

# History of

## Britt Elementary School

W. C. Britt Elementary School for grades one through five opened in August 1969. Located at 2503 Skyland Drive, Snellville, it was the only elementary school within the city limits of Snellville. The one-story red-brick building sits on 15.26 acres purchased on October 16, 1967, from Wayne H. and James D. Mason for the sum of \$40,000. The original owner of the property was James Sawyer, one of the founders of the city of Snellville.

The school, consisting of 26 classrooms, two main halls, three cross halls, two walk-through courtyards, lunchroom, library, administrative offices and lobby, was built for approximately \$525,000. The engineers were James and Associates. Jacobs and Matthews were the architects, and the contractor was Scott-Robinson Co.

W. C. Britt Elementary School was named for educator William Clifford Britt. The son of Andrew Nelson Britt and Louisa Hazelrigs Britt, W. C. Britt was born on May 10, 1889, near Norcross in Gwinnett County. He moved with his family to the Snellville area as a young child.

W. C. Britt attended Perry Rainey Institute in Auburn, Georgia, and received an AB degree and a BS degree in agriculture from the University of Georgia. He married Bernice Maddox of Lawrenceville. Their four children are Martha Lou Britt Jones, Helen Britt Powell, Laurie Britt and Clark Britt.

Mr. Britt began his teaching career at the age of 18. He taught at Oak Shade, Grayson, Centerville and Reed Creek in Hart County. He was a long-time principal of Snellville High School. He worked with the War Foods Administration during World War II. He was employed by the State Department of Education from 1956-62, at which time he retired. He spent 53 years in education-related work. A well-respected community and civic leader, beloved principal and friend, Mr. Britt died on August 4, 1967.

Due to growth in the area, W. C. Britt Elementary School was built to replace the Snellville Elementary School for grades one through eight. That school became the first middle school in Gwinnett County, serving grades six, seven and eight. Troy Thomason served as the only principal of the Snellville Elementary School during

### FAST FACTS

Address: 2503 Skyland Drive  
Snellville, GA 30078

The following have served as principals of W. C. Britt Elementary School:

1969–1972	Troy Thomason
1972–1975	Don Phillips
1975–1980	Emmett Lawson
1980–1985	Harold Beaver
1985–1990	Gary Fairley
1990–1993	Dan Hicks
1993–2000	Gloria Sheppard
2000–2008	Beverly Todd-Lee
2008–Dec. 2016	Doris Jones
Jan. 2017– Present	Melissa Madsen

School Colors: Blue and Silver

School Mascot: Comets

Ruby Jordan, Historian (1989)

Russ LaPlume, Assistant Principal (2006)

Doris Jones, Principal (2015)

Special Acknowledgments:

Troy Thomason, former principal

Don Phillips, former principal

Emmett Lawson, former principal

Harold Beaver, former principal

Betty Garmon, former paraprofessional

Helen Britt Powell, daughter of W. C. Britt

Gary Fairley, former principal

Dan Hicks, former principal

Gloria Sheppard, former principal

Beverly Todd-Lee, principal

its 12-year existence. Bringing many of his faculty and staff with him, Mr. Thomason became the first principal of W. C. Britt Elementary School.

A native of Douglas County, Mr. Thomason moved to Gwinnett County with his family. Mr. Thomason graduated from Snellville High School, and received a BS and Master of Education degrees from Oglethorpe University. He taught in Centerville and Sugar Hill schools and was principal both at Centerville School

and Suwanee High School. He came to Snellville High School in 1946 as a math teacher and served as principal of the high school during its last term, 1956-57, when W. C. Britt left the school system to work for the State Department of Education. South Gwinnett High School opened in the fall of 1957 and the old granite building became Snellville Elementary School. Mr. Thomason was principal of Snellville Elementary until it was replaced by Britt Elementary in 1969.

Mr. Troy, as he was called by students and faculty, took pride in the appearance of his school both inside and out. He desired that the new building open looking the best it could. When funds were not available to plant shrubbery around the building, Mr. Troy provided the funds himself (the PTA reimbursed him the first year). Ten days before school opened, Mr. Troy was involved in a tractor accident as he helped finish landscaping the grounds. School opened on schedule but without Mr. Troy. He was in the hospital recuperating from surgery on his leg that was broken in the accident. A former educator and friend of Mr. Troy's, Richard Norton, assisted with the opening, along with a fifth-grade teacher, Sybil Mitchell, and school secretary Margaret Nash. Mr. Norton came morning and afternoon to attend to problems and report back to Mr. Troy. As soon as Mr. Troy was released from the hospital, he came to school to take up his duties in a wheelchair.

