

History of

South Gwinnett High School

South Gwinnett High School, which combined Snellville and Grayson High Schools, first opened its doors in the fall of 1957 with 300 students in grades 9 through 12. There were 45 juniors, 86 sophomores, and 114 freshmen. The faculty consisted of 13 members, including the principal. The first graduation ceremony was held in the gym of the Old Snellville High School with 55 students receiving diplomas.

During the summer before the school opened, a teacher/students committee chose “Comets” as the school symbol and “blue and gray” as the school colors. Mr. Jimmie Powell selected “Cometa” as the name of the school annual because it is the Latin word for “stars,” and Alan Herndon wrote the words for the Alma Mater. Instead of taking a senior class trip, the first seniors used the money to purchase letters for the school name. The name is still in place today.

Jane Alexander, a business education teacher from 1957 to 1976, reported that the school was much smaller and the people much closer in the early days. Mr. Knight, the first principal, who served from 1957 to 1964, would invite the entire faculty to his home for an end-of-school picnic. He also invited the senior class to his home for a “possum” hunt every year until the classes became too large.

Ralph Head, who served as principal from 1964 to

FAST FACTS

Address: 2288 E. Main Street
Snellville, GA 30078

The following have served as principals of South Gwinnett High School:

1957–64	Victor H. Knight
1964–73	Ralph Head
1973–79	Kenneth Smallwood
1979–82	Charles Mason
1982–86	Byron Collier
1986–89	John Campbell
1989–93	Coley Krug
1993–95	Delores Hendrix
1995–2002	Bobby Crowson
2002–Oct. 2008	Berry Simmons
Oct. 2008–Sept. 2012	Clay Hunter
Oct. 2012–Present	Eric Thigpen

School Colors: Blue and Gray

School Mascot: Comets

1973, witnessed the beginning of the expansion as a third hall was added to the school in 1965. He oversaw the renovation of the cafeteria in 1966 and the addition of a fourth hall (G) in 1971. The construction of the fourth



hall gave South six additional classrooms and several administrative offices.

In 1973, Kenneth Smallwood became principal. He opened South's largest addition, "H" hall, which contained twelve new classrooms and a library. Mr. Smallwood remained at South until 1979 when he left to become Superintendent.

Charles Mason was principal from 1979 to 1982. "Excellence" was his motto, and under his leadership South began to "reach for the stars" in academics, extracurricular activities, and in all other endeavors. Mr. Mason taught a class every day so as not to lose touch with the students and classroom teachers. His students loved him, and he modeled his expectations and requirements for all.

Byron Collier was principal from 1982 to 1986. He continued the drive for excellence, but at the same time (with his sense of humor and people skills) helped develop a feeling of family unity which the school retains to this day. Of the many fond memories Mr. Collier has of South, the most unusual is that of the student who rode a horse to school each day and tethered him on the baseball field until time to go home.

John Campbell served as principal from 1986 to 1989. Under Mr. Campbell, South's SAT scores rose 21 points, the football team made it to the state playoffs, a strong AP Foreign Language program was developed, and nine students received appointments to the service academies. He also arranged for students to use the First Baptist Church parking lot so they would not be endangered by having to cross Highway 78 to park.

Coley Krug succeeded John Campbell in 1989 and made it his priority to let the community know what an excellent school South was. "A" hall and the walkway were all added to South. Due to the efforts of Mr. Campbell, everyone became aware that South, though older than most of the high schools in the county, was inferior to none. *Primus Inter Pares* (first among our equals) became our motto. So we were, and so we remain.

In 1993, Delores Hendrix became principal. In 1995 the Mock Trail Team at South placed first in the United States, and the girl's basketball team won the state championship. A new addition to "A" hall was added as well as the new gym. Creative, dynamic, and involved, there was never a "moment of silence" on her watch.

Bobby Crowson was principal from 1995 until 2002. With excellence in all areas as his standard, Mr. Crowson set the pace for pride and commitment at South. The new South Gwinnett Community Stadium

was dedicated at the first home football game in 1999. Grayson High School opened in the year 2000 to relieve the overcrowded conditions at South. Mr. Crowson left to accept a position with the Superintendent of Education in 2002.

