

BILOXI SCHOOLS

1940-1949

The Biloxi Schools In The 1940s

Biloxi – Population, 1940 Census – 17,475

Mayor, 1940 – Louis Braun

City Council – John D. Swanzy, E.D. Tucei

Superintendent, Biloxi Public Schools – G.W. Ditto, 1934-1946
A.E. Scruggs, 1946-1957

Biloxi School Board –

1940 - C.S. Wentzell, Frank P. Corso, Fred Ferson, Mrs. Fred Quint,
C.L. Campbell

1941 – C.S. Wentzell, Frank P. Corso, C.L. Campbell, Fred Ferson,
Mrs. W.D. Collins

1942 – C.S. Wentzell, Fred Ferson, C.L. Campbell, Mrs. W.D. Collins,
M. Jumonville

1943 – C.S. Wentzell, Fred Ferson, Mrs. W.D. Collins, C.L. Campbell, W.S. Reed

1944 – C.L. Campbell, H.M. Toche, August Parker, Stanley Butte, E.H. Tardy

1945 – Stanley Butte, Dr. D.L. Hollis, August Parker, E.H. Tardy, H.M. Toche

1946 – Stanley Butte, E.H. Tardy, Glenn Swetman, Dr. D.L. Hollis, H.M. Toche

1947 – Dr. D.L. Hollis, Glenn Swetman, Lewis Hood, Jr., H.M. Toche,
Frotscher Steckler

1948 – Lewis Hood, Jr., H.M. Toche, Glenn Swetman, Dr. D.L. Hollis,
Frotscher Steckler

1949 – Lewis Hood, Jr., Glenn Swetman, Dr. D.L. Hollis, Judge Leslie Grant,
Frotscher Steckler

Student Enrollment in 1940-1941, reported in first week – 2,748

Total Budget, Biloxi Public Schools, for 1940-1941 – \$102,385.50

IV. THE BILOXI SCHOOLS – 1940 – 1949

Inarguably the great defining event for Americans of the 1940s was World War II, which began for the United States on December 7, 1941. Although it ended on August 14, 1945, with the surrender of Japan, effects of the war dominated the country through the remainder of the decade.

The Biloxi schools made the wartime commitments that were required of all schools during those years. Old files of school papers, yellowed clippings, yearbooks—all reveal the intense concern felt by Biloxi Public Schools faculty members and students as the events of World War II unfolded.

Headlines frequently told the story: "Biloxi Students Join In War Bond Drive"; "Students Enter Services"; "Servicemen Write To Biloxians"; "Overseas Reports From Last Year's Seniors"; "Old Glory Theme of Yearbook."

Enrollment figures for the Biloxi schools in 1940 showed that Dukate had 379 students; Gorenflo, 351; Howard I, 281; Howard II, 395; Lopez, 371; and Central High School, 589 in grades 9-12. A further breakdown of the numbers revealed that there were 2,366 white students enrolled; 382 in the colored schools.

In an obvious move to prepare for future construction, the School Board on July 6, 1940, authorized purchase of five parcels of land east of Biloxi High School, one lot being that of the Presbyterian Church, with the stipulation that the price of \$2500 was for the church lot only. The other lots were owned by the Taltavull family, Joe Swetman, L.A. Witter, and what was identified only as a house operated by H.O.L.C.

On August 15, 1940, Superintendent Ditto was authorized by the Board to buy on consignment and sell high school textbooks, with the profit to be reported to the School Board at the end of the year.

Make-up of the School Board at this time included Mr. C.S. Wentzell, Mr. Frank P. Corso, Mr. Fred Ferson, Mrs. Fred Quint, and Mr. C.L. Campbell. Prominent during the mid-1940s were other Biloxians named to the Board, including Mr. Glenn Swetman, Dr. D.L. Hollis, Mr. H.M. Toche, Mr. Stanley Butte, Mr. E.H. Tardy, Judge Leslie Grant, and Mr. Frotscher Steckler. They were Board members during an extraordinary time of war and the aftermath of war and the development of an extremely large military presence, an expanding student population, and growing demands on school facilities.