When W. C. Britt Elementary School opened its doors in August 1969, it had a physical plant to house 650 students and an enrollment of 673. A four-room addition to the building had been authorized, and construction took place during the first year.

As federal and state school funds became available, more programs began in the county schools. Paraprofessionals were hired to help primary teachers, and special education classes were started for children with learning disabilities and speech problems. Thousands of new library books were ordered and the library workroom overflowed with books to be processed (there was no county processing of books at that time). The librarian, Evelyn Brooks, spent many hours readying books for the shelves, in addition to her daily schedule of skills classes and story times.

By this time, Snellville had become the fastest growing city in Gwinnett County. In 1971, enrollment had increased so much that it was necessary to bring in four mobile units to use as classrooms. Mr. Troy recalled that on Monday mornings he could expect to find several new students in his office waiting to be enrolled.

During the 1971-72 school year, a 96' x 60' metal activities building was constructed. This building was primarily constructed for physical education purposes and large assemblies.

Mr. Troy laid the groundwork for two new programs to begin in 1972-73, these being a physical education program and a readiness program. After serving in the educational field for 36 years, Troy Thomason retired to his farm in Snellville to devote more time to raising prize-winning cattle.

Don Phillips became principal in 1972. Born in Gwinnett County near Lawrenceville, he graduated from Lawrenceville High School. He received a BA degree in psychology from Emory University, a Master of Education degree in social sciences from the University of Georgia



and did graduate work in school administration and school social work. He taught in Gwinnett County high schools for 12 years at Grayson, Lawrenceville, Central Gwinnett and South Gwinnett. He was in school administration at Lawrenceville Elementary and Central Gwinnett before coming to Britt Elementary as principal in 1972.

Mr. Phillips remembers his first day as principal at Britt Elementary. He felt highly complimented when a small boy looked up at him and asked sincerely, "Are you the new Mr. Troy?"

During Mr. Phillips' tenure, Snellville experienced still more growth. This school was filled to capacity, utilizing every inch of available space, including storage rooms, closets and a cross hall. The playground and parking lot now held several mobile unit classrooms. A new elementary school for the Centerville area, to be opened in the fall of 1973, was under construction. This new school would relieve the crowded situation at Britt, whose enrollment had climbed to 1,127.

The construction of the new Centerville school was delayed and the opening date was postponed. Thus began double sessions at Britt Elementary. The Britt faculty and staff saw the sun rise each day, while the Centerville personnel saw the sun set, making their way home after dark. The lunchroom employees of both schools worked together and prepared food for everyone. Britt students ate their lunches just before leaving for home. Centerville students ate their lunches as soon as they arrived and then went on to class. Construction was completed and Centerville opened in February of 1974. It was a great day.

While Mr. Phillips was principal, a more complete elementary program was implemented by the county, including a physical education teacher, lead reading teacher, readiness program, limited kindergarten program, increased special education and a library clerk. Britt was one of the schools in the county to pilot a movement education program in physical education. Britt also opened its library for two years during the summer months on a limited basis to promote summer reading. Mr. Phillips left Britt in 1975 to assume the role of coordinator of school social services.

Emmett Lawson came to Britt in 1975 as principal. Born in Moultrie, Georgia, he graduated from Moultrie High School. He received a BA in journalism from the University of Georgia, a Master of Education degree in school administration from Valdosta State College and a Specialist in Education degree from Georgia State

University. He taught in the Colquitt County School System and was an assistant principal for Valdosta City Schools. He was an administrative specialist, School of Urban Life, at Georgia State University, and coordinator of special projects with Newton County Schools.

Snellville was still experiencing phenomenal growth when Mr. Lawson became principal. During his administration, Gwin Oaks Elementary and Ralph D. Head Elementary opened, relieving somewhat the again crowded conditions at Britt Elementary. For two years, increased enrollment qualified the school for an assistant principal.

Mr. Lawson led Britt Elementary through the SACS self-study. It was an enlightening and rewarding experience culminating in a presentation to the SACS Committee. Statewide kindergarten was begun for all children. Counselors were allocated for the first time to elementary schools.

