

Bryant School

Location S-18/T1/R10E

Funds: \$156

District: 2

1908-09 Alma Humble, 7 months at \$35
1918-1919 Beulah McNeely, 6 months at \$50
1923-24 Doris McGee, 6 months at \$60
 J. H. Bowman, 3 months at \$60
1938-39 Elementary Lois Below, Eliza Woodall
 Jr. High—J. B. Armstrong
2003-2004 Elementary teachers

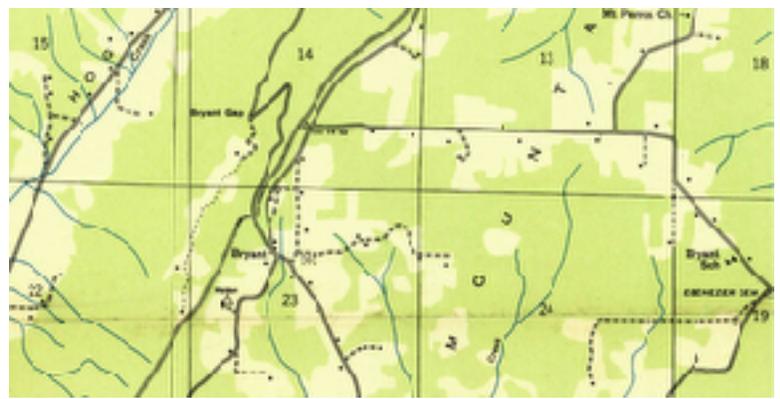
Bryant School has been in continuous operation since 1907. The minutes of Commissioners' Court are not available. I cannot say about the school prior to 1907. In 1923, the trustees were E. H. Smith, T. J. Smith, J. M. Winters, Long Island.

Old Bryant School building from Ed Carter—Bryant School 1931-1952



From Ed Carter's article for the Chronicles

In the late 1800s and first third of the 1900s, several schools existed in the Bryant community. An article published in The Daily Sentinel on August 5, 1971 documents their names: Ebenezer School, Dean School (which officially was Crescent Hill School), Scott School, Center Point School, and Mountain View School. When the Mountain View School building burned in 1930, a new one-room Bryant Schoolhouse replaced it. The new school building



opened in 1931 with Mr. Henry Evans of Sheffield, AL serving as both principal and teacher. It was built on ten acres of land donated by Mr. E.C. Marona and a Mr. Rigsby. A second room was added to Bryant School in time for the 1932-33 school term. The two teachers that year were Miss Elberta Clark of Bridgeport (grades 1-3) and Mr. Carlus Page (grades 4-6). They later became Mr. and Mrs. Carlus Page of Scottsboro.

The next leader of Bryant School was Rev. John B. Armstrong. Three additional rooms were added to Bryant School in the early 1930s. In the 1940s the number of grades was briefly increased to twelve. Home economics and agriculture classes were a part of the curriculum.

In 1952, while Mr. A. T. Bottoms was the principal, the Bryant Schoolhouse burned to the ground. Community opinions differ as to who was responsible for the arson. Classes were held at various locations in Bryant while the present school building was constructed. When Bryant Junior High School reopened in 1953, it consisted of grades 1-9. Today, it is a K-8 school.

Private schools have also been an integral part of the Bryant community for many years. A Seventh-day Adventist school opened in 1905 as the Old Paths Industrial School. Its name was later changed to Floral Crest School, an arm of the Floral Crest Seventh-Day Adventist Church. It has educated six generations of students. Mountain View Christian Academy is relatively new. It is a K-12 non-denominational ministry of the Mountain View Church of God. It opened in 1982 with Mrs. Beverly Gilmer as the first principal.

Charlotte Hill remembers that her father-in-law Otha Hill contracted for the bus route in the Bryant area using his own bus.

History of Schools in the Bryant, Alabama Community By Edward H. Carter

The first school on the northern end of Sand Mountain was started about 35 years before Bryant became a dot on Jackson County's map when a post office by that name was established in the area in 1891. The earliest school was housed in a log church house built in the mid-1850s by Rev. Zachariah Gordon soon after his family moved to the vicinity to mine coal. According to a church history written by Mrs. Dorothy Marona, Gordon Chapel Church and School was located near the current day intersection of Alabama Highway 73 and County Road 90.

