clothes. And we didn't have no problem after that. But, Ms. Rogers, she really went to bat for us. She did."[22]

Overall, Laster's sense was that she "couldn't really tell" what the teachers thought about desegregation. "They made you kind of feel comfortable or more so, than the students did, or course," Laster remembered. But she was aware that not all teachers acted professionally. Michael Coley's disturbing experience with his teacher was one example.[23]

The Plains 17 tried their best to cope with the range of experiences they had as the first black students by finding solace in each other and their parents. Laster and Thomas both found the bus ride to and from school to be the most relaxing part of the day, where they could just enjoy themselves and trade stories about what happened at school. "We had fun because it was just us on the bus," Thomas said. After school, they had plenty of stories to share with their parents, not only about what they were learning but about the behavior of their white classmates. "They would mostly say, 'If they don't say anything to you, don't you say anything to them. If they call you names, or say something ugly, you just go on like you don't hear it," Laster said. "So they just told us, 'Remember what you're going to school for, to get an education. Not to make friends if they don't want to be, then you don't worry about that. And just remember how you were raised. And don't be disrespectful, no matter how ugly they act, and or what they say. Because you're going to get an education.'"[24]

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[21] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[22] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

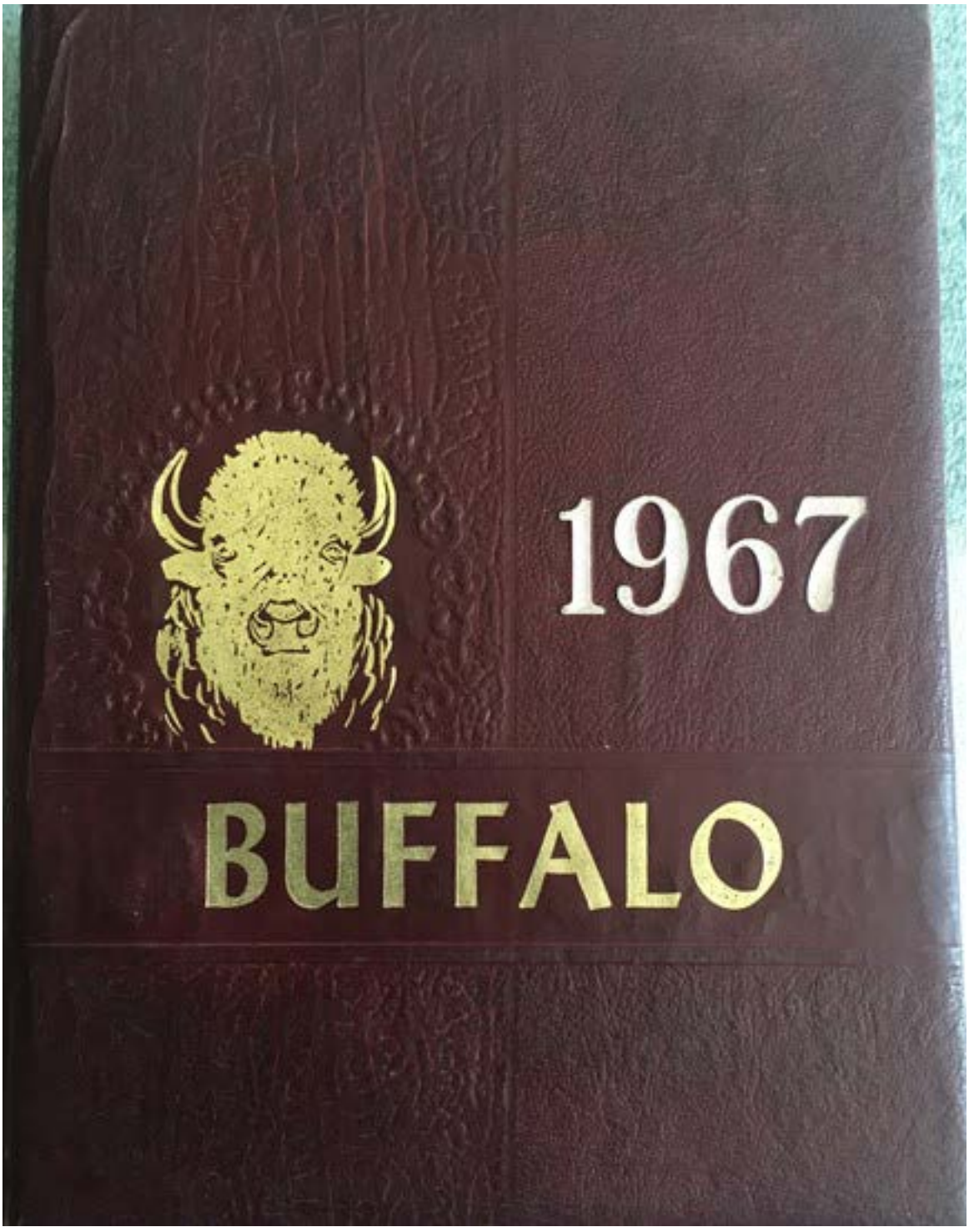
[23] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[24] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

The educational experience was one of the greatest perks that the Plains 17 noticed during this initial phase of desegregation. Both Coley and Laster commented on the difference between the materials at Plains High School versus what they had used at Westside. Even though someone ripped them up, Coley vividly remembered how nice the books were compared with what he had used at Westside. "We got the hand-me-down, the second-hand books," Laster said. "But then when I went to Plains High School, everything was new, and we had the new books. Maybe you may have had some that were used, but they were in good condition. Because I can actually remember getting a school book, I don't remember what class it was, at Westside, and the backs were practically torn off the books. And it just made me think, now that I've gotten older, and they said separate but equal, but it was never equal. It was not equal, from my standpoint, and from the people that went to school with me, it was not equal."[25]

[25] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Figure 7.1. Plains High School Yearbook, 1966–1967



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 7.2. "The Plains 17," 1966–1967

In 1966, Plains High School was desegregated, not integrated. That year, the first black students—the "Plains 17"—attended the previously all-white school. There were 12 girls and 5 boys in a school with an enrollment of 415 students.

High School



Beverly Edge
(Junior)



Betty Jean Hollis
(Junior)



Brenda Oates
(Junior)



April Wright
(Junior)



Clyde Jackson
(Sophomore)



Benny Wallace
(Sophomore)



June Edge
(Freshman)



Josephine Gardner
(Freshman)



Martha Jackson
(Freshman)



Linda Oates
(Freshman)



Willie Pickett
(Freshman)

Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

"The Plains 17," 1966–1967

Junior High School



Christine Clinkscale
(Eighth Grade)



Willie Kate Clinkscale
(Eighth Grade)



Edna Gardner
(Eighth Grade)



Martha Ann Hollis
(Eighth Grade)

Elementary School



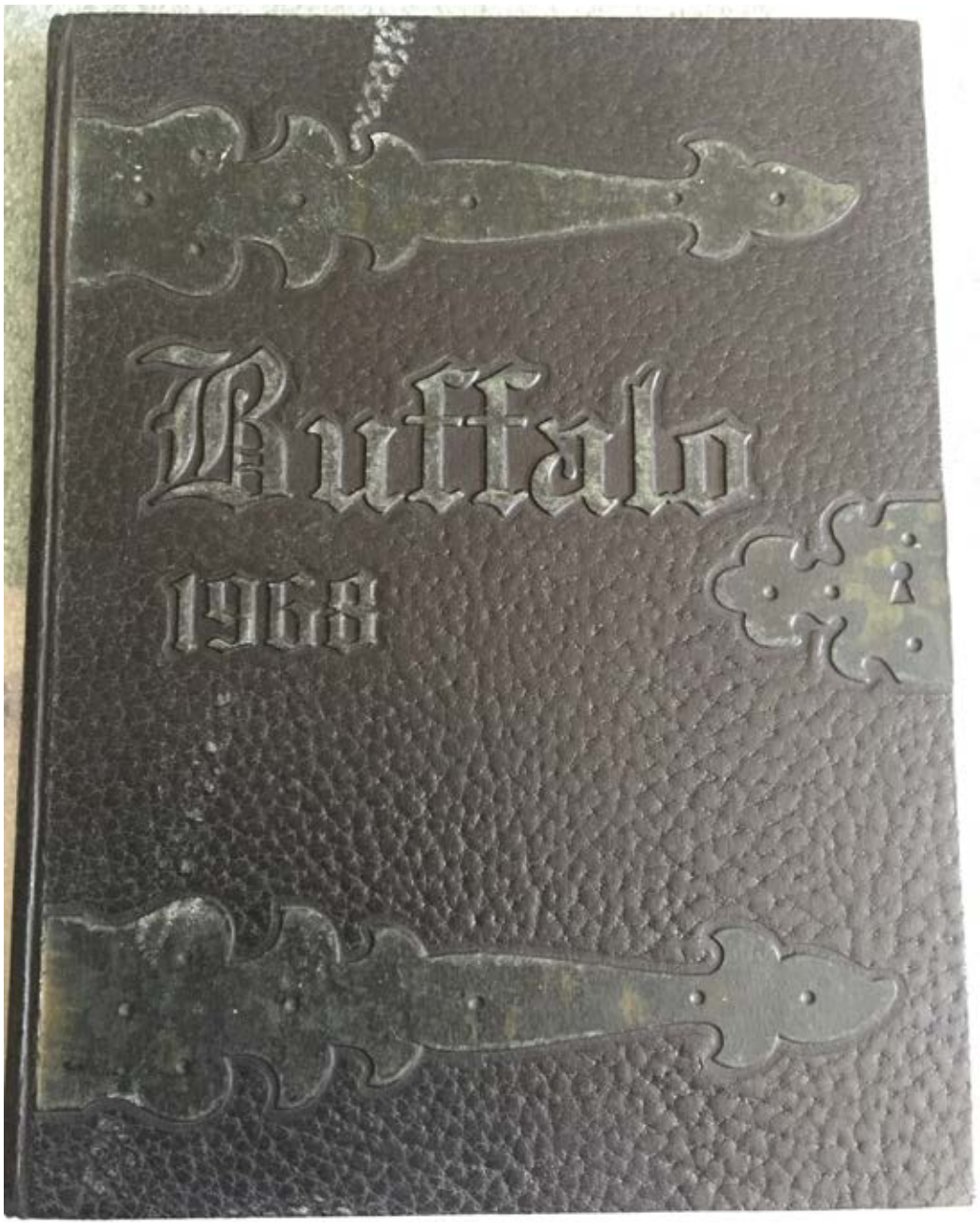
Michael Coley
(Seventh Grade)



Raymond Pickett
(Sixth Grade)

Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 7.3. Plains High School Yearbook, 1967–1968



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 7.4. Persisting segregation in Plains High School Sports, 1966–1967
Although racial desegregation came to Plains High School in 1966, the school's athletic teams remained white-only. The images here are from the boys' varsity basketball team for the 1966–67 school year. Chip Carter, the future president's son, was number 11.





Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

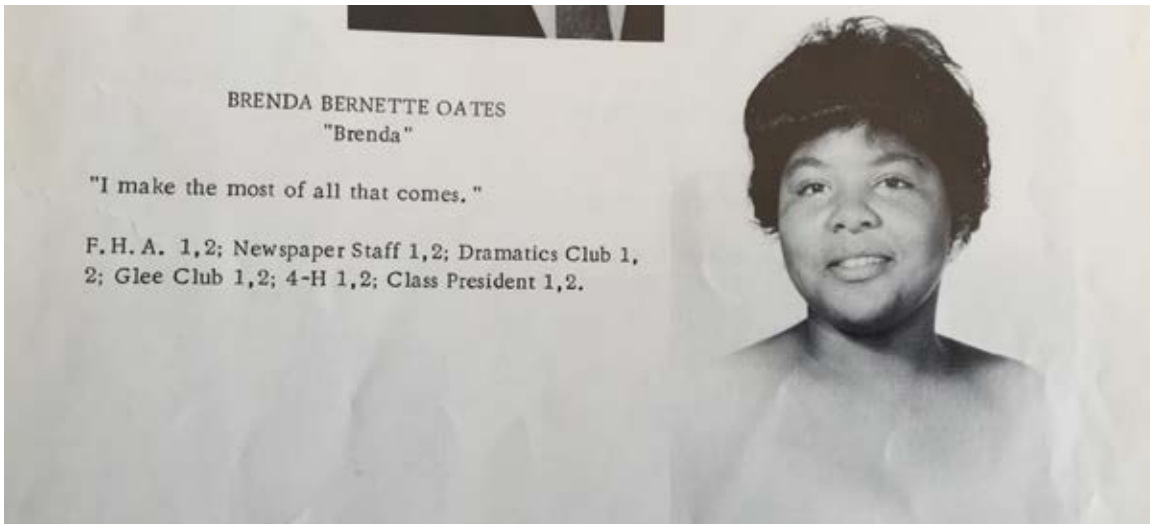
Figure 7.5. Persisting segregation in Plains High School sports, 1967–1968
The images here are of a cheerleading squad and the girls' varsity basketball team for the 1967–68 school year.





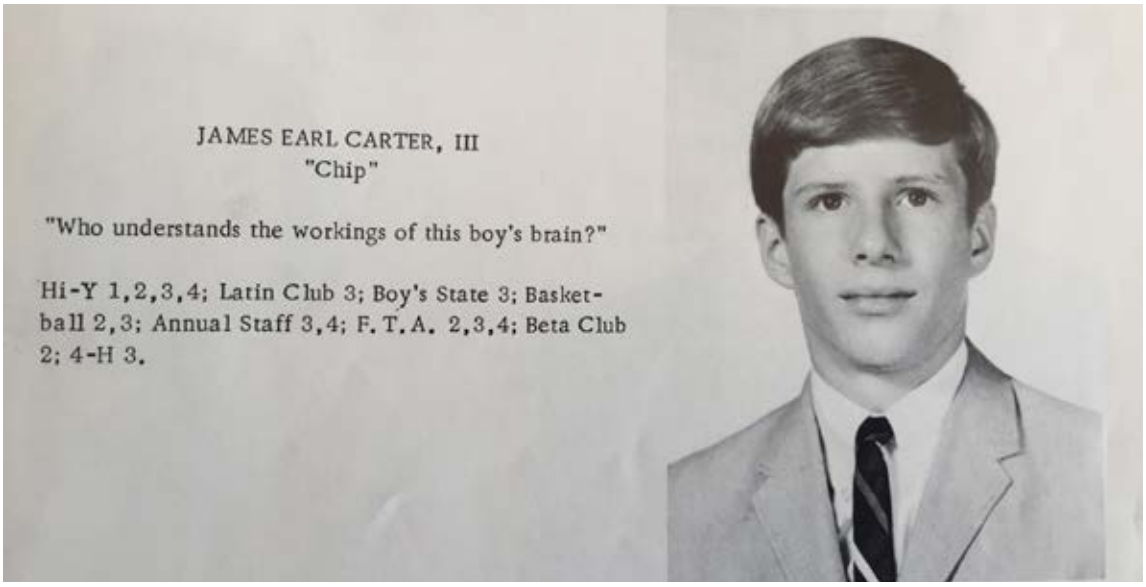
Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 7.6. "The First Graduate," 1967–1968
In 1968, Brenda Oates became the first black student to graduate from Plains High School. The images here are from the 1967–68 school annual.



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

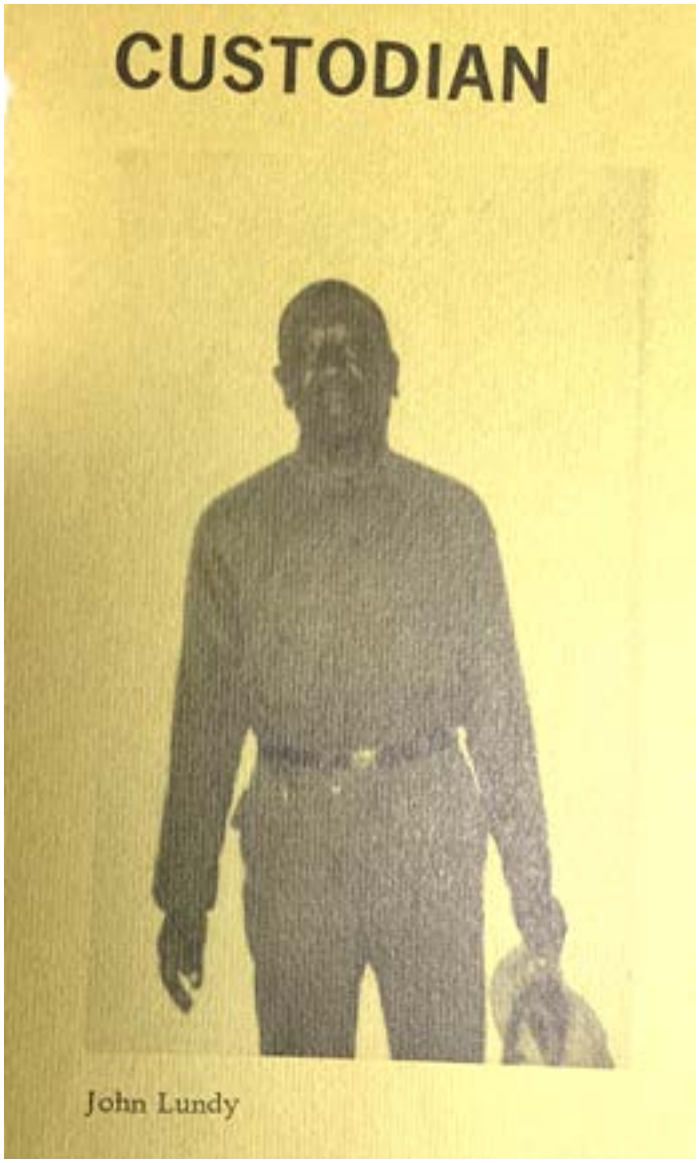
Figure 7.7. "Carter Classmate," 1967–1968
The Carters' second oldest son, James Earl "Chip" Carter III, was a classmate of Brenda Oates. He also graduated from Plains High School in 1968.



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 7.8. Reverend John Lundy

While the student body of Plains High School was desegregated for the 1966–67 and the 1967–68 school years, there were no black teachers or administrators. They remained all white. The only blacks on staff were custodians. Rev. John Lundy was one of them. The image here is from the Plains High School yearbook, 1968–69.



Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Back to *Our* School

Despite the newer books, most of the Plains 17 only lasted at the school one or two years. Brenda Oates and April Wright were the only students among the Plains 17 to remain at the school, and Oates was the first black student to graduate. Chip Carter, the eldest son of the Carters, remembered that "they both graduated pretty high in their class and they fit in. It was a difficult time, though, it really was."[26]

The students who left all had different reasons for opting to transfer to Staley High School or Sumter High School. Being threatened by his teacher convinced Coley that he would be better off attending Sumter High School. All of the threats, insults, and mistreatment added up to one thing: there were "a lot of efforts to keep the school segregated," he said.[27] As sisters, Laster and Thomas had different reasons for leaving Plains High School after two years. "From my perspective, it was that we wanted to be involved in extracurricular activities, and we wanted to experience football games," Laster said. "You see, Plains High didn't have a football team. They just had basketball."[28]

Though Laster did not dwell on it, surely the incident on the day that an assassin killed Martin Luther King Jr. weighed on her. She was in the Home Economics classroom on the top floor when she saw a group of white students come upstairs. "They were running up the stairs just shouting, and just so excited, and having an awesome time, and they were just so glad," she remembered. "And we said, 'What's going on?' So, the teacher said, 'Hold on.' So, she went to the door, and they said Dr. Martin Luther King had been shot and killed." Most of the students celebrating were white boys. The white girls in the class "just kind of like, smirked, and they didn't say anything." The teacher immediately dismissed the celebrating students, and then took Laster and other black students back into the lab. "She said she was sorry," Laster recalled. "It was sad, but they were celebrating. I remember that. I remember that vividly."[29] Rosalynn Carter recalls her son, Chip, experiencing something similar when John F. Kennedy was killed. "When the news was announced in Chip's classroom, the teacher said, 'Good!' and the students applauded.

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[26] James Earl "Chip" Carter, III, interview with Bob Short, June 23, 2008, Reflections of Georgia Politics Collection, Russell Library, University of Georgia.

[27] Michael Coley and Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren, June 29, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[28] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[29] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Chip, who has a quick temper like mine, picked up a chair and threw it at the teacher—and spent the next few days in the principal's office. It was not a proper thing for him to do, but we never blamed him."[30]

The cumulative effect of the acts of aggression, on the one hand, and feelings of invisibility, on the other, convinced African American students that Plains High School would never feel like *their* school. Thomas transferred from Plains High School to Sumter High School in 1968, and graduated in 1970, part of the school's last graduating class from the building on Rucker Street in Americus. She summed up the experience of the Plains 17 this way: "All in all, we got through it, but we just decided after those two years that we would go back to *our* school, which was Sumter High." Years later, when Laster was working at an office in Americus, one of her classmates came in. He recognized her from Plains High School. "He said, 'You know, if I said or did anything to you, when you were over at Plains High, that was ugly, or mean, or cruel. Please forgive me.' And said, 'I do, Billy.' And I said, 'I know it was a sign of the times.'"[31]

At Sumter High School, members of the Plains 17 could exhale and take for granted that they were belonged. They knew the teachers were concerned about their education. While the sting of having a teacher threaten to flunk him was still fresh in Coley's mind, he found in Ms. Hill, one of his favorite teachers, a person who "really put forth the effort in educating the students even under the circumstances. . . . Out of all those tough circumstances, they gave the best." Laster pointed out that even though very few of the teachers at Sumter High School were from Sumter County, they nevertheless took a special interest in students. "They just wanted to make sure that we got a good education, and a good start in life," she said.[32]

A Whole New World

In the fall of 1970, after more than a decade of massive resistance and only a few years of unsuccessful token desegregation, Sumter County and Americus joined school systems throughout Georgia in opening their doors to an integrated student body. Both school boards grudgingly complied after a federal court ordered Americus, Sumter County, and seventy-nine other school districts throughout the state to desegregate.[33] Both school

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[30] Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 51.

[31] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[32] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park; Michael Coley and Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren, June 29, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[33] Duane Riner, Bill Jordan, Tom Linthicum, and Bob Rohrer, "What Do Children Gain?" *Atlanta Constitution*, May 13, 1971, 1.

systems made changes and closed schools in the wake of desegregation. Three elementary schools serving grades 1–6 remained open: Northeast, in the New Era community northeast of Americus; Southeast, in Leslie, east of Americus; and Westside, in Plains. These were the three equalization schools. Two other schools for white children closed: Thalean and New Era. Sumter High School, which formerly served black students from both Sumter County and Americus, was demoted in educational rank and became Central Junior High School. It served grades 7 and 8. Plains and Union high schools served grades 9–12.[34]

In Americus, there were seven city schools in 1970–71. Like Plains and Union, Americus High School served grades 9–12. Like Central, Staley was a junior high school and served grades 7–8. The other five schools served grades 1–6. Of those, Furlow and Cherokee served grades 1–3, Sarah Cobb and Eastview served grades 4–5, and Rees Park served grade 6.[35]

The second time around, the experience of being a black student at Plains High School was different. "It was like a whole new world when we came back." That's the way Edna Laster described her experience at Plains High School the second time around. With Plains High School equally open to all students regardless of race, Laster "was excited going back, because I knew someone would have my back," she said. There was "safety in numbers." When she first went to Plains High School, she was often the only black student in a class of twenty or more white students. When she returned, white and black students were almost evenly split. She also had a completely different social experience when she returned. "See, we didn't partake of any of those activities then, but now that I went back my senior year and after, oh, it was a whole different thing. And we were active supporters of the basketball and baseball." Amy Wise, who started at Plains High School when it was all-white, characterized desegregation as "an adjustment period. It was a coming-together. But as I heard a man say one time, the greatest thing to pull people together that don't know each other is to set a common goal to work on. And I think that's where your sports played a very important role. They had a goal to win."[36]

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[34] See Sumter County Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1970–1971, FLAT-2310, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia; United States, Congress, House, Ways and Means Committee, *General Tax Reform (Testimony from Administration and Public Witnesses)*, Public Hearings…, 93-1, 1973, 3094.

[35] See Americus City Superintendent's Annual Report to State Department of Education, 1970–1971, FLAT-2305, Georgia State Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[36] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

For Michael Coley, it was "Night and Day between 1966 and 1971." (You may recall that Coley opted to leave Plains after a teacher threatened to fail him.) Speaking in 1971 to an *Atlanta Constitution* reporter, Coley, who was a junior when he returned to Plains High School, said, "[T]eachers here treat blacks and whites alike. They may not really feel that way, but they haven't showed us different."[37]

However, part of what made the experience of Coley, Laster, and other black students more pleasant in 1971 is that the staunchest opponents of desegregation were now sending their children to private academies. By 1979, 79 percent of students at Plains High School and in other Sumter County schools were black. The city schools were about 58 percent black. When the school system finally faced a ruling to desegregate in 1970, white parents protested at first. When an interviewer asked Kim Fuller, daughter of Billy Carter, "What do you remember about integration?," she responded, "Oh Lord. I remember the boycotts of schools. I remember in Plains when white families boycotted and there were like three families left in the building. It was us and the MacDonalds, because Mr. Mac, their daddy, taught there, and probably one other family that I don't remember, but there was nobody else in school."[38]

Members of the school board reacted to the ruling by lowering taxes and doubling down on their support of Southland Academy and other private academies expressly founded to reestablish all-white spaces for the county's white students. One of the founders of Southland Academy admitted in 2021 that a genuine fear of racial integration was a major factor in the school's establishment. So were rulings by the US Supreme Court on school prayer and Bible readings cited as a motivation. "It is true that the Southland crowd was reacting to integration and the assault on religion."[39]

Southland was chartered in 1966, the same year the county schools desegregated. The following year, it opened its doors to 112 students. It was housed in the old Anthony School building, near Georgia Southwestern College, on Anthony Drive. Southland acquired the school property and various school materials at a tremendously discounted

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[37] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park; Michael Coley and Eugene Edge, interview with Jason Berggren, June 29, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park; "What Do Children Gain?" *Atlanta Constitution*, May 13, 1971.

[38] David Morrison, "Flaws Appear in the Picture of School Desegregation in Carter Country," in *Atlanta Constitution*'s special report, "Black and White Together: 25 Years of Desegregation since *Brown v. Board of Education*," May 16, 1979, 22–23, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398902336/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021. Forty decades later, the racial makeup of the county's public schools remains similar. According to one *New York Times* reporter, in 2020, "Sumter County has about 70 percent African Americans attending the public schools right now." See Steve Fennessy and Pria Mahadevan, "Georgia Today: How Racial Gerrymandering Divided a South Georgia Town," *Georgia Public Broadcasting*, November 5, 2020, https://www.gpb.org/news/2020/11/05/georgia-today-how-racial-gerrymandering-divided-south-georgia-town; Kim Fuller, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan and Leila Weinstein, May 30, 2007, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[39] Henry L. Crisp, "Letter to the Editor," *Americus Times-Recorder*, May 5, 2021, A4.

price from the county school board. It was considered a "surplus" school. In 1970, the school relocated to its spacious fifty-acre site on Southland Road. The other notable private schools that opened in response to desegregation efforts were Heritage Academy, Brooklyn Heights Christian School, and Smithville Academy.[40]

Most of the white families who remained in the public schools either were strong supporters of integration and public education or were not wealthy enough to afford private schools. The board's actions and the departure of so many white families deprived their once beloved public schools of hundreds of thousands of dollars in state funding.[41]

In addition to lowering taxes and supporting Southland Academy, the Sumter County School Board became a subject of ongoing controversy and litigation over voting rights that continue to this day.[42] Before 1968, the grand jury had historically appointed members of the school board. After a successful challenge to Sumter County's pattern of excluding black residents from juries, the county changed to an elected system. Under this system, the seven school board members would be elected to staggered four-year terms from five education districts: two elected from one district, one member elected from each

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[40] Alan Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1962–2006," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1962_2005.htm; "Organization and History," Southland Academy Student and Parent Handbook, 2020–2021, revised July 2020, 6. The following is the stated purpose of the school's founding: "The purpose of establishing the school was to make available a quality educational program for those who seek such a challenge, to expose the student to a Christian atmosphere that is conducive to learning, and to provide all the facets of education upon which good citizenship is founded." The board designated Anthony as a "surplus" school at its regular June 1966 meeting and decided that it would be put up for sale. It acknowledged that a "private school corporation" was interested in acquiring it from the county. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, June 7, 1966. After four weeks of advertising, the board entertained bids in July 1966. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, July 5, 1966. The board received two offers and accepted the higher offer of $5,105.75 from Southland. This decision permitted the private school "to have the building complete with all equipment belonging to the Sumter County Board of Education." At the same meeting, the board selected Henry Crisp to serve as its attorney and "draw up necessary legal papers." At the following meeting, Crisp was referred to as "our newly elected County School lawyer." See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, August 2, 1966. Meanwhile, the board decided to hold special education classes in the "Southland Academy School, formerly known as Anthony School," for the 1966–67 school year. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, September 6, 1966. The board also agreed to sell "surplus" laboratory equipment to Southland. See Minutes of the Sumter County Board of Education, April 14, 1967. For the emergence of the private schools established in Americus and in nearby Smithville and Southland's beginnings at the Anthony School, see William Bailey Williford, *Americus through the Years: A Story of a Georgia Town and Its People, 1832–1975 (*Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1975), 401–2; Jordyn Kaplan, "Segregation Academies in Sumter County, Georgia: A Case Study for Social, Economic, and Political Conservatism in the 1970s," December 16, 2020, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/11b4249af016454fae-f119131ad39306; Evan Kutzler, "Is Anthony School Worth Mourning?" *Americus Times-Recorder*, April 28, 2021, A8. Alan Anderson observed that Brooklyn Heights Christian was established in 1970. Its address was 1602 Washington Street. The school building was located behind the main church building on 1607 Armory Drive. See Anderson, "A Chronology of Americus and Sumter County, 1962–2006," Sumter County History Files, http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/history/1962_2005.htm; *Johnson's Yellow Pages for Sumter County*, February 1979, Juanita S. Brightwell Special Collections Room, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Americus, Georgia.

[41] Morrison, "Flaws Appear in the Picture of School Desegregation in Carter Country," Atlanta Constitution, May 16, 1979, 89; Jimmy Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 187–88.