Under Mr. Lawson's leadership, the still-active Parent Volunteer Program was organized and implemented by the PTA. The PTA provided funds for a full-time clinic worker for Britt Elementary students—one of the first in the county. Many conveniences were added, including a copy machine, laminator, permanent viewing screen, sound system and portable stage.

To promote school spirit, the student body was asked to choose school colors and a school mascot. Blue and white were the favorite colors of students, and the Bobcat was chosen as mascot. The first "Britt Bobcat Day," a day of field events involving all students, was so successful that it has become an annual event.

Mr. Lawson left Britt Elementary in 1980 to become principal of Brookwood High School. He served at South Gwinnett High School as an assistant principal before assuming his duties at Brookwood High, which opened in 1981.

Britt Elementary's fourth principal was Harold "Hal" Beaver. A native of Charlotte, North Carolina, he graduated from Independence Senior High School. He earned a BS degree from Western Carolina University and an Administration Supervision degree from the University of Georgia.

Mr. Beaver established a management system which allowed teachers to give input to programs needed at Britt. He improved community involvement with parents. Office and workroom equipment were updated. A walkway from the front entrance to the bus loading area was installed and a large multipurpose area was paved adjacent to the activities building. Britt published its first

yearbook, The Bobcat, in 1983, and each year following during Mr. Beaver's administration.

The Local School Advisory Committee was formed during this administration and was welcomed by Britt parents. Britt was one of the first schools in the county to offer a choice of lunch entrée and a salad bar. This pilot program was designed to increase school lunch participation and decrease waste. It is now implemented throughout the school system.

The computer age was upon us. The county did not fund computers for elementary schools. Britt obtained its first computer, a Texas Instruments machine, through the Campbell's Soup "Labels for Education" program. Students collected over 30,000 labels to redeem for the computer. This was the beginning of a dream at Britt—a computer in every classroom.

New residence construction in Britt's district had slowed somewhat, and enrollment began to drop slowly. In June 1983, there was an enrollment of 850 students. Classes were no longer held in the cross-hall, and only seven portable classrooms were in use. This was short-lived, however, and by 1985, yet another elementary school was built in the Snellville area to relieve overcrowding. Brookwood Elementary, only three miles away, opened in 1985, and Mr. Beaver left Britt to become principal there.

Britt's fifth principal was Gary Fairley. Mr. Fairley was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and graduated from Therrell High School. He received his BA, MA and Ed.S degrees from Georgia State University. Mr. Fairley came to Gwinnett County in 1970 as a classroom teacher at B.B. Harris Elementary.

When Mr. Fairley came to Britt as principal in 1985, construction was underway for 16 classrooms, restroom facilities and a media center. This welcome 25,000 square-foot addition was opened when school started in 1986. The new classrooms were filled immediately with kindergarten and first-grade students. The media center operated from book carts until late November, when shelving was finally installed. The playground and parking lot were conspicuously absent of portable classrooms.

In the Fall of 1990, Gary Fairley left Britt to become the principal of Pharr Elementary School located in Snellville. Pharr Elementary was named after a former Britt teacher, Mrs. Lorena Pharr. Ms. Lorena, as she was affectionately known, taught third grade for many years at Britt before her retirement in 1974. The Gwinnett County Board of Education named this new school in honor of Mrs. Pharr, for her dedication to the students of Snellville.

Mrs. Pharr volunteered at Britt, as well as the new Pharr Elementary School, for many years until her health began to fail. Mrs. Pharr had an annual tradition of delivering daffodils to the staff every spring. Her yard was filled with these beautiful flowers and she would share them with every staff member at both Britt and Pharr Elementary Schools.

Dan Hicks was called upon to be the next principal of Britt. Mr. Hicks received his BS degree from Ball State University, a Master of Education degree from Emory University and a Specialist in Education degree from The University of Georgia.

Before assuming the principalship at Britt, he was a classroom teacher and assistant principal within the county. Mr. Hicks taught at both Beaver Ridge Elementary School and Summerour Middle School. Mr. Hicks was also the assistant principal at Five Forks Middle School, Duluth Middle School and Norton Elementary School.

