

History of Tuscaloosa High School – 1890 to 1963

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This is the story of a town and a school. Within a period of about 65 years the town grew from a village into a thriving metropolis; the school grew from an enrollment of 11 to almost 2,000. The story of such progress is a fascinating one.

In 1891, Benjamin Harrison was president of the United States. Tuscaloosa recorded a population of 4,215. The University of Alabama, just 60 years old, had an enrollment of not quite 200. The nation was first reading of a 13-year-old Tuscumbia, Alabama, girl who was struggling to overcome tremendous handicaps — Helen Keller.

On the evening of May 29, 1891, the first senior class to receive diplomas in a Tuscaloosa public school numbered 5 (4 boys and a girl). The historic occasion occurred 16 years before an act of the Alabama Legislature on August 7, 1907, which established secondary public schools in Alabama.

FIRST PUBLIC SCHOOL WAS OLD STAFFORD

The first public school in Tuscaloosa was Stafford School, which was demolished seven years ago to make way for what is now Hotel Stafford.

The session of 1890-91 had an enrollment of 260, 11 of whom were classified as high school students.

The high school curriculum included general history and civil government; compositions and declamations were required regularly; courses in Latin, grammar, algebra, geometry, arithmetic, psychology, bookkeeping, physics, German, geology, and Greek were offered.

GIRLS ADMITTED IN 1890

From the beginning of the public high school system in Tuscaloosa, girls were admitted, and the highest average of the first graduating class was made by the one girl in the class.

The first superintendent was Professor Carleton Mitchell of Atlanta.

HIGH SCHOOL DISCONTINUED FROM 1893-1900

In the hard times following 1893, the schools struggled along with limited revenues. The high school department had to be discontinued until 1900. Frequently schools were kept open only through the efforts of the board, who sometimes paid expenses out of their own funds. Quarters were cramped, equipment was poor, the teaching staff was inadequate. Teachers, on more than one occasion, taught without pay so that the school terms could be completed.

The graduating class of 1900, the year of the reopening of the high school department, was 7, six girls and one boy.

The population of Tuscaloosa by 1900 had increased to 6,271.

NEW HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING OPENED IN 1911

1911 was a great year for the development of Tuscaloosa High School. A new high school building was opened on February 7, 1911, with 125 students and five teachers with Frank L. Grove as principal. The building still stands on 10th street and was used as a junior high school until the junior high students were moved into their present building.

The building was constructed at a cost of \$30,000.

The population of Tuscaloosa had increased to 8,407 and the enrollment of the University of Alabama had increased to 571.

The first Black Warrior was published in this year; the recently established Tuscaloosa News commented favorably on the annual.

The football team, coached by Randall Browne, defeated the University team 15-10. The first basketball team was organized under the leadership of Charles Moffett.

At the end of the year, diplomas were presented to 26 graduates. Two types of diplomas were awarded, academic and commercial.

SECOND THS BUILDING OPENED IN 1926

1926 was another milestone in the history of our school. A splendid new high school building was opened. It had cost \$350,000 to construct. The superintendent was J. M. Burnett; the principal, Miss Clara Verner. There were 18 teachers and 350 pupils.

A library was established for the first time.

The curriculum had undergone a number of changes. In addition to the courses formerly offered, home economics, typewriting, stenography, biology, French and Spanish were now being offered. A physical education department was also added.

Student self-government also began in 1926 with a number of students who initiated a voluntary patrol to help keep order in the halls during the lunch period.

A school paper, the Hi-Life, made its appearance.

The class of 1926 consisted of 68 graduates. George H. Denny, president of the University of Alabama, was the commencement speaker.

NEWEST THS COST OVER \$2 MILLION

The most recent milestone in the story of THS brings the record of progress up to date. In September, 1955, 1,365 students enrolled in the two and one-half million dollar school located on a campus of 33 acres facing 15th street. Serving as its principal in 1957 was J. R. Pittard.

Today Harold Greer is our principal. He is assisted by 63 teachers who instruct students in what seems a varied curriculum indeed when compared with the courses offered in 1891. Other staff members include a counselor, a dietitian, a nurse, a building engineer, a secretary, and a bookkeeper.

From an enrollment of 11 in 1890 to an enrollment of 1,506 in 1962-63; from a teaching staff of five in 1911 to a staff of 69 today; from Stafford which housed all grades, to the present building, which houses only three high school classes—that, in brief, is the story of the secondary school keeping step with a city which has increased from 4,215 in 1890 to almost 64,000 according to the 1960 census.

Looking forward in the future it seems that the school and the town will continue to grow and prosper.