

Beeson Academy and Pisgah Schools

Location: S18/T4/R8E
Funds: \$530.00



Wendell Page wrote this information about Pisgah schools.

Pisgah School began as Beeson Academy. The academy was founded by J. J. Beeson while he was serving as Superintendent of Education for the Jackson County Commissioners' Court. Beginning in 1908, he was employed as principal of Pisgah School.

1908-1909 J. J. Beeson, Principal 4 months at \$70
Daisy Beeson (his daughter) 4 months at \$45
1909-1910 J. J. Beeson, Principal 4 months at \$75
Daisy Beeson 4 months at \$40
1918-1919 W. H. Varnell 5 months at \$95
1922-1923 W. F. Garner 8 months at \$125
Allie Roden 8 months at \$90
Grace Hurt 8 months at \$75
1923-1924 A. M. Raines 8 months at \$125
Mrs. Wm. White 8 months at \$80
Allie Roden 8 months at \$90
Magnolia Raines 8 months at \$70
Dell Owens 8 months at \$80

Pisgah High School Faculty:

J. H. Wheeler, Principal
William Sloan
Floyd Overby
Francis Martin

Pisgah Elementary Faculty:

Thelma Williams
Louise Smith
Inez Hicks
Iva Hughes
Nola Callahan

2003-2004 37 teachers

Currently (2022-2023), Dr. John Prestridge is high school principal, and Beverly Ashmore is the elementary school principal. The Pisgah schools have 46 teachers.

According to the school website, Pisgah High School is a pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade school which school enrolls an average of 700 students each school year. The campus currently includes a high school building for grades seven through twelve, an elementary building for grades kindergarten through the sixth grade, a library, an annex building which houses the pre-k program and the nurse's office, two gymnasiums, one lunchroom, an agricultural building, and football, baseball, and softball fields.

Morning and afternoon enrollment at the Jackson County technology center, the Earnest Pruett Center of Technology (EPCOT) in Hollywood, Alabama, is available to our students beginning the sophomore year. Students have the opportunity to explore a variety of career fields. Also beginning in the sophomore year, Pisgah High School in collaboration with Northeast Alabama Community College offers dual enrollment classes to students. These classes give students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school. These available classes are in the core subject areas.

This overview of Pisgah Schools comes from *The Heritage of Jackson County Alabama*.

In 1861 Sam Rorex and others built a church near Callahan Spring. In 1880 the church burned and another was built across and slightly south of the current site of the First Baptist Church of Pisgah. The first school was taught by John Ambrester and his sister, Mary Ann Ambrester. After his death several instructors including Rev. Wm. Derrick and Rev. Charles E. Roach Sr., filled in until the arrival of J. J. Beeson in 1881 who taught there until his death 15 years later.

Eleven years of the school was under denominational control. In 1909 through the influences of Rev. C. T. Starkey and Jesse Ambrester, the Baptist Home Mission Board established a school, naming it "Beeson Academy" in honor of J. J. Beeson. The building was erected on land donated by Mrs. S. C. Estes. After the building burned in 1922, the school was taught in the Baptist Church and dormitory with J. H. Jarnigan as principal.

In 1924 the state building was erected on the site of Beeson Academy. During much of this time, the Pisgah School was the only school outside of Scottsboro in Jackson Co. that offered education beyond the elementary grade levels. [Editor's note: Three locations began offering high school programs within two years of each other: Scottsboro (Jackson County High School), Section, and Pisgah.] This photo of the 1924 school is from Caroline Lynch.



In 1917, Pisgah Jr. High School was established and became a Vocational High School in 1925. Albert Rains, later to become a U. S. Congressman, was the first principal after the State took over the school.

In 1942, the present main high school building (consisting of nine class rooms, a home economics department, a library, two rest rooms, teacher's lounge, and principal's office) was erected with WPA labor. The elementary building was constructed in 1953, a new gymnasium in 1961, a junior high school wing was added in 1963, a new agriculture department in 1965, a new lunchroom in 1969, and a new library in 1985.

Through the years, several schools have consolidated with Pisgah: Jones Cove, Webster and Chalybeate Springs in 1939; New Herman in 1941; Browntown and Central in 1946; Sublets in 1951; Pleasant View in 1964; and Deans Chapel in 1969.

According to the school website, in the fall of 1998, sixty years after the construction of the main high school building, students moved into the present day building. The main structure of the old high school building was sold and moved to Gorham's Bluff, a community in Pisgah. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, the agriculture department moved in to a newly designed shop after the destruction of the old 1964 ag building.

