

A Brief History of Bibb County Public Schools

On November 24, 1823 the first school in Macon was chartered. **Macon Academy** opened in early 1824 under the direction of the Reverend Oliver Danforth, the first school teacher in Macon. The school was founded under the auspices of the Commissioners of the Bibb County Academy who had been appointed by the Legislature in 1823. A school building was erected on Academy Square (Square No. 1), bounded by First, Second, Walnut, and Wharf (later Ocmulgee, now Riverside) Streets. The city of Macon was incorporated on December 8, 1823. By 1831, it was announced that there were five schools in town and a female academy in the vicinity.

1858 – The Board of Trustees of the Bibb County Academy agreed to open the school as a free school, however some tuition was still charged. After the war, the school reopened as the Macon Free School in 1866.

The Academy for the Blind was formally organized in 1851. The school was chartered by the state legislature in 1852.

1868 -- **Lewis High School**, constructed by the American Missionary Association for black students, opened. The original site was at the corner of New and Pine Streets.

The General Assembly of the State of Georgia passed a law establishing public schools in the state in late 1870 and Bibb County was able to move into the statewide system. On August 23, 1872, the General Assembly of Georgia passed an act creating the Board of Public Education and Orphanage of Bibb County, a true public school system supported by taxpayer funds. This act provided that the Board would be self-perpetuating, the power of filling vacancies being left in the hands of the board. The Board was also given the authority to levy a tax in Bibb County, subject to the approval of the Board of Commissioners, for financing the school program. The new Board continued the acts and contracts of the old County Board of Education. On January, 1873, B.M. Zettler was elected the first superintendent of schools.

In the first year of operation, there were 6 schools in Macon, 43 teachers, and 1516 students. Total expenditures were \$21, 702.15. The existing schools were **First Ward School, Second Ward School, Fourth Ward School, East Macon School, Cotton Avenue School, Lewis High School** and several small schools in the suburbs and county. This is the year the **Central High School** was opened in a building on the corner of College and Bond Streets and the **Third Ward School** was opened.

From the beginning of the Bibb County Public School System, it has been the policy of the Board to build neighborhood schools which were considered desirable for quality education. The pattern of new schools followed the pattern of the growth of Macon. Each school was built to satisfy the need to furnish a school for the children in the area.

1874 – **South Macon School** opened.

1876 – **Lewis High School** was destroyed by fire. Soon after the fire, the Congregational Church built a new school for the lower grades. Meeting rooms in the church were used for high school students.

1877 – A new public high school was built at the corner of Spring and Pine Streets. Lumber was taken from the old Beasley Tavern on Cotton Avenue, and the labor was paid for by voluntary contributions from the patrons of the high school.

1880 – A new **Alexander Free School** was built at the corner of Second and Pine Streets. The old school, which had been Elam Alexander's home, had been used as a school beginning soon after the war. The old building was moved to the back of the lot on Pine Street.

1880 – Trustees of the Macon Free School purchased the Medical College on Mulberry Street and turned it over to the Board of Education. The school was named **Whittle School** and replaced the public school on the old Academy Square.

1882 – Trustees of the Macon Free School built a new school on Orange Street known as the **Nisbet School**.

By 1883, there were 40 schools (city and county), 68 teachers, and a total expenditure of \$27,677.70 in operating costs.

1884 – The people of Vineville built a new school financed by voluntary contributions. The residents of East Macon also built a new school by voluntary contributions.

In 1884, a Macon teacher made an experiment intended to prove the effects of chewing gum on study. Twelve students were assigned 29 math problems. Six students were allowed to chew gum while doing the assignment; six were not allowed to chew. The chewers solved correctly 21 of the problems and the non-chewers solved eight. Also in the same year, a lengthy editorial complained of the heavy burden of home assignments.

By 1885, there were 80 teachers and 4,778 students in public schools, with 125 students attending Alexander Free School, and 250 students attending private schools and colleges.

1888 – A gift from Stephen H. Ballard of New York allowed the construction of a three story brick building to replace the Lewis High School that had been destroyed in a fire in 1876. After the fire, the Congregational Church had built a new school for the lower grades and the high school students used rooms in the church for classes. The citizens of Macon gave \$500 toward building a library and industrial arts room for the school. A gift the next year from Mr. Ballard's sister allowed for the construction of a girl's dormitory. Later the school was named **Ballard Normal School** in their honor.