Berry Simmons became principal in 2002, continuing the tradition of excellence set by Mr. Crowson. In 2002 a massive building program began. This program enabled South to add over 50 classrooms, including all new science rooms, a new theater, band room, and an orchestra room. A purchase of adjacent property on Skyland Drive allowed the movement of the baseball field across the street and provided some much need green space for various instructional needs and extra-curricular activities. As the student enrollment continues to increase, an additional building program is forthcoming. Teachers at South continue to set high expectations for their classes, and students are striving to excel. These are strong indicators that we will make excellent strides in student achievement this year as we continue the "tradition of excellence" at South Gwinnett High School.

Info from the 1989 History:

SNELLVILLE CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL
1922-1957

Alma Mater

Hail now to Snellville High

To you we sing.

Loyal and true, we'll be to you

Your praises ever ring.

Hail to your standards true

Allegiance we pledge.

To the Red and Black we say

All Hail! Snellville to you.

Citizens of Snellville dreamed and planned for a consolidated high school long before it became a reality. A few civic, progressive and educational-minded men would not take 'no' for an answer. They worked night and day to get a bond passed to consolidate Snellville, Pharr's Academy, Haynes Creek and Oak Shade Elementary schools. A building was begun in 1922.

When school opened in September of 1922, all of the above mentioned schools continued as elementary schools. Those pupils eligible for high school from these schools furnished their own transportation to Snellville's elementary school. Overflow pupils were taught in the Baptist Church, whose men so graciously consented to its use until the building was ready for occupancy.

The new school was built of local granite, donated by Ellen Snell Johnson. Rock was quarried at Baker's Rock

Quarry near Snellville and was hauled to the building site on U. S. Highway 78 by local men on two horse wagons. The building was completed and occupied in February of 1923. That was a big day in the lives of citizens of south Gwinnett County.

The first commencement of the Snellville Consolidated High School was held in May of 1923. The graduating class consisted of three members, one boy and two girls. Tommie Rawlins, a member of the first graduating class, recalled how, since local schools only went through eighth grade, he came to be a senior when the school opened. Mr. Rawlins said, 'I attended school in Snellville through the eighth grade. My granddaddy lived in Loganville, and I stayed with him and attended the Loganville School during the ninth grade. In the tenth grade, I was able to ride with two teachers, W. C. Britt and Jamie Bryan, to Grayson High School in an old truck. So, when the school opened in the fall of 1922, I was in the eleventh grade and completed the requirements for graduation in May.'

Many conveniences that are now considered necessities were not available in 1922 when Snellville High School was built. Electricity did not come to Snellville until 1938. The lighting for the school was provided by a generator in the basement. On every evening occasion it has been said that the lights would go out at least once.

The building did not provide for indoor restroom facilities. Outdoor restrooms were located on either side of the building, one for boys and one for girls. These facilities were used by the teachers as well. Restrooms were not added to the building until 1957, when many improvements were made.

The heating system was coal-burning pot-bellied stoves in each classroom. Pupils were responsible for keeping the coal scuttles full from the coal pile located on the school grounds. The superintendent, teachers and older boys built the fires on winter mornings. However, Elizabeth Williams, a third-grade teacher in the '40s, remembered, 'It was not unusual to come in my classroom and find a warm fire going, started by one of my eight-year-old boys.'

Since custodial services were unavailable, teachers and pupils cleaned their own classrooms. Classes would take turns sweeping the oiled halls and auditorium. Classes were also assigned the responsibility for keeping the school grounds neat.

In the early days of Snellville High School, students were transported by bus for seven months of the year. During the beginning and ending months of the school

year, students were expected to furnish their own transportation. School buses were either black or green in color. They had window openings but no window panes; instead, roll-up curtains were used. For many years, high school boys served as bus drivers. There were no paved roads until 1936 when Highway 78 was paved from Stone Mountain to Snellville. In rainy weather, the roads became muddy and slippery. Colbert Brannan, a member of the class of 1930, recalled, 'When the weather was bad and the roads were muddy, the superintendent would send junior and senior boys on the bus routes. If the bus started to slide into a ditch, we would get off the bus and push it back in the road. We also pushed the bus up hills when it was too slippery to make it on its own.'

At the beginning of school each day, pupils and teachers lined up and marched to the auditorium for chapel. This special time of togetherness included Bible reading, prayer, hymn singing and announcements. Eventually, individual classes became responsible for the chapel program always including Bible reading or recitation and prayer. Assemblies were held daily for many years, then once weekly or anytime the principal felt the need to have everyone together. Chapel was an integral part of the school throughout its existence.

