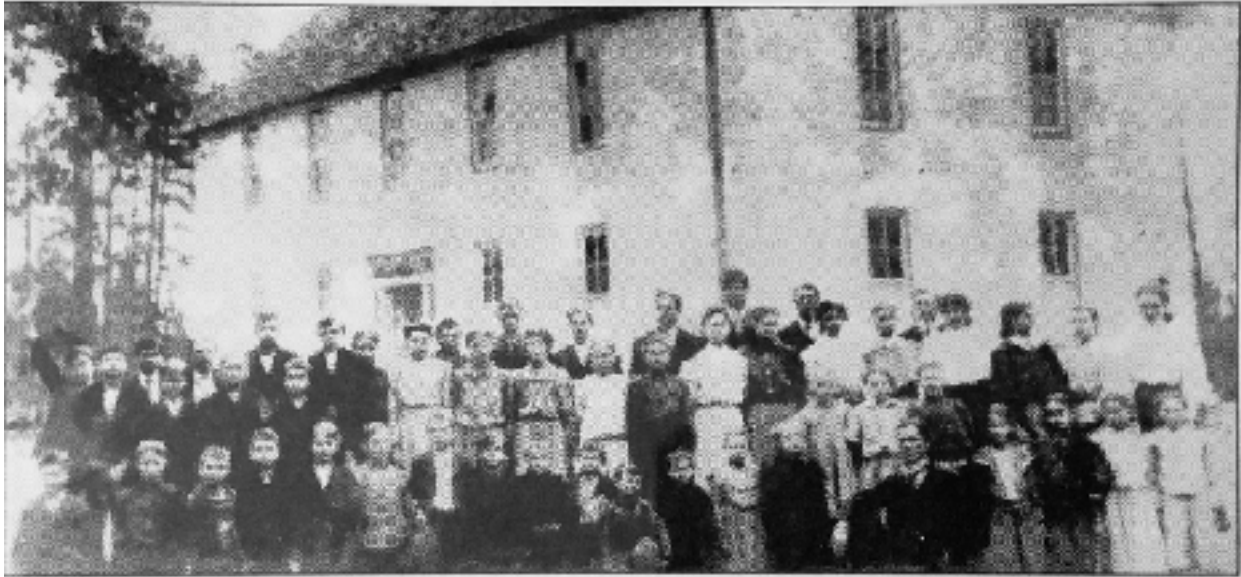


**Sand Mountain Institute Dutton**



## Sand Mountain Institute



Sand Mountain Institute Students — Row 1, l-r: Lonnie Hudson, Sherman Griffen, Jack Garner, Paul Williams, Bert Thomas, Justice Smalley, Henry Gann, Winston Smalley, Willie Bramlett, Ernest Hudson, Jim Garner, Tilden Holden, Ruth Newton, Ina Campbell, Mary Griffin, Bessie Gann, Nellie Hudson, Z.E. Pinnegar, Clara Pinnegar, Mae Chaney, Nellie Anderson, Cleo Wilson, Row 2, l-r: Robert Garner, Eldie Pinnegar, George Anderson, Pierce Williams, Audie Griffin, Ester Wilson, Willie Griffin, Effie Woolum, Maude Griffin, Jeppie Dutton, Noffie Smalley, Victoria Anderson, Mandy Woolum, Sallie Griffin, Mollie Woolum, Tommie Chaney, Annie Smalley, Minnie White. Row 3, l-r: Freeman Tatum, Willie Pinnegar, Gerthy White, Will Garner, I.J. Williams, Roy Anderson, Will Hudson, Wonnie Thomas, (unidentified), Edgar Stone, Henry Griffin, Gordon White.

## PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN EARLY 1900s SHOWS SAND MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

The Institute, Which Trained Students and Teachers, Was Near the Site of the Present School

# Education Played an Important Role In the Early Development of Dutton

By JOHN PECK  
Times Staff Writer

DUTTON — Teachers who taught schools in this area during the early 1900s may have received their education at the Sand Mountain Institute — a college that apparently was very short-lived.