Gresham High School opened on the corner of Cotton and Spring. It was built by the Macon Free School Board of Trustees at a cost of \$20,000.

1889 – **Ballard Normal School** established. This school for training new teachers grew out of the old Lewis High School.

1892 – **Winship School** in Huguenin Heights was built.

1892 - The **Alexander Free School** which had operated as a separate school was turned over to the Board of Education.

1894 – The King’s Daughters organized the Free Kindergarten Association.

1898 – Professor C.W. Kilpatrick, in charge of the country schools of the Bibb County system, put into operation the first traveling library in Georgia.

By the early 1900s, a steady increase in Macon’s school population brought the need for more classrooms. In the ten year period preceding 1907, there was a forty-four percent increase in enrollment. During this period schools were erected out of funds from two sources, the Elam Alexander estate and public funds.

1902 – **Alexander No. 2** was built on College Street facing Tattnall Square Park.

1908 – **Newburg School** in South Macon was built with public funds.

1909 – The Board purchased the historic property at the corner of Forsyth and Orange Streets for the eventual building of a new boy’s school. Since the need for more high school space was urgent, renovation of the existing building was begun almost immediately. In October 1909, the high school boys used the building for the first time. The name **Lanier High School** for Boys was chosen in September, 1910. The girls continued to attend Gresham High School.

1910 – **Alexander No. 3** was built in North Highlands on a lot donated by Senator Bacon.

1911 – **Clisby School** opened on Hillyer Avenue with Miss Jessie Rice as principal.

1911- **Bloomfield School** in the Godfrey District opened.

During 1913-14, morning and afternoon classes were held in the Gresham building while a new building was erected at the corner of Forsyth and Orange Streets. The new **Lanier High School** opened in September, 1913. It featured an auditorium with a seating capacity of 1200 and a stage twenty-three by thirty feet. The school was co-educational.

1913 – A new school building was erected in Vineville.

A move toward consolidation of several small rural schools led to the building of four new consolidated schools for both grammar and high school students: **Rutland** in 1914; **Union** in 1915; **Howard** in 1916; and **Lizella** in 1916.

The final pre-war public school building to be erected was **Ballard School** on Forest Avenue off Vineville in the Pleasant Hill area. It replaced the older school on New Street which had been bought by Macon Hospital.

During these years several curricular changes and innovations came about. The Board of Education set up a manual training program in the public schools. The program extended from simple clay modeling in the first grade to domestic science and woodworking in high school. In 1907, a public school art teacher was appointed.

A fourth year was added to the high school course. The class of 1912 was the first to attend the additional year with their graduation from high school in 1913. No class actually graduated in 1912.

One change that met with opposition was the proposal to offer military training in 1915. It was added as an optional course. The coming of World War I ended most of the criticism. In 1917, the course was required for all male students.

In 1917, the committee of the Board on course of study recommended the practice of mid-term promotion which had been discussed as far back as 1906. The practice of mid-term promotion was adopted and used for twenty years.

In January, 1920, a fire destroyed the **Clisby School** on Hillyer Avenue. The students were transferred to the old Nisbet School on Orange Avenue which was not in use at the time. The Winship students were transferred to Alexander II and the Winship School was closed. A new school was planned to be named Clisby School. The new school built at the corner of Pio Nono Avenue and Beech Street was named **Winship** instead at its completion. Later the name Clisby was given to the recently built Vineville school. The **William B. Redding School** also opened in 1920.

1921 – New school opened at **Fort Hawkins** with 506 students.
John W. Burke School opened.

1922 – The city of Macon passed a bond issue and appropriated \$500,000 for schools. In 1922 a site was chosen on Monroe Street for building an industrial school for black students. When completed the school was named **Monroe Street School**.

1923 – New **Virgil Powers School** opened to replace the oldest public elementary school in Macon. The name of Monroe Street School was changed to **Hudson Industrial School**. The first graduation for the school was in 1929 with a class of 36.

Part of the 1922 funds were used to build a new high school for boys on the old Napier property facing Holt Avenue. The old Napier home place was turned around and moved to a lot facing Napier Avenue. When completed in 1924, the school was named **Lanier High School**. The name of the old school was changed to Pearl Stevens High School and was used entirely by girls. The students objected to the new name. The Board changed the name and both schools continued under the Lanier name.