[42] Nicholas Casey, "A Voting Rights Battle in a School Board 'Coup,'" *New York Times*, October 25, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/25/us/politics/voting-rights-georgia.html?searchResultPosition=1.

of the four remaining districts, and one member elected at large. In enacting this election process, the county failed to abide by the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act, which mandated nine states with a history of disfranchising African Americans seek federal approval for any changes to how people voted.[43] The first challenge to this system came from then governor Jimmy Carter and other residents of Sumter County, who sued the school board to invalidate the school board election plan. Ever since, Sumter County has faced a struggle over ensuring that African Americans receive fair representation on the board.[44]

During the spring of 1971, a group of students and parents that included both black and white families demonstrated to protest the board's hypocritical and egregious actions. They had three demands. First, the boycotters demanded their immediate resignation or impeachment of four Sumter County school board members who had a direct financial interest in private segregation academies. Second, they wanted assurances that a public school that the board sold for $1,001.50 to an all-white community club would not become a segregation academy. Third, they wanted to keep the millage rate the same for school purposes. At the time, the board was proposing to cut the 19-mill ad valorem tax to 15 mills. In effect, the board was working to replace the dual black-white school system with a dual public (mostly black) and private (all white) school system. Sumter County wasn't alone. In 1970, there were 34,000 white students in private schools, and an estimated 20,000 were enrolled for the expressed purpose of avoiding desegregated public schools. According to the Southern Regional Council, organized in 1944 in Atlanta to promote racial justice, about 535,000 white students attended segregation academies in eleven southern states.[45]

In addition, the board created upheaval at Plains High School by firing several faculty members, including the principal, Cecil Dunn, who had a two-year contract to head the school. During the summer of 1971, the board sold the residence where he lived, which was included as part of this contract. Dunn suspected that the board wished to fire him because of his occasional visits to Koinonia Farm, a biracial, communal farm. "If the officials were as good as the kids and parents here, we would have a terrific school," Dunn said. "They're going to run me out. I can't stay here." In 1972, the board ended up firing

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[43] US Congress, House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, "Extension of the Voting Rights Act: Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982), 687.

[44] Casey, "A Voting Rights Battle in a School Board 'Coup.'"

[45] "Students in Sumter End School Boycott," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1971, 15-B, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398269311/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021; US Congress, House, Ways and Means Committee, *General Tax Reform (Testimony from Administration and Public Witnesses)*, Public Hearings…, 93-1, 1973, 3089.

Dunn; Wilson, the school superintendent; Mrs. Bozeman, who worked as curriculum director; Mrs. Fuchs, a counselor; and Mrs. Morrison, a bus driver. Students at Union High school staged a boycott. The board agreed to rehire Dunn but not the others.[46]

The board's efforts to undermine the Sumter County schools continued the next school year. Both Union High School and Plains High School desperately needed improvements. Plains High School had problems with leaks and its heating system, and the auditorium at Union High School was in such disrepair that students and teachers could no longer use it. With budget cuts resulting in the closing of several elementary schools, conditions were so overcrowded that some elementary classes were being held on the stage and in the lunchroom. Even though the board had a surplus of $220,000 in July 1971, four of the seven school board members refused to reallocate the funds for repairing and renovating schools. Instead, they voted to cut off even more funding, reducing the school tax millage from 20 to 12 mills, and used the surplus to cover general operating expenses. Their priority was giving public schools in Sumter County the bare minimum while reducing white families' taxes enough so that they could afford private education. The four board members with direct ties to segregation academies were James Gaston, a teacher at Southland Academy; E. L. Poole, whose daughter-in-law was a teacher at Southland; Hugh Crenshaw, a founder of Heritage Academy; and Roland Satterfield, whose children attended a private school.[47] While serving as governor, Jimmy Carter joined his mother, brother, and forty-two other Sumter County residents in suing the Sumter County School Board to remove Gaston, Poole, Crenshaw, and Satterfield from the board because they were building up private schools at the expense of the public school system. A judge ultimately dismissed the suit because the board members with ties to private schools left the board, but the new board members still made decisions that were against the interests of the public schools.48 The school board's willful neglect of the very community institutions they were charged with safeguarding hurt all of the students who remained in the county's public schools.

"A Forced Embrace"

While the school board recklessly withdrew funds from the schools that black students had fought so hard to desegregate, black and white students and teachers at Plains High School and the other schools in Sumter County were trying to find their way together. Edna Laster

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[46] US Congress, House, Ways and Means Committee, *General Tax Reform (Testimony from Administration and Public Witnesses)*, Public Hearings…, 93-1, 1973, 3099.

[47] Phil Gailey, "Sumter Schools Suffer in Scarcity of Funds," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 28, 1972, 1, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398546014/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[48] "1972 Suit by Carter Dismissed," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1974, 55, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398894643/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

said the way that white students, teachers, and parents treated black students was "like a forced embrace.... It was much easier for the black community to embrace them, than them embracing us." Some white students put pressure on one another to remain aloof from black students, especially those who were actively participating in boycotts. For instance, Kim Fuller recalled her unease with speaking to Raymond Pickett, whom she knew because his grandmother, Lillian Pickett, had once helped nurse her grandmother. "I can remember talking to him, and some of my friends saying, 'Why are you talking to him?,'" Fuller said. Raymond Pickett's family and others were involved in a march from Union High School to Plains High School. She nervously watched the students arrive from the sewing lab upstairs. "I can remember standing up there, looking out the window and all these black students were walking down the driveway at the school, and being kind of scared, because not understanding exactly what was going on. The Edge family and the Pickett family were two families I remember most prominently, and they weren't happy." Raymond Pickett's involvement in the march only exacerbated her self-consciousness about speaking to him. She even fretted about using the water fountain after Pickett, but she did it anyway. "It was hard. I remember wanting to talk to some of them, Raymond, and some of his brothers and sisters, and kind of feeling funny because I was doing it."[49]

If peer pressure sometimes made white students feel uncomfortable acknowledging or making friends with black students, admonitions from parents heightened their reluctance to become too chummy with their classmates. White parents and grandparents had a difficult time coming to terms with black and white students learning, participating in activities, and socializing together. Speaking to an interviewer in 1971, Willie Fred Smith, then a senior at Union High School, observed, "White and black kids are learning to get along together." But he noticed that parents and other adults interfered. "If adults left them alone," he said, "they'd work it out."[50]

Others at Union had a different recollection. At the start of the 1970–71 school year, the historically white high school in Leslie apparently had zero white students. One former student recalled that first day of school that year this way: "When the bus drove up to Union High School that morning and we stepped off the bus, everything was different. There were black kids walking around everywhere and there were no white kids. I looked around and there literally were no white kids. Where had they all gone? How was this possible?"[51]

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[49] Kim Fuller, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan and Leila Weinstein, May 30, 2007, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[50] US Congress, House, Ways and Means Committee, *General Tax Reform (Testimony from Administration and Public Witnesses)*, Public Hearings…, 93-1, 1973, 3098.

[51] Kathryn Robinson Wallace, *Children on the Battlefield of Desegregation in Rural Sumter County, Georgia* (Columbia, SC: n.p., 2021), 62–63.

According to the school's annual, the whites at Union were that year were three juniors (all male), four sophomores (all male), fourteen freshmen (seven males, seven females), and ten students in special education (four males, six females). There was also the principal, half of the faculty, the entire cafeteria staff, and a few other staff members who were white. It was an example of school integration virtually in name only.

Figure 7.9. Plains High School Historical Marker
This historical marker is located outside the Plains High School. It says that Plains High School was "racially integrated in 1966."

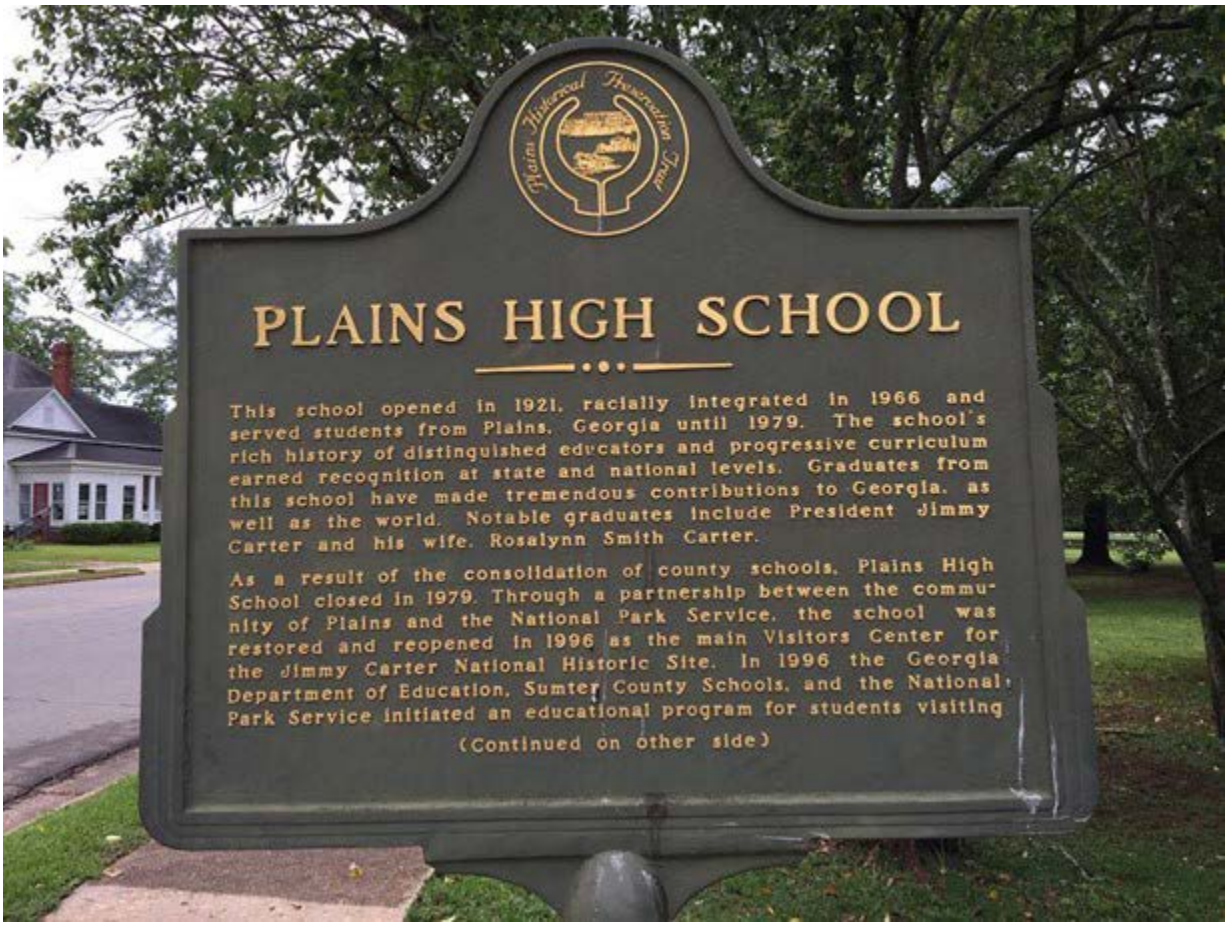


Photo by D. Jason Berggren

While her parents were open-minded about her acting friendly toward her black classmates, Kim Fuller's maternal grandfather felt differently. When she graduated from Plains High School in 1974, Fuller walked into the ceremony next to Calvin Aldridge, who had "this huge afro." According to Fuller, "Mama said she had to put her hand on granddaddy's knee so he would not get up. He was going to come and get me because he didn't want me walking down with him, yet he never showed that side to me." Black students experienced this type of hostility from parents and grandparents firsthand. "[At] school

functions they would come to," Edna Laster recalled, "they would not be friendly at all." Because so many white residents of Plains seemed unwilling to embrace the idea of an integrated black and white student body, they unwittingly contributed to the school's demise. Jimmy Bagwell spoke for many when he said, "The school used to be a main center of the community; it is no longer that at all."[52]

"Deplorable Conditions"

Whether they were pleasant toward black students or not, the bigger problem was that many white citizens of Sumter County acquiesced in their elected representatives diverting resources from the county's schools. As the 1970s wore on and both Plains High School and Union High School shifted to having mostly black student bodies, the physical condition of both buildings deteriorated to the point that patch-up repairs were no longer sufficient.

Claude Frazier, who succeeded Annie B. Floyd as the principal of Westside Elementary in the 1970s, said that the school system disregarded his reports about broken windows in classrooms there, and that there was only one maintenance man for all of the county schools.[53] The school board also shifted school buildings, buses, and other materials to private academies by labeling them "surplus" and selling them at ridiculously low prices.[54] A group of black and white parents, including Eugene Edge, organized the Sumter County Organization for Public Education (SCOPE) to push for enhanced educational opportunities and better facilities for their students. In 1976, while the Sumter County School Board continued to ignore the disrepair, the Sumter County Grand Jury proposed the idea of a new county-wide high school to replace the county's two high schools.[55] A year later, there was a referendum for a proposed $2.2 million school bond to fund the construction of a new consolidated school to replace the two old high schools. Both Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter recorded messages for the local radio station to advocate for the bond issue. "We owe it to our children not to let our pride in the past cloud our vision of the future," then president Carter said. "If we refuse to pay a few cents a week additional taxes for this new school, we only guarantee that the cost will be much higher in the future, the

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[52] Kim Fuller, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan and Leila Weinstein, May 30, 2007, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park; Dr. Jimmy Bagwell, interview with Jennifer Cohen-Jordan and Leila Weinstein, May 11, 2007, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

[53] Bobby Fuse, Claude Frazier et al., interview with Jason Berggren, Adrienne Petty et al., May 8, 2017, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park. Annie B. Floyd died in April 1971.

[54] Wayne King, "Crumbling School in Plains Mired in Consolidation Drive," *New York Times*, January 28, 1979, A24, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/121007600/D30CB999498448F3PQ/1?accountid=15053, accessed October 8, 2021.

[55] "Americus," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 9, 1976, 3, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398456344/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

cost both in dollars and lost human potential among our children." First Lady Rosalynn Carter also recorded a message: "Our children deserve to have an education as good as other communities provide for their children."56 But Sumter County residents rejected the bond issue 1,284 to 1,098 countywide. The county had 5,094 registered voters at the time. Residents of Plains were evenly split, with 195 voting for the bond issue and 194 voting against it.[57]

By the spring of 1979, the state of Georgia forced the Sumter County School Board to act. Plains High School and Union High School appeared on the Georgia Board of Education's list of fifty-three schools whose facilities had failed to meet standard requirements for three years or more. The state threatened counties with schools that remained on the list with the loss of funding if they failed to address the substandard conditions. The state Education Board heard directly from Sumter County citizens, who insisted that Sumter County School Board members, all of whom were white, were neglecting the "education and welfare" of the mostly black students at both schools. The Education Board gave the offending counties a deadline for drafting and signing a plan to bring their schools up to standard.[58] The board responded by closing both high schools and moving the students who attended them to a building that formerly housed the county's junior high school. It then divided the junior high students among three elementary schools.[59]

Things came to a head during the fall when SCOPE organized parents and children to boycott Sumter County schools. The boycott, which involved seventy-five percent of the county's 1,900 public school students, lasted for a month. In addition to demanding improved school facilities and curriculums, SCOPE held a voter-registration drive and circulated a petition, once again, to unseat the school board members. They later filed suit to take control of the schools away from local officials.

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[56] David Nordan, "'Mr. Jimmy' Just Another Taxpayer," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 27, 1977, 10, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398675915/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021; "Carter Backs Bond Vote at Home," *New York Times*, March 29, 1977, A16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/123152766/448618DD707A4667PQ/1?accountid=15053, accessed October 8, 2021.

[57] "Carter's Appeal, School Rejected," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1977, 9, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398679659/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021; "Carter's Home County Rejects School Bonds," *New York Times*, March 30, 1977, A10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/123491558/CA4BC1A1FD3B4F18PQ/1?accountid=15053, accessed October 8, 2021.

[58] Rebecca Linn, "Substandard Schools Get Deadline for Shaping Up," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 9, 1979, 51, Newspapers.com, https://ajc.newspapers.com/image/398825251/?terms=, accessed October 8, 2021.

[59] Wendell Rawls Jr., "Students in Carter's Home County Continue Boycott for Public Schools," *New York Times*, October 26, 1979, A16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/123954664/2A238268B26241D3PQ/1?accountid=15053, accessed October 8, 2021.

Even after the opening of Sumter County High School, controversy over the school board and its efforts to undermine public schools persisted. In 1980, a federal judge ruled that the county's election system was discriminatory, which made it difficult for African Americans to win elective office.[60]

Today, about 75 percent of students in Sumter County schools are black, and the county is embroiled, once again, in fights over voting rights, voter suppression, and the best way to ensure a fair composition of the school board. These problems are hardly unique to Sumter County. Residents continue to complain about the quality of the education at local schools, and the opening of Furlow Charter School has only exacerbated segregation in the school system. Some black residents see the school as yet another way to circumvent efforts to achieve truly integrated schools.[61]

Given the persistence of white flight from public schools, some might wonder whether the brave efforts of black students who segregated schools in Sumter County and Americus changed anything. Were their efforts worth it? "If I had to do it again, I would," Laster said. "It may have been a risk, but it was worth it, for the ones coming behind us."[62]

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[60] "Georgia County's Elective System Held Discriminatory," *New York Times*, April 8, 1980, A-12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/121152307/AC447E286D094C4EPQ/1?accountid=15053, accessed October 8, 2021.

[61] Casey, "A Voting Rights Battle in a School Board 'Coup.'"

[62] Edna Laster, interview with Jason Berggren and Adrienne Petty, May 15, 2018, Oral History Project, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Excerpts from an Interview with Josephine Thomas

Jimmy Carter National Historic Site
Plains, Georgia
May 16, 2018

DR. JASON BERGGREN: Today is May 16th, 2018. I'm Dr. Jason Berggren with my colleague, Dr. Adrienne Petty. We are at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in Plains, Georgia. We are conducting an interview today in relation to our special history project on public education in Sumter County from the 1930s to the 1970s. I'm going to now turn it over to our guest to introduce herself.

MS. JOSEPHINE THOMAS: My name is Josephine Thomas, and I have lived in Plains most of my life. I was born in Webster County, but I've been in Plains most of my life. I attended school at the Westside School down on Highway 45. I attended two years here at Plains High School, and I did my last two years in high school at Sumter High in Americus, Georgia.

DR. BERGGREN: And that's where you graduated.

MS. THOMAS: That's where I graduated from.

School Memories in Sumter County, Georgia

DR. BERGGREN: To start us off, what are your most vivid memories?

MS. THOMAS: Of school?

DR. BERGGREN: Of schooling.

MS. THOMAS: Well, I attended, like I said, Westside Elementary School in Plains, and I really enjoyed it as a child. I have people that tell me that they went to the old school, which was a wooden school, but I attended the. . .it was new to me when I went because it was a brick building. The floors were really pretty when I went, and I just enjoyed school period. I enjoyed my classmates. I never really got into it with anyone. I just enjoyed because I always tried to treat everyone the way I would want to be treated. So those are my memories. All my teachers were really nice. Most of them are gone now, but I still remember them. They were really nice to me.

DR. BERGGREN: Do any particular teachers that stand out?

MS. THOMAS: Not really. I try not to have choices, so not really. They were all really nice and I enjoyed them. I liked their teaching techniques. I never really got into it or disagreed with them on anything, so I really didn't have too many choices.

DR. BERGGREN: What kind of techniques did you especially appreciate from them?

MS. THOMAS: Their care and attitude towards you, and the fact that they wanted you to learn. Back when I was in school, we did not have children to disrupt classes as we have today, and the teachers were able to teach us. Now, they have to put up with problems they're having from children that are in the classroom because you have some that don't want to learn. There are some that can't learn in the classroom setting, but back when I was in school, the teachers cared for you. If they had a problem with you, they took care of you at school, but you know who got a phone call or a note when you went home? Your parents did. You were taken care of at school and then when you got home, your parents took care of you, so we didn't have a choice but to do what we were supposed to do in school. Teachers—

DR. BERGGREN: I hear there was a principal out at Westside, Annie B. Floyd.

MS. THOMAS: Annie B. Floyd. Yeah, that was my principal. That was her. She was the most beautiful lady, dressed nice, but she was a really nice lady. After she stopped, she died, and then we had Claude Fraser. He was there until we left Westside and went to Americus, to Sumter County Elementary School. He was an OK principal too. He really was.

DR. BERGGREN: What would the school do to help facilitate the learning? You said there were certain things that, I guess, couldn't, wouldn't, be put up with then that maybe happen today.

MS. THOMAS: As far as discipline was concerned, you didn't talk out in class. You didn't talk back at the teacher. Those things were understood when you left home. You were going to school to learn, and that's what you did. You didn't get in trouble. We really didn't have too many kids that got in trouble in school.

DR. BERGGREN: I was going to ask what happened to them, those who did?

MS. THOMAS: Well, they ended up in the office, and I don't know what the results were from that. I never ended up in the office. I tried to do the right thing, and listen, and obey. If you did that, you didn't have any problems. None whatsoever.

Family Life

DR. ADRIENNE PETTY: Now, who were your parents and how many children were in your family?

MS. THOMAS: My daddy was James Gardner. He was from Marion County, but he met my mom, who was Vera Wakefield Gardner, and he ended up moving down here. They got married. It was ten of us. They had ten children. He started out as a, as far I can remember, he was a farmer farming with… Well, no, he was not a farmer. He was a hand that worked on the farm, Tom Downer. He's dead now, but it was out where the Boyhood Farm is now because he lived in that house, Tom Downer did, in the Carter birth home.

DR. BERGGREN: Before the Carters?

MS. THOMAS: Right. No, it was after the Carters.

DR. BERGGREN: After the Carters, OK.

MS. THOMAS: …Before they developed it into that. My daddy worked for him on a farm. We were little then. My mom was not able to work because it was so many small children. One year, they finished farming at the end of the crop season, and he told my daddy that he did not make enough that year, and he didn't have anything to give him. He had all of us at home as small children. I'll never forget. It was a Saturday. My daddy found another house to move into, and he started working at Sullivan Lumber Company in Dumas, Georgia. We stayed in that house until my mom and dad were able to buy a house in Plains. I guess I may have been in sixth grade in elementary school. They bought a house and moved it to the present location on Highway 308. They had to do a lot of fixing on it, but my granddaddy was like a carpenter. He was a minister, but he also did work on houses and he helped get it fixed up for us to move into because he left Sullivan Lumber Company and went to Champion Home Builders right up here. It used to be Champion. I think Williams Warehouse bought that building up here, but he worked there until he retired. He was a good provider.

MS. THOMAS: My mom, like I said, was a Wakefield. Her daddy, which was my granddaddy, was a Methodist minister. So, he really didn't have an outside job. What he did, he did carpenter work on everybody in the community's houses. That's what I remember him mostly doing. We would go visit him on Sundays. We would go to his house to visit and at Christmas time, we would always go to his house, but it was a good home. It was a good home, but it was a good place for us to go visit whenever we would go. Those are the memories that I have of him.

MS. THOMAS: When he died, the children and the grandchildren were allowed to go in and choose what they wanted to choose of his. I have a cabinet of his that he always sat his telephone on in his bedroom, so that was what I liked the most, and I got a seashell that he had from Florida. Those are the memories that I have of him. With help, I got the cabinet redone. We refurbished it, and it's sitting now in the foyer in my house with the seashell. My granddaddy was good. We used to ride to church with him. When he got older, he

would take us to drive for him to church. When you approached a stop sign, he said, "OK. Now, that sign said stop. It didn't say slow down. Said stop." We would drive, but he was the boss. We were turning the wheels, but he was telling us what to do.

DR. PETTY: Where was his church?

MS. THOMAS: Andersonville, Georgia. He had two churches and they both met twice a month. . . .

DR. BERGGREN: What were your parents like in terms of your schooling?

MS. THOMAS: They always told us to go to school, do your best. When we got home, we did our homework. There was no question about it. It was homework. Even with doing chores, the homework came first. We lived right in the triangle where you turn on Bishop Johnson Road to past the cemetery, going out to the Boyhood Farm. We lived right down the right in that little triangle. We had to carry water from that house. No, we had to leave that house and go down to the house that Jimmy Carter used to live in on the left down there, and we had to carry water. The day before my mom washed, we had to carry water to fill up the drums to have water to wash in. When we come home the next day from school, do you think my mom had washed? No. She waited until we got home and we had to help. That taught us how to do it.

MS. THOMAS: But parents today, children don't do anything anymore. We had chores to do. We got home and we had to hang out clothes by the car light at night because it would get dark on us trying to wash, but we would say, "Well, I wonder if my mama didn't. . . . Why she wait until we got home?" But after we grew up, we saw the way it helped us. It taught us how to do it. The next day we come in, she may have taken the clothes in, but we still had to fold them and put them away. So we learned how to do things. She taught us how to do things. My dad and my mom, they never divorced. They stayed together all of our lives.

MS. THOMAS: I've lost two siblings. There were actually thirteen of us. It was ten by my mom and dad together, but when they got married, he had two children and she had one, but we were all sisters and brothers. So I don't consider them a half-brother or half-sister. They were my sister and brother because we were all raised together. A lot of people put a name on it, but we didn't. They were our sister and our brother because we were taught to do that, so we did.

DR. BERGGREN: Did your brothers and sisters stay pretty much in the same area?

MS. THOMAS: I have one that lives here in Plains along with me. I have a brother and a sister in Americus. I have some in Connecticut, and I have some in Atlanta, and I have one brother in Sandersville, Georgia. Yeah, but we get together often.

Religious Devotion in School

DR. BERGGREN: Was religion in school when you were starting out?

MS. THOMAS: We did because we always had. . . It was always on a Friday. I forget what you call it, but we would all go to the lunchroom. Then we'd have a prayer. Then the principal would talk to us about keeping up with the rules and doing what you're supposed to do. I'll think of the name of it after a while, but that was Ms. Floyd.

DR. BERGGREN: Like a—

DR. PETTY: Sounds like it was on devotion? No.

MS. THOMAS: Devotion.

DR. PETTY: Devotion.

MS. THOMAS: That's what it was. We'd have it once a week and—

DR. PETTY: So, this is with Ms. Floyd. She started it.

MS. THOMAS: Right.

DR. BERGGREN: OK.

MS. THOMAS: That's when she started because when I left elementary school, I came here for two years before forced integration. Then I did the last two years, my junior and senior year at Sumter High School.

Attending Plains High School in 1966

DR. BERGGREN: What years were you at Plains High School?

MS. THOMAS: It was probably '66, maybe, because I graduated in '70, and I came here my freshman and my sophomore year. Then we just decided to not go anymore because it was kind of hard in a way. Then the year after I graduated, that's when the schools integrated in '71 because I graduated in '70. I was the last graduating class from Sumter High School on Rucker Street in Americus.

DR. BERGGREN: What was it like coming to Plains High School?

MS. THOMAS: At the time, it wasn't pleasant because they were not used to blacks going to school with them. We would get spat on, and we would get kicked. It was always done in a way where they would not get caught, but we still learned. We were able to learn through

all of that, but it was quite different because we rode the bus to Westside and then that was a bus that transported us from Westside to here every day. Then when we got finished, they'd take us back to Westside to get on our buses to go home.

DR. BERGGREN: Did some of those activities against you happen in the classroom or in between classes?

MS. THOMAS: In between classes because the teachers kept it pretty much down—

DR. BERGGREN: Did they?

MS. THOMAS: . . . When you were in the class, but it was between classes. If we would go to lunch, we would always have to sit by ourselves. After lunch, when you finished your lunch, you could go to the gymnasium for a while, and of course, we would sit in there by ourselves too a lot. All in all, we got through it, but we just decided after those two years that we would go back to our school, which was Sumter High.

School Choice

DR. BERGGREN: Did you choose to come to Plains High School?

MS. THOMAS: We did. We chose to come because our parents. . . If you were working for someone else, their children did not come. See, my daddy was working at Champion. He wasn't working for anyone else. I mean, he was, but it was not like farming. Then there were children of black farmers who came too. So, it was by choice.

DR. BERGGREN: Did some—

MS. THOMAS: I'm sure that a lot of changes were—I won't say *made*—but there were a lot of differences that were acknowledged, the fact that we were here. It may be that some of the children had never been around black children that close before. I don't know.

DR. PETTY: Had you been around white children?

MS. THOMAS: Not so much, except for going downtown maybe to shop at the grocery store or something. Not much more than that. I was not afraid of them, and I would not have kicked them, and I would not have spit on them, but I guess everybody has a different feeling about things.

DR. PETTY: How did you react when those things happened to you? What did you do?

MS. THOMAS: That was nothing you could really do because mostly it was the guys that were doing it. The girls, they wouldn't talk to you, but they wouldn't say anything ugly to you either. It was mostly the guys that would do it. Like I say, it was done between classes, so nobody. . . It would be just your word against theirs if you said anything.

DR. BERGGREN: Was it always the same kids or it was different ones?

MS. THOMAS: No, they were different ones. Different ones. They were different ones.

DR. BERGGREN: When the opportunity came up, did you bring the matter to your parents and say, "This is happening and I want to go ahead and attend Plains High School," or did they present it to you and say—

MS. THOMAS: Who, my parents?

DR. BERGGREN: Mm-hmm.

MS. THOMAS: I think it was a group of parents that got together and decided that we would do it. That's how it happened. They asked us did we want to do it and we said, "Yes."

DR. BERGGREN: Who asked you?

MS. THOMAS: Our parents.

DR. BERGGREN: Your parents did. Was it coming from do you think churches or civil rights organizations?

MS. THOMAS: It wasn't a civil rights organization. I think it was just a community group here in Plains because everybody that went was from this area. It wasn't like they were coming from Americus. It was either from the city of Plains or down in the country.

DR. BERGGREN: Yeah.

DR. PETTY: Your sister mentioned some teachers might have been involved.

MS. THOMAS: Edna.

DR. BERGGREN: Edna, yes.

DR. PETTY: Edna was telling us there's some—

DR. BERGGREN: That's who we spoke with.

DR. PETTY: There could have been some teachers who were involved in that too.

MS. THOMAS: And trying to get us to come. Yeah. I guess to see what the experience would be like. She's what? A year younger than I am, but she remembers some things that I don't remember. . . .

The First Black Students at Plains

DR. BERGGREN: Your sister had mentioned that to help get through Plains High School, there were some teachers that you felt comfortable with, who you could trust. Did you have that same experience?