The church and school's name changed to Ebenezer at some point after the Civil War. In 1908-09, when Ebenezer Baptist Church built a new wood-framed building, the school's classes moved there as well. An article printed in the February 19, 1920 edition of the Bridgeport News states that Ebenezer School was still in operation. The school closed sometime later in the 1920s or early 1930s. However, Ebenezer Baptist Church still thrives

Two other schools which were started during the second half of the 1800s were the Guilford School and a school opened by Miss Susan Z. Standish for girls. Both were located near the brow of Porter's Bluff on the western brow of Sand Mountain. The Guilford School was in existence for an unknown period after the Civil War, until the family moved to Atlanta in the 1880s. An 1888 newspaper item in The Stevenson Chronicles called the second school "Miss Standish's Young Ladies Seminary". It remained in operation on Porter's Bluff at least through the first portion of the 1900s and possibly up to near Miss Standish's death in 1915.

Interviews conducted by Mrs. Beverly Gilmer with several retired teachers in the Bryant community in 1970s, document the existence of several other schools. One of them was the Dean School, which was also referred to by some as Crescent Hill School. It was also located near the western brow of Sand Mountain, south of Porter's Bluff, on current Jackson County Road 131. This subscription school was originally named for the family that donated the land. It

operated for only a few weeks or months each year, depending upon the weather and the need for the students to do farm labor for their families. It existed until the 1940s.

According to the research of Ed Carter, the first public school in Bryant was opened about 1912. A two-acre site on current Jackson County Road 267, east of Bryant Cemetery, was purchased on November 3, 1911 for a new school in School District No. 2. The school was called Center Point School because its location was very near the middle of land section 24. Its first teacher was Vaux Owen. It was destroyed in the 1920s when a forest fire burned out of control.

The process for starting Bryant School at the present-day school's location on Highway 73 was set in motion on October 22, 1930 when E. C. and Dorothy Marona sold three acres of land to the state of Alabama for a school site. The land deal was actually a gift from since the state paid the couple only \$1.00. A one-room schoolhouse was erected on the site in time for school to open in 1931. Mr. Henry Evans of Sheffield, Alabama, was Bryant School's first principal. He was also the sole teacher during its first year of operation. A second room was added to the building in time for the next school term. Mr. Carlus Page of Woodville and Miss Elberta Clark of Bridgeport were the school's the faculty that year. Miss Clark taught grades 1-3 in one room and Mr. Page taught grades 4-6 in the other. It is not known how long they taught at Bryant. The two later married and became well-known Scottsboro citizens.

The next documented principal of Bryant School was Rev. John B. Armstrong, a native of Blount County. The October 15, 1936 issue of the Bridgeport News-Herald newspaper reported that "Rev. J. B. Armstrong and family arrived from Langston and are located near the Bryant School in the teacherage. He, with his well-recommended assistants, Misses Mable and Mildred Hackworth, of Stevenson are the teachers here this year."

Soon after Mr. Armstrong's arrival, Sam Rigsby, of Boaz, Alabama, who owned property adjoining the new school grounds, heard of Mr. Armstrong's innovative approach to education and donated seven additional acres of land to the school for agricultural experimentation.

The first reference to Bryant School being a junior high school appeared in a "news" column in the December 3, 1936 issue of the Bridgeport News-Herald. The blurb stated, "The young people of this place are going to organize a young people's club Friday night December 11 at the Junior High School at 7 p.m."

According to another story published in the September 30, 1937 issue of the same paper, Mr. Armstrong and the school trustees worked diligently to get four more rooms built onto the school. The county board of education furnished \$650 for the project, with the rest of the money coming from donations and volunteer labor from the community. The school's enrollment increased from a mere handful to 130 pupils. The school's faculty was Mr. Armstrong, Miss Mildred Hackworth, Miss Mabel Hackworth, and Miss Lou Velma Clark of Bridgeport, a newcomer from Florence State Teachers College. Classes were taught through the ninth-grade level. This school was also called the Bryant Mountain View School in some newspaper articles.