In 1925 the Board voted to add a fifth year to the high school course of study. There was no graduating class in 1927.

At the May, 1926 Board meeting, the members voted to close the rural high schools at Lizella, Rutland, Union, and Howard school. The students in these areas were transported to the Lanier schools by bus.

1927 – **Charles H. Bruce School** opened in Newberg community.
Florence Bernd School opened.

In 1928, the Board of Education recommended a \$500,000 bond issue to provide a new grammar school in the Log Cabin Heights area, one in Ingleside, the enlargement of Alexander III and the improvement of several schools for black students.

In 1929, the Board of Education announced plans to build a new girls' school to be built on Montpelier Avenue. The **A. L. Miller High School for Girls** opened in 1931.

1929 – **Log Cabin School** opened. The school was built on four acres of land that had been purchased by the Board of Education in 1925.

1931 – The **Pearl Stevens School** opened.

1935 – **John H. Heard School** opened.

In 1936, the Bibb County public schools received 40,000 new textbooks as free textbooks began to be supplied by the state.

1937 – **M.M. Burdell School** opened.
Green Street School opened.
L. H. Williams School opened.

1942 – **Cynthia H. Weir School** opened.
Unionville School opened.

In 1946 an expansion plan for county schools with an expenditure of \$2,000,000 was proposed by the school superintendent, Dr. Mark A. Smith. Voters approved a \$2,500,000 school and road bond issue in January, 1948. The expansion was needed due to the unusual increase in Macon's population in the last decade.

In 1949, the Macon City Directory listed 52 public schools, 3 business schools, 3 religious schools, 2 parochial schools, 1 blind academy, and 1 aviation school. The population of the city of Macon was about 100,000.

In 1949, **Ballard-Hudson High School** opened on Anthony Road.

In "The History of Each School Building in the Bibb County School System," a report prepared by the committee chaired by W.C. Whitley in 1972, an addendum noted that "a

number of small schools -- both black and white -- were established in the early years." Many of these were one or two room buildings. Until 1940, there was very little consolidation of these schools serving black students. As the population shifted to a general pattern of citizens moving into the city, the reevaluation of school needs resulted in the building of three consolidated schools for black students in the county. These schools were **Pleasant Grove, Capel, and Duresville.**

By 1972, small schools which had served black students at locations throughout the county but no longer existed were listed as:

- Turpin Street** -- Tybee on Hazel Street
- Antioch** -- South Macon at the junction of Broadway and Second Streets
- Stinsonville** -- Ingleside to the rear of Alexander IV
- Mt. Hope** -- Walden near Cochran Field
- Pleasant Grove** -- Lizella
- Union Church** -- Zebulon Road
- Ocmulgee** - Camp Wheeler vicinity
- Swift Creek** -- Jeffersonville Highway
- Holly Grove** -- Jeffersonville Highway
- Summerfield** -- Near Wesleyan
- Mt. Zion** -- Near Heard
- Goodwin** -- On Thomaston Road
- White Springs** -- Roberta Road
- Evergreen** -- Hartley Road
- Union** - Two miles beyond Holton near river

The committee report also listed small schools that had served white students and, by 1972, no longer existed. These are:

- Hardy's Crossing** -- between Lizella and Skipperton
- Chambliss** -- at ten mile fork on Thomaston Road
- McCary** -- Jeffersonville Road
- New Castle** -- Old Marion Road
- Holton** -- at Arkwright
- Price** -- Bass Road
- Bloomfield** -- off River Road
- Skipperton** -- beyond South Macon
- Colaparchee** -- Zebulon Road
- Glen Cove** -- Lundy Road
- Manchester** -- Roff Avenue
- Bethel** -- Lizella on old Knoxville Road
- Midway** -- Warrior District, Lizella
- Napier Heights** -- Lawton and Holt Avenues

In 1950, small school buildings no longer used were sold and the funds from the sales were added to the building fund account of the Board of Education to be used for the construction on new facilities. The school buildings sold at this time were:

- Union Church**
- Swift Creek**

**Old Duresville
Summerfield
White Springs
Goodwin
Bloomfield
Antioch
Wheatley
Alexander I**

With voter approval of a \$2,500,000 school and road bond issue in 1948, the expansion plan for county schools proceeded with many school facilities completed in the next two decades. The pattern of construction of new schools continued the commitment of building of neighborhood schools as the population and growth of the city and county continued to expand.