Though no one seems to know exactly when the facility was built, most local historians list 1925 as the date the school burned.

Longtime resident John B. Ryan, 72, said a legislative act set aside 10 acres of land to establish a school called the Sand Mountain Institute.

## A Sense Of Place



A Times Series

### Tennessee Valley Communities

The two-story facility, believed to have been built around 1875, played a unique role in rural northeast Alabama in that it educated teachers who in turn ventured out into sparsely populated areas to teach in country schools.

Agriculture was the prime source of income for nearly every resident on Sand Mountain, and that meant good schools and an adequate supply of teachers were often hard to come by.

Mrs. Nellie Nichols, 89, remembers the Sand Mountain Institute. She told of a time she and her best friend, Mae Chaney, witnessed a group of boys throwing corn cobs

at a teacher, T.E. Pinegar, while he walked across the school yard. Pinegar had stored corn under the steps to the school and had picked up an armload to carry home.

The school at that time was being used to educate children, but Mrs. Nichols said teachers once attended it to receive their certificates.

The two-story building had pot-bellied heaters on each floor, wood benches and a stage at one end, Mrs. Nichols said.

Historians say the town's first school for youngsters was built in 1886 about a mile southeast of where the current school sits. It was made of logs and had an open fireplace, two doors and a window.

Since the school was almost surrounded by briar patches and woods, it became known as the "Briar Patch School." The first seats in the building were made of split logs.

Mrs. Virgie Chambers, 85, taught in Dutton for 42 years. She recalled living in a dormitory across from the Sand Mountain Institute after moving in Dutton in 1925. The dormitory survived the fire but was demolished in a tornado two years later, Ryan said.

The Dutton Post Office, named for then-postmaster M.M. Dutton, was originally located about a mile-and-a-half west of town in a small grocery store.

Dutton was a booming town in the 1890s and 1900s, Ryan said. The town was comprised of at least eight businesses, two blacksmith shops, a cotton gin, a sawmill, two cafes and a town doctor.

The Dutton School only went to the 11th grade then, meaning students who wanted to further their education had to go elsewhere. Ryan said he rode a bus with a homemade body to Scottsboro to finish school.

Mrs. Chambers said Dutton became a central gathering spot for residents throughout Sand Mountain when a regular "Swap Day" was held. Holes, farm equip-

ment, clothing, household items and other goods were peddled by those who came to trade. People traveled by horseback, on foot, or by car along dirt roads and camped nearby for several days when the event was held, she said. Some slept in covered wagons, she said.

The paved highway didn't come until after World War II, Ryan said.

When electricity came, "everybody's first purchase was usually a refrigerator," Mrs. Chambers said. Telephones and mechanized farming were other major luxuries that greatly altered the lifestyles of Dutton residents, she said.

Mrs. Chambers said she bought her first refrigerator in 1933 and that it continues to operate today at the charity organization in Section she donated it to.

After the Sand Mountain Institute burned in 1925, another school was built to replace it. When it perished in a 1937 fire, residents again got together to construct a school, only this time with their own funds, Ryan said. "I don't think you could find a community anywhere else that could put a school up like that without any indebtedness," Ryan said. While the new school was being built, students attended classes in makeshift classrooms such as churches and even a potato shed, Ryan said.

On Feb. 7, 1963, E.B. Thomas became the first mayor of Dutton. Today, the town is governed under the leadership of a woman, Mrs. Sus B. Strickland, who took office in October 1980.

The only major business in Dutton today is the W.L. Dilbeck Grocery Store, a central gathering spot for many of the local townspeople who, during the colder months, can often be found huddled around an old heater inside the rustic store discussing politics, playing cards or remembering old times.

"I tell everybody if I didn't like it here, I'd have moved," said Glen Gregg, 71.