The following people have served as principal of Pisgah School:

1925-1926 Albert Raines
1926-1931 J. B. Cagle
1931-1951 Jesse Wheeler
1951-1953 J. E. Stephens
1953-1971 Cecil Bearden
1971-1973 Billy Lee Beard
1973-1975 Paul Allred
1975-1976 John Allen
1976-1981 Jerry Jeffery
1981-1982 Wayne Pendley*
1982-1989 Sam Kenimer
1989-1996 Billy Shelton
1996-2000 Ronnie Shelton
2000-2007 John Kirby
2007-2015 Mark Guffey
2015-2016 Rhonda Wheeler/Billy Duncan
2016-2019 Billy Duncan
2019- Dr. John Prestridge

*Wayne Pendley, principal; Alex Jeffery, custodian; and Timothy Brown, a summer worker, were killed in an accidental fire in the two-story building at Pisgah School in the summer of 1982.

The first mention of Pisgah school in the local newspapers is found in the *Scottsboro Citizen*, November 28, 1879.

Feb 17, 1881 SC: Ad for Pisgah School.

The Scottsboro Citizen (Scottsboro, Alabama) - 17 Feb 1881

Pisgah School.
PISGAH, JACKSON COUNTY, ALA.

This school will open in our new building on Monday the 21st inst., for a term of seven months. The location is one of the healthiest in the South. The community is noted for Sobriety, Morality and Christianity.

Board, in good families, can be had cheap.

Tuition very low. Give us a trial. We mean work--good, earnest, hard work.

JOHN J. BEKSON,
Principal.

feb 17-1w

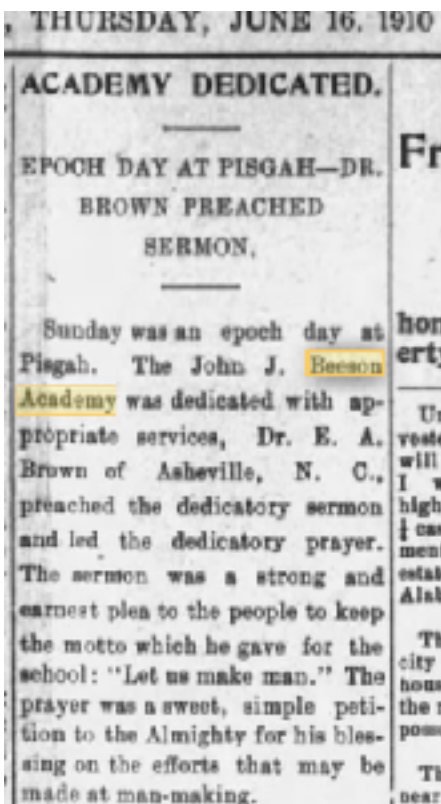
Oct 21, 1909 PA: "School opened at this place, Tuesday of last week. Rev. H. P. Waits of Pisgah delivered an interesting lecture to the pupils in the morning and Rev. G. Wallace Gasque, of Section, made an inspiring address in the afternoon....The dedication of he John J. Beeson Academy will be Monday, November 1st. Everybody is invited to attend."

Nov 4, 1909 PA: "Owing to the illness of Dr. A. E. Brown, the dedication of John J. Beeson Academy was postponed indefinitely."

June 16, 1910 PA: Beeson Academy dedicated. See article.

Aug 11, 1910 PA: Flowery tribute to John J. Beeson and the town of Pisgah. "Beautifully encored in a picturesque spot on the great Sand Mountain is Pisgah. Pisgah is both a discovery and a creation. It may be truthful said that the lamented John J. Beeson is her discoverer and the layer of her foundation which is builded on the rock of moral and mental education....Already the home of educational advantages, Pisgah has become within the past few months, the abiding place of Beeson Academy, an institute founded under the auspices of the Missionary Baptist Southern Convention...Pisgah, high, healthful and hopeful—great is Pisgah."

Nov 23, 1911 PA: "County Superintendent C. S. Brewton visited the Sulphur Springs public school Wednesday night and will visit the Flat Rock school Thursday a.m. the Rosalie School Thursday p.m., the Pisgah School Friday a.m., and Chalybeate Springs school Friday p.m. He will also attend public land sales at Dutton Saturday.