1949:

**Lanier A (Central Complex)
Ballard Hudson B (Southwest Complex)
Ada Banks School**

1950-1959:

**Miller A
Appling B
McEvoy B
Willingham B
Agnes Barden
Minnie Butler
Duresville
J. Ellsworth Hall
Eugenia Hamilton
Henry A. Hunt
Joseph N. Neel
Jesse Rice
Joseph B. Riley
Rosa Taylor
T.D. Tinsley**

1960-1969:

**Appling A
Ballard A
Minnie Burghard
Metta T. Danforth
Matilda Hartley
Walter P. Jones
McKibben Lane
W.T. Morgan
James H. Porter**

**Maude Pye
Winship**

1971: **Springdale**

In 1967-68, the Bibb County School System moved from a dual system to a unitary system based on the “freedom of choice movement.” In 1969-70, the Board of Education moved from a self-perpetuating board to an elected board. A compromise agreement and plan to fully integrate the elementary schools, formally known as a consent decree, was signed on September 5, 1978.

1982 - New buildings for **Union School** and **Williams School** were constructed.

From 1990 to 1996, four schools were built in Bibb County.

**Brookdale
Carter
Weaver
Westside**

In 1999, a SPLOST (Special Local Option Sales Tax) was approved for \$139 million and, with additional state and local capital outlay funds, ten schools were constructed. In the case of Alexander II and Vineville, the historic school buildings were reconstructed. Included in the construction projects were seven major building renovations, 112 classrooms added to existing schools, 9 new gymnasiums, and a central kitchen.

2000-2005:

**Alexander II
Burdell-Hunt
Heritage
Skyview
Taylor
Vineville
Howard
Rutland MS
Hutchings
Rutland HS**

In November, 2004, the Bibb County Board of Education gained independent control of its finances for the first time with the majority support of voters and the support of the Bibb County Commissioners.

An ELOST (Education Local Option Sales Tax) was approved for \$165 million in September, 2005. Three high schools, two middle schools, an elementary school and an early childhood center are planned, as well as technology upgrades for all schools.

Mrs. Sharon Patterson, Superintendent of Bibb County Public Schools, was chosen as the 2006 School Superintendent of the Year by the Georgia School Board Association and Georgia School Superintendents Association.

Bibb County Public Schools, one of the oldest school systems in the state, is unique in that it is one of four school systems in Georgia that developed and has maintained a county school system throughout the history of educational changes in the state of Georgia.

Ann Grantham
Media Services Coordinator
Bibb County Board of Education

December, 2005

References

Annual Report of the Public Schools of the City of Macon and Bibb County, Georgia.
Volume II 1917-1920, Volume III 1920-1925, Volume IV 1935-1939.

Butler, John C. Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia.
Macon: J. W. Burke Co., 1879. Middle Georgia Historical Society, Inc., 1969.

Joiner, Oscar H., ed., A History of Public Education in Georgia, 1734-1976.
Columbia, SC: R. B. Bryan Co, 1979.

The History of Each School Building in the Bibb County School System.
Report prepared by Committee chaired by W. C. Whitley; 1971.

History of Macon: the First One Hundred Years 1823-1923.
Macon, Georgia: The Macon Telegraph, 1923. The Macon Telegraph, 1996.

The History of Macon, Georgia: 1823-1949.
Lyon, Marshall, & Brooks; Macon, Georgia. c.1950

Macon's Black Heritage: The Untold Story
Tubman African American Museum; c.1997.

"Bibb County 2005 Education SPLOST Program Fact Sheet." 15 Aug 2005.
Georgia Informer, Inc.. 03 Dec. 2005
<http://www.georgiainformer.com/Files/bibb_county_2005_education_splos.htm>.

"Digital Library of Georgia." Bibb Schools. GALILEO. 03 Dec. 2005
<www.galileo.usg.edu>.

"New Georgia Encyclopedia." Public Education. GALILEO. 03 Dec. 2005
<www.galileo.usg.edu>.

"Patterson named Georgia Superintendent of the Year."
The Macon Telegraph 03 Dec 2005. 04 Dec 2005
<<http://www.macon.com>>

"Voters OK SPLOSTS." The Macon Telegraph 21 Sep 2005. 03 Dec 2005
<<http://www.macon.com/mld/macon>>