MS. THOMAS: It may have seemed like it was, but I never had the opportunity to talk to them to say, "OK. I'm here for you if you need me." I think the ones that probably made the children behave more or not do anything to you are the ones that showed that they cared for us more. I can't remember one or the other.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you—

MS. THOMAS: But it was quite an experience. It really was.

DR. PETTY: Did it help too that Etna was here, to have your sister here?

MS. THOMAS: At this school?

DR. PETTY: Mm-hmm.

MS. THOMAS: Yeah, it did. It was she and then it was one, two, two more girls that I graduated with that went here. Some were older.

DR. PETTY: She said two were your cousins.

MS. THOMAS: April.

DR. BERGGREN: The—

DR. PETTY: April.

DR. BERGGREN: April.

MS. THOMAS: April Wright, yeah. She went because, see, her daddy was a farmer. He farmed with Jimmy Carter, as a matter of fact. Leonard Wright, that was his name, and Mary Minion. That was April's mom. Yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: If my memory served, did you also know the Edge girls? Did you know them?

MS. THOMAS: Yes. Well, one of the Edge girls is one of the ones that I graduated with. June was her name.

DR. BERGGREN: June.

MS. THOMAS: Then it was Beverly and then there was Brenda Oates. She's passed away now.

DR. BERGGREN: Now, she was the first to graduate from Plains.

MS. THOMAS: Brenda Wright [Oates], right. She was the first one to—

DR. BERGGREN: Did you know her well?

MS. THOMAS: I think she was the only one—

DR. BERGGREN: The only one?

MS. THOMAS: . . .to graduate, I believe.

DR. BERGGREN: During that transition period? Because I want to say she graduated with Chip Carter. I believe it was the same year.

MS. THOMAS: But I thought she and April were together. Maybe not. Maybe not. But I did. I knew Brenda.

DR. BERGGREN: What was she like?

MS. THOMAS: She was a kind-hearted person, really nice. She was really nice. I don't have anything negative to say about her. Very smart girl, though. She was very smart.

Riding the Bus to School and Extracurricular Activities

DR. PETTY: Did all of the black students. . . . Did all of you all get along—

MS. THOMAS: We did.

DR. PETTY: . . .going on that bus?

MS. THOMAS: Yeah. Of course, when we get on the bus in the afternoons or in the mornings coming up here, we'd talk about things that had happened.

DR. PETTY: Do you remember any of those stories?

MS. THOMAS: Not really. Basically, the same thing that we talked about, but it seemed like the boys got along better with the guys than the girls did with the girls.

DR. BERGGREN: Really?

MS. THOMAS: I guess because guys just get together and they don't think about anything, but girls are real picky about stuff, so maybe that's why. But we really didn't have too many girls that would sit down and conversate with us. They were nice to us and they would speak, but as far as sitting down, having a conversation, not too much. I'm sure it was an experience for them as it was for us.

DR. BERGGREN: What was the bus experience like?

MS. THOMAS: You mean coming up here? It was—

DR. BERGGREN: Yeah, the bus ride.

MS. THOMAS: We had fun because it was just us on the bus, just the black kids from the school down there. So, it was nice. Like I said, we all got along good together, the ones that came up here. Never had any disagreements or anything.

DR. BERGGREN: Your bus ever pass a bus carrying white children as you remember?

MS. THOMAS: I can't remember because it was such a short distance. Such a short distance. We didn't participate in extracurricular activities like hand basketball.

DR. BERGGREN: Here at Plains?

MS. THOMAS: Right here. Well, I wasn't an activities person anyway. I liked the outside, but I didn't like playing ball or anything like that.

DR. BERGGREN: What about any clubs?

MS. THOMAS: And clubs, no.

DR. BERGGREN: What was the reason?

MS. THOMAS: I don't know if we ever tried to join a club, so I can't really say what the reason was. Maybe we thought that if we had tried, we probably would have been rejected, so I just don't ever remember any of us trying to join a club.

DR. BERGGREN: When you went then to Sumter County High School, did you get more involved?

MS. THOMAS: I did, but I was kind of a quiet person, really quiet, but we did. We got into a few clubs like FHA. We had the future homemakers classes, but I don't remember us being a member of the club here. All in all, it went good.

Attire for School and School Competitiveness

DR. PETTY: Did you notice any differences in terms of the way that the black kids and the white kids dressed or wore their hair or anything like that?

MS. THOMAS: Well, of course, they always dressed better than we did because we were from such a large family. So, we wore what our parents bought for us to wear. It was like, "Oh, she really looks nice," but then I knew what our situation was. So, I never wished that I could dress like that person or that person because our parents provided what they could for us. So, it wasn't a problem for me to wear what I had. Even before I started here, we were at Westside and my mama would sew. I'll never forget what she would make us.... When we put them on, we just thought we had on a million-dollar dress, but even at that, you had the black kids that picked at you because it was homemade. My daddy was not a farmer. He didn't make as much money as the farmers did. I will never forget that, that the kids picked at us because we wore homemade clothes.

DR. PETTY: The kids that were from farms did?

MS. THOMAS: Yes.

DR. BERGGREN: Really?

MS. THOMAS: Yes.

DR. PETTY: I'm sorry.

DR. BERGGREN: Wow.

MS. THOMAS: Yes. Because their parents were able to buy them a new piece every now and then, but it was very seldom that we got anything new to wear. My mama could sew, so she made our clothes and we appreciated it because she did the best she could do. Like I said, my daddy, he provided for us. We never went hungry and we never went without clothes to wear.

DR. BERGGREN: You said that was black children who would make those comments?

MS. THOMAS: Yes. That's when I was in elementary school.

DR. BERGGREN: Wow. Because we heard from others that we interviewed that there would be comments between those who grew up in the city, Americus, versus—

MS. THOMAS: And the ones who—

DR. BERGGREN: ...those who grew up in the county.

MS. THOMAS: Well, that's true too. That's very true.

DR. BERGGREN: You ever experience that?

MS. THOMAS: The way the school was, when you left Westside in the eighth grade, you went to Staley for the ninth grade. Then you went to Sumter High for tenth through twelfth, but see, when I got to Sumter, I was eleventh grade, so I never went through Staley. Oh, yes. They're still, even though the schools are merged as one, you still have the kids that still call us the kind of kids. You still have that going on.

DR. BERGGREN: Still today?

MS. THOMAS: Still today, but we ignore it, but you still have it today. You still do, but it's not as bad. Children learn to ignore it. Children aren't concerned nowadays with things like we were when we were in school.

DR. PETTY: In what way? You mean they—

MS. THOMAS: It's like we were determined. There was competition with us when we were in school. OK, if Johnny sits over here and I was here, I was going to try to beat him and make a better grade than he did. It was like competition, but now, the kids, they don't do that. I don't know what their minds are on nowadays with kids in school. It was like competition, and you strived to do your best because you wanted to impress your parents. I'm not saying that the kids of today don't want to impress their parents, but it just look like that drive is not there because, number one, the parents are a lot younger than they were when I was being raised. My parents took responsibility for their children, but as we all know, there are so many parents now that don't take responsibility for their children, and they're kind of out there on their own doing what they want to do. You can listen to the news and tell that there's a lot going on. When we were in school, we strived to do our best because we wanted to be at the top too. Now, I don't think they worry about it. Some do, but you got so many that don't worry about it.

Support from Parents

DR. PETTY: How did your parents respond when you did well in school?

MS. THOMAS: Oh, they praised us. When we didn't do well, we would get in trouble, "OK. You're not going here. You're not going to do this until you bring those grades up." And we brought them up too. Now, I don't think there's that type of discipline with a lot of children nowadays. I'm not saying that there are not some that do that, but if we didn't do well in our grades, we didn't get to go anyplace. We didn't get to play with the other children.

DR. PETTY: What—

DR. BERGGREN: Until those grades came up.

MS. THOMAS: Until they came up, right. I mean, you had to bring them up because they knew what we were capable of, and I guess that stuck with me because with my kids, I have two, they're both in their forties now, but when they were in school, we would say, "Go to school. Get your work. Strive to do your best. That's what we expect is your best. When the teachers find out that you were doing your best, then that's what they expect you to do and that's what we expect, is you to do your best, and more if you can. Do your best and then some more." So they did pretty good.

Students with Learning Disabilities

DR. PETTY: How were the children treated at the different schools who weren't. . . either they were slower learners or not—

MS. THOMAS: But you know—

DR. PETTY: . . .not as motivated, or did you not notice anything like that?

MS. THOMAS: That, I did. When we were in school, we may have had one or two that were at a disadvantage educational-wise because of the mindset, but you know what? We didn't separate them. The teachers did not separate them. We knew that they were not capable of doing some things, but nobody ever picked at them. We just treated them just like they were one of us and they did what they could do, but once they did that, that was all. We would help them all we could, but that was just something there that they couldn't learn. That was before they developed all the special ed classes for children, which is a good thing because they get special help that they need, but that was not there when I was in school, but then nobody treated them any differently than us.

MS. THOMAS: I don't know if they knew that they were at a disadvantage, but nobody ever acted like they knew that they were any different from us. They just treated everybody the same, and so did the teachers. The teachers never put them in a corner or said, "You can't do this." Well, they couldn't do that anyway, but they never treated them any differently than they did us. There were only a few back then, but it's a lot more nowadays.

DR. PETTY: So, you didn't feel like the teachers played any favorites or anything like that?

MS. THOMAS: I don't. If they did, they never showed it. If they did, they never showed it.

Transitioning to a Historically White School

DR. BERGGREN: When you went from Westside to Plains, did you feel that you were academically at the same level as the white kids, that Westside prepared you and you were—

MS. THOMAS: I—

DR. BERGGREN: . . . ready to compete, as you would say?

MS. THOMAS: I never thought of it in that sense because I did what I did at Westside. I got my lesson. I got my grades and I never thought of there being any difference because I knew that some kids were more capable than I was, and there were probably some not as capable as I was, but that didn't bother me.

DR. BERGGREN: Were your grades good at Plains High School?

MS. THOMAS: They were good.

DR. BERGGREN: OK.

MS. THOMAS: Yeah.

DR. BERGGREN: You don't feel that teachers penalized you in any way?

MS. THOMAS: No, because we kept up with our grades and everything, so when you got your end of the year, end of the . . . I think it was like six weeks then. You would say, "OK. This is it," but it wasn't like if I did this well on my grades, why is my end of the six weeks' grade like this? I don't think it was. I don't think it was. . . .

Returning to a Black School

DR. BERGGREN: When you went, after two years at Plains, and then finished your last two years at Sumter County, was the education experience at the same level, or do you think it was a little lower? I mean, in terms of how you fared compared to where you think you may have been at Plains the last two years, compared to what Sumter County offered?

MS. THOMAS: I think it was pretty much on an even keel.

DR. BERGGREN: Was it?

MS. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

DR. BERGGREN: What—

MS. THOMAS: I think it was.

DR. BERGGREN: What about compared to the other students who were at Sumter County? Did you feel that because you'd gone to Plains that educationally you might be more prepared than they had been?

MS. THOMAS: I never did. I just fell in with the group. I just fell in with the group. But like I say, we got into a few clubs while we were there. I didn't. I was just not, I would say, an outgoing person. Some people want to hop into everything. I was not like that.

Looking Back on 1966 and Class Reunions

DR. BERGGREN: Looking back, since it's hard for others who did not go through your experiences like the process of integrating the schools, that compared to most black children in the county, right, you're among a handful that attempted—

MS. THOMAS: Right, the handful.

DR. BERGGREN: . . . integration.

MS. THOMAS: Attempted to make a change, I would say.

DR. BERGGREN: Then you endured all that you did and that others who were with you endured the same thing.

MS. THOMAS: Right.

DR. BERGGREN: Would you have done it again? Would you have gone back? If you could do it again, would you still have gone to Plains in '66?

MS. THOMAS: '66 is when I started.

DR. BERGGREN: Or '67.

MS. THOMAS: Yeah. '66, yeah. You know what? I don't think that I'm any better than the ones that did not go by doing that. I'm sure we may have made a change, but it didn't make me feel like I was more special because I did that. That's just the way I felt about it.

DR. BERGGREN: Let me ask you, do you think that those initial efforts, do you think there was a positive impact? Do you think it changed things?

MS. THOMAS: I think it did somewhat, but I'm not sure how it changed because, see, I graduated when forced integration came about, so I wouldn't know. I guess if I had been in it. . . . Now, my sister may have been able to compare it because she did her last year here. She did her senior year here, so she was able to compare how it was then and how it was when it was forced. So, I don't know.

DR. BERGGREN: Has she shared with you, and this is one of the things that we found, I guess, and the most impressive way that made an impact, I guess, on us from your sister telling it that there have been class reunions, but she's never had a reunion with white students.

MS. THOMAS: There's never been one with the blacks and whites.

DR. BERGGREN: Right. What do you think of that?

MS. THOMAS: I don't know. It might mean that no one has reached out to try to do an integrated class reunion.

DR. BERGGREN: In either way? Either direction? Is that what you mean?

MS. THOMAS: That's what I'm saying. Maybe either direction, nobody has reached out to do it. I don't know.

DR. PETTY: She said they tried.

MS. THOMAS: They tried, OK. . .

DR. BERGGREN: Does your class from 1970, do they have reunions?

MS. THOMAS: We do. We do.

DR. BERGGREN: How often?

MS. THOMAS: We try to do something every. . . Well, we call it every ten years, but we get together in between and maybe do lunch or just go out and eat with the Warrens, with the different classmates. In all, we may have maybe fifteen to twenty that are religious in doing it, but with the ones that are out of town, it's hard to get them—

DR. BERGGREN: Get them.

MS. THOMAS: . . .to participate. So, we just enjoy the ones that are here. We have one guy that comes from Augusta. Whenever we do anything, he's going to always come from Augusta, Georgia, down so he can be with us. We have a good time when we get together. Only one of the ones that went to Plains High School with me is with that class. She tries to come when we have the ten-year because she lives up in the Atlanta area, but the others, well, they never did integrate with us when we came in as a freshman and a sophomore. See, once we got to Sumter, we had kids from Plains and Leslie going to school with us. That was before all the schools, the city and the county schools, I mean, come together as one. Then once we all come together, we were all just as one over in Americus. . . .

Race Relations in Sumter County

DR. BERGGREN: What are your initial memories of a separate but equal system?

MS. THOMAS: What are my memories?

DR. BERGGREN: Mm-hmm. How far back can you go that you remember that there was a racial caste system in place?

MS. THOMAS: As a little girl, I guess, because when we went to Westside, I started out in first grade, and we were separate then. If you never integrate and you're always separate, I guess you think that you're separate and you don't think about interacting with anyone else. Then once we came here, it. . .and my dad and my mom asked us did we want to do it, we just said yes. I guess because we thought it would be OK, and it was in a sense, other than those little things that they'd do to you. The teachers would always say. . . . They wouldn't say it in front of us, but I'm sure they gave us a good talking. They had to treat. . . . When we would sit in class, sometimes you might have one to sit behind you or in front of you, but you always were sitting to yourself a lot. Even that didn't bother me because I was in the class to learn.

DR. BERGGREN: Do you remember any interactions that your parents may have had with white citizens in Plains or elsewhere? What the interactions were like?

MS. THOMAS: I always got along with people. I don't ever remember them saying that they got into an argument or a disagreement with any other parents. I can't remember that. . . .

Final Thoughts

DR. BERGGREN: As we wrap up, do you have any lasting or last thoughts about your education or growing up in Sumter County?

MS. THOMAS: Well, growing up in Sumter County has been kind of OK for me. I started my family here. I got married and started my family here, and I'm still here. My children, we encouraged them to go on to school after high school, and they did that. I tried to encourage other children to do the same thing. Even though they may not be in my family, I still encourage them to do the same thing and do their best. My husband and I were mentoring at the elementary school before I got sick, but after that, we just forgot it. Once I retired, I did it for a while. I kept trying to encourage him, and he never would go. And finally, he decided to, and he really enjoyed it.

DR. PETTY: Did he grow up here too?

MS. THOMAS: Yes. He lived out on the experiment station [on a farm] when he was growing up. I think he was like two or four when they moved here. As a matter of fact, that's where I met my sweetheart at, in school. He was—

DR. PETTY: Where? At Westside.

MS. THOMAS: At Westside.

DR. BERGGREN: Westside, wow.

MS. THOMAS: I was in the sixth or seventh grade and he was eighth grade. He left and went to Staley. When he went to Staley a year before I did, because he graduated a year before I did. Then I came up here. Then we got back together for one year at Sumter because he graduated in '69. I graduated in '70, but through all of that, our relationship lasted. So, I guess it's pretty good because we've—

DR. BERGGREN: And what's his name?

MS. THOMAS: . . . been married forty-six years. Jeremiah Thomas.

DR. BERGGREN: Jeremiah Thomas. . .

Amy Wise: Shattering the Glass Ceiling

While the Plains 17 broke the color line, Amy Wise represents a generation of women who slowly but surely shattered the glass ceiling in Sumter County. When she graduated from Plains High School in 1975, all members of the Plains City Council were men. Today, Wise is a longtime member of the city council. She also was a trailblazer at Georgia Southwestern State University, taking positions there once solely occupied by men.

There is one, once predominantly male space that she sometimes wishes she had the opportunity to join: the US Air Force. In high school, she took the air force entrance exam and aced it, scoring a 99 out of 100. Years of helping her father, a mechanic, in his shop enabled her to easily identify tools, which was a major part of the exam. The air force recruiter called her house twice. "We don't see many girls that score this high on this class," she remembered the recruiter telling her dad. But her dad, himself an air force veteran, didn't want her to follow in his footsteps. Even though he doted on her and was never very strict, he would not allow her to serve in the US Air Force.

"If I could go back," Wise says, "I would talk to him more and say, you know, this is my opportunity to see the world, serve this country, and so forth and so on. And my heart's very patriotic anyway so I felt like I would have really liked being a part of the military. I would not have attempted to fly a plane. But anything else, I would have enjoyed. Even working on one, I would have enjoyed that."

Even though she was not able to pursue a career in the air force, she has never abandoned her patriotism, her faith, her love of history, and her sense of duty. All these characteristics were kindled, in part, by her teachers at Plains High School. At weekly assemblies in the auditorium, they sang songs and engaged in other activities that "instilled a love of your community, patriotism, and religion." They learned practical "survival skills" like cooking, sewing, and raising farm animals from Future Farmers of America and Future Homemakers of America. A fifth-grade teacher who loved birds enhanced her appreciation of nature through the Audubon Club.

Outside of school, these lessons were reinforced at home and at church. In addition to helping her dad at his shop, she learned other practical skills at home, like gardening and keeping house. "When you came home from school, the first thing you did is you did your homework and then there was sweeping floors, sweeping porches, washing dishes," she remembered. "Yeah, we were given chores. We were never entitled by any means whatsoever."

Her Sunday School teachers, none other than Mr. Jimmy and Miss Rosalynn, spread the gospel and nudged her to get past her shyness. When she was ten years old, she played "Away in a Manger" on the piano for her Sunday School class, the first time she had played for an audience. "And I was real timid back then," Wise recalled. "So as soon as I got through with the first verse, I ran to go sit back in my chair. Seriously. Mr. Jimmy stopped me like, "Now, Amy. I want you to go back and play it again." I was like, "Yes sir." Wise went back to play the second verse. As she neared the end of it, she remembered thinking, "Oh boy, it's my chance to run." But Mr. Jimmy made sure that she finished playing the entire song. "Before I could get up and run," she said, "he started singing the third verse before I even started playing. . ., so I had to catch up with him."

Her teachers at Plains and Dr. Jimmy Bagwell, with whom she took classes at Georgia Southwestern, nurtured her love of history and exploring artifacts, like a baptismal pool that she once saw at an old African American church in Sumter County.

"Jimmy Bagwell is one I could have listened to all day long, and he would also teach you things that are not in the history books," Wise said. "That's what I like, little anecdotes to the side, the little stories. . .the down-to-earth or hands-on things. You compile them with the history facts, and it just brings it to life in some way. You visualize it."

Serving on the Plains City Council for the past decade, Wise has drawn on her love for her community and appreciation for the simple things that she learned at Plains High School. "Every so often, there's grant funding offered for people to work on their houses," she said. "To be able to. . .help people that don't have the money to do it with, I think that's a good accomplishment."

Bernstine Hollis: Her Own Boss

During his historic run for president in 1984, Rev. Jesse Jackson fired up crowds with a familiar call and response. "Hands that picked cotton," he would call out. "Will now pick a president," the crowd would respond.[1] In the case of Plains High School graduate Bernstine Hollis, she went from picking cotton on a future president's land to working in the Carter White House. And, no, "she wasn't the babysitter," her mother used to have to tell some people. Her job was corresponding secretary, first for the First Lady Rosalynn Carter and then for President Carter. Since then, she has spent her career working at the Carter Center in Atlanta.

Over the years, Hollis has worn many different hats working for Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter. The fourth of Mary and Leonard Wright's five children, Hollis grew up picking cotton and shaking peanuts on a farm the Carters owned. It was typical for Hollis and other children at Westside School to leave school early during the fall months throughout their elementary years. "During the harvest time, our parents would have us picked up or dismissed from school around noon, so that we could come home, eat lunch, and prepare to work in the field until the evening," she recalled. When Amy Carter was little, Hollis would go to the Carters' house after school to babysit.

In 1970, Hollis graduated from eighth grade at Westside School and entered the ninth grade at Plains High School that fall. Several years before, her older sister, April, had been among the initial seventeen during the period of trial desegregation, but she ended up transferring. "Going into high school, period, is a shift," she said, but she was entering school at the moment of total integration on top of that. Nevertheless, she took the move in stride. "You're talking to the person who really just took life with a grain of salt. I didn't see disparities. I don't see this, I don't see that. I try to see the good in an individual." She doesn't recall any problems at Plains High School. "You go in, you make new friends," she said. "That's just who we are."

Two beloved teachers still stand out in Hollis's memory because they encouraged her to do her best. At Westside, Opal Tillman, her band teacher, stood out in Hollis's mind as a beloved teacher. Hollis played the clarinet, and Tillman "really pushed, pushed, pushed me." At Plains High School, she was fond of her psychology teacher because he also motivated her to live up to her potential at the time. One time, he wrote a comment on her paper, in red ink, that is ingrained in her memory: "You need to push yourself more. There is more in you."

She also appreciates how lessons from her psychology class have served her throughout her life. "I believe that he had a great impact on me," she said, "because I believe in trying to analyze what a person may be thinking and trying to help them to

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[1] Fay S. Joyce, "Jackson Tells Alabama It 'Will Never Be the Same,'" *New York Times*, February 10, 1984, A-19.

understand the importance of life and who they are and the impact that they can have on other people as well. But not to always be so negative but to look at the good in themselves and the good in other people as well."

Hollis's life continued to be intertwined with the Carters after she graduated from Plains High School in 1974. She was still living at home with her parents when Jimmy Carter asked her parents whether she or her sister would be interested in an opportunity. She immediately started working on Carter's 1976 presidential campaign at the Plains Depot. "I have literally had people from the BBC to come and interview me while I was in Plains," she said.

After President Carter's victory, she moved "from small town to the nation's capital." "It's a big jump," Hollis recalled. "There was no in-between." Hollis' mother, Mary Minion, recalled worrying about her still-teenaged daughter moving to Washington, DC. "I was kind of skeptical about her going away from home because she was a country girl and she'd never been away from home," Minion said. "But she has always been, she wanted to be, her own boss."[2]

At first, Hollis worked on Mrs. Carter's correspondence. Within a few months, she moved over to the president's correspondence. "I shared the office with another young lady, that kind of managed the office," she said. "We would answer the phones a lot and we would do a lot of proofing.... And then, in another office there was a pool of about sixty typers, who would be typing correspondence. And one or two people within the group of sixty would actually be typing his speeches. And, well, Rain (Hollis' colleague) and I would do a lot of proofing of the speeches and everything to make sure that everything was correct."

In addition to enjoying the work she did, Hollis loved the perks of her job. "I got myself involved whenever dignitaries would come to the White House," she said. "They would always want some staff or someone there to pass out flags from that particular nation. And I collected those flags, and still have them." She also would invite her future brother-in-law and his family to the annual Easter Egg Roll at the White House.

Hollis's connection to the Carters continued when they left Washington. For more than thirty years, she has worked at the Carter Center. There, in working with people, she has modeled herself after her two favorite teachers. "Those persons pushed me to make sure that I exceeded," Hollis said. "Mm-hmm. So I can appreciate that now. And I can understand the drive that I have now to try and push someone else. Because someone took the time to do it for me." Now close to retiring from the Carter Center, Hollis reflects on her close connection to the Carter family. "I tell our grandkids sometimes, 'Your nana has only had one job. Pretty much. I mean, my whole life, I've pretty much had one job."

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[2] Krista Reese, "At U.S. Parks, New Path to the Past," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2001.

Bobby Fuse: A Daily Fight for Dignity

Growing up in Americus during the 1950s and 1960s, Bobby Fuse was immersed in the city's rich African American culture, which was centered around church, school, and the connectedness of a tight-knit segregated community. Fuse, who has devoted his life to education and improving society, got early lessons in being a community leader from watching the people around him. When they noticed that black children in Americus did not have enough opportunities for musical instruction, the members of the Colored Federation of Women hired a music teacher from Albany. When young civil rights activists needed a place to gather, the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church provided them a meeting space, even though it could have led to retaliation from his white employers.

Most of all, Fuse learned to be a leader and a man of strong conviction by emulating the young people in his community who took the lead in launching the civil rights movement in Americus. He was barely ten years old when the famed "Americus Movement" started. Though he wasn't yet old enough to take part in the nonviolent demonstrations that young people mounted during the early sixties, he embraced the vision and goals of the civil rights movement. At his young age, he already recognized that segregation not only deprived African Americans of equal opportunity and equal access, but also deprived white people the chance to benefit from the cultural and intellectual contributions of black people.

In seventh grade, when teachers at his school distributed a form about Freedom of Choice, he made up his mind to attend the all-white Americus High School. The more expansive facilities and the newer textbooks appealed to him. But he also knew he and the other black students had something to contribute to the school. "I actually thought that I was. . .going over to Americus High School to share with less-fortunate persons some of the cultural attributes and geniuses of my culture," he said. He was among the eighty or so black students who first enrolled in Americus High School during the 1965–66 school year. Because parts of the school were damaged by a fire, Fuse and the other eighth graders had classes in the Anthony School, located near the Georgia Southwestern College campus.

While black students in Plains and the rest of Sumter County had access to school buses, black schoolchildren in Americus did not. This presented a challenge for Fuse and the other pioneering black students entering Americus High School. Most of the local black taxi-cab owners were unwilling to transport students, seeing any involvement in supporting school desegregation as too risky. Mrs. Jackson, the only female taxi-cab driver, was the exception, and Fuse has never forgotten her courage. "In the early day," Fuse remembered, "Ms. Jackson was the only one who fearlessly stepped up and decided that she would take us to school." Each day, she zig-zagged from the north side of town, where most African Americans in Americus lived, to white neighborhoods throughout the city. In the morning, she would do a "school run," with Fuse and other children riding in the rear,

back-facing seat of her station wagon. Then she did a "maid run," dropping off black women who cooked, cleaned, and babysat for white families. From time to time, Ms. Jackson's child and adult clients were in the car together, and Fuse remembered the older women giving him and the other kids "all sorts of encouragement, 'good boy,' 'behave yourself' and that type of thing."

The black women in the community who worked in domestic service offered yet another lesson in courage for Fuse. While many of them took taxi cabs to and from the homes where they worked, some women's employers picked them up in the morning and dropped them back home in the evening. The custom in Americus, Plains, and elsewhere was for black women to sit in the back seat on the passenger side. "Occasionally," Fuse said, "a liberal white woman would make her statement and have her maid sit in the front seat." Yet most adhered to the racist practice. "Often there would be a dog in the front seat, but the maid would have to sit in the back," Fuse remembered. After enduring this humiliation for years, black women who worked in the domestic field found ways to resist. Fuse's aunt and other maids started walking rather than subject themselves to sitting in the back seat like a child. Eventually, Fuse said, "someone supported. . .Deacon Jackson in the purchase of a bus, school bus, and he painted it and it became the city of Americus bus system." This private bus offered a new way for black schoolchildren to get to white schools across town, and for black women to get to and from their workplaces with a sense of dignity.

For Fuse and his classmates, being a student at Americus High School was a daily fight for dignity. While Fuse had hoped that exposure to black students, teachers, and their approaches to education would enrich his white peers, he found that school desegregation fell far short of his expectations. During the Freedom of Choice period, from 1964 to 1970, Americus High School moved all extracurricular activities to private homes so that they were only available to white students. The situation did not improve with "total" integration in 1970.

The main problem, in Fuse's opinion, is that "integration" never really happened at Americus High School, and many other schools in the Jim Crow South, for that matter. "Have we talked about that part? The difference between school integration and school assimilation?" Fuse said that integration would have equally incorporated the cultures, teaching, musical traditions, sports mascots, character development, and other aspects of each school. "Assimilation is what happened, when you reduced all of your African American, black schools to junior high school status and white schools remained the same senior high school," he said. "All of that part of our history and our culture was assimilated into the whites.'"

Claude Frazier: Developing All Students

It is rare for teachers and school administrators to spend their entire careers in the same school system, but that's precisely what Claude Frazier accomplished for decades. Not only did he work in Sumter County schools throughout his career, but he also received his entire education in Sumter County. His tenure in the school system, which spanned the eras of school segregation and desegregation, gave him a unique perspective.

Born in 1944, Frazier started elementary school in the Chambliss community at age five and remained there until sixth grade, when the school was closed. It was one of many community schools, segregated by race, that were scattered around the county. He then attended Union High School, where he played basketball and was part of Sumter County's winning tradition in athletics. After graduating from Union High School in 1961, Frazier first attended Georgia Southwestern and then completed his bachelor's degree at Georgia Southern. The only time he spent outside of Sumter County was to study school administration at Middle Tennessee State University during the summers.

Frazier's teaching career began at Union High School. During the 1966–67 school year, the school was all-white, just as it had been during his years as a student there. By his third year as a teacher, the school had made the transition to "token integration," as Frazier calls it, and then "total integration."

Many white families, "especially people who had young daughters," took their children out of Union High, Frazier remembers. "There were private schools popping up all around, there were a few parochial schools around, and so we lost a lot of kids to that."