Over time, home economics and agriculture classes were added to the curriculum, as well as upper level classes for a few students. The emphasis was on practical farming and household knowledge. In 1941, three students were awarded a 12th Grade high school diploma. The three were Richard Norris, Elmer Winters, and Louise Reese (Winters). This information was verified by Owen Norris, the brother of Richard Norris.

The Jackson County Sentinel published an article about Bryant School in its January 24, 1950, edition. The principal, Mr. A. T. Bottoms, reported that the student enrollment that year was

289. The school's faculty that year consisted of seven teachers. The names of the teachers were listed by grade, along with the number of students they were responsible for teaching. They were: Mrs. Lois Hicks, 47 first graders; Mrs. Thelma Winkler, 32 second graders; Mrs. Mary Ellen Rochester, 38 third graders; Miss Callie Burk, 31 fourth graders; Mr. Weldon Norwood, 37 fifth graders; and Mrs. Burma Clark, with 23 sixth graders. Mrs. Ada Keith Bottoms was responsible for the junior high and tenth grade students. The school had 24 enrolled in the seventh grade, 21 in the eighth grade, 18 in the ninth grade and 18 in the tenth grade. Principal Bottoms also taught some of the upper level classes.

At one time, the Bryant students who desired to finish high school had to travel to Bridgeport High School. They rode a bus off the western side of Sand Mountain into Hogjaw Valley and then crossed the Tennessee River on Reece's Ferry at the southern tip of Long Island. In extreme weather, if crossing the river on the ferry was deemed too dangerous, the students could not go to school.

In 1952, the Bryant School building burned. Community opinions today vary as to who was responsible for the suspected arson case. The general consensus is that the fire was associated with a school discipline case. No one was ever arrested for the crime.

After the fire, classes were held at various locations in the Bryant community while a new concrete block school building was constructed. The younger students finished the year in a temporary classroom building on the campus that did not burn. Others attended classes in the American Legion Hall, located on the road between Weldon's Store and Porter's Bluff (now County Road 262). Several students from the Bryant community were also permitted to exercise a different option; they transferred to Mount Olive Junior High School in Higdon for that school year.

When Bryant Junior High School reopened in 1953, it had only nine grades. In the interim, the Board of Education decided to eliminate the tenth grade. Tenth graders who wanted to continue their education had to travel with the juniors and seniors who were already being bus to an area high school.

At some unknown point in the 1950s, the County Board of Education decided that Bryant Junior High School graduates would attend Pisgah High School, located about 30 miles south of Bryant, rather than Bridgeport High School. Pisgah was a very large school, at the time, drawing students from as far south as Section and as far north as Bryant. This arrangement continued until Section High School was opened for the 1955-56 school term and North Sand Mountain High added senior classes for the 1964-65 term.

Herbert Pace recalled, when interviewed, that he made the journey from Bryant to Pisgah High School from the fall of 1954 until he graduated from PHS in the spring of 1957. He stated that the bus driver was always one of the senior boys. The bus made stops at Mount Olive Junior High in Higdon, Flat Rock Jr. High and Rosalie Jr. High, as well as any place along Highway 71 where Pisgah students were standing beside the road. This practice continued until the early 1970s, even after North Sand Mountain High School was opened.

In 1977, the ninth grade was eliminated at Bryant Junior High School. This action was mandated by the Jackson County Board of Education for all junior high schools in the school system. The reasoning behind this change was that students could be better prepared for college by attending grades 9-12 at a senior high school, rather than just the latter three grades.

Over the years, several men served as the principal of Bryant Junior High School. Since the 1952 fire, the list includes the following: Mr. Sam Peek, Mr. Curly Arnold, Mr. Truman Maples,

Mr. James Pratt (1969-72), Mr. Cecil Bearden (1973-79), Mr. Larry Holt (1980-85), Mr. Dana Moore (1986-1990), Mr. Marland Mountain (1991-1995), Mr. Darrell Kirk (1995-2002), Mr. Mark Guffey (2003-2005), and the one with the longest tenure, Mr. Lloyd Ellison (2006-2019). In February 2019, Beverly Evans Ashmore became the school's first woman principal. In May 2019, the enrollment of Bryant School was 157 students in grades K-8.