During his time at Britt, Mr. Hicks began a school within a school concept. Mr. Hicks was trying to make Britt seem smaller by instituting this concept as the student enrollment kept climbing to about 1,250 students. He believed in having this school within a school concept, all students would benefit from making a large elementary school feel more personal.

Mr. Hicks was called to open a new elementary school in the Brookwood cluster. Craig Elementary was to open in August of 1993 and with Mr. Hicks' departure, Mrs. Gloria Sheppard became the principal of Britt.

Mrs. Gloria Sheppard graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a BS degree in elementary education, a Masters of Education degree and a Specialist of Education degree in school leadership from Georgia State University. Mrs. Sheppard taught school and was a school principal with the Decatur City School system for eighteen years before moving to the Gwinnett County Public Schools. In Gwinnett, she taught at Lilburn Elementary School and was the assistant principal at Gwin Oakes Elementary before arriving at Britt.

During her tenure at Britt, the school received the Gwinnett County School of Excellence award along with the Georgia School of Excellence award. These awards reflected the great teaching and learning taking place each day at Britt Elementary School. This was a great honor placed upon Britt in the 1999 school year.

Mrs. Sheppard began a morning TV news broadcast to the student body. Each morning students would produce and anchor the daily news. The outdoor habitat

was also established during the time Mrs. Sheppard was at Britt.

Mrs. Sheppard retired from Britt in the summer of 2000.

Mrs. Beverly Todd-Lee was appointed the next principal of Britt. Ms. Todd-Lee, a native of Alabama, graduated from Jacksonville State University with a BS degree in education, Masters degree from the University of Alabama and a Specialists of Education degree from Georgia State University in the field of educational leadership.

Ms. Todd-Lee taught 10 years in Alabama before moving to Gwinnett County. Ms. Todd-Lee taught at Berkeley Lake Elementary and Camp Creek Elementary. She was the assistant principal at Camp Creek and Shiloh Elementary before coming to Britt.

On Ms. Todd-Lee's first day as a principal, she had an unusual and exciting surprise. A parent was driving the wrong way in the parking lot. Ms. Todd-Lee stopped the parent to tell them to turn around and the driver jumped out and slid the van door open. In the back was his wife and she was in labor. Ms. Todd-Lee called 911 and ran to the corner to solicit help from the traffic officer. When she returned with the officer, the baby was in the process of making his arrival in Britt Elementary's parking lot. Five year later, Britt's "special delivery student" started kindergarten at Britt.

Ms. Todd-Lee wanted to create more of a sense of community with the high school and middle school, so she presented the idea of changing the school mascot from Bobcats to Comets. She took a schoolwide vote that allowed all faculty, staff, and students to vote for their mascot. The students overwhelmingly voted for the Comets, so the school mascot was changed to the Comets. Ms. Todd-Lee also established a Character Education program with the motto: *Respect Yourself and Others*. This program continues to make a difference for Britt's students. Ms. Todd Lee retired from Gwinnett County Public Schools in June of 2008.

Doris Jones began her term as principal of W. C. Britt Elementary School in June 2008. She previously served as Assistant Principal at Dacula Middle School for six years. In addition to teaching first and second grade at Old Suwanee Christian School for one year, Mrs. Jones taught in the following Gwinnett County Schools: Dacula Middle School, Lilburn Middle School, Lawrenceville Middle School, and Creekland Middle School.

After completing her Bachelor of Science Degree in Family and Consumer Science at the University of

Georgia, Mrs. Jones completed a Masters Degree in Middle Grades Education. She also completed a Specialist Degree in Middle Grades Education at Georgia State University and a Specialist Degree add-on in Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia.

In addition to the her Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership, Doris Jones was an inaugural graduate of the 1999 GCPS Leadership Academy and was also a graduate of the inaugural class of the 2007 GCPS Quality-Plus Leadership Academy for Aspiring Principals.

During her first year as principal, the Britt faculty and staff focused on improving student engagement using Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies and using collaborative planning to improve teaching and learning across all grade levels at Britt. Faculty members used collaborative planning to review data and plan rigorous instruction. As a Title I Targeted Assisted School for 2008–09, Britt Elementary made AYP, Adequate Yearly Progress, and was awarded a Title I Distinguished School Award by the state of Georgia. In addition, W. C. Britt was named the 8th Healthiest School in the United States for its health and nutrition program.