From Frazier's perspective, the desegregation of schools went smoothly. He insists that he never heard complaints about harassment or intimidation from black students. "The most difficult racial problem was I would have white parents come tell me 'I do not want my kid in that black teacher's classroom,' and I would have black parents come to me and say, 'I do not want my kids in that white teacher's classroom,'" Frazier recalled. "It must've taken us four or five years to get over that prejudice that was going on." As a teacher and administrator, Frazier wasn't always privy to the sneaky, surreptitious ways that white students expressed their contempt for black students.

Frazier became principal of Westside Elementary after Annie B. Floyd lost her battle with cancer. After nearly a decade there, he was promoted to assistant principal at Sumter High School, which came about as a result of the merger between Union High School and Plains High School. He eventually became the assistant to the superintendent of Sumter County Schools.

Frazier worked hard to combat the school board's willful neglect of Sumter County schools. He hounded school officials until they repaired the broken windows at the high school. When a problem with teen pregnancy emerged, he worked to arrange transportation for students returning home from after-school events to minimize their unsupervised

time. At a time when many of his white neighbors, former classmates, and fellow teachers were turning their back on the public schools and holding black students to lower expectations, Frazier demonstrated a commitment to the development of all students.

Kay Bell: Life with a Disabled Brother

Reflecting on schools in Sumter County, Kay Bell cannot help but think about how things would have been better for her brother had he been growing up today. While she and her sister, Marcia, went all the way through New Era School and Americus High School with no problem, their brother, Larry, had developmental disabilities that the school system wasn't equipped to handle during the 1940s and 1950s. Instead, her brother had to stop going to school after third grade. Eventually, authorities forced her parents to send him to Gracewood State School and Hospital, a facility located near Augusta, five hours away from their home. The practice of separating children with disabilities from their families and institutionalizing them was widespread at the time.

When Larry was little, a doctor told Bell's mother to put Larry in an institution and forget about him. "Well, she wasn't going to do that," Bell said. Instead, her mother worked hard to meet the needs of her son. When she was not working at the Manhattan Shirt Company, she was home with Larry and the rest of the family. "It was to work, home, and, like I said, when I look back, I think my brother took up a lot of my mother's time," Bell remembered. Her mother also stopped going to church after another member of the congregation criticized the way Larry was behaving. "Someone made a comment about her controlling her child at church and so she just didn't go back," Bell said.

Larry remained at home until a new family moved to her community and complained to the sheriff about him. "The sheriff came to mama's door and said, 'You're going to have to do something,' Bell said. "And I don't think that Larry committed any crime or hurt them, it's just that. . .back then, people didn't understand that ailment. Whereas now, gosh, we know so much and there's so much help out there. But it just wasn't there [then]."

In many ways, her brother's disability shaped Bell's childhood as well. More than a decade younger than her brother and sister, Bell's early childhood coincided with the roughest period for her brother. Living "out in the country," there was always work to do. Aside from going to school and church, she spent a lot of time at home doing chores and helping put up food for the winter. "My fingers stayed green in the summer because we were always shelling butter beans or peas," she remembered. "Grandmother and daddy would go out there and pick it in the morning and then we'd be in a circle and we'd all have a pan where we would be shelling." When her mother wasn't at the factory and her father wasn't at work as a traveling salesman, they were going to visit Larry at Gracewood. "We made that trip often," she remembered.

As she got older, she took on increasing responsibility at home. “When I got off of that school bus at four, I would start supper so that when [my mom] got home shortly thereafter, we would be having supper. Then cleaning up, then going to the next thing,” she said. Bell didn’t participate in sports, go to Friday night football games, or participate in many of the activities that her older sister had done, like 4-H. “I think that may have been why I wasn’t involved in some things that mama was able to provide for my older sister, because she was having to follow up with [Larry],” Bell reflected.

Bell still wonders what her brother’s life would have been like if he had been growing up just a couple of decades later, when the federal government mandated that every child had a right to an education, no matter what. “He was so borderline and understood so much that I thought, if Head Start or something had been in place for him, he could have probably had a job or something carrying boxes at the post office or something like that,” she said. Bell knows about the services now available to children who have developmental disabilities, like Larry. Rather than being labeled “feeble-minded” and separated from their families, they are permitted to remain at home. She has also seen movies about the way disabled children were treated in the past. “And I thought, boy, we’ve come a long way. Thank goodness.”

Lillie Heard: More like Parents than Teachers

When we interviewed Lillie Heard in 2018, she had just finished piecing together an elaborate quilt created by schoolchildren in the class of her daughter’s Hampton University classmate, who teaches at a charter school in Washington, DC. The quilt featured appliqued images of each child’s hand, four to a square, in vivid fabrics.

In many ways, that quilt symbolizes Heard’s lifelong commitment to excellence in education and her equally important commitment to those non-academic pursuits that enrich children’s learning experience. Heard is proof that the teachers at all-black schools didn’t let unequal access to funding stop them from exposing their students to a rich and varied range of activities.

Heard’s father passed away when she was young, so she grew up with her mother and grandmother in Leslie. Before his death, her father had raised cotton and peanuts on land given to him by his father, a big-time farmer in Lee County. Neither of Heard’s parents completed as much school as she did because Lee County, where they both grew up, did not make transportation available for them to pursue their education past the grades offered in their immediate area.

Heard attended grade school at Leslie Public School, a three-room schoolhouse that sat across a ditch from her house. Because she lived so close to school, she never brought her lunch to school. “Lunchtime, we could go home and get lunch and come back to school,” she said. In the school building, she remembers there being a room for storing

wood and a place for students to put their books. There were three or four grades to a class. Heard thrived in this environment because she was a bright and precocious child, and she started picking up the work that older children were learning.

Heard moved on to Southeast Elementary School, one of the schools that opened during the experiment with school equalization. She went on to Staley High School from there and graduated in 1962. At all three schools, Heard was one of the top students. Because she excelled in school, her teachers and classmates singled her out for certain responsibilities. She took the daily attendance at the blackboard every day and even completed the monthly attendance report that each school was required to submit to the county. "A friend said I was like the bookkeeper for the principal," Heard said. During high school, her peers elected her to various positions in student government for the entire time. When she graduated, she and other high-achieving students had to deliver speeches.

Throughout her school days, Heard was always busy. From a young age, she picked cotton in the fields of large white farmers. By the 1950s, farmers were paying workers to pick cotton and shake peanuts by the day. "Whatever was available to do, you just did it growing up," she said. The work didn't bother her, and she liked being able to contribute money to the household or to have her own spending money. Unlike many other children, she was fortunate that her mother never required her or her four siblings to miss school. "At a certain time of the year. . . early spring. . . parents would pull their kids out and let them go work," she recalled. One of Heard's favorite activities as a child was 4-H. She has fond memories of the week-long camp in Dublin, Georgia, where she and other kids would work on cooking, sewing, and farming projects. She also participated in 4-H activities within the county.

Somehow, while participating in activities and keeping her grades up, Heard also fit in working for "a white lady." On the weekends or after school, Heard did many things to help her: cooking, cleaning, washing, and ironing. Some of the dishes Heard cooked came from her mother's instruction. The woman she worked for always told her, "Your greens always taste better than my greens." Heard also learned to cook many new things in this job because "she would cut out a recipe out of a newspaper and magazine and she would let me try cooking it." The woman had a daughter who was the same age as Heard.

Even though the family she worked for and other white people were "nice," Heard said, white people "still had their separate feeling." At the drugstore in Leslie that sold ice cream, white kids were allowed to sit at the booth, but black kids had to buy their ice cream and go back outside.

By the time Heard was in ninth grade, she was sewing for many people in the community, black and white. She started off sewing clothes for her employer, her daughter, and her niece, charging two dollars or two-fifty per piece. She'd sew "whatever they wanted. . . . They'd bring me a magazine and say, 'Oh, I need this made. I want a dress like this.' And somehow, I put it together. And that was how I made a lot of extra money

growing up. Sewing for the people in the community and making whatever they wanted." She made so much money sewing during high school that she was able to send her sister, who was attending college, extra spending money.

Going to Staley was exciting for Heard because she had the chance to meet other black kids from across Sumter County. Staley offered the only ninth grade for students in Americus and throughout the county. At the same time, she had to adjust to the "city kids," who thought they were "smarter than we were for some reason." Heard didn't let that bother her. She thought she was "just as good." She later attended Sumter High School. Throughout her time there, Heard played basketball, a passion that she continued for years as a physical education teacher in the Sumter County schools. Heard remembers the thrill of competition and her team's winning record. Most of all, she remembers the support of her teachers who, on and off the basketball court and in and out of the classroom, were "more like parents. They lived in Americus at that time, and they commuted to Leslie. But they knew everybody in the neighborhood. All the students' parents, too." She had teachers who would buy shoes and other necessities for students who lacked transportation to travel to Americus. Some of the teachers who taught her in grade school also opened their homes in Americus to her and other students when they had evening basketball games during high school. "They would let us spend the night with them. . .so we could walk to school the next day," she said. Heard graduated from Sumter High School in 1962 and entered Albany State. When she became a physical education teacher at Staley High School in 1966, she emulated the teachers and coaches she'd had when she was a student. But she didn't let her admiration for them get in the way of her competitive spirit and the healthy rivalry between all-black Sumter High School and Staley High School. Heard remembered, "When I first started working, I was coaching the girls' basketball team. And my high school coach. . .was still coaching. . . . My girls had to beat him read bad. And we did it!"

Lonnie Wise: Vietnam as the Test of a Lifetime

Around the same time that struggles over desegregation were raging in Americus and Sumter County schools, war was raging in Vietnam. More than four hundred young people from Sumter County served in the war, and seven made the ultimate sacrifice.[3] One of the men who served in the Vietnam War and survived was Lonnie Wise, a 1968 graduate of Plains High School. Among his classmates were Chip Carter, the second son of Jimmy and

[3] The seven men from Sumter County who died serving in the Vietnam War were R. B. Bridges Jr. of Americus, Elijah Herring Jr. of Leslie, Glenn Richard McCuaig of Americus, Henry Pullum Jr. of Americus, Johnny Fred Scott of Americus, James Stewart Jr. of Americus, and Freddy Roosevelt Williams of Plains. See "U.S. Military Fatal Casualties of the Vietnam War for Home-State-of-Record: Georgia," https://www.archives.gov/files/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-lists/ga-alpha.pdf; "Six Alabama Servicemen Killed in Viet," *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 23, 1968, 1; "Brother of 2 City Men Dies at 19 in Vietnam," *Capital Times*, March 20, 1969, 14.

Rosalynn Carter, and Brenda Oates, the first black graduate of Plains High School. There are a lot of ways that Plains High School prepared Wise and other students for life, but fighting in a guerilla war, witnessing death, and living with the memory of it was not one of them.

Wise grew up knowing that he wanted to go into the military. His father, Luther Wise Jr., flew B-17 bombers in World War II and worked at the Marine base in Albany during Wise's childhood. When he was not working at the base, his father was working as a mechanic. Working in their father's shop, Wise and his sisters, Amy and Shirley, could not help but pick up useful skills. More importantly, they absorbed their father's morality as a businessman. "Everybody around town respected my dad," he said. "If people couldn't afford, they would help him. It's like a Habitat House. They would help him do work on his car, and he wouldn't charge them anything. That's the kind of person he was." Similarly, their father and mother, Anne, were generous in sharing vegetables from their garden with the community.

After graduating from Plains High School, Wise knew that he wanted to go into the military. His mom encouraged him to go to college for two years, figuring that he would end up staying for four years. But once he completed six quarters at the end of 1969, he immediately volunteered for the US Army and got advanced training in the infantry at Fort Benning after first completing basic training at Fort Polk. After other training as a paratrooper and in leadership, he reported to Travis Air Force Base in California, and then went to Vietnam.

The eleven months and fourteen days that Wise spent in Vietnam shaped a significant part of his life. Serving during 1971, as the war was starting to wind down, he was part of a "real quiet and stealth-like" helicopter flight rescue team. "Our job was, if a chopper went down, we would go to that site and secure that site," he explained. "We would rescue the crews; we would secure the helicopter and stay there with it until they flew in a bigger helicopter to get it out. Or if it was destroyed or in bad shape, we would use thermite grenades and just burn it and take whatever we could out of it, radios or weapons, and burn it." They also did reconnaissance work. They would "fly low and agitate the enemy to get them to fire at them, and. . .make contact with the enemy forces. If it was more than we could handle, we would usually escape out."

His service brought him immense pride but also deep scars. "Everyone who served in infantry has some PTSD, I can assure you," he said. "You know, if you see a friend take his last breath right beside you and wonder, 'What if that bullet was meant for me and not for him?' That what if's a big question. I did a lot of soul searching on that, I can tell you. 'Why them, not me? Why did I survive?'"

Wise did not experience the type of angry backlash that many Vietnam veterans endured when they returned. However, only in recent years have people thanked him for his service. His life after the war has been stable and successful. He married his wife,

Annette, worked for years at Georgia Power, and raised one daughter, Rebecca, now an award-winning high school teacher. He continues to live a good and full life. He and Annette Wise water plants for the Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Trail, which she founded while working at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. The scars of war still remain, but with the support of his family, he deals with the residue of combat. "Well, it's been forty-eight years," he said in 2018. "I'm still working on it."

William Powell: Learn What You Can Wherever You Go

William Powell's area of expertise as a teacher is math, but the students who passed through his classes learned much more than algebra and trigonometry. Reflecting on his teaching career, he remembered some of the lessons he taught his students. One was a white young man he taught at Union High School. "School wasn't really important to him," Powell said. "He wanted to be a truck driver." Another student, a young woman, didn't understand why she had to take math. Powell's answer to all of his students, no matter their background, level of motivation, or life aspirations, was the same: "Try to learn what you can, wherever you go [because] education is a lifetime thing."

Growing up in Marion County, Florida, Powell couldn't have imagined that he'd end up being a teacher. His father died in a work accident, leaving his mother to raise him and his siblings on her own. After graduating from high school, Powell went into the US Army toward the end of World War II. He served for fourteen months at Schofield Barracks in Oahu, Hawaii. When he returned to Florida, he enrolled at Florida A&M College on the G.I. Bill. "That's what caused me to be able to go to college," he said. After a year, he transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he majored in math.

Powell discovered that teaching was his calling during his senior year at Morehouse. Part of what motivated him was being able to transmit knowledge and build upon the instruction that he received. "I like teaching so I can get all the information to the children better than I could," he said.

A year before the *Brown* decision, Powell started teaching in the Sumter County schools. Like other black educators at the time, he recognized that even school equalization efforts left schools woefully underfunded, but he knew that keeping his students motivated was the most important aspect of their education. "A book is not going to do anything for you if you don't want to do it," he said. "So, I just [tried] to teach as much I could to all children. Not anyone being better than the other one. I just know they learned as fast and as much as they could at the time." Still, Powell said that desegregation "came at the right time."

The memories of Powell that stand out to his former students are his quiet demeanor, his meticulous attention to detail, and how neat he was. When instructing students at the board, he carefully held his chalk with a tissue. "He was very quiet,"

remembered Josephine Thomas. “You had to lean in to hear him.” He never was “buddy buddy” with his students, but he prided himself on always being fair with them. Whether his students finished school or not, Powell is proud that most of them “went on and did something productive in life. They made a livelihood.… They would make the world better.”

Figure Gallery and Tables

Figure 7.10. "The Plains 14," 1967–1968

Plains High School continued to be a desegregated school in the 1967–68 school year. That year, the "Plains 17" became the "Plains 14." Seven of the originals had left Plains, while four others enrolled. Still, there was a net loss of three black students. There were ten girls and four boys in a school with an enrollment of four hundred students.

High School

Brenda Oates (Senior)	Clyde Jackson (Junior)	Benny Wallace (Junior)	June Edge (Sophomore)
Josephine Gardner (Sophomore)	Martha Jackson (Sophomore)	Christine Clinkscale (Freshman)	Edna Gardner (Freshman)
Linda Oates (Freshman)	Otis Reynolds (Freshman)	Etheline Sims (Freshman)	

Junior High School

Margaret Edge
(Eighth Grade)

Elementary School

Eleanor Edge (Seventh Grade)	Raymond Pickett (Sixth Grade)



Otis Reynolds

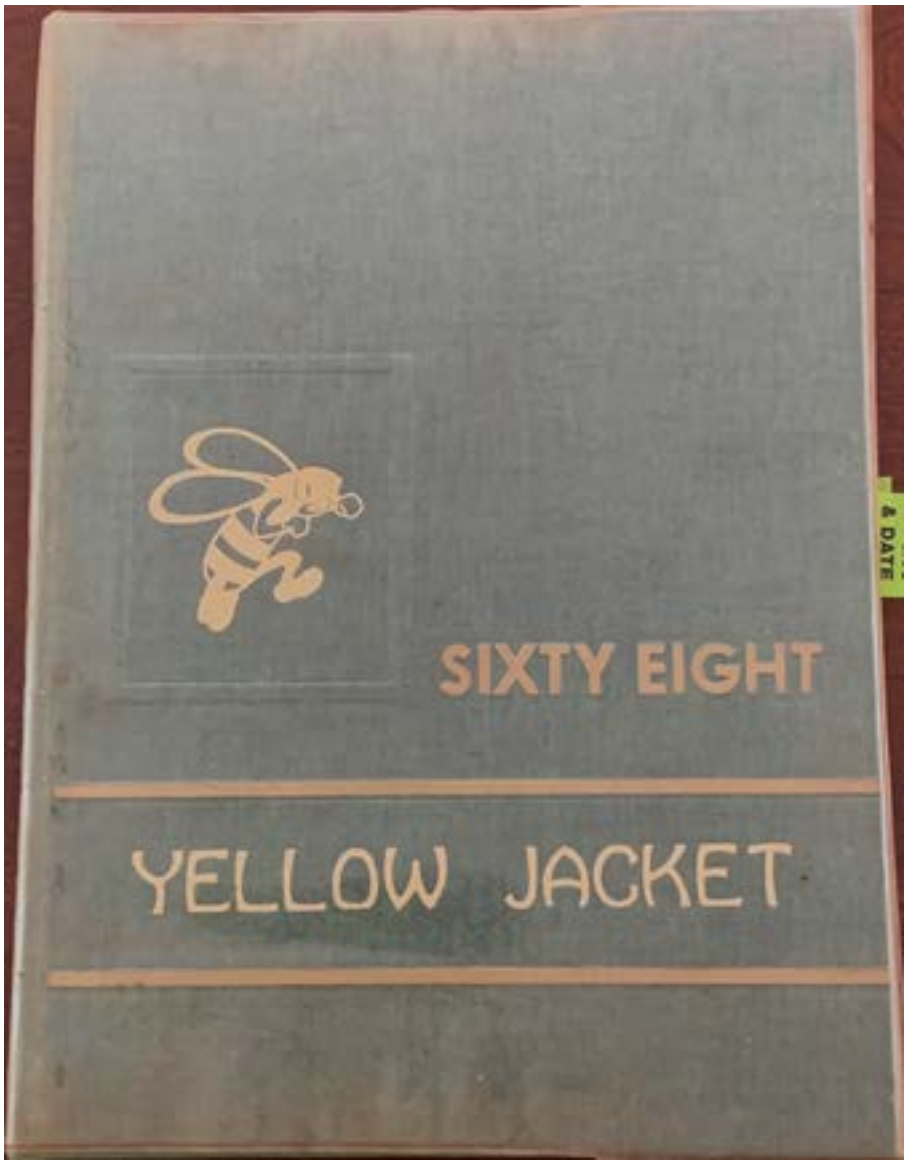


Etheline Sims

Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

Figure 7.11. Persisting segregation in Union High School sports, 1967–1968

The situation was the same cross-county at Union High School. Like Plains, the school's athletic teams remained white-only. The images here are from the boys' basketball and baseball teams for the 1967–68 school year. This was Union's second year of desegregation.



Courtesy of Claude Frazier

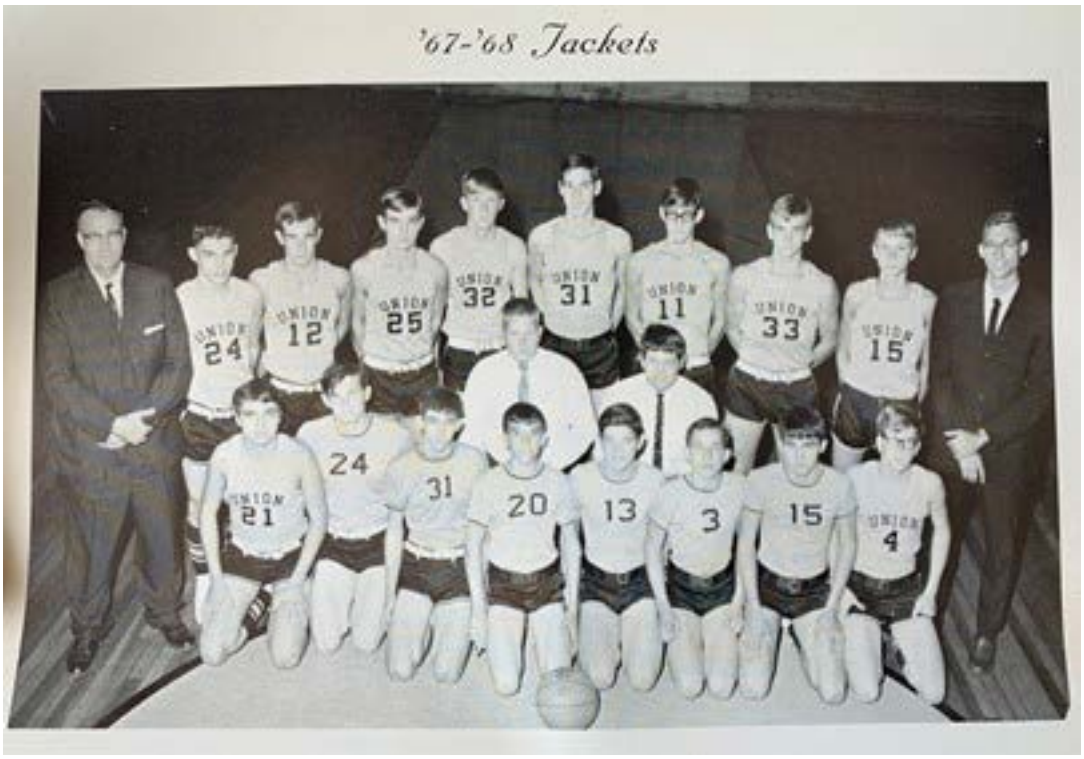
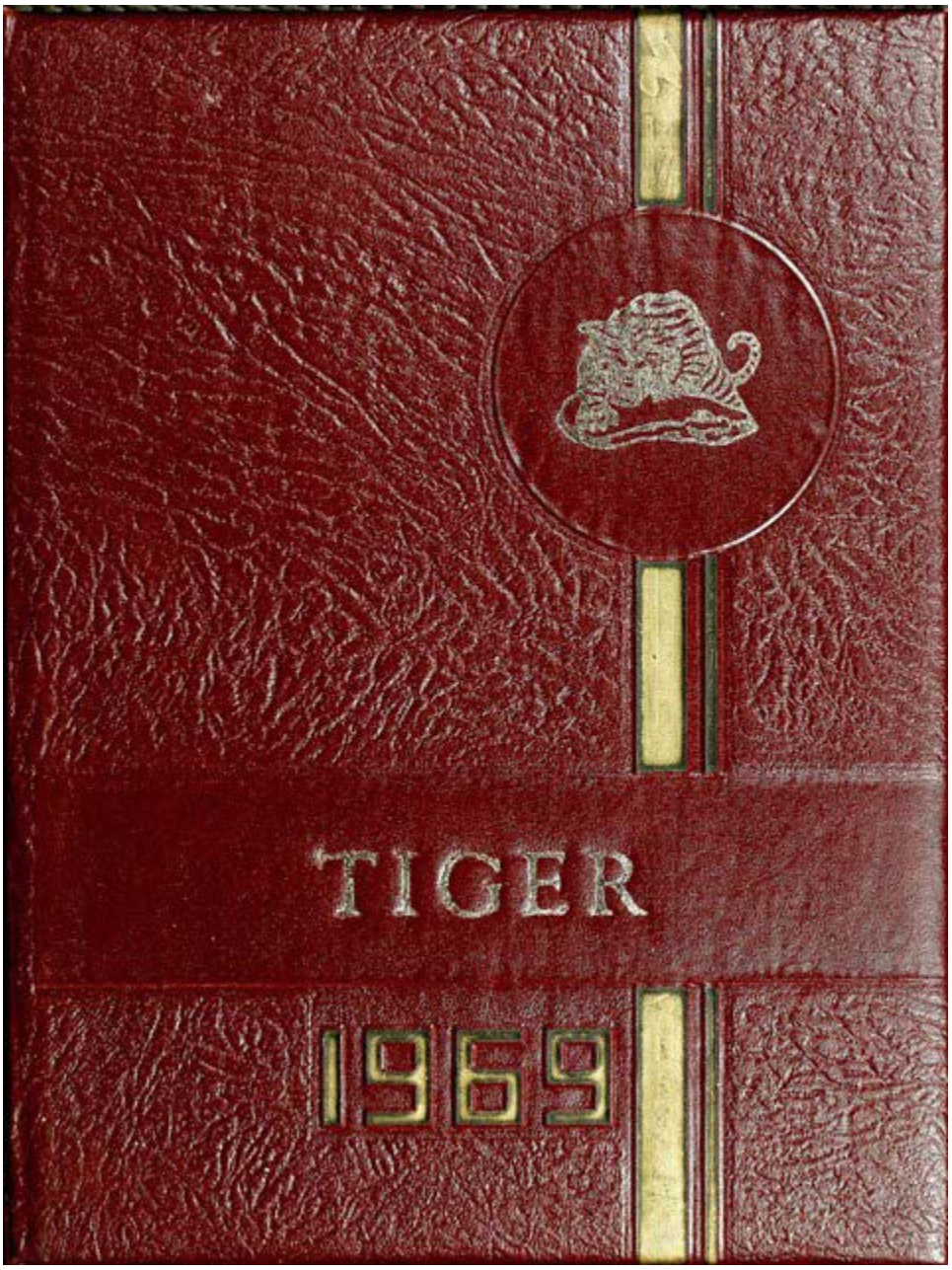

'67-'68 Jackets
UNION 24
UNION 12
UNION 25
UNION 32
UNION 31
UNION 11
UNION 33
UNION 15
UNION 21
24
31
20
13
3
15
UNION 4



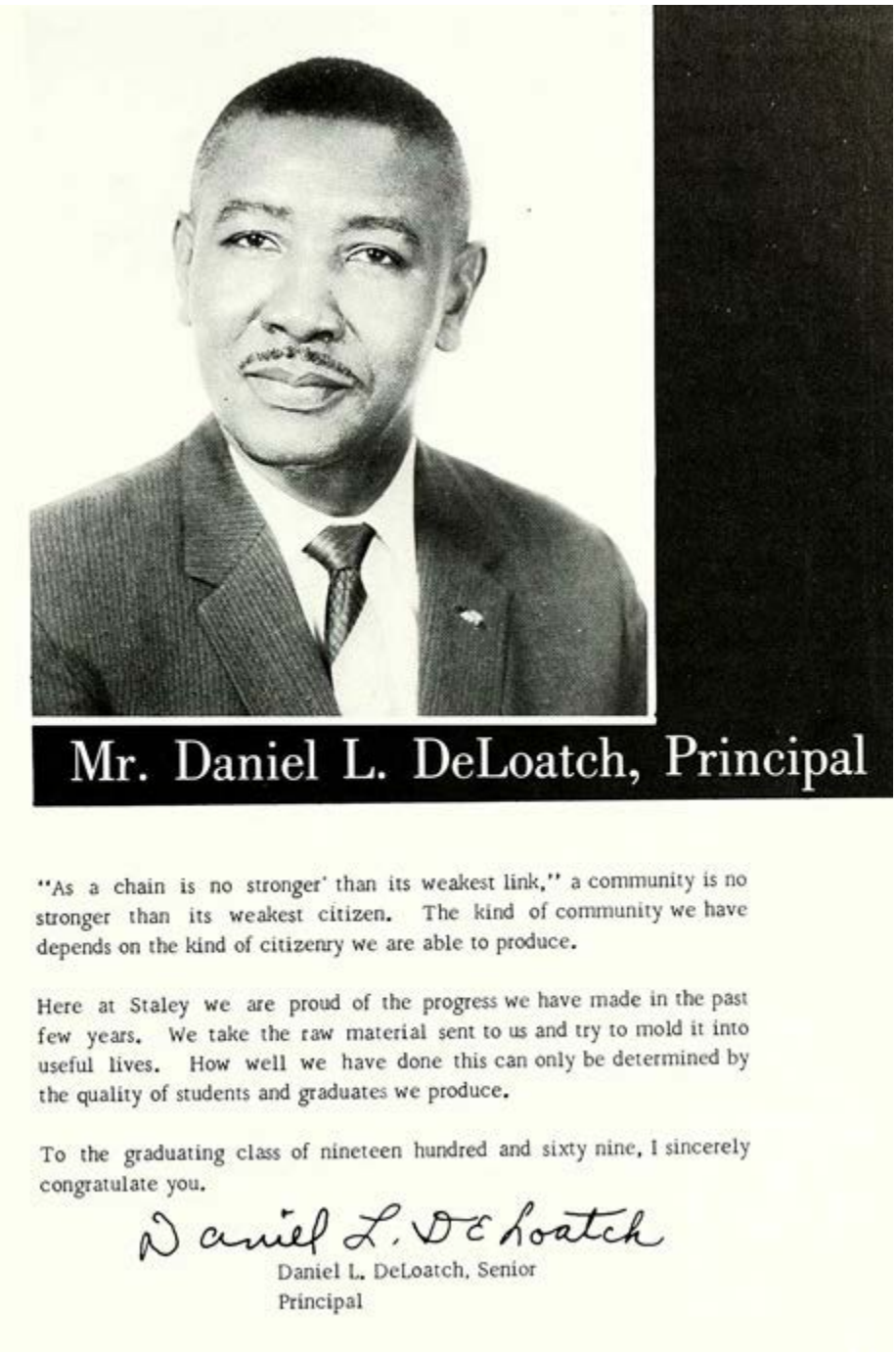
Figure 7.12. A. S. Staley High School Yearbook, 1968–1969

By the mid-1960s, the racial desegregation of Sumter County public schools was underway. Nevertheless, the student body at historically black schools like A. S. Staley High School in Americus remained segregated. Staley's faculty, however, was desegregated. The images here are from the 1968–69 Staley High annual.