A large gong-type bell was suspended outside the school auditorium. This bell was hand-rung by pulling the rope attached to it. A bell ringer was assigned to ring the bell at the beginning and ending of the school day and at the end of each class period.

The school opened with eleven grades from 1922 until 1952, when the twelfth grade was added. The eighth grade was considered part of the high school program until 1952. Students were required to pass four units of study a year for a total of 16 units in order to graduate. There were few elective courses offered to students. There were no graduating classes in 1926 and 1952. In 1926, all seniors dropped out to work and two returned the following year to graduate with the 1927 class. The 1952 class had the privilege of being 'seniors' for two years and graduated in 1953, the first class to complete the 12-year program.

During the 35 years as a combined elementary and high school, there were 10 superintendents or principals. L. P. Green was first, serving during the terms of 1922-24. Following him were W. C. Britt, 1924-27; C. E. Landrum, 1927-28; J. B. Brookshire, 1928-29; J. T. Tatum, 1929-30; W. C. Britt, 1930-40; R. C. Simonton, 1940-41; J. T. Garner, 1941-42; S. P. Farrar, 1942-43; Louisa K. Johnson, 1943-45; W. C. Britt, 1946-56, and

Troy Thomason, 1956-57.

The period beginning in 1930 was one in which Snellville made great strides in her development. This was accomplished by cooperative effort put forth by the people in the area. The school played a leading part in this development. An article in the Gwinnett Journal, August 19, 1930, states:

“Federal vocational and home economics work will be taught in this school. When some of the county school authorities called on the State Vocational Board for the work to be taught in Gwinnett County, they granted the request and designated Snellville as being the logical place for the work. This work offers an opportunity to a number of rural children who probably could not get the advantage of it otherwise and stay at home.”

In addition to the vocational training, the high school curriculum included science, mathematics, history and English.

In this same year, a problem concerning water supply to the school arose. An excerpt of an article from the Gwinnett Journal, August 26, 1930, shows how the people working together surmounted the obstacles:

“The people of the Snellville Consolidated School district met at the auditorium Wednesday, August 13, for the purpose of making plans and to discuss means of supplying water for the school for the coming year. At this meeting it was decided to discuss the proposition with each patron of the district and meet again on the following Wednesday. When they came back they had raised by public subscription the greater part of the amount required to install a plant by which the children can have fresh water in the building at all times. The people of this community are to be commended for this progressive movement.”

In an account of a mother-daughter, father-son banquet held at the school in 1931, is found this commendation of the school:

“Snellville School has advanced with rapid strides this year under the leadership of Superintendent Britt. Vocational agriculture has been introduced in a successful manner. One of the state officials mentioned that Snellville School had purchased more equipment this year than any other school in the state. A new water system has been installed, complete equipment for the home economics department, the office, and the primary departments have been added. Snellville is to be congratulated upon the advancement in education, and one must visit the school to learn the secret of their success.” (Gwinnett Journal, April 14, 1931)

In 1931, Snellville and surrounding areas suffered a severe hailstorm. The money crop, cotton, was leveled. Other crops were also ruined. With hopes of a prosperous harvest shattered, the people were faced with the harsh reality of surviving the winter months. Under the leadership of Mr. Britt, they planted fall vegetables, more than they could possibly eat. Then to take care of the surplus and provide sustenance for the coming winter, Mr. Britt was instrumental in starting a canning plant in the basement of the schoolhouse. Sears, Roebuck & Company furnished cans that the people could not pay for, and the Red Cross sent enough money to cover the cost of approximately three to four thousand cans to be used by the citizens of the community for preserving their late and surplus crops. A few years later, in 1936, a granite canning plant was constructed on the school property. This was designed to meet all the canning needs of each family in the community.

In 1936, another article from the Gwinnett Journal stated that the Snellville community had accomplished much through the cooperative efforts of the people in the area. At this time, the addition to the building, a combination auditorium/gymnasium and four classrooms, had just been completed under President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. It was noted here that a great deal of labor and materials had been donated by the people toward this project.

The idea of an annual Alumni Banquet was sparked by the class of 1932 at a class picnic in 1937. The association held its first meeting in 1938. Five annual meetings were held. After the 1942 banquet, the annual affair was discontinued due to World War II.