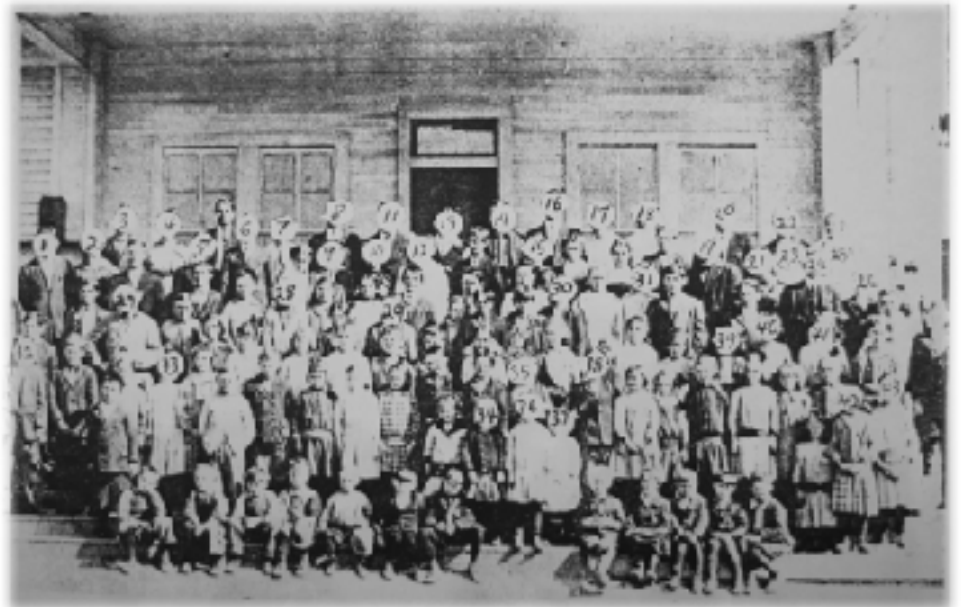


The street it faced is Medcalf dr. Which was taken over by the new High School.



Students and Faculty of the Beeson Academy, 1915-1916

- 1 Granville Gant
- 2 Browder
- 3 Carl Clark
- 4 Riva McCloud
- 5 Barnett Daniels
- 6 George Deans
- 7 Geo Newberry
- 8 - - - Milligan
- 9 Geneva Gant
- 10 Marie Ambrose
- 11 John Rouch
- 12 Flora Pittman
- 13 - - - Browder
- 14 Pat Roton
- 15 Esley Mullins
- 16 Emmett Patterson
- 17 Polly McCloud
- 18 Combs Finke
- 19 Anka Angstrom (Linn)
- 20 Goodwin Young
- 21 Miss Burleson (Clarke)
- 22 Mary Lou Hayes
- 23 Ruby Wann
- 24 Jay Hardy (Marie Parker)
- 25 Marie H. H. H.
- 26 Thelma Rouch
- 27 Zebie Weidlin
- 28 Mayona M. J. J.
- 29 Nancy Ambrose
- 30 Roy Ambrose Gant
- 31 Maggie Kern
- 32 W. P. Arnold
- 33 I. S. T. Whittier
- 34 Kathleen Ambrose
- 35 Ray Ambrose
- 36 ~~Thelma~~ Mable Chambers
- 37 Ella Maude Mann
- 38 Olive Ambrose
- 39 Lewis Gant
- 40 Lois Mann
- 41 Doris Starkey
- 42 Manie Hicks
- 43 Eva Mullins



Debra Underwood shared these family photos of Pisgah school busses in the 1930s.



From History of Pisgah Baptist Church 1851-1973 by Earnest B. and Richard L. Wheeler

The state of Alabama, from 1819 when it first became a state, had done very little or nothing toward the education of its common citizens. The economy of the state was based upon the growth and selling of cotton. This economy was dominated by the large, slave-holding plantation owners, who could not have cared less about the education of the lower strata or “poor white trash” as they were called by the wealthier slave holders. The stronghold of this landed gentry was in what is commonly called “The Cotton Belt” or black belt section of the state. The children of these plantation owners were sent to private school in the north and east. Some were sent to Europe.

Nothing, or little, was done to implement the Acts of the (Alabama) State Legislature establishing a public school system in the state before 1907.

During 1900-1917, religious denominations established several academics which were designated to aid students until 1914-1915. The land on which the Academy was built consisted of eleven acres given to the Baptist Home Mission board by the S. C. Estes family about 1912. The Beeson Academy was named in honor of John J(ustice) Beeson, the fourth pastor of Mount Pisgah Church, 1990-1897. The first principal of the Academy was J. M.

Langston (1914-1915). The faculty consisted of the principal and one other teacher, Miss Burleson. Courses of study ranged from the first grade through the twelfth.

A dormitory was built to house students from a distance who could not live at home and attend school. It was a humble beginning but certainly a giant step forward in the education of the children of Pisgah and Sand Mountain. Many of the students at Beeson Academy were enabled to enter college and complete their education. The Academy continued to grow until 1920, when the building was destroyed by fire.

Classes were continued until 1921 in the church building with James H. Jarnigan as Principal. In 1921, the land on which the Academy stood was sold to the Jackson County Board of Education as a site for Pisgah's first public school. The present buildings of the Pisgah School stand on that land. Thus a glorified chapter in the history of Pisgah Baptist Church was closed.