U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900–1999, Ancestry.com

Figure 7.13. Staley High School Principal Daniel L. DeLoatch



Mr. Daniel L. DeLoatch, Principal

"As a chain is no stronger than its weakest link," a community is no stronger than its weakest citizen. The kind of community we have depends on the kind of citizenry we are able to produce.

Here at Staley we are proud of the progress we have made in the past few years. We take the raw material sent to us and try to mold it into useful lives. How well we have done this can only be determined by the quality of students and graduates we produce.

To the graduating class of nineteen hundred and sixty nine, I sincerely congratulate you.

Daniel L. DeLoatch

Daniel L. DeLoatch, Senior
Principal

U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900–1999, Ancestry.com

Figure 7.14. Staley High School traditions

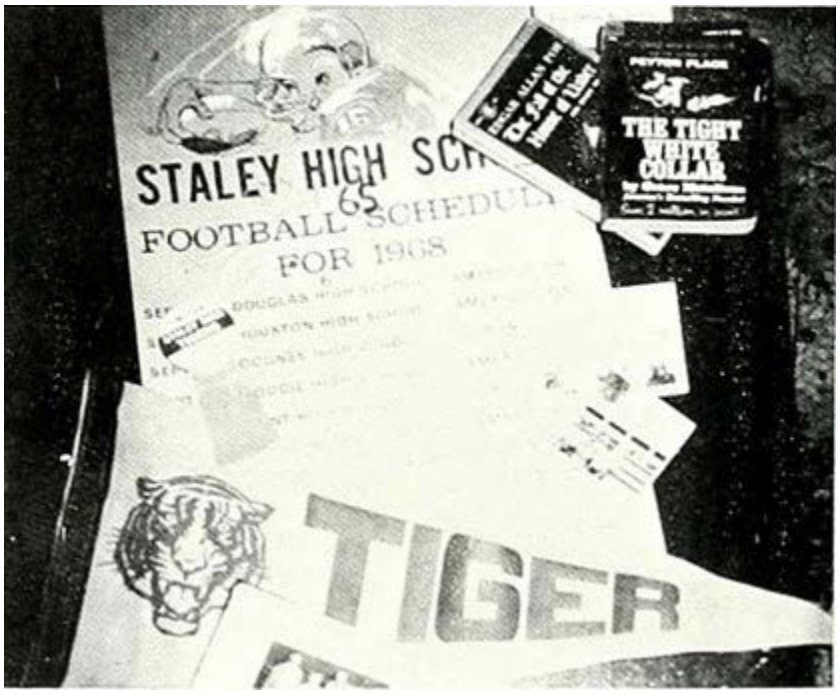
Alma Mater

Staley, Staley High our school,
Here our feet shall trod,
Our hearts shall ever be true,
Our dear school, our school.

From these walls so firm and stout,
Sons and daughters shout;
Far behond the realm of light,
Staley, Staley our school.

Through the years as they roll by,
Our love lingers on;
Every hour and ever day,
Thoughts enchance our hearts.

Staley, Staley, Staley High!
We dearly love you!
We will praise and honor you,
Maroon and gold so true.



U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900–1999, Ancestry.com

Figure 7.15. Staley Tigers High School Football, 1968



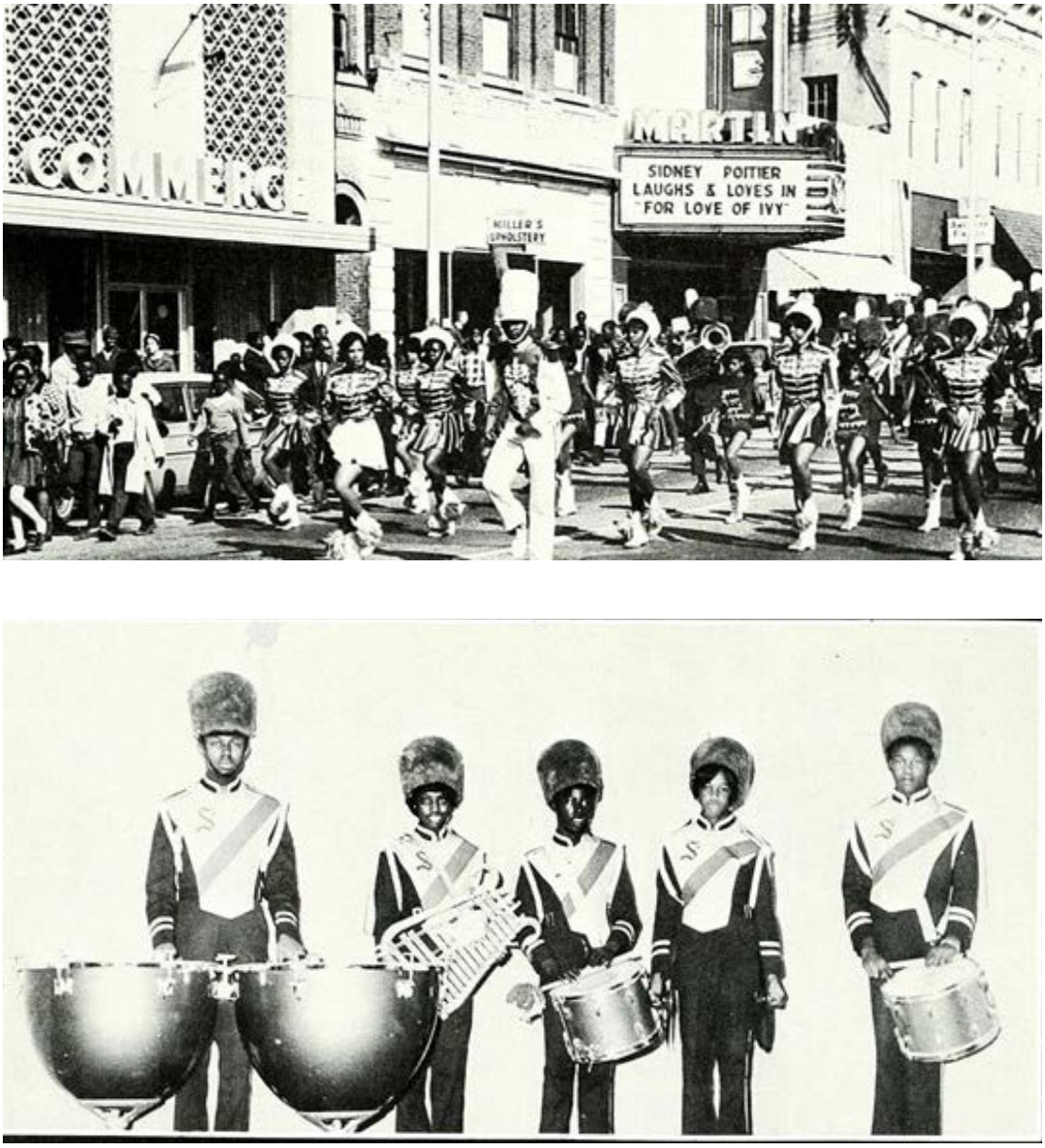


RONALD "PUP" BIVINS
QB



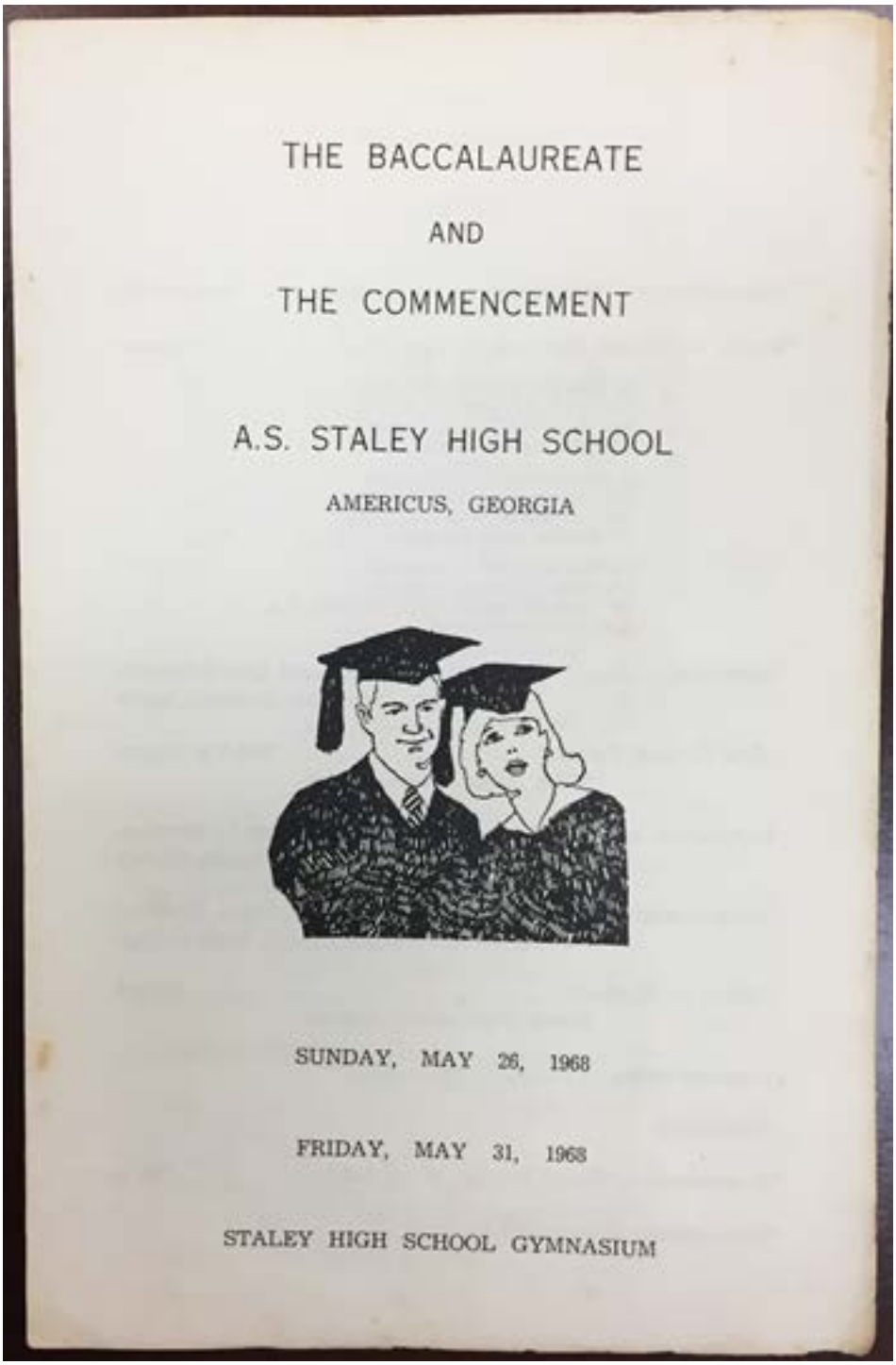
U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900–1999, Ancestry.com

Figure 7.16. Staley High School Marching Band, 1968–1969



U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900–1999, Ancestry.com

Figure 7.17. Staley High School Graduation Program, 1968



THE BACCALAUREATE

AND

THE COMMENCEMENT

A.S. STALEY HIGH SCHOOL

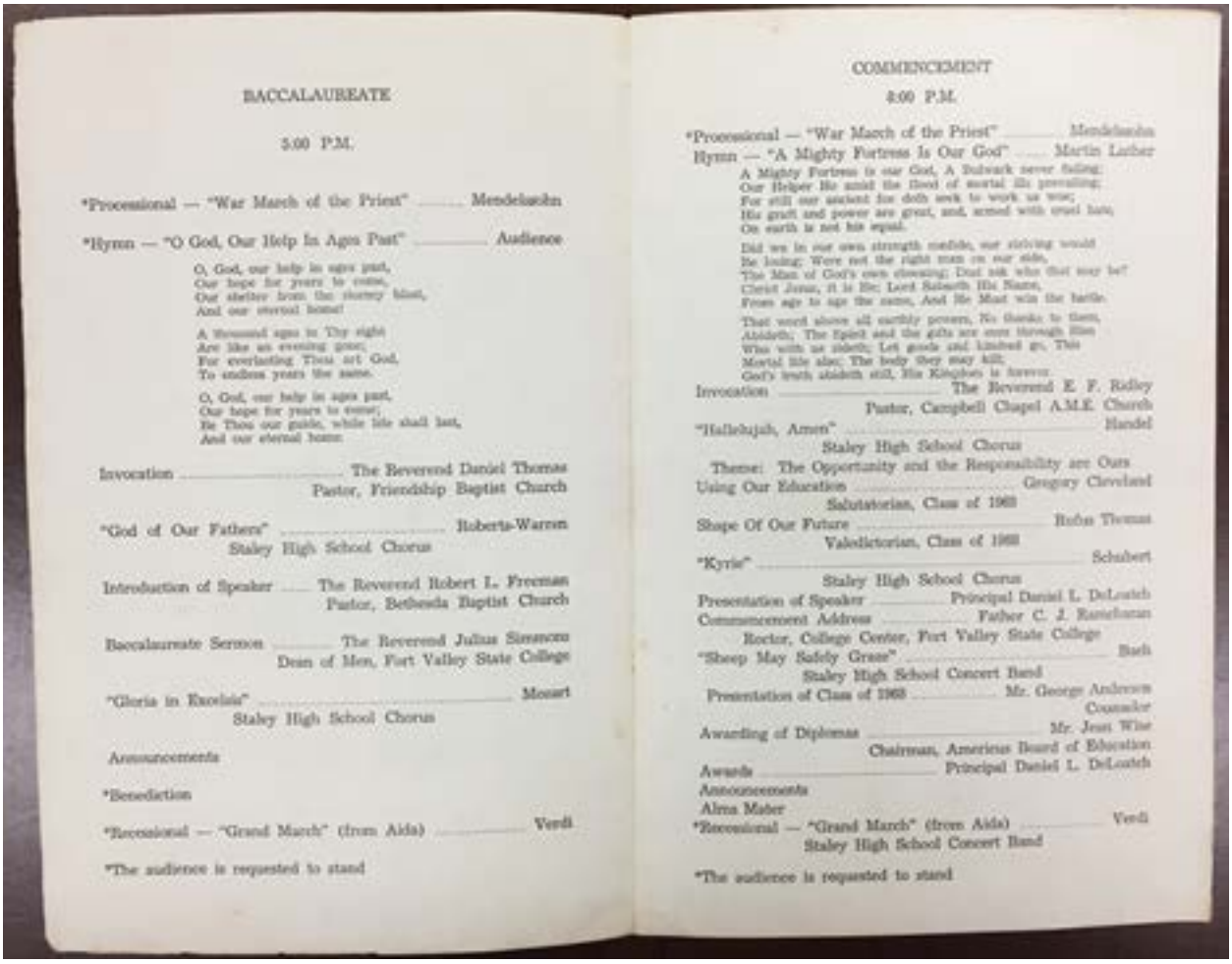
AMERICUS, GEORGIA

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 1968

FRIDAY, MAY 31, 1968

STALEY HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard



BACCALAUREATE

5:00 P.M.

*Processional — "War March of the Priest" ..... Mendelssohn

*Hymn — "O God, Our Help In Ages Past" ..... Audience

O, God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
For everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

O, God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come;
Be Thou our guide, while life shall last,
And our eternal home.

Invocation ..... The Reverend Daniel Thomas
Pastor, Friendship Baptist Church

"God of Our Fathers" ..... Roberts-Warren
Staley High School Chorus

Introduction of Speaker ..... The Reverend Robert L. Freeman
Pastor, Bethesda Baptist Church

Baccalaureate Sermon ..... The Reverend Julius Simmons
Dean of Men, Fort Valley State College

"Gloria in Excelsis" ..... Mozart
Staley High School Chorus

Announcements

*Benediction

*Recessional — "Grand March" (from Aida) ..... Verdi

*The audience is requested to stand

COMMENCEMENT

8:00 P.M.

*Processional — "War March of the Priest" ..... Mendelssohn
Hymn — "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" ..... Martin Luther

A Mighty Fortress is our God, A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing;
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would
Be losing; Were not the right man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing; Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.

That word above all earthly powers, No thanks to them,
Abideth; The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him
Who with us sideth; Let goods and kindred go, This
Mortal life also; The body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still, His Kingdom is forever.

Invocation ..... The Reverend E. F. Ridley
Pastor, Campbell Chapel A.M.E. Church

"Hallelujah, Amen" ..... Handel
Staley High School Chorus

Theme: The Opportunity and the Responsibility are Ours

Using Our Education ..... Gregory Cleveland
Salutatorian, Class of 1968

Shape Of Our Future ..... Rufus Thomas
Valedictorian, Class of 1968

"Kyrie" ..... Schubert
Staley High School Chorus

Presentation of Speaker ..... Principal Daniel L. DeLoatch

Commencement Address ..... Father C. J. Ramelmeier
Rector, College Center, Fort Valley State College

"Sheep May Safely Graze" ..... Bach
Staley High School Concert Band

Presentation of Class of 1968 ..... Mr. George Anderson
Counselor

Awarding of Diplomas ..... Mr. Jean Wise
Chairman, Americus Board of Education

Awards ..... Principal Daniel L. DeLoatch

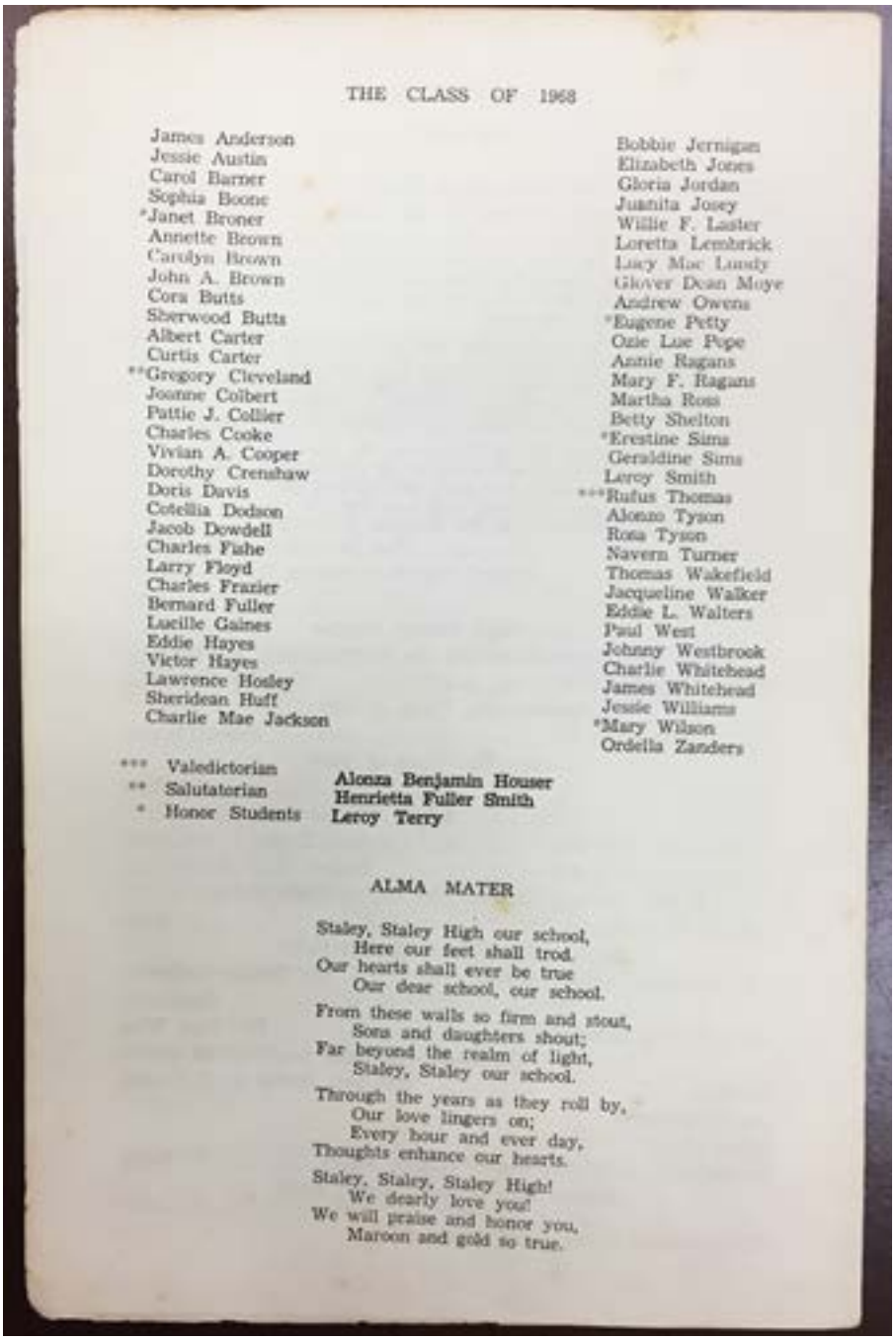
Announcements

Alma Mater

*Recessional — "Grand March" (from Aida) ..... Verdi
Staley High School Concert Band

*The audience is requested to stand

Figure 7.17. (cont'd)



THE CLASS OF 1968

James Anderson
Jessie Austin
Carol Barner
Sophia Boone
*Janet Broner
Annette Brown
Carolyn Brown
John A. Brown
Cora Butts
Sherwood Butts
Albert Carter
Curtis Carter
**Gregory Cleveland
Joanne Colbert
Pattie J. Collier
Charles Cooke
Vivian A. Cooper
Dorothy Crenshaw
Doris Davis
Cotellia Dodson
Jacob Dowdell
Charles Fishe
Larry Floyd
Charles Frazier
Bernard Fuller
Lucille Gaines
Eddie Hayes
Victor Hayes
Lawrence Hosley
Sheridean Huff
Charlie Mae Jackson
Bobbie Jernigan
Elizabeth Jones
Gloria Jordan
Juanita Josey
Willie F. Laster
Loretta Lembrick
Lucy Mae Lundy
Glover Dean Moye
Andrew Owens
*Eugene Petty
Ozie Lue Pope
Annie Ragans
Mary F. Ragans
Martha Ross
Betty Shelton
*Erestine Sims
Geraldine Sims
Leroy Smith
***Rufus Thomas
Alonzo Tyson
Rosa Tyson
Navern Turner
Thomas Wakefield
Jacqueline Walker
Eddie L. Walters
Paul West
Johnny Westbrook
Charlie Whitehead
James Whitehead
Jessie Williams
*Mary Wilson
Ordella Zanders

*** Valedictorian — **Alonza Benjamin Houser**
** Salutatorian — **Henrietta Fuller Smith**
* Honor Students — **Leroy Terry**

ALMA MATER

Staley, Staley High our school,
Here our feet shall trod.
Our hearts shall ever be true
Our dear school, our school.

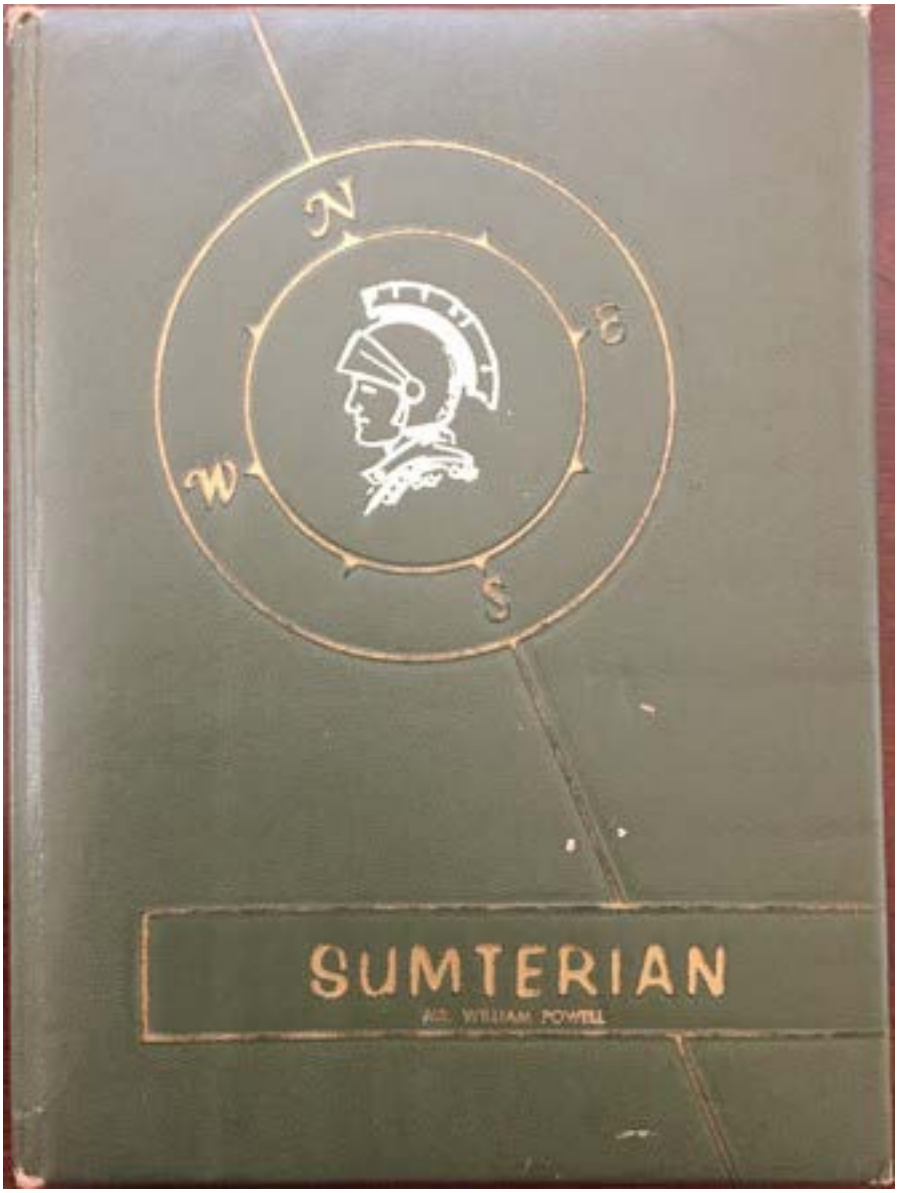
From these walls so firm and stout,
Sons and daughters shout;
Far beyond the realm of light,
Staley, Staley our school.

Through the years as they roll by,
Our love lingers on;
Every hour and ever day,
Thoughts enhance our hearts.

Staley, Staley, Staley High!
We dearly love you!
We will praise and honor you,
Maroon and gold so true.

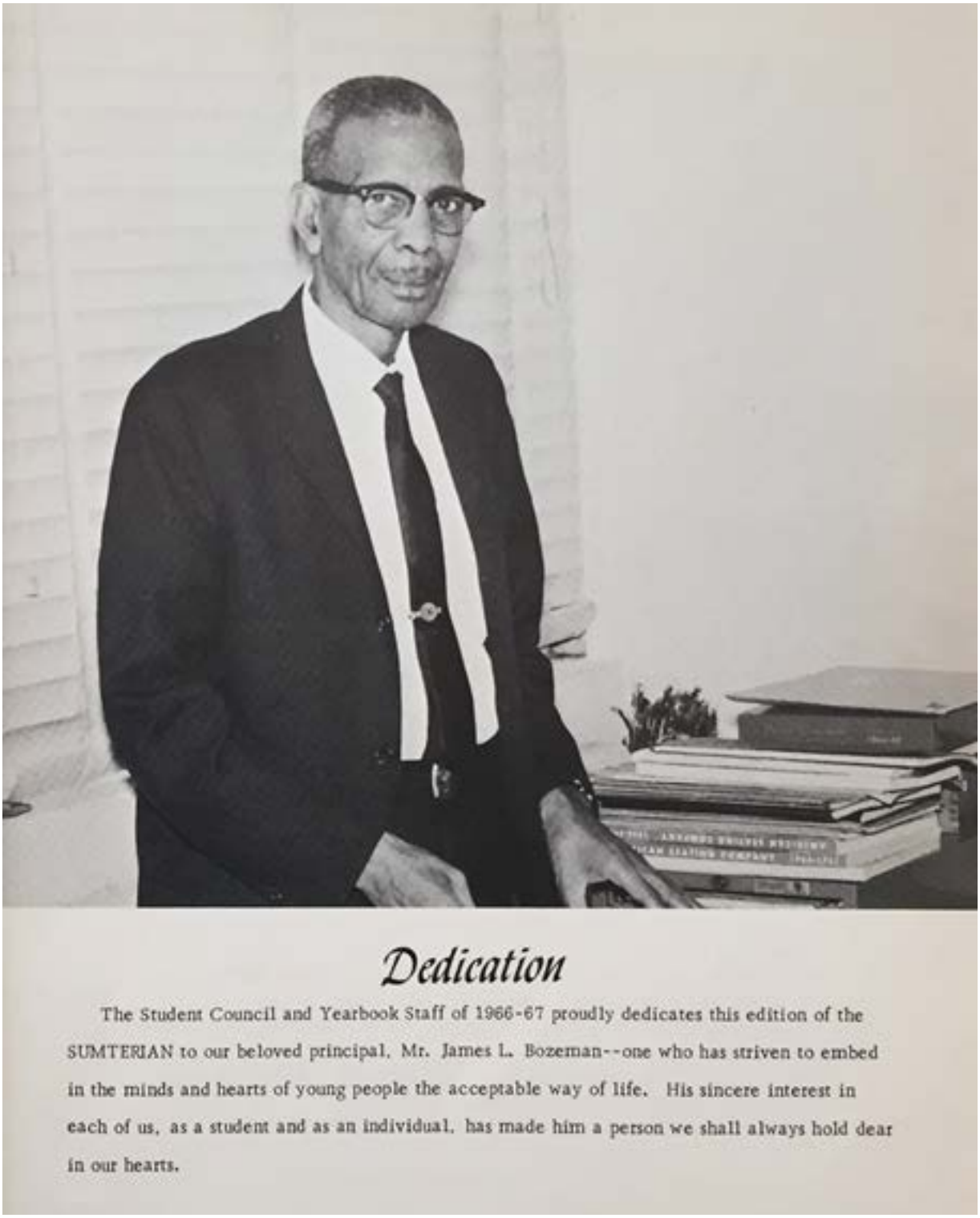
Figure 7.18. Sumter High School Yearbook, 1966–67

As Plains High School admitted its first black students in 1966, Sumter High School in Americus had two white students in its otherwise all-black student body. The two whites who attended were from the Koinonia community: sophomore David Wittkamper and freshman Leonard Jordan. Two Hispanics also attended that year: freshmen Beatriz and Fabio Correa. The images here are from the 1966–67 school annual.



Courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.19. Sumter High School Principal James L. Bozeman



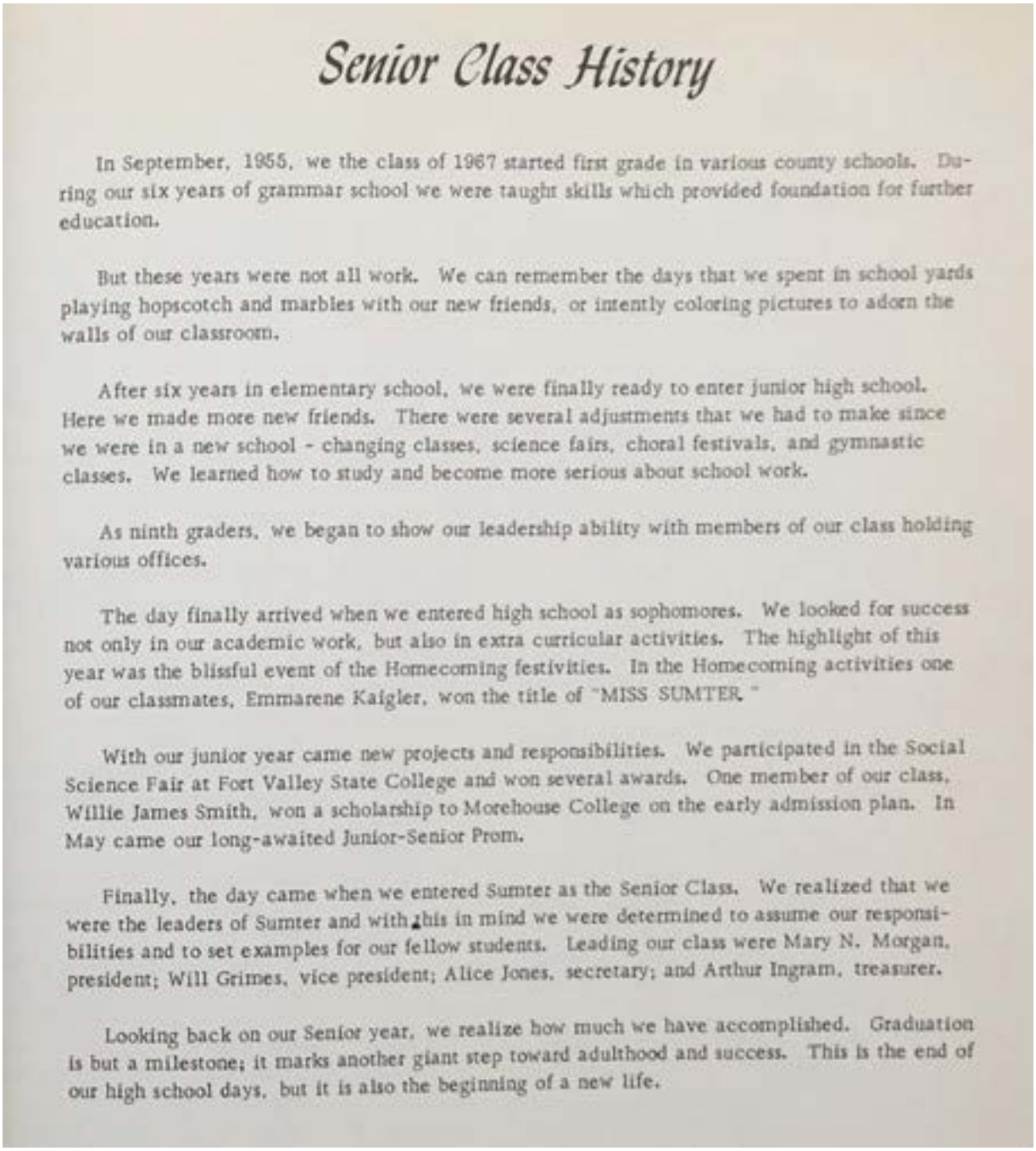
Dedication

The Student Council and Yearbook Staff of 1966-67 proudly dedicates this edition of the SUMTERIAN to our beloved principal, Mr. James L. Bozeman--one who has striven to embed in the minds and hearts of young people the acceptable way of life. His sincere interest in each of us, as a student and as an individual, has made him a person we shall always hold dear in our hearts.

1966–1967 Sumter High School Yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.20. Sumter High School Class of ’67

When Jimmy Carter joined the Sumter County Board of Education in December 1955, the Sumter High School senior class of 1967 was in the first grade “in various county schools.”



Senior Class History

In September, 1955, we the class of 1967 started first grade in various county schools. During our six years of grammar school we were taught skills which provided foundation for further education.

But these years were not all work. We can remember the days that we spent in school yards playing hopscotch and marbles with our new friends, or intently coloring pictures to adorn the walls of our classroom.

After six years in elementary school, we were finally ready to enter junior high school. Here we made more new friends. There were several adjustments that we had to make since we were in a new school - changing classes, science fairs, choral festivals, and gymnastic classes. We learned how to study and become more serious about school work.

As ninth graders, we began to show our leadership ability with members of our class holding various offices.

The day finally arrived when we entered high school as sophomores. We looked for success not only in our academic work, but also in extra curricular activities. The highlight of this year was the blissful event of the Homecoming festivities. In the Homecoming activities one of our classmates, Emmarene Kaigler, won the title of "MISS SUMTER."

With our junior year came new projects and responsibilities. We participated in the Social Science Fair at Fort Valley State College and won several awards. One member of our class, Willie James Smith, won a scholarship to Morehouse College on the early admission plan. In May came our long-awaited Junior-Senior Prom.

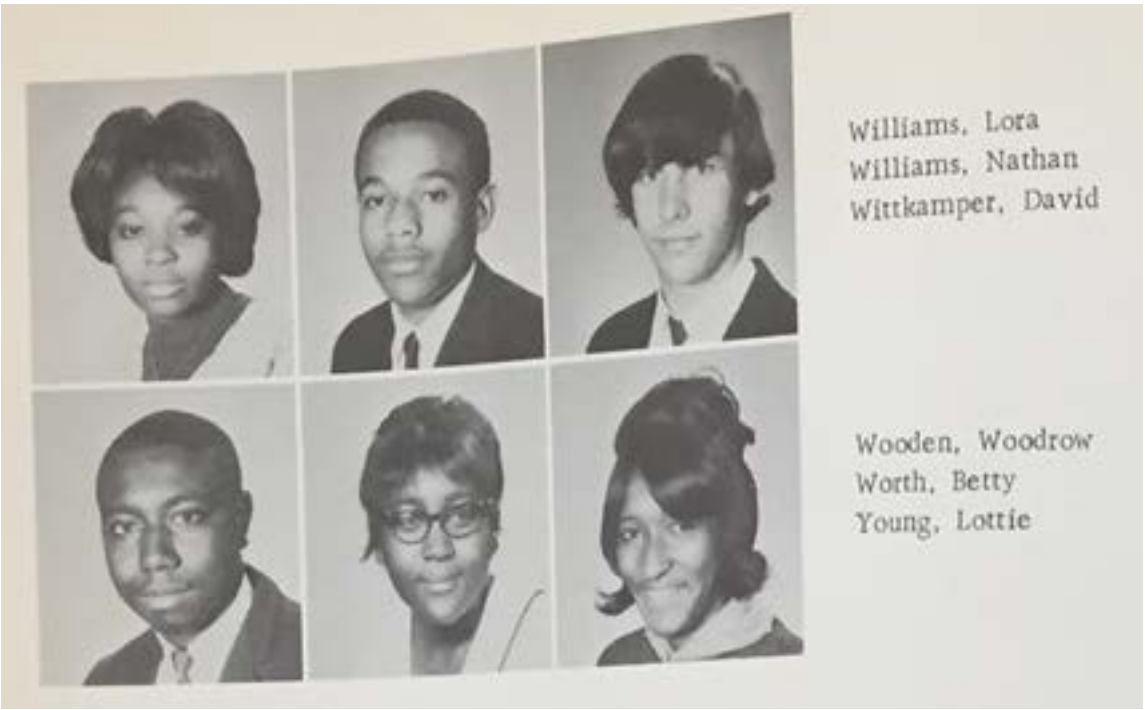
Finally, the day came when we entered Sumter as the Senior Class. We realized that we were the leaders of Sumter and with this in mind we were determined to assume our responsibilities and to set examples for our fellow students. Leading our class were Mary N. Morgan, president; Will Grimes, vice president; Alice Jones, secretary; and Arthur Ingram, treasurer.

Looking back on our Senior year, we realize how much we have accomplished. Graduation is but a milestone; it marks another giant step toward adulthood and success. This is the end of our high school days, but it is also the beginning of a new life.

1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.21. Sumter High School as a refuge for Koinonia students

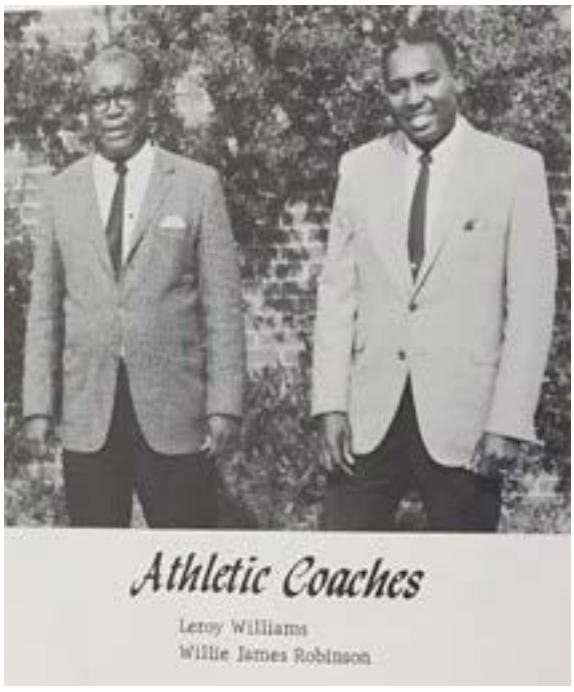
Students from Koinonia were generally not welcome in the historically all-white high schools in Sumter County. One student, David Wittkamper, attended Americus High School for his ninth-grade year. However, according to Jim Auchmutey, author of *The Class of '65*, he did not return. Because the community preached racial equality and justice, he experienced "constant bullying and occasional physical abuse" from classmates. For the next school year, he transferred to the all-black Sumter High School. Effectively, Sumter High was a refuge for Koinonia students.



1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.22. Sumter Trojans High School Football, 1966







1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.23. Sumter Trojans/Trojanettes High School Basketball, 1966–1967



1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.24. Sumter High School Marching Band, 1966–1967



1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.25. Sumter High School Dance Group, 1966–1967





1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.26. Sumter High Choral Club and Director Miss L. R. Purdy, 1966–1967





1966–1967 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of William Powell

Figure 7.27. Sumter High School Graduation Program, 1968

Among the 1968 Sumter High School graduates were two from the "Plains 17": Betty Jean Hollis and April Wright. This was not unusual. Several of the Plains 17 finished their schooling at Sumter.



Commencement Exercises

Sumter High School

Americus, Georgia

BACCALAUREATE

SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 1968 — — 5:00 P.M.

CAMPBELL CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH

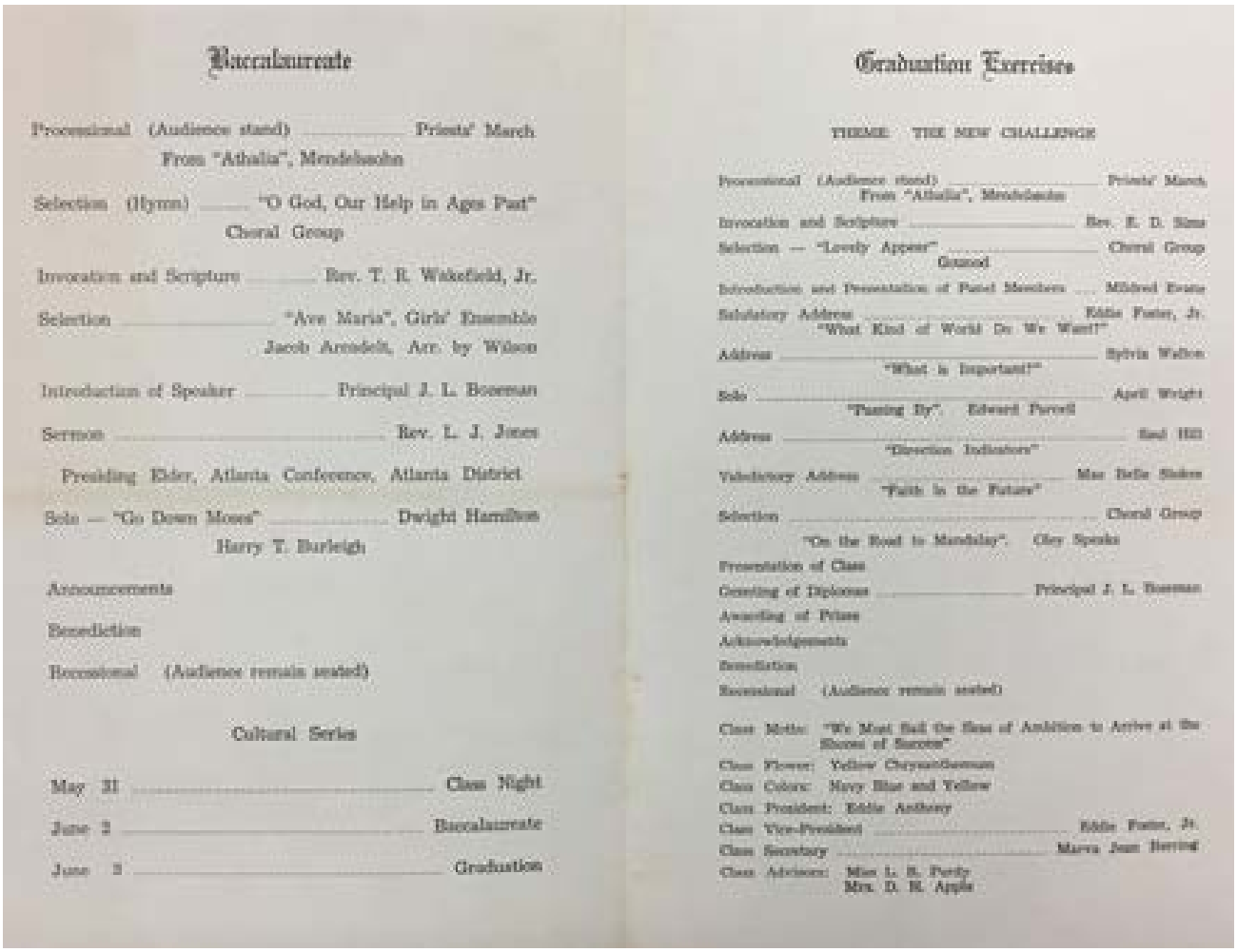
S. H. S

GRADUATION EXERCISES

MONDAY NIGHT, JUNE 3, 1968 — — 8:00 P.M.

CAMPBELL CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH

Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard



Baccalaureate

Processional (Audience stand) ..... Priests' March
From "Athalia", Mendelssohn

Selection (Hymn) ..... "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"
Choral Group

Invocation and Scripture ..... Rev. T. R. Wakefield, Jr.

Selection ..... "Ave Maria", Girls' Ensemble
Jacob Arcadelt, Arr. by Wilson

Introduction of Speaker ..... Principal J. L. Bozeman

Sermon ..... Rev. L. J. Jones
Presiding Elder, Atlanta Conference, Atlanta District

Solo — "Go Down Moses" ..... Dwight Hamilton
Harry T. Burleigh

Announcements

Benediction

Recessional (Audience remain seated)

Cultural Series

May 31 ..... Class Night

June 2 ..... Baccalaureate

June 3 ..... Graduation

Graduation Exercises

THEME: THE NEW CHALLENGE

Processional (Audience stand) ..... Priests' March,
From "Athalia", Mendelssohn

Invocation and Scripture ..... Rev. E. D. Sims

Selection — "Lovely Appear" ..... Choral Group
Gounod

Introduction and Presentation of Panel Members ..... Mildred Evans

Salutatory Address ..... Eddie Foster, Jr.
"What Kind of World Do We Want?"

Address ..... Sylvia Walton
"What is Important?"

Solo ..... April Wright
"Passing By". Edward Purcell

Address ..... Saul Hill
"Direction Indicators"

Valedictory Address ..... Mae Belle Stokes
"Faith in the Future"

Selection ..... Choral Group
"On the Road to Mandalay". Oley Speaks

Presentation of Class

Granting of Diplomas ..... Principal J. L. Bozeman

Awarding of Prizes

Acknowledgments

Benediction

Recessional (Audience remain seated)

Class Motto: "We Must Sail On Seas of Ambition to Arrive at the Shores of Success"

Class Flower: Yellow Chrysanthemum

Class Colors: Navy Blue and Yellow

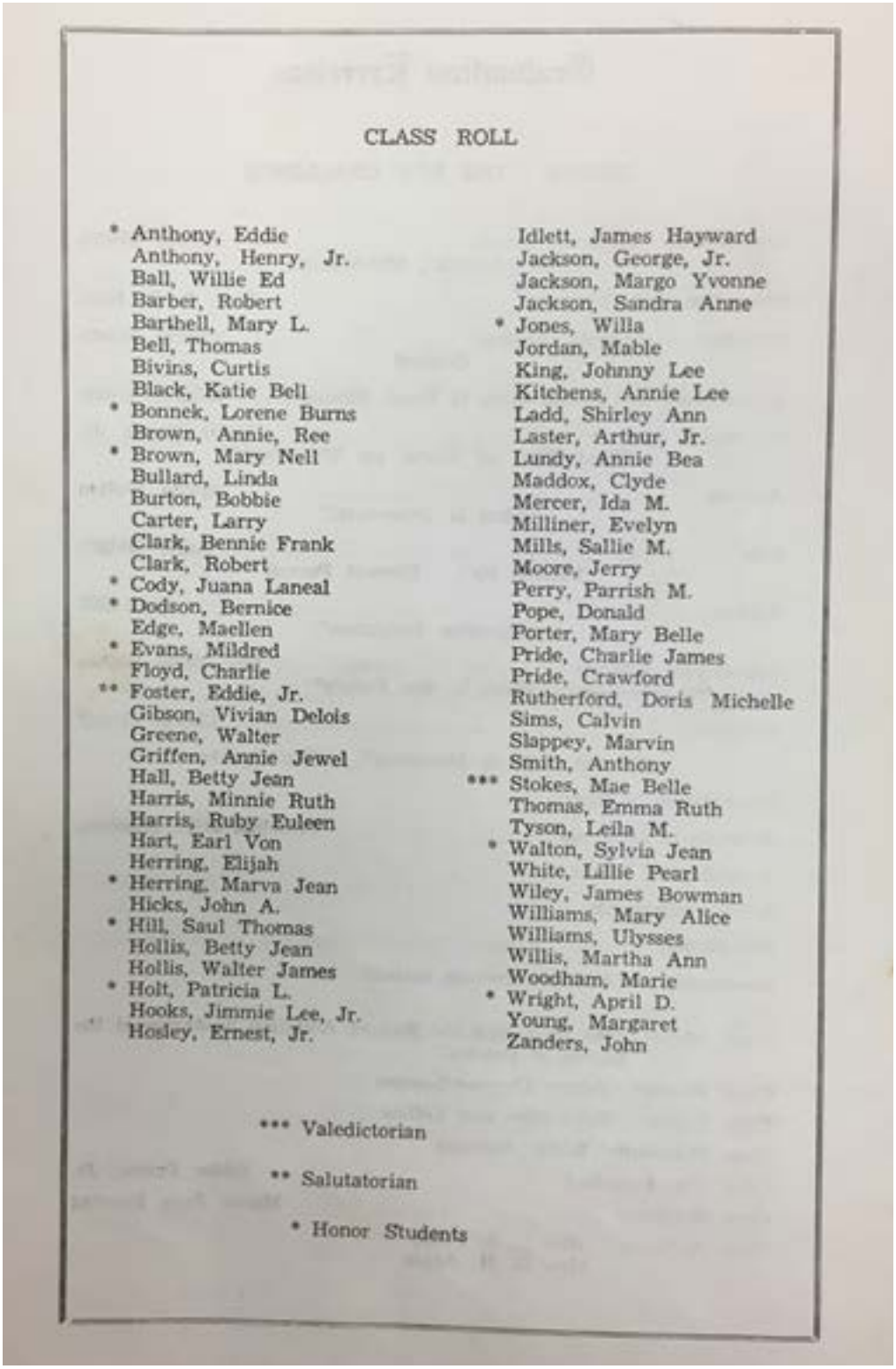
Class President: Eddie Anthony

Class Vice-President ..... Eddie Foster, Jr.

Class Secretary ..... Marva Jean Herring

Class Advisors: Miss L. S. Purdy
Mrs. D. R. Apple

Figure 7.27. (cont'd)



CLASS ROLL

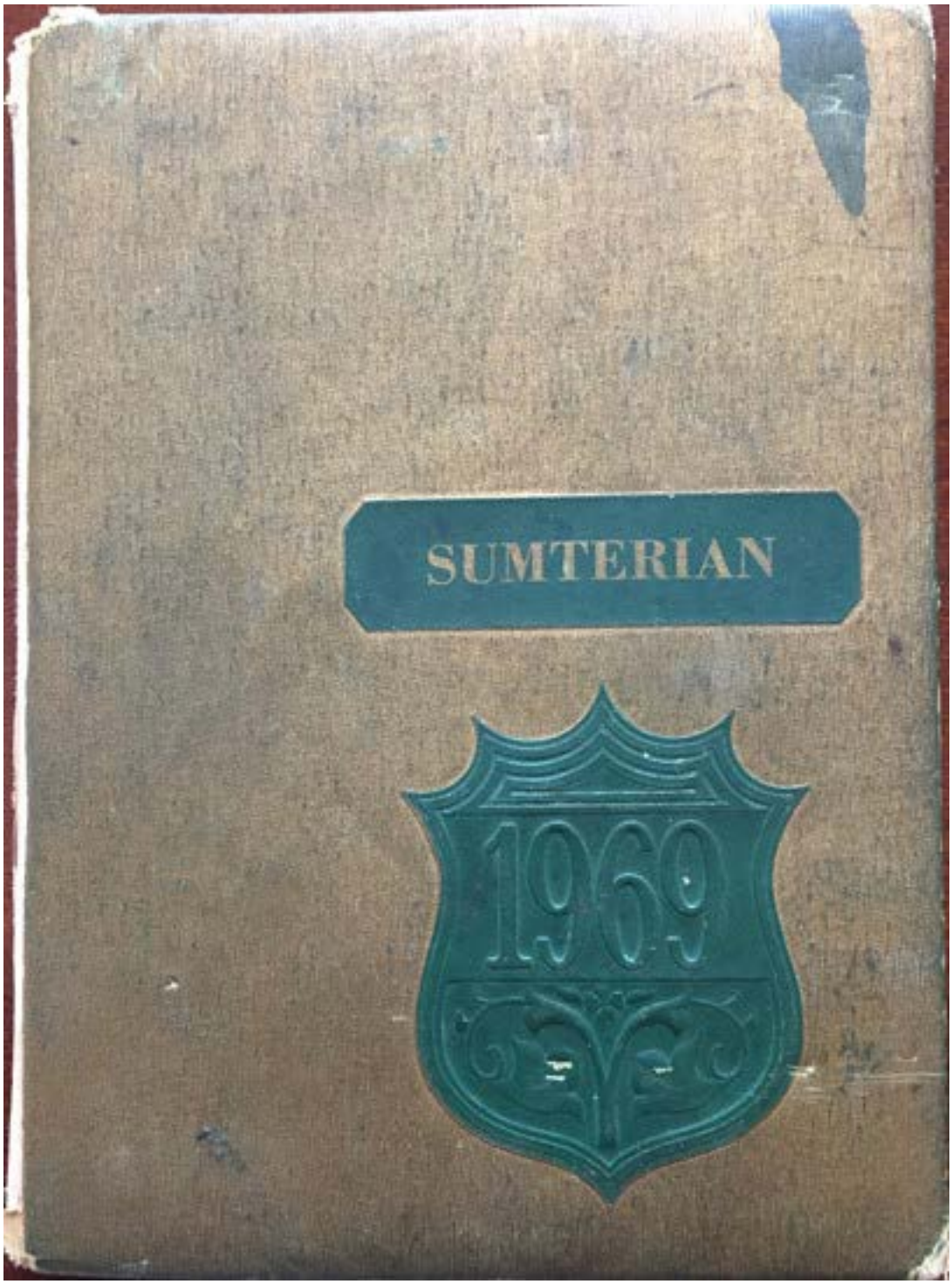
* Anthony, Eddie
Anthony, Henry, Jr.
Ball, Willie Ed
Barber, Robert
Barthell, Mary L.
Bell, Thomas
Bivins, Curtis
Black, Katie Bell
* Bonnek, Lorene Burns
Brown, Annie, Ree
* Brown, Mary Nell
Bullard, Linda
Burton, Bobbie
Carter, Larry
Clark, Bennie Frank
Clark, Robert
* Cody, Juana Laneal
* Dodson, Bernice
Edge, Maellen
* Evans, Mildred
Floyd, Charlie
** Foster, Eddie, Jr.
Gibson, Vivian Delois
Greene, Walter
Griffen, Annie Jewel
Hall, Betty Jean
Harris, Minnie Ruth
Harris, Ruby Euleen
Hart, Earl Von
Herring, Elijah
* Herring, Marva Jean
Hicks, John A.
* Hill, Saul Thomas
Hollis, Betty Jean
Hollis, Walter James
* Holt, Patricia L.
Hooks, Jimmie Lee, Jr.
Hosley, Ernest, Jr.
Idlett, James Hayward
Jackson, George, Jr.
Jackson, Margo Yvonne
Jackson, Sandra Anne
* Jones, Willa
Jordan, Mable
King, Johnny Lee
Kitchens, Annie Lee
Ladd, Shirley Ann
Laster, Arthur, Jr.
Lundy, Annie Bea
Maddox, Clyde
Mercer, Ida M.
Milliner, Evelyn
Mills, Sallie M.
Moore, Jerry
Perry, Parrish M.
Pope, Donald
Porter, Mary Belle
Pride, Charlie James
Pride, Crawford
Rutherford, Doris Michelle
Sims, Calvin
Slappey, Marvin
Smith, Anthony
*** Stokes, Mae Belle
Thomas, Emma Ruth
Tyson, Leila M.
* Walton, Sylvia Jean
White, Lillie Pearl
Wiley, James Bowman
Williams, Mary Alice
Williams, Ulysses
Willis, Martha Ann
Woodham, Marie
* Wright, April D.
Young, Margaret
Zanders, John

*** Valedictorian

** Salutatorian

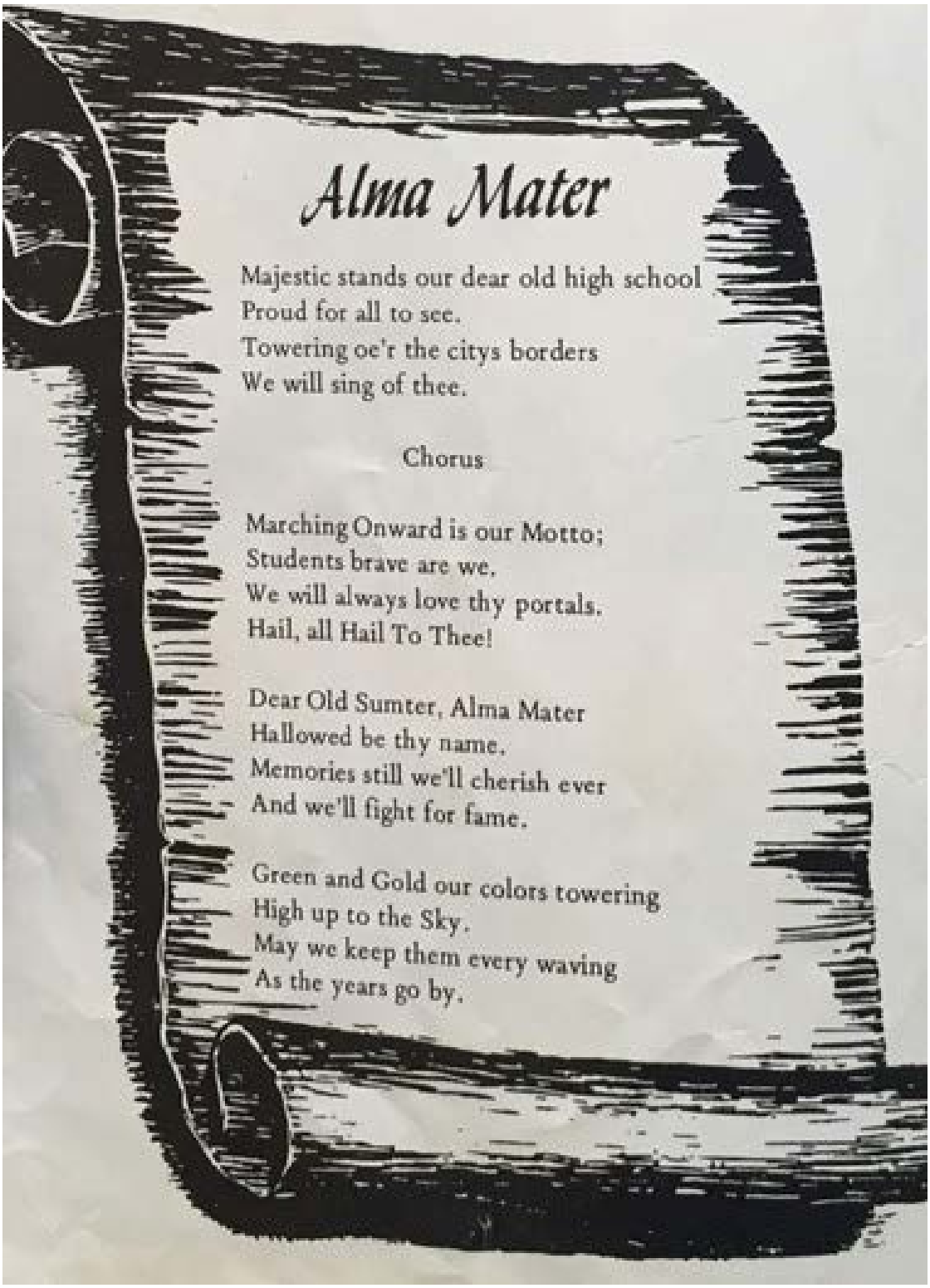
* Honor Students

Figure 7.28. Sumter High School Yearbook, 1968–1969



Courtesy of Clarence Laster and Edna (Gardner) Laster

Figure 7.29. Sumter High School alma mater



Alma Mater

Majestic stands our dear old high school
Proud for all to see.
Towering oe'r the citys borders
We will sing of thee.