In 2009–10, the school continued its focus on engaging instruction with an emphasis on using technology to engage Britt's 21st Century Learners in effective, challenging, and engaging learning. Staff development and classroom support increased the use of technology for learning. In September of 2009, the Britt Elementary Community celebrated 40 Years of Teaching and Learning at W. C. Britt Elementary School. W. C. Britt's family joined in the celebration along with former teachers and parents of W. C. Britt Elementary School. Once again, W. C. Britt received the Title I Distinguished School Award for Title I Schools making AYP. W. C. Britt Elementary was a Schoolwide Title I School for 2009-10. With the opening of Anderson-Livsey Elementary in the Shiloh Cluster, W. C. Britt experienced changes for the 2010–11 school year with almost half of the school's students redistricted to Norton Elementary School and nearly half of the faculty members moved to Anderson-Livsey.

W. C. Britt opened the school year in 2011 with approximately 520 students, a reduction from the 920 students enrolled the previous year. All students were learning in building classrooms, and all but three of the classroom trailers were removed from the Britt campus. The focus continued to be increasing student achievement, increasing the use of technology, and increasing the co-teaching and collaboration using data. Once again, Britt

Elementary made AYP as a result of 2011 CRCT student achievement. The entire W. C. Britt school community also celebrated Gwinnett County Public Schools' receipt of the nationally coveted 2010 Broad Prize for Urban Education which spotlights excellence in education. The honors continued with Britt being named a Title I Distinguished School for the 8th year in 2011.

On November 27, 2012, Britt Elementary was presented with the inaugural Family-Friendly Partnership Award. Britt was one of only three schools from Georgia selected for this honor. Britt hosted the state's highest ranking education official, Dr. John Barge, State Superintendent of Schools, for an awards assembly with Britt students, district leaders, parents, and community members. Dr. Barge presented the school with a welcome mat for the school's front entrance identifying its family-friendly status. Dr. Barge stated, "These schools are models for the entire state on how to engage families and make parents feel welcome from the moment they walk in the door." The Gwinnett County Board of Education recognized Britt Elementary for Best in Customer Service at their November 15, 2012, Board of Education Meeting. Principal Doris Jones accepted the award on behalf of the school.

In October 2013, Britt 1st grade teacher Sarah DaSilva was honored as the 2013 Teacher of Promise by the Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics. This award is presented to a mathematics teacher in Georgia who recently entered the field and who demonstrates qualities of excellence in the teaching of mathematics. She was described as a master of differentiation who sets high expectations for students and therefore her students learn at high rates. Sarah was a model teacher for other teachers as she shared lesson plans, learning tasks, and assessments with her peers.

The International Reading Association awarded Britt Elementary School the 2014 Exemplary Reading Award. Principal Jones, Assistant Principal Melissa Madsen, Literacy Coach Kay Brickley and Media Specialist Shannon Davis accepted the award at the state conference in Macon on March 8, 2014. The school was honored at the International Reading Association Conference on May 9, 2014, in New Orleans. The remarks made during the presentation of the award included comments like, "The culture and school environment oozes with sound literacy activities every minute of the school day!" and "This is one of those wonderful schools where the entire staff works together for the benefit of the kids."

Britt Elementary's academic success continued in

2014–15 as measured by district and state measures (CCRPI). In addition, a Britt parent, Mrs. Crystal Eplin, was honored by the state as one of six parents receiving the 2015 Georgia Parent Leadership Award. She was officially presented the award at the Georgia Capitol on March 3, 2015.

In more recent years, Britt's focus on student achievement has led to several initiatives. The school's full time math, literacy, and science coach supports learning by providing instruction for Britt students as well as by providing ongoing staff development. Additionally, technology tools have helped to transform learning. Digital initiatives included BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) and Genius Hour.

As a Title I school, Britt has sponsored extended-day math instructional activities. In addition, the school sponsors events to help parents as they support their children with technology, literacy, math, and science.

Britt students also are encouraged to extend their learning by participating in various groups and clubs. Students pursued extracurricular interests through morning clubs which included Chess, Art, Science, Claymation, Origami, Reading Fluency, Math, Readers Rally, Chorus, Knitting Club, and Wizzle Pro Math.

As Britt Elementary School approaches its 50-year mark of existence, it continues to offer the very best education to its students. We at Britt are proud of our heritage and look forward to what the future holds for our school and students, where "Everybody is Somebody in Snellville."