After the government passed the School Lunchroom Program, the basement under the old auditorium, the former canning plant, was converted into a lunchroom in 1939. Men of the community made the tables and benches, and the lunchroom was operated by the PTA with WPA help. Students paid five cents per day for their lunches or else brought commodities and were given credit at market prices. The PTA ladies who worked in the lunchroom did not receive pay, but were compensated in lunches for their school children. Vera Nash was the first lunchroom manager. She was followed by Essie Mansfield, Edna Cofer and Josie Bankston.

In 1939, a drive was initiated to secure additional books for the school library. Since the school had little income, it was impossible to buy sufficient books outright. Under the leadership of Willie D. O'Kelly and W. C. Britt, and through publicity given the drive by the Atlanta

papers, numerous books were donated. Money was also contributed toward the purchase of books. When the count was made, even though some books were discarded for a variety of reasons, it was found that an untold wealth of books had been bestowed upon the school.

During the years of World War II, everyone joined in to help the war effort. Many graduates of Snellville High School joined the Armed Forces to serve their country. U. S. Savings Stamps were sold weekly in the school. During the harvest season, school was dismissed at 1 p.m. Students and teachers alike worked afternoons to gather the crops.

Trying to cope with the difficulty of finding suitable housing for the teachers, the school built a small residence near the canning plant in the early 1940s. This was first occupied by the agriculture teacher. In 1948, the school had an opportunity to buy some old army barracks. From these structures were built one small residence and one duplex apartment. Although these were primarily available for the faculty, they were sometimes occupied by families outside the school personnel. The rent from these houses provided some income for the school.

In 1953, due to increased enrollment, property adjacent to the school was purchased and the dwelling thereon was converted into classrooms for the second grade. In 1954, it was necessary to further expand. A building was bought when Lawson General Hospital in Atlanta dismantled and this structure was used for the third grade.

The Parent-Teacher Association dating back to 1923 was inactive from 1924 until 1929 when it was reorganized with Annie Sawyer as president. It was affiliated with the national PTA from 1932-39 and again in 1946-57. Throughout the years, the PTA has made numerous contributions to the welfare of the school in every way possible.

The social event of the year for the high school students was the Junior-Senior Prom held annually in the spring. The prom took place in the gymnasium which the Junior Class had spent hours decorating. Teachers were sponsors and chaperones. Prom cards, listing proms by number, were filled in as the evening began. When the school bell rang, boys would locate the girls reserved for prom #1 and they would go outside into the warm spring night and promenade or walk together usually for 10 minutes. When the bell rang again, it was the signal to come inside and claim prom #2, etc. During the evening, the students participated in folk dances. This special night came to a close as students and teachers joined together

for the Grand March.

Early in the life of Snellville High, school colors of red and black were chosen and the bulldog became the school's mascot. Basketball was for a long time the only organized sport at the school. Competition was keen and rivalry was strong among the county's high schools. The highlight of the basketball season was the county tournament, followed by district and state tournaments. Both boys' and girls' teams emerged victorious many times, acquiring trophies for their efforts. School spirit, which was always enthusiastic, became even more so when cheerleaders were added to the basketball program in 1940.

Baseball became a part of the sports program under the leadership of Coach Jim Powell in the early 1950s. Much of the equipment was donated by the local American Legion. The school furnished uniforms and other needed equipment, while players furnished their own gloves and shoes. During the 1956-57 term, a football program was begun by Coach Powell. Football equipment and uniforms were purchased at a cost of \$2,300. Payment was made with money collected from Coca-Cola machines at the school, along with contributions from local civic clubs and sports-minded individuals. A boys' track team was also formed during this time, permitting more students to participate in the sports program.

The Alumni Association was reactivated in 1954, after being inactive for 12 years. The largest member of this group is the class of 1956, being composed of 42 graduates. The association meets annually in the spring at the local Methodist Church for a time of fun, food and fellowship.

In the late '40s, the school welcomed its first custodians, Carl Pratt and Matthew Moon. Teachers and students gladly relinquished their housekeeping and fire-building chores to these two men. Sebastian Lopez later became custodian and served the school system for many years.

Troy Thomason became principal for the 1956-57 school term, the last school year for Snellville High School. A new high school opened in the fall of 1957, combining with students from Grayson High School. Called South Gwinnett High School, it is located at 2288 E. Main Street (Highway 78), one-half mile east of the school it replaced. After 35 years of existence, the Snellville High School building was renovated and, along with a new brick addition, became Snellville Elementary School for students in grades one through eight.