Chorus

Marching Onward is our Motto;
Students brave are we.
We will always love thy portals.
Hail, all Hail To Thee!

Dear Old Sumter, Alma Mater
Hallowed be thy name.
Memories still we'll cherish ever
And we'll fight for fame.

Green and Gold our colors towering
High up to the Sky.
May we keep them every waving
As the years go by.

1968–1969 Sumter High School yearbook, courtesy of Clarence Laster and Edna (Gardner) Laster

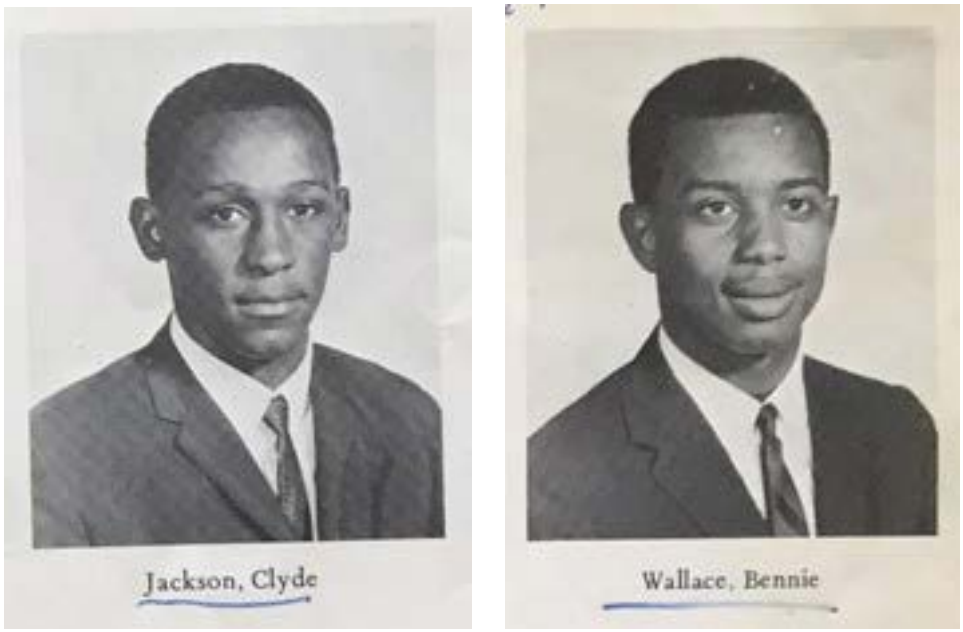
Figure 7.30. The faculty of Sumter High School, 1968–1969



1968–1969 Sumter High School Yearbook, courtesy of Clarence Laster and Edna (Gardner) Laster

Figure 7.31. Sumter High School Class of 1969

Two of the "Plains 17" were members of the Sumter High School 1969 senior class: Clyde Jackson and Bennie Wallace. After attending Plains for their sophomore and junior years, they came to Sumter.





1968–1969 Sumter High School Yearbook, courtesy of Clarence Laster and Edna (Gardner) Laster

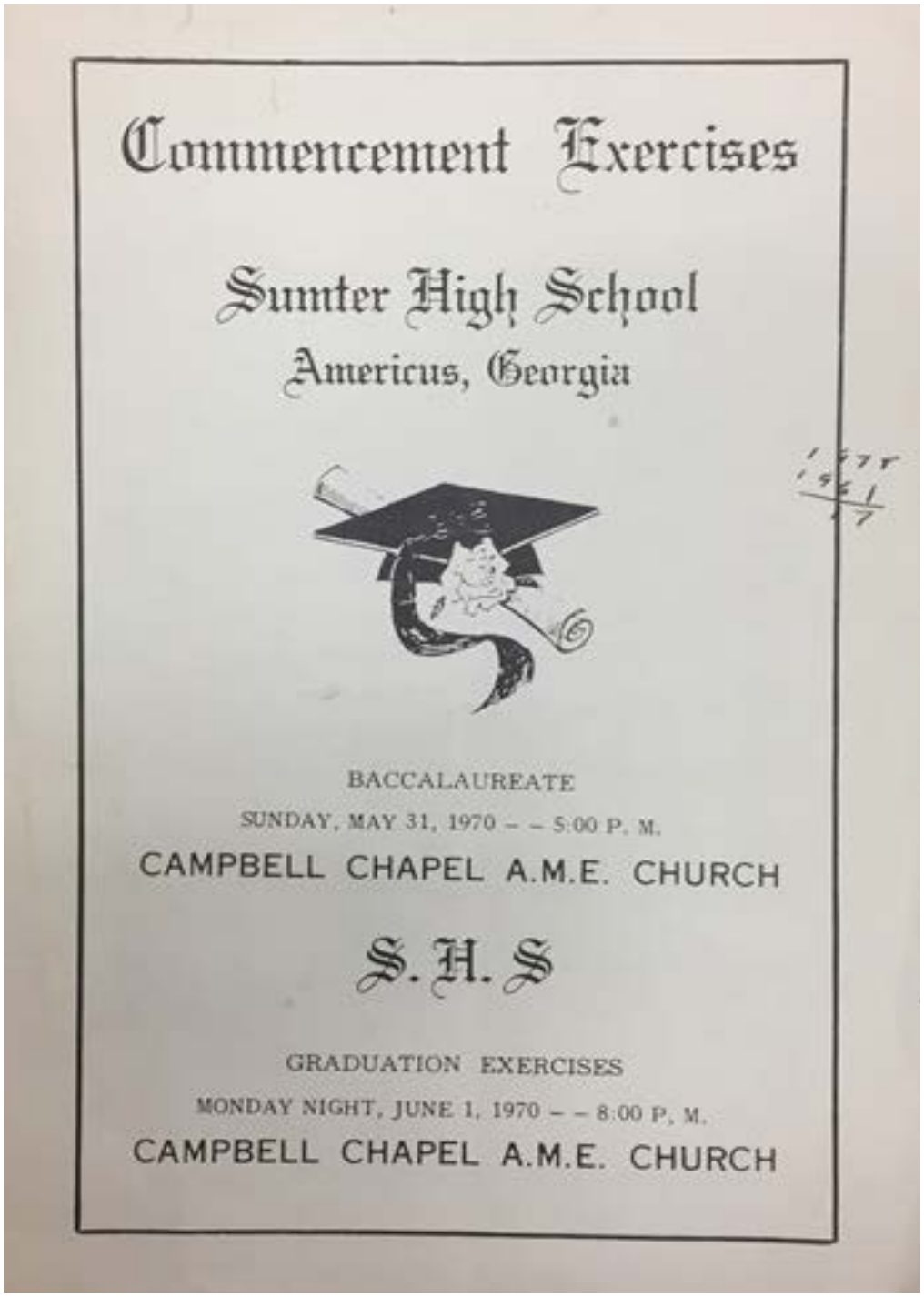
Figure 7.32. Sumter High Graduation—Campbell Chapel AME

As at Plains High School, graduation was an important affair at the segregated black high schools in Sumter County. Graduations at Staley High School were held in its auditorium. Graduations at Sumter High School were offsite. Because it lacked a facility large enough on campus, Sumter held its graduation events at Campbell Chapel AME Church, 503 Jackson Street, in Americus. Religion was an important part of graduation. Hymns were sung. Prayers were offered. Clergy gave the invocation and benediction. The images here are of the AME church and from the graduation program of Sumter High School, June 1, 1970—Sumter High's last graduating class.



Photo by D. Jason Berggren

Figure 7.33. Sumter High School Graduation Program, 1970



Commencement Exercises

Sumter High School

Americus, Georgia

BACCALAUREATE

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 1970 – – 5:00 P. M.

CAMPBELL CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH

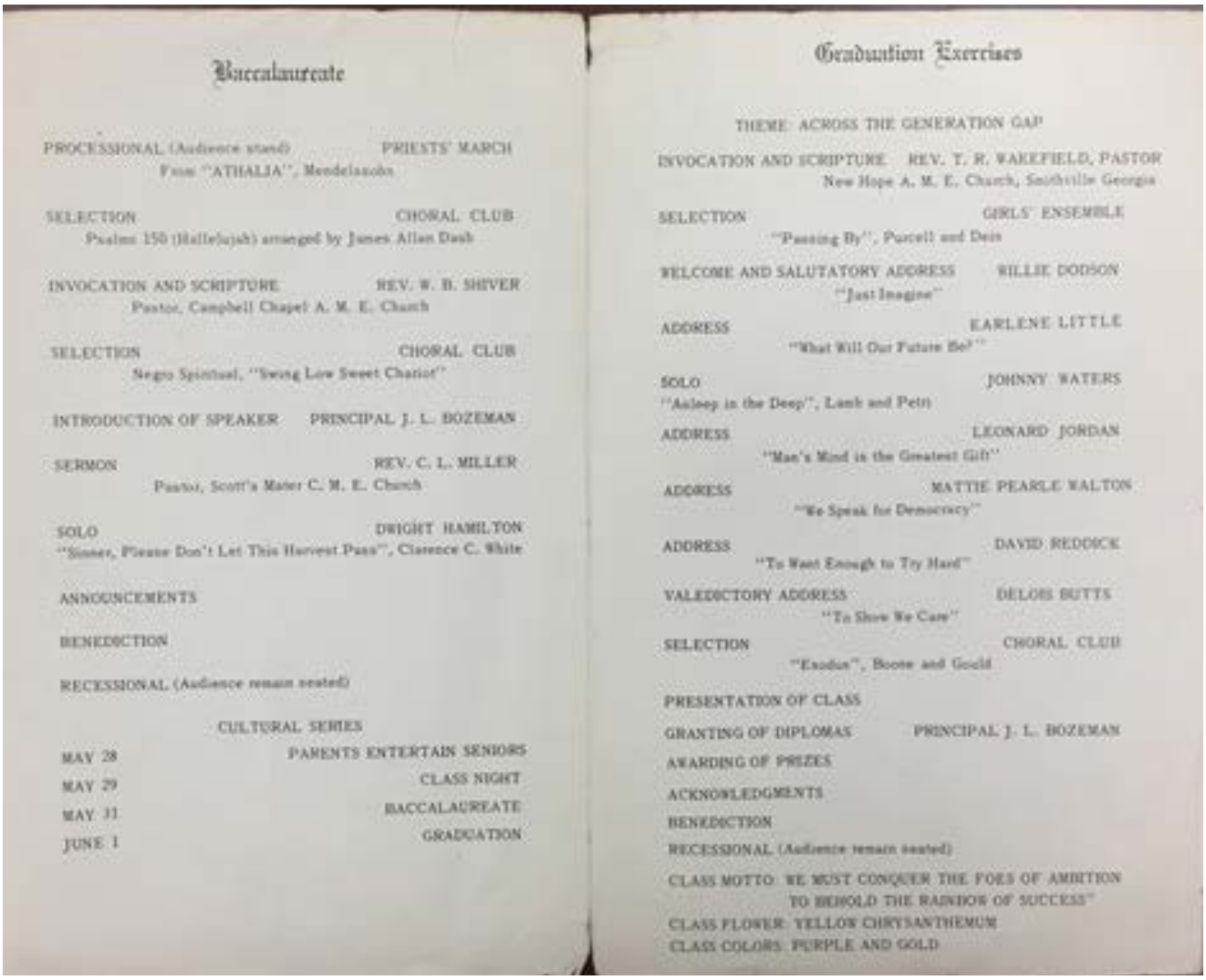
S. H. S

GRADUATION EXERCISES

MONDAY NIGHT, JUNE 1, 1970 – – 8:00 P. M.

CAMPBELL CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH

Courtesy of Lillie Mayes Heard



Baccalaureate

PROCESSIONAL (Audience stand) PRIESTS' MARCH
From "ATHALIA", Mendelssohn

SELECTION CHORAL CLUB
Psalms 150 (Hallelujah) arranged by James Allen Dash

INVOCATION AND SCRIPTURE REV. W. B. SHIVER
Pastor, Campbell Chapel A. M. E. Church

SELECTION CHORAL CLUB
Negro Spiritual, "Swing Low Sweet Chariot"

INTRODUCTION OF SPEAKER PRINCIPAL J. L. BOZEMAN

SERMON REV. C. L. MILLER
Pastor, Scott's Mater C. M. E. Church

SOLO DWIGHT HAMILTON
"Sinner, Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass", Clarence C. White

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BENEDICTION

RECESSIONAL (Audience remain seated)

CULTURAL SERIES

MAY 28 PARENTS ENTERTAIN SENIORS
MAY 29 CLASS NIGHT
MAY 31 BACCALAUREATE
JUNE 1 GRADUATION

Graduation Exercises

THEME: ACROSS THE GENERATION GAP

INVOCATION AND SCRIPTURE REV. T. R. WAKEFIELD, PASTOR
New Hope A. M. E. Church, Smithville Georgia

SELECTION GIRLS' ENSEMBLE
"Passing By", Purcell and Dein

WELCOME AND SALUTATORY ADDRESS WILLIE DODSON
"Just Imagine"

ADDRESS EARLENE LITTLE
"What Will Our Future Be?"

SOLO JOHNNY WATERS
"Asleep in the Deep", Lamb and Petri

ADDRESS LEONARD JORDAN
"Man's Mind is the Greatest Gift"

ADDRESS MATTIE PEARLE WALTON
"We Speak for Democracy"

ADDRESS DAVID REDDICK
"To Want Enough to Try Hard"

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS DELORIS BUTTS
"To Show We Care"

SELECTION CHORAL CLUB
"Exodus", Boone and Gould

PRESENTATION OF CLASS

GRANTING OF DIPLOMAS PRINCIPAL J. L. BOZEMAN

AWARDING OF PRIZES

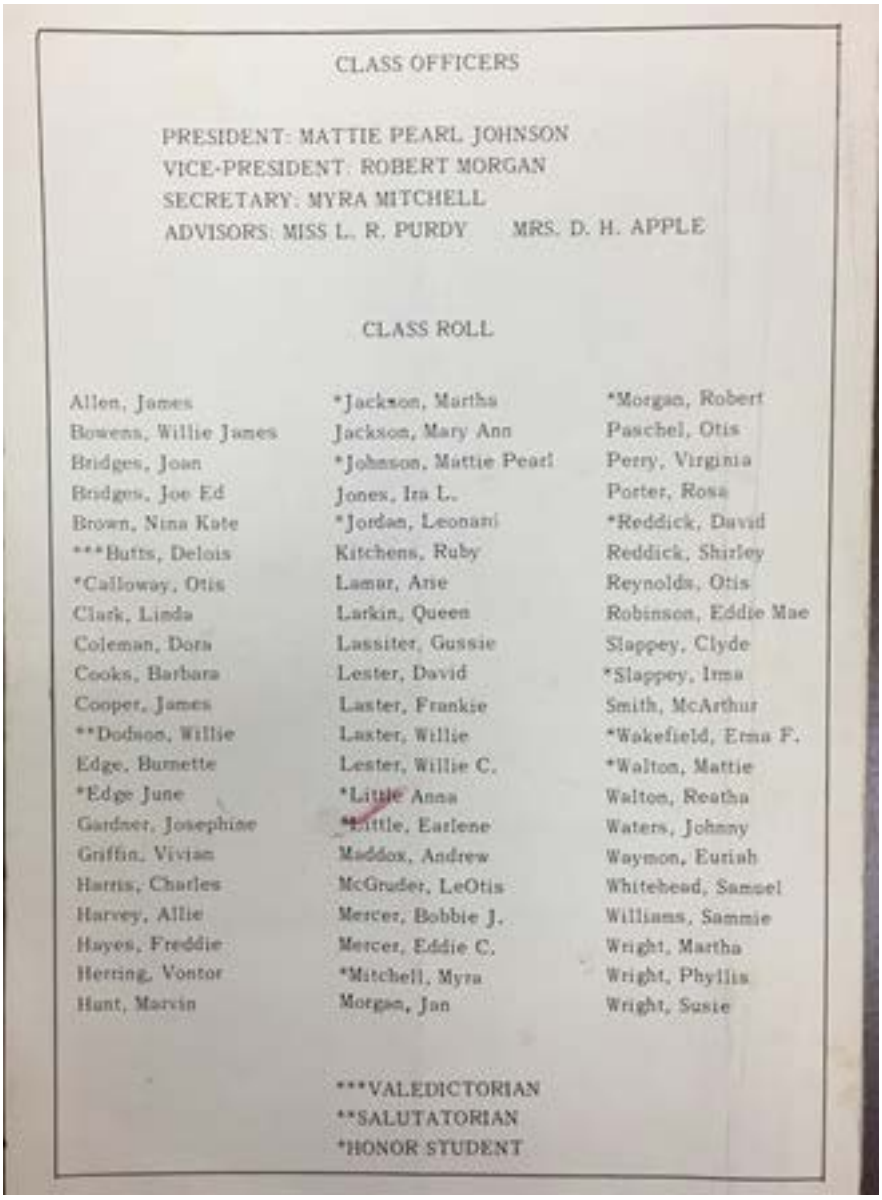
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BENEDICTION

RECESSIONAL (Audience remain seated)

CLASS MOTTO: WE MUST CONQUER THE FOES OF AMBITION
TO BEHOLD THE RAINBOW OF SUCCESS"
CLASS FLOWER: YELLOW CHRYSANTHEMUM
CLASS COLORS: PURPLE AND GOLD

Among the 1970 Sumter High School graduates were a few more students who had desegregated Plains High in the 1966–67 and 1967–68 school years. They were June Edge, Josephine Gardner, Martha Jackson, and Otis Reynolds. Also among the Sumter graduates was Frank Leonard Jordan, the youngest son of Koinonia founder Clarence Jordan.



CLASS OFFICERS

PRESIDENT: MATTIE PEARL JOHNSON
VICE-PRESIDENT: ROBERT MORGAN
SECRETARY: MYRA MITCHELL
ADVISORS: MISS L. R. PURDY MRS. D. H. APPLE

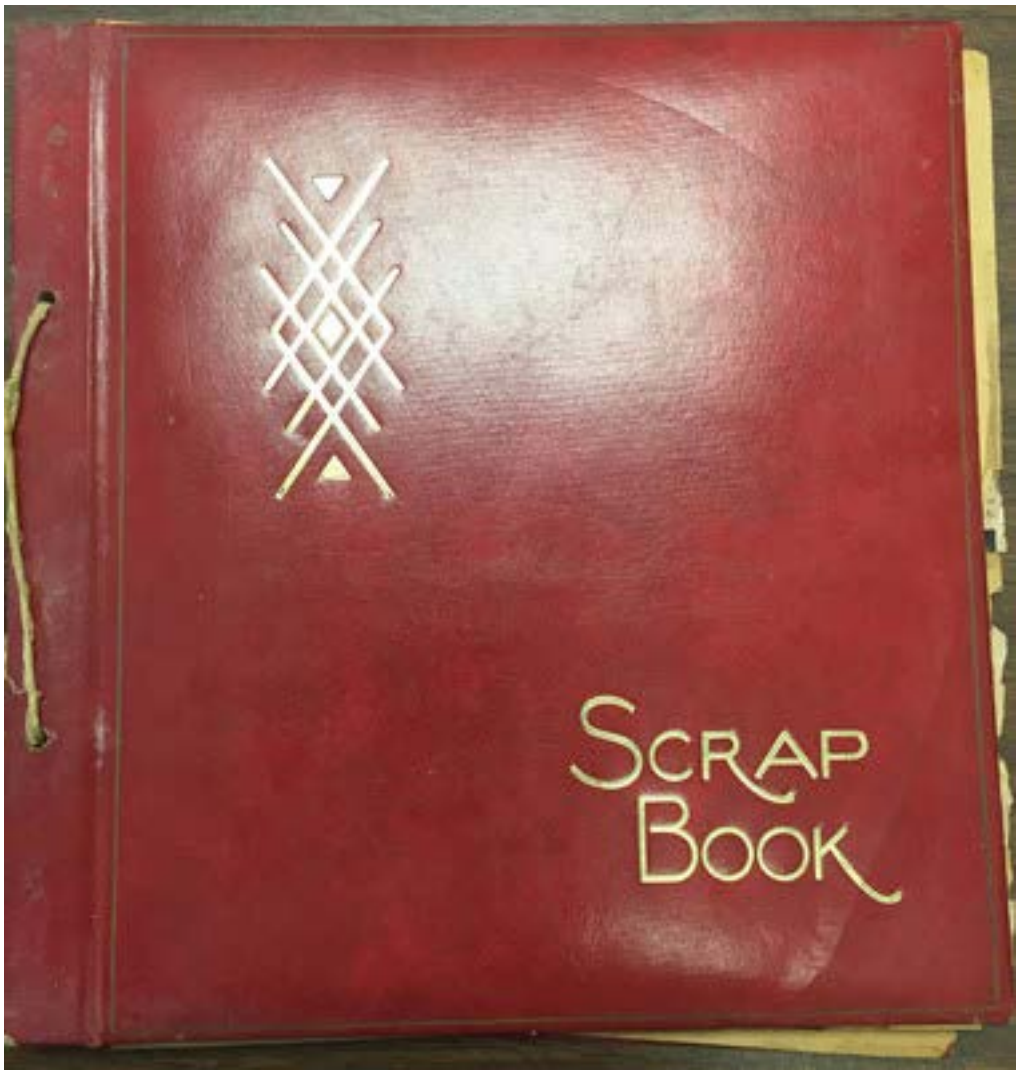
CLASS ROLL

Allen, James
Bowens, Willie James
Bridges, Joan
Bridges, Joe Ed
Brown, Nina Kate
***Butts, Delois
*Calloway, Otis
Clark, Linda
Coleman, Dora
Cooks, Barbara
Cooper, James
**Dodson, Willie
Edge, Burnette
*Edge June
Gardner, Josephine
Griffin, Vivian
Harris, Charles
Harvey, Allie
Hayes, Freddie
Herring, Vontor
Hunt, Marvin
*Jackson, Martha
Jackson, Mary Ann
*Johnson, Mattie Pearl
Jones, Ira L.
*Jordan, Leonard
Kitchens, Ruby
Lamar, Arie
Larkin, Queen
Lassiter, Gussie
Lester, David
Laster, Frankie
Laster, Willie
Lester, Willie C.
*Little Anna
*Little, Earlene
Maddox, Andrew
McGruder, LeOtis
Mercer, Bobbie J.
Mercer, Eddie C.
*Mitchell, Myra
Morgan, Jan
*Morgan, Robert
Paschel, Otis
Perry, Virginia
Porter, Rosa
*Reddick, David
Reddick, Shirley
Reynolds, Otis
Robinson, Eddie Mae
Slappey, Clyde
*Slappey, Irma
Smith, McArthur
*Wakefield, Erma F.
*Walton, Mattie
Walton, Reatha
Waters, Johnny
Waymon, Eurish
Whitehead, Samuel
Williams, Sammie
Wright, Martha
Wright, Phyllis
Wright, Susie

***VALEDICTORIAN
**SALUTATORIAN
*HONOR STUDENT

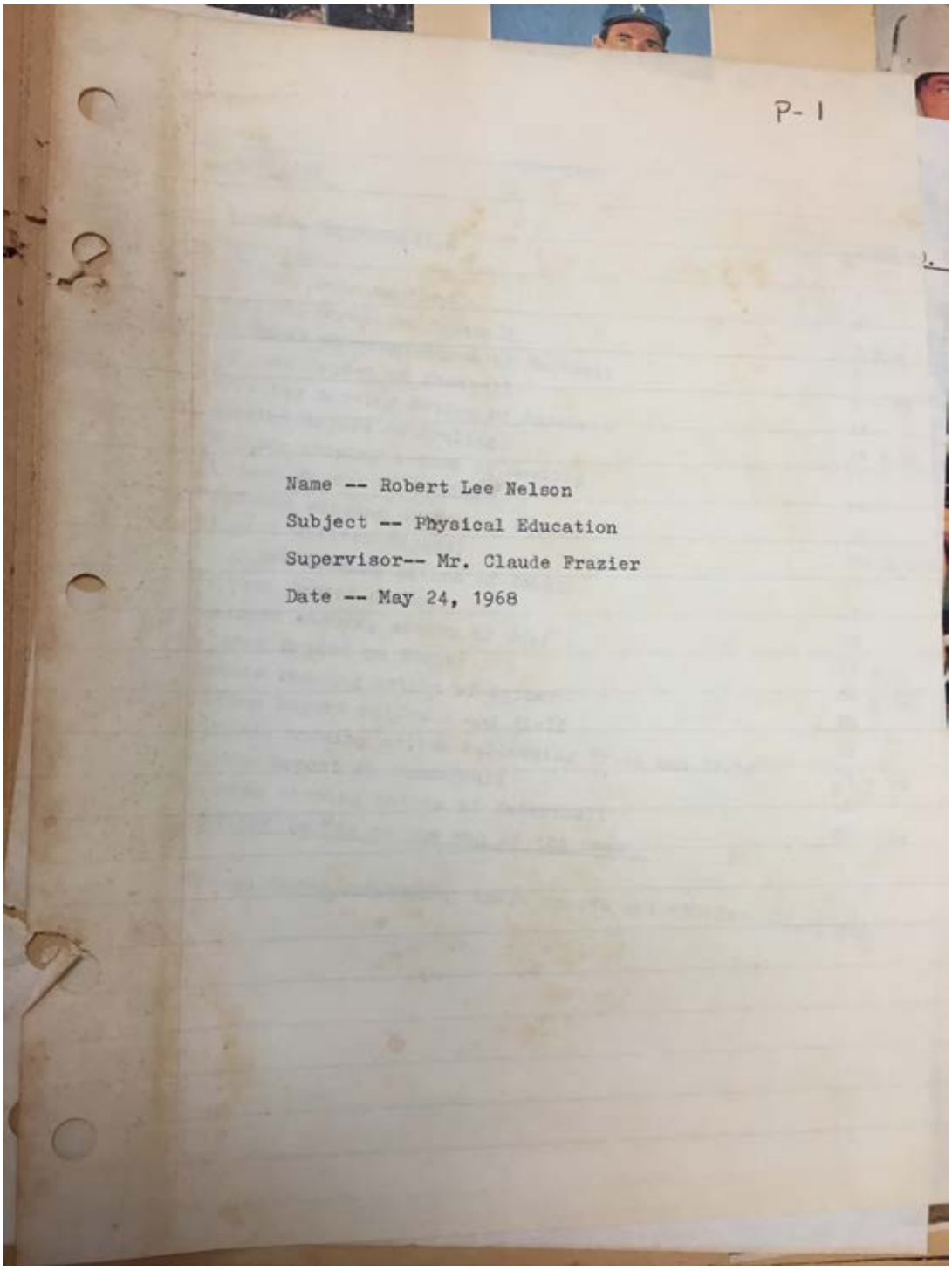
Figure 7.34. Union High School PE Project, 1968

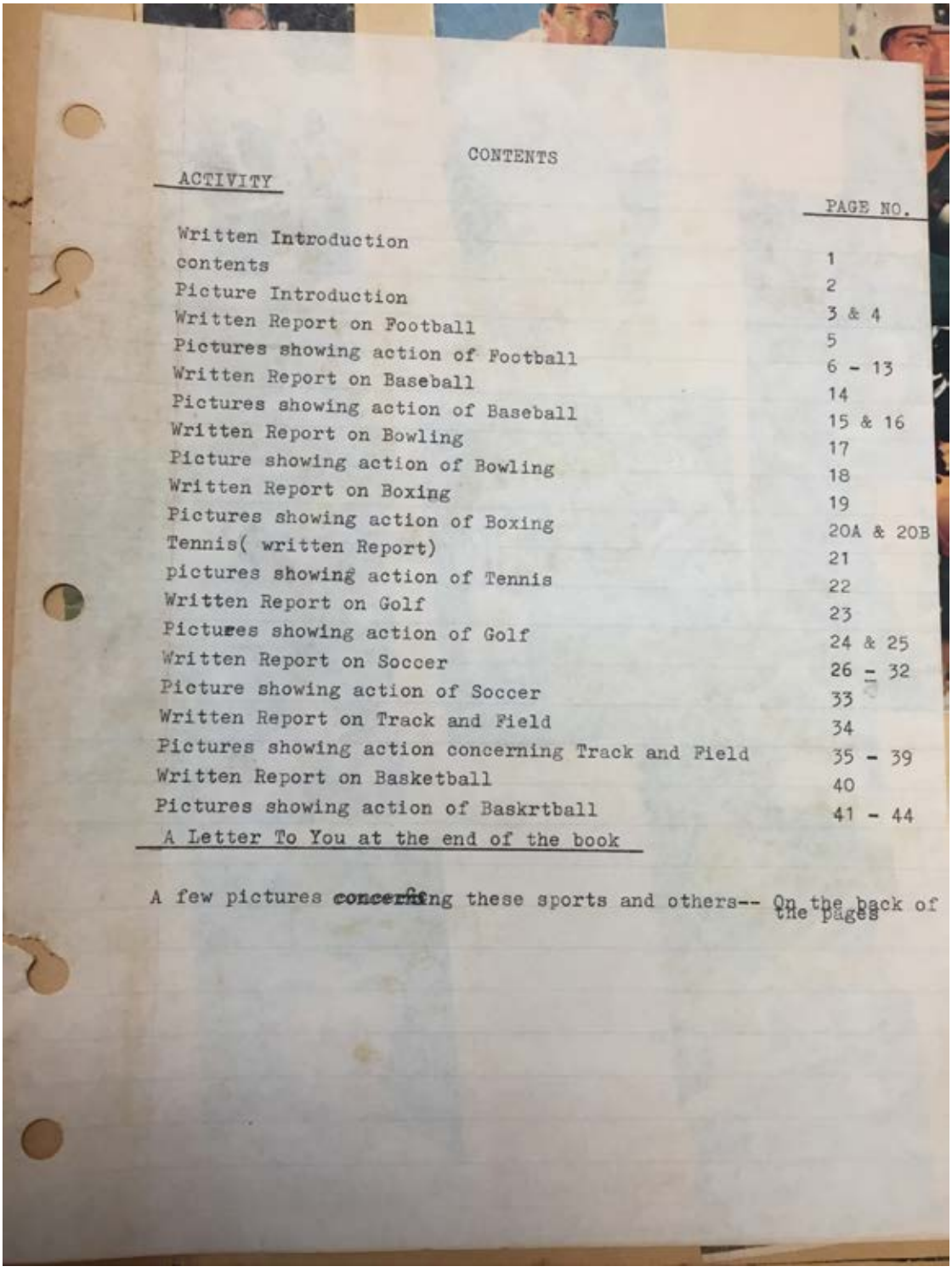
Like Plains High School, Union High School also desegregated in 1966. In the first few years, very few black students attended Union. One of those who did was sophomore Robert Lee Nelson. The images here are from a physical education assignment he completed for Mr. Claude Frazier and from the 1967–68 yearbook. Frazier was a baseball and basketball coach at Union and the interim principal during the 1967–68 school year. He kept this assignment through all these years as a reminder of the teacher-student relationship he had with Mr. Nelson. He was kind enough to share these artifacts with us.



