

Smithville Schools

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Source: Mr. and Mrs. Collins F. Kindred collection

Among the recorded documents of Clay County we find the following legal document recorded: "May 2, 1854, this document is made between Calvin Smith and Agnes Smith, his wife, Party of the First Part, and Trustees Sylvester Warfield, Preston Aker and Michael Inhoff, Parties of the Second Part. The Central Male and Female Academy located in the town of Smithville of Clay County, Missouri. Witnesses of said party of the first part of one dollar lawful money to them in hand paid to the second parties and their successors. The plot was designed to as No. 5, Block 2 in the second addition to the said town of Smithville, the lot being 60 x 120 feet more or less according to the survey. Signed by Justice of Peace, Isaac Wood."

Until the year 1867 the school was exclusively a subscription school. Mr. Harmon began a Public School in October 1867. The building had two rooms and was located on the site of the present Wm. and Bess Long home. The building itself is still standing where it was moved just east of the present high school building on Winner Avenue. In 1881 a new building was erected on the present school site. This building was a three room structure. Some years later the upper floor was divided by a half partition with sliding doors, so it could be used as two rooms or an assembly hall. This school was replaced in 1905.

Some of the early day teachers were J.F. Justus, Mrs. Jennie Tracy, Prof. Talbott, Prof. Dade, Prof. Snowberger and J.F. Odor. Prof. W.E.A. Aul was Superintendent in 1898-99 when he taught seventy pupils in one room. Other teachers in 1904 were W.H. Ellington, Lillian Douglas, Arabella Storms, George J. Stringer and Virgil Jandon. Some faculty members in 1905 were Mrs. Ella Collins, Miss Lena Rule, Miss Nannie Douglas and Prof. Charles Storms. In November 1905, teachers and pupils were installed in a new six-room brick building representing a cost of \$11,000. The High School then offered a three-year course. This building is still in use and is called "the old grade building." The estimated value of the Smithville School property in 1902 was \$3,000, with an enrollment of 99 male pupils and 103 female. Smithville's population in 1910 was 680.

In 1908, J.K. West was Superintendent of Smithville Schools, with teachers Miss Viola Spicer, Miss Nell Wood, Mary E. McCouan, Ada Lederer, and Lena Hamilton. In 1916 Prof. W.R. Boucher was Superintendent with other teachers Wade Graham, Miss Lola Davis, Amy K. Thomas (Breckenridge), Robert E. King, Bertha Taylor and Vesta Mae Newman (Sterling).

School Directors at Smithville in 1914 were: Dr. R.J. Woods, Dave Roberts, John Williams, Dr. E.C. Hill, John Morton and Burk Edwards. In the year 1914 the Smithville District was changed from a Common School to a "Village School Plan," which now had six directors with four years high school work. Smithville School was approved by State University in September 1915, and the school was classed from a third class to a first class school. THE SMITHVILLIAN, the first school yearbook, was printed by the press of the Democrat-Herald in 1917.

In 1917 a large U.S. flag, purchased by the school children, floated from a 40-foot locust pole. It was placed by J.J. Swetnam and Dave Roberts. In May of 1917 the School Board purchased the Cox and Reeves properties south of the school grounds for location of a new high school building. The formal laying of the cornerstone of the new high school building was conducted by Temperance Lodge No. 438 A F & AM the last week of September, 1917. Seventeen members of the band played and Reverend Fred V. Loos acted as master of ceremonies. The new high school was completed for use in January 1918. The seniors contributed \$160 from a box supper to the \$1600 gym that was constructed later. Miss Lindsey was the basketball coach for the girls of Smithville High School in 1921. The PTA was organized in 1922 with Mrs. Frank Rollins as President. In 1922 Rev. Loos addressed the high school graduates for the twentieth time. The Domestic Science girls gave a banquet for the football boys in 1922 and the team was christened "Tommies" in the high school assembly.

Many local citizens have served as school board members, but some of the ones that would quickly come to mind were: S.B. Waller, Alex Breckenridge, Dudley Capps, E.R. Stroeter, J.T. Duncan, C.C. Kindred, A.C. Helvey, A.N. Ecton, J.E. Kindred, and Virgil Walker. However, if you are new to the community, perhaps these names are the only ones that would be familiar to you: Ward Hanks, Paul Barber, Frank Halferty, Oran Major, Charles French, Duane R. Howard, Gene Littrell, Marvin Preston and R.L. Mallett.

From the early twenties until the fall of 1940, Mr. Buell B. Cramer was Superintendent of the Smithville Schools. During this time the Teacher Training classes were taught and many of the young girls and boys began their careers as rural district teachers throughout Clay and other adjoining counties. The Teachers Training program was granted Smithville Schools in the fall of 1922 (only Liberty and Excelsior Springs were older).

In the fall of 1940 Clifford Edwards became the new Superintendent with Nellie Lee Piburn as Principal. Mrs. Piburn had previously taught Mathematics eighteen years under the leadership of Buell B. Cramer.

Homer D. Williams began his work as Superintendent of the Smithville Schools in 1942. Teachers whose names could be found on the list then, or soon after, would be: Hester Golden, Nellie Piburn, Joe H. Farmer, Lois Fann, Doroty Boydston, Lena Hansford, Verna Lee Jasper, Lois DeWeese, Harold Riley, Olie Erickson, John Price, Andy White, Rosalia Hill, Bettie Duncan Kirkland, Betty Lee Pace, Mrs. Sidney (Jean) Williams, Mrs. E.J. Justus, and Zell Thompson.

In 1936 the new \$15,000 high school gym and auditorium was completed. The old gym was torn down. The new gym was made larger in 1960. The lunch room was built in 1951. A new elementary building was constructed on Maple Avenue in North Smithville in 1955, with five additional rooms being added later. As the district continues to grow and "time marches on," plans are underway for a new high school building to be built, up the hill, south of the present high school building.

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