

BLYTHEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

School Days in 1909

Online Exhibit Panel Project

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Blythewood School
around 1900

*Image provided by
Jim McLean*

At just six years old in 1909, Hudnalle B. McLean, Sr. entered first grade at Blythewood School. This was a wood-frame building for white students, as the Bethel School for African American students was in another part of town. With only two rooms, the school was not very large. Folding doors divided the rooms and could be opened up to create a single large area for special events, and a stage was located at one end of the building. Both rooms had wood-burning stoves and that was the only source of heat. Students brought wood to keep up the supply and a wood shed behind the school kept the wood dry.

Also located behind the school were two outhouses, one for boys and one for girls. These toilets were not hooked up to any plumbing. Outhouses were built over deep holes in the ground and occasionally moved to new spots. Young Hudnalle's school days were punctuated by the sound of the bell. A teacher could pull a rope inside the building to ring the bell for the start of the school day, to signal the time for recess.

He walked to school, as did most students. Some traveled by horse and buggy. Hudnalle brought his lunch in a gallon molasses pail, and most students provided their own lunches. In 1909, the school taught the basic subjects of "reading, writing and arithmetic" as well as algebra, geometry and latin, for students in the higher grades. Tenth grade was as high as the school went at the time, which was not unusual.

Over time, both the Blythewood School and the Bethel School expanded and gained new buildings and more teachers, subjects, and grades. As the facilities modernized, students could enjoy cafeterias, buses and indoor bathrooms! *Resource: "A Little Information on Early Schools in the Area, as I Remember Them" by Hudnalle B. McLean, Sr., July 4, 1992, provided by Jim McLean.*