Courtesy of Claude Frazier

Figure 7.34. (cont'd)



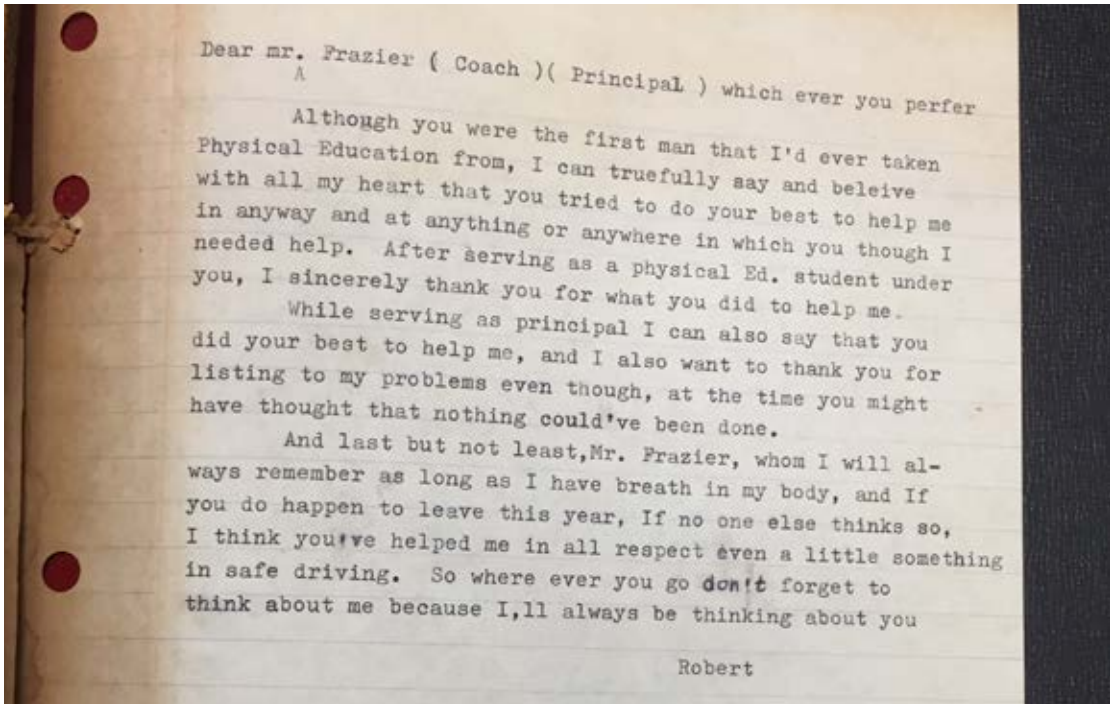


CONTENTS

ACTIVITY	PAGE NO.
Written Introduction	1
contents	2
Picture Introduction	3 & 4
Written Report on Football	5
Pictures showing action of Football	6 - 13
Written Report on Baseball	14
Pictures showing action of Baseball	15 & 16
Written Report on Bowling	17
Picture showing action of Bowling	18
Written Report on Boxing	19
Pictures showing action of Boxing	20A & 20B
Tennis(written Report)	21
pictures showing action of Tennis	22
Written Report on Golf	23
Pictures showing action of Golf	24 & 25
Written Report on Soccer	26 - 32
Picture showing action of Soccer	33
Written Report on Track and Field	34
Pictures showing action concerning Track and Field	35 - 39
Written Report on Basketball	40
Pictures showing action of Baskrtball	41 - 44
A Letter To You at the end of the book	

A few pictures ~~concerning~~ these sports and others-- On the back of the pages

Figure 7.34. (cont'd)



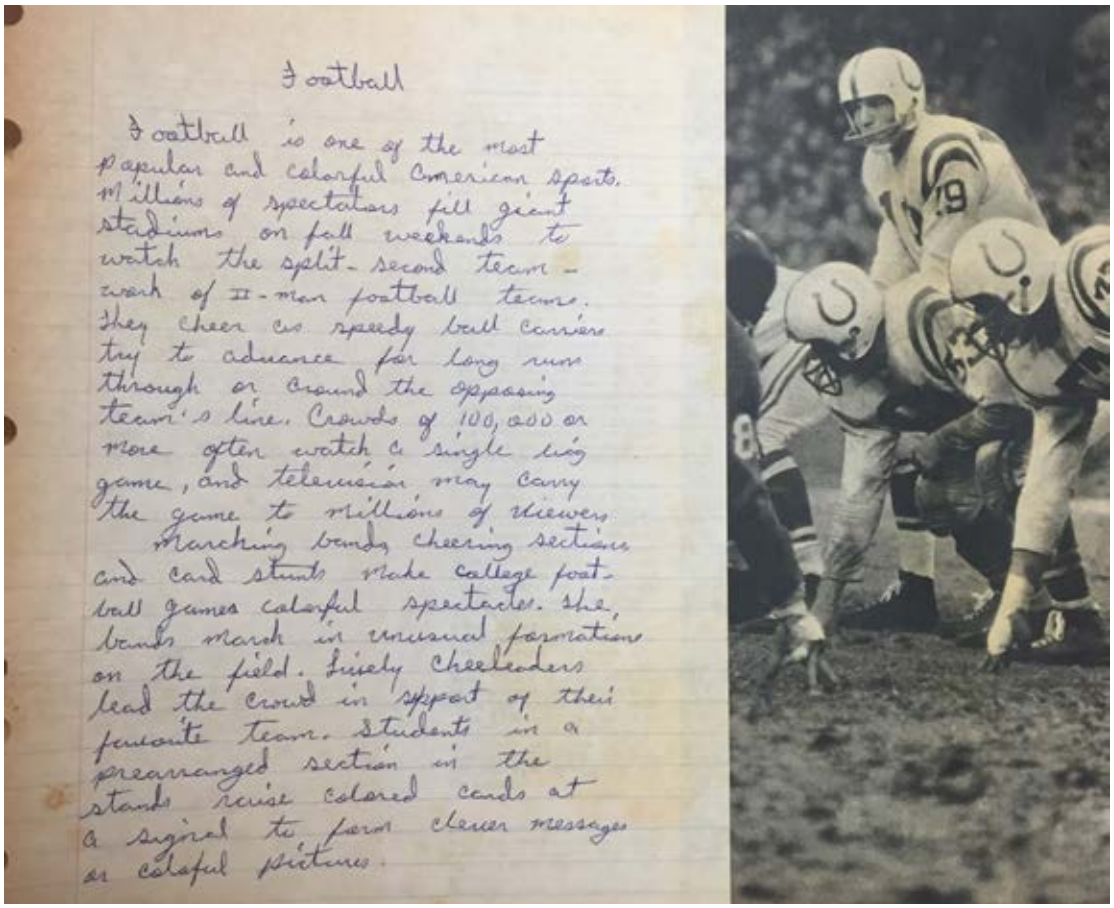
Dear mr. Frazier (Coach)(Principal) which ever you perfer
A

Although you were the first man that I'd ever taken Physical Education from, I can truefully say and beleive with all my heart that you tried to do your best to help me in anyway and at anything or anywhere in which you though I needed help. After serving as a physical Ed. student under you, I sincerely thank you for what you did to help me.

While serving as principal I can also say that you did your best to help me, and I also want to thank you for listing to my problems even though, at the time you might have thought that nothing could've been done.

And last but not least, Mr. Frazier, whom I will always remember as long as I have breath in my body, and If you do happen to leave this year, If no one else thinks so, I think you've helped me in all respect even a little something in safe driving. So where ever you go don't forget to think about me because I,ll always be thinking about you

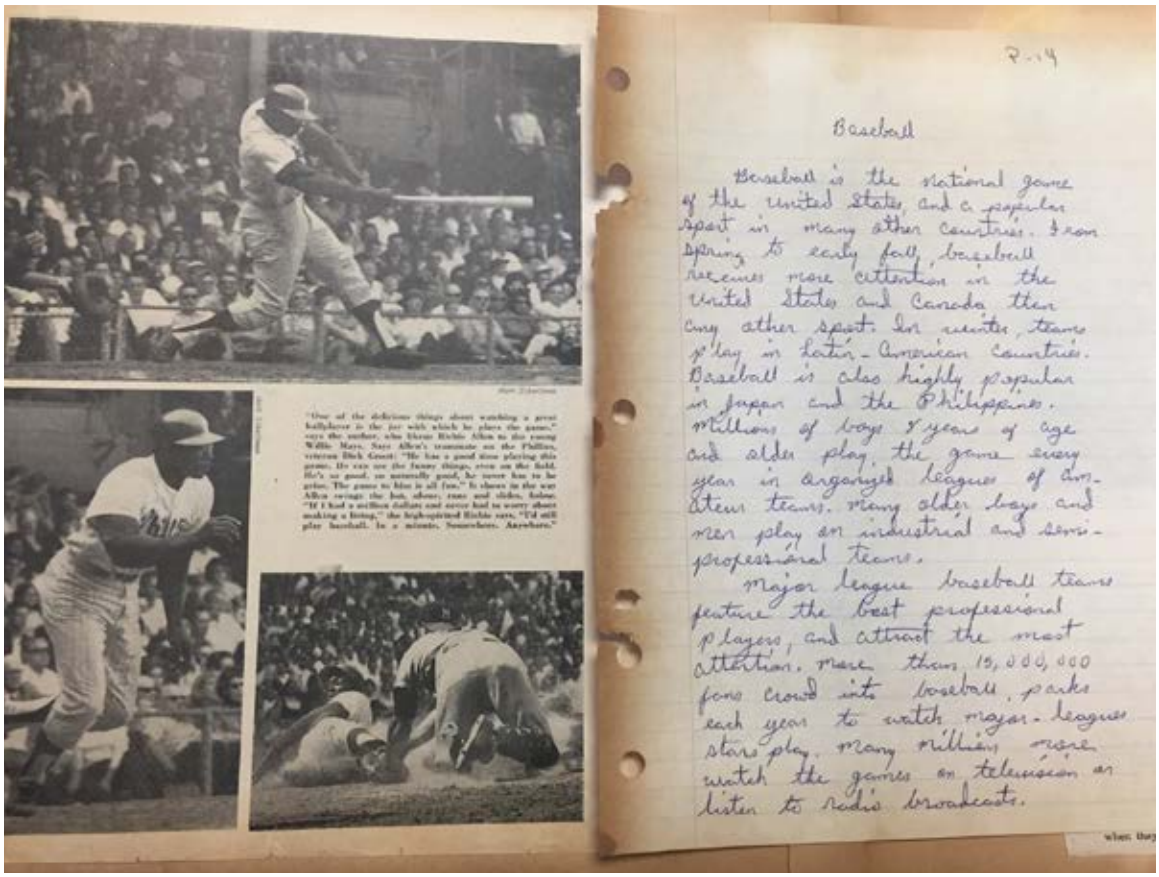
Robert



Football

Football is one of the most papular and colorful American sports. Millions of spectators fill giant stadiums on fall weekends to watch the split-second teamwork of 11-man football teams. They cheer as speedy ball carriers try to advance for long runs through or around the opposing team's line. Crowds of 100,000 or more often watch a single big game, and television may carry the game to millions of viewers.

Marching bands, cheering sections and card stunts make college football games colorful spectacles. The bands march in rehearsed formations on the field. Lively cheerleaders lead the crowd in support of their favorite team. Students in a prearranged section in the stands raise colored cards at a signal to form clever messages or colorful pictures.



Baseball

Baseball is the national game of the United States and a popular sport in many other countries. From spring to early fall, baseball receives more attention in the United States and Canada than any other sport. In winter, teams play in Latin-American countries. Baseball is also highly popular in Japan and the Philippines. Millions of boys 8 years of age and older play the game every year in organized leagues of amateur teams. Many older boys and men play on industrial and semi-professional teams.

Major league baseball teams feature the best professional players, and attract the most attention. More than 15,000,000 fans crowd into baseball parks each year to watch major-league stars play. Many million more watch the games on television or listen to radio broadcasts.

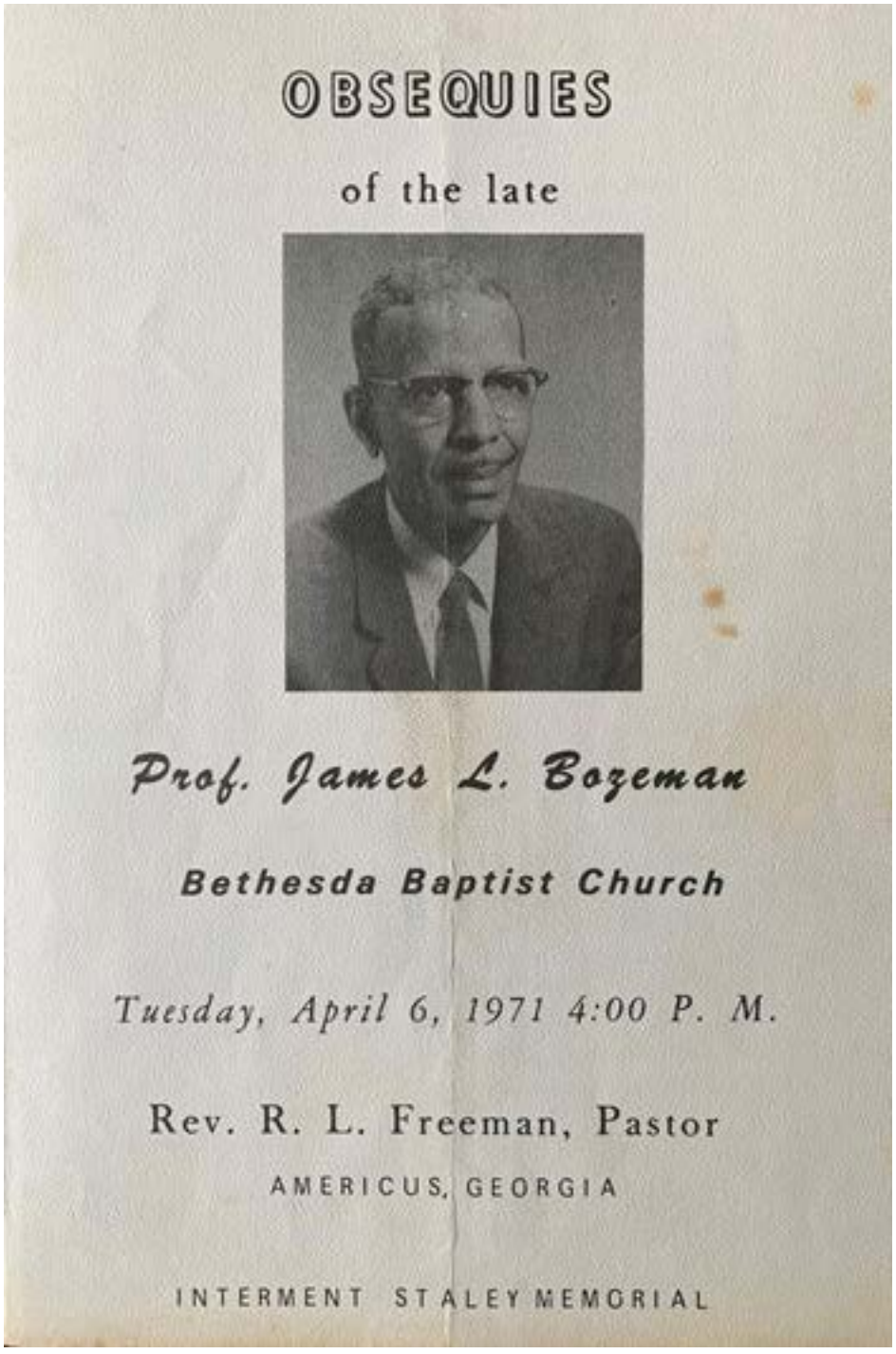
Figure 7.35. Union High School 1967–1968 Yearbook—
Claude Frazier and Robert Nelson





Courtesy of Claude Frazier

Figure 7.36. Memorial program for James L. Bozeman



Courtesy of Claude Frazier

OBITUARY

James Leon Bozeman, who departed this life April 2, 1971. He was born in Hawkinsville, Ga. He was the son of the late Iola Mason and James L. Bozeman, He was educated in the public schools of Ga. Morehouse College, Atlanta University, University of Pittsburgh and New York University. He was a member of the Springfield Baptist Church of Hawkinsville, Ga. before joining the Bethesda Baptist Church where he served as Deacon until the time of his death.

He was married to Dorothy Lawson of Savannah, Ga. To this union, one child was born.

He served in the public schools of Georgia for many years as principal. He served as president of the Georgia Inter-scholastic Association for a number of terms. He was a very active member in both professionals and fraternal organizations.

At the time of his death he was serving as Assistant Superintendant of Sumter County School systems.

Survivors include his wife, Mrs. Dorothy Bozeman, one daughter, Mrs. Annola Coward of Kensington, Md., five grandchildren, Robin, Roderick, Jon, Roselyn and Jacqueline Coward, a son-in-law, Frederick S. Coward of Kensington, Md., two cousins, Mrs. Maxine Stevens and Dr. S. M. McDew of Savannah, Ga., two sisters-in-law, Mrs. Ruth Caulton, El Paso, Texas, and Mrs. Evelyn Shaw. Sewickley, Pa., three brothers-in-law, Mr. Walter J. Lawson, New York City, Mr. Marvin L. Caulton, El Paso, Texas Mr. Garfield Shaw, Sewickley, Pa., a number of neices and nephews, and many dear friends.

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

Psalms 4:8

PROGRAM

PROCESSIONAL		
SONG	"Old Rugged Cross"	CHOIR
PRAYER		REV. DANIEL THOMAS
SCRIPTURE		REV. J. B. BALDWIN
SONG	"Last Mile Of The Way"	CHOIR
REMARKS (3 min.)	REPRESENTATIVE OF I.B.P.O.E. of W. THE MASONIC LODGE # 17 SUMTER CO. BD. OF ED. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE	
READING OF OBITUARY	(Silently)	SOFT MUSIC
SOLO		DEA. O. L. BRYANT
EULOGY		REV. R. L. FREEMAN
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		
RECESSIONAL		

Active Pallbearers

Curtis Franklin
Willie James Robinson
James Davis
Raymond Green
Thomas McGrady
William Powell
Freddie Reese
Dea. T. R. London

Dea. Richard Robinson

Honorary Pallbearers

Leroy Williams
Robert Scott
Douglas Harold
J. C. Childers
Fred Jones
Kelsie Daniels
Lewis Lowe
Dea. Johnnie Cherry
Dea. Oscar Walker
Dea. J. W. Harris
Dea. Charlie Brown
Dea. Willie Paschal
Dea. Otis Hargrove
Dea. O. L. Bryant

Flower Attendants

Bethesda Floral Club
Modern Matron's Club
Women Civic & Social Club

Table 7.1. Moving Toward Racial Integration: Data from Plains High School, 1968–1969 and 1970–1971

		1968–69	1970–71
Student Body	Senior Class	41 (100, white)	46 (56.5, white)
Faculty	All Teachers	12 (100, white)	17 (59, white)
Administration	Principal	1 (100, white)	1 (100, white)
Staff	Secretary	1 (100, white)	NA
	Guidance	1 (100, white)	1 (100, white)
	Media/Library	1 (100, white)	1 (100, white)
	Cafeteria	4 (100, white)	3 (100, white)
	Maintenance	1 (100, black)	1 (100, black)

Note: Percentages and race are given in parentheses.
Source: Plains High School Yearbooks, select years, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Table 7.2. The "Plains 7": The First Black Faculty at Plains High School, 1970–1971

Teacher	*Description of Teaching Duties and Extracurricular Advising*
Dorothy Patterson	Taught business education and math; faculty co-advisor for yearbook staff.
Hardin Ragin	Taught vocational agriculture and faculty advisor for Future Farmers of America. Previously taught at Sumter High School. Graduate of Fort Valley State College and did advanced study at the Tuskegee Institute. Advisor for New Farmers of America.
Frederick Douglas	Taught physical science and physical education.
Lenore Purdy	Taught English and faculty advisor for the Choral Club. Previously taught at Sumter High School. Graduate of Spelman College and did advanced study at Albany State, Columbia University, and Hampton Institute. Director of the Choral Club and Senior Class Advisor at Sumter High.
Minnie Engram	Taught science.
Essie Bronner	Taught reading.
Roshon Smith	Taught special education.

Sources: Sumter High School Yearbooks, select years; Plains High School Yearbook, 1970–1971, Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Table 7.3. Enduring Segregation: Data from Union High School, 1968–1969 and 1970–1971

		1968–69	1970–71
Student Body	Senior Class	32 (94, white)	60 (100, black)
Faculty	All Teachers	8 (100, white)	16 (50, white / black)
Administration	Principal	2 (100, white)	1 (100, white)
	Assistant Principal	1 (100, black)	1 (100, black)
Staff	Other	2 (100, white)	3 (67, white)
	Guidance	1 (100, white)	1 (100, black)
	Media/Library	1 (100, white)	1 (100, black)
	Cafeteria	7 (100, white)	5 (100, white)
	Maintenance	1 (100, black)	1 (100, black)

Note: Percentages and race are given in parentheses.
Sources: Union High School Yearbooks, select years.

Table 7.4. Integrating Union High: The First Black Faculty, Staff, and Administrators, 1970–1971

Teacher / School Official	*Description of School Duties and Extracurricular Advising*
Willie Robinson	Assistant principal and athletic coach. Graduate of Albany State College. Advanced study at Atlanta University. Previously taught driver's education, physical education, and biology at Sumter High School.
William Andrews	English, literature. Graduate of Fort Valley State College.
Dorothy H. Apple	Chemistry, physics, and physical science. Graduate of Delaware State College and Atlanta University. Advanced study at the University of Pennsylvania. Previously taught at Sumter High School.
Levora Coleman	Reading. Graduate of Albany State College.
Alphonso Edwards	Math and science. Graduate of Albany State College.
Collius Horton	Librarian and certified teacher. Graduate of Albany State College.
Mildred Hoston	Special education. Graduate of Albany State College.

William Powell	Math. Graduate of Morehouse College and Atlanta University. Previously taught math at Sumter High School.
St. Clair Spence	Social science. Graduate of Albany State College and Columbia University. Previously taught world history and world geography at Sumter High School.
Margaret Mathis	Guidance counselor. Graduate of Albany State College and Fort Valley State College. Previously taught typing, shorthand, and bookkeeping at Sumter High School.
Abidel Champion	Teacher's aide.

Sources: Union High School Yearbook, 1970–1971; Sumter High School Yearbooks, select years.

Conclusion

It has been only a little more than half a century since black and white Sumter County children could sit in the same classroom together and learn side by side. Today, the county, like many places in the United States, still struggles with eradicating segregation and providing the best possible education to all students. Yet telling the story of separate black and white schools together—in the same book—shows that since the end of the Civil War, the educational prospects of white schoolchildren have been deeply intertwined with the strivings of African Americans for equal education.

During Reconstruction, the aspiration of freedpeople to educate their children benefited not only themselves and their children, but also all other Georgians. Newly emancipated from slavery, freedpeople immediately opened churches and schools, and made educating their children one of their most sacred priorities. African American lawmakers enacted universal public education as a standard for all children in Georgia and throughout the South. Although former Confederates discredited and demeaned them at the time, these politicians laid the groundwork for what could have been a transformative educational system for white and black children alike.

The end of Reconstruction brought an abrupt halt to the commitment to invest in the education of all children. As white Democratic politicians worked to regain power and roll back the gains made by African American politicians, the schooling of black children became less and less of a priority. The disfranchisement of black citizens contributed to a decades-long pattern of a hierarchical and unjust approach to educating children. The white children of the well-to-do received educations that positioned them to assume positions of leadership in the region's business and politics. Public-school education equipped the white children of the poor and working class with an education that sometimes helped them transcend the circumstances of their birth. But the state equipped black schools with scarce resources to provide only the most rudimentary skills to assume a place in the agricultural and service economy of the South.

During the Jim Crow era, a segregated and unequal approach to education, like other realities of social and political inequality, limited the vision of white people in Sumter County and throughout the South. Rather than nurturing an expansive view of democracy and society, it recreated, across several generations, the notion that education should preserve, not challenge, existing hierarchies. The movement of more prominent, white farm families to Americus at the turn of the century inspired the county to improve educational options for children in the county. Building new schools and consolidating existing schools provided white children with more modern facilities and better-trained teachers, but further diminished the resources available to educate black children. Unequal funding and segregation were the main ways that the county and state improved the curriculum and facilities for white students at the expense of schooling for black children.

Despite all efforts to undervalue their lives and dim their prospects, black families remained steadfast in their aspiration to educate their children. If anything, discrimination and economic exploitation strengthened their resolve to prepare their children for brighter futures. Schools for black children continued to proliferate throughout Sumter County—in private homes, in churches, and eventually in dedicated school buildings. Black parents and teachers fought to receive the bare minimum in funding, school buildings, teacher pay, books, and supplies that was available to white students. As part of the main labor force of the region's agricultural production and domestic labor force, black sharecropping families often had to shortchange their children's education because they were under extreme financial pressure on the farm. Many were not able to educate their children past the seventh grade.

Private wealth partially subsidized black schools. Philanthropies such as the Julius Rosenwald Foundation stepped into the breach and invested money in new schools for black children. But the state continued to spend a pittance on these schools compared to what they spent per pupil on white students' educations. Teachers and parents also redoubled their efforts to give black children the best education they could. They opened their homes to teachers who commuted from their homes to teach during the week. They encouraged students in and out of school to stay focused on their schoolwork, even though many children had work responsibilities that competed for their time. They sewed costumes and decorated the school for special performances. They pooled their resources to provide transportation when the county and city would not pay for school bus service.

In separate schools, both black and white children not only nurtured a love of learning but also became centers of community life. They both exposed students to a range of academic subjects and extracurricular activities. They hosted programs for children and families alike. Through weekly devotional programs, they contributed to the moral development of children. They provided safe havens where students didn't have to worry about whether they belonged.

Yet black students and their parents recognized that as long as there were separate schools and unequal funding, it would be impossible to create a just society. The risk that families in various communities took in insisting on equal educational opportunities for their children culminated in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision, which outlawed school segregation. For several years after the decision, the Sumter County and Americus school boards found ways to avoid abiding by the ruling. Jimmy Carter never took a stand on desegregation throughout his tenure on the school board.

Nevertheless, Carter understood all too well why providing a quality education to the state's children was so important. In a 1964 graduation speech, he mentioned figures that underscored the ways that children of the poorest citizens of Georgia, many of whom

were black, often did not have the luxury of completing high school. "Can we be satisfied," he asked, "when out of 110,000 children who entered the first grade twelve years ago, only 41,000 will receive a high school diploma, the worst dropout record in the nation?"[1]

Young black people in Americus and Sumter County also recognized the problem of educational equity and access, and took decisive action, forcing the school systems to deal with the reality of school desegregation. After numerous experiments with "freedom of choice plans," full segregation finally became a reality in the early 1970s. Groups of dedicated teachers, students, and parents overcame years of separation and distrust to make schools work for all children.

Unfortunately, the impulse to treat quality education as a privilege, rather than a right, continued. Within the schools, black teachers and students too often had to sacrifice the traditions they had created in their own schools and take on the traditions of the newly desegregated white schools. Another problem was the refusal of more affluent and politically influential white parents to accept the new reality. Rather than support integrated schools, the all-white Sumter County school board siphoned resources to all-white segregation academies in an effort to preserve the existing, unequal social order.

In many ways, Sumter County is still reckoning with the unfinished business that began nearly 160 years ago. De facto segregation and unequal access to quality education are still overwhelming realities that dim the life prospects of most students. Although white students make up a minority of the student population, white and African American leaders in the county are still vying for control over the Board of Education in the wake of a new voting map that makes it harder for African Americans to achieve fair representation on the board.[2] The story of Sumter County schools reminds us that expanding access to education and deepening people's capacity to think critically and accumulate knowledge improve society for all.

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[1] "Speech Presented by Senator James E. Carter, Graduation Exercises, Georgia Southwestern College, June 5. 1964," Carter Family Papers, Box 62, Jimmy Carter's Speech File, Presidential Papers of Jimmy Carter, Carter Center, Atlanta.

[2] Nicholas Casey, "A Voting Rights Battle in a School Board 'Coup,'" *New York Times*, October 25, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/25/us/politics/voting-rights-georgia.html, accessed June 13, 2021.

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Mr. Eugene Edge, Plains, Georgia

Mr. Chris English

Mr. Claude Frazier, Americus, Georgia

Ms. Lillie Mayes Heard, Leesburg, Georgia

Mr. Clarence Laster and Mrs. Edna Gardner Laster, Americus, Georgia

Mr. William Powell, Americus, Georgia

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