One of the most interesting items in the school budget of 1940 concerns comparative salaries for the head coach, the high school principal, the band director, and other faculty members. Ordinarily—and certainly under today's accreditation requirements—one would think that the high school principal's salary would be higher than that of any other staff member in the school. But the head coach, Mr. A.D. Brown, actually made \$100 more than Mr. Scruggs, who was principal. And the salary of Mr. M.M. Flowers, band director, was only \$145 less than that of the principal, whose salary was \$1900.00—and more than the salary of any other faculty member, including all other principals (Board Minutes, July 18, 1940, 4). The situation seems to have been the usual pattern during that period, and, in fact, the band director's salary would later be a matter for lengthy controversy in the schools.

On December 16, 1940, the Board adopted a resolution regarding emergency repairs to Lopez School, declaring that an investigation had shown that the roof was in very bad condition, leaking practically in every room, causing much inconvenience to the children and great damage to city property. As with other emergency actions, the Board specified that "the public peace, health, welfare and necessity" demanded that the work be done as soon as possible. On December 19, the Board awarded a contract for replacing the Lopez roof to Biloxi Roofing and Sheet Metal Works for \$2165.45.

At this meeting the Board also considered a master plan to build a stadium, auditorium, a junior high school, and an elementary school to replace Howard I.

After a lengthy series of moves over several years by city and state officials, often with disappointing results that resulted in further actions not always supported fully by local people, an event took place that was to change Biloxi forever. It would have an enormous impact on the schools. Biloxi had offered some of the "best" land in the city as a potential site for Army Air Corps use. It included the well-loved Naval Reserve Park and the golf club, together with other property. And, as historian Val Husley writes in *Biloxi: 300 Years*, "On June 12, 1941, the Air Corps Station No. 8, Aviation Mechanics School in Biloxi was declared activated. Within two weeks workers under federal contract began construction on its first barracks. By early August almost five hundred workers were on site erecting the schools' 661 buildings. Estimated base construction totaled almost ten million dollars" (*Biloxi: 300 Years* 137).

That was the beginning of what would one day be Keesler Air Force Base, bringing into the city not only a huge number of military personnel but also their families—thousands of children over the years to be educated in the Biloxi schools, requiring the construction of new buildings, the employment of additional personnel. Though of course there were problems for the school district connected directly with the opening of a military base inside the city limits, the benefits would far outweigh the problems. Financial considerations had to come into play as a result of this historic event, and eventually the federal government would contribute money to the schools in lieu of lost taxes.

On February 4, 1941, Superintendent Ditto reported on the National Defense classes. The State Vocational Board approved classes for auto mechanics. Applications had been made for classes in sheet metal works, pipe fitting, electricity, and machinists. All programs except the class for machinists had been submitted to Washington for approval.

Superintendent Ditto reported on September 4, 1941, that the schools had experienced a very pleasant opening, with excellent morale among teachers and students. "Even though the schools have been crowded, everything has gone along very smoothly the past two days," he said. As enrollment in the schools increased, with the total having risen to almost 3,000, part-time vocational classes were organized with on-the-job training for students. And the district executed a contract with Fernwood Rural School District for students transferred to the Biloxi schools from Fernwood.

It was also reported that the new Biloxi High School stadium would be ready for the opening game, to be played between Biloxi High School and Moss Point High School on Friday, September 19, 1941.

Indicative of the continuing financial strain the schools faced, the School Board on November 27, 1941, was forced to borrow \$9,000 from the Peoples Bank to pay salaries. It was certainly not the first time the Board borrowed money to meet expenses—and it would not be the last.

At the same meeting, a letter from Esther Donaldson of the Biloxi Teachers Association, dated November 26, 1941, was read. It showed the increasing involvement of teachers in the life of school governance: "The members of the Biloxi Teachers Association wish to express their sincere appreciation to you for the progressive attitude that you have taken toward the city schools, and the desire on your part to help raise the educational standards for the youth of Biloxi. We deeply appreciate the Board's ruling for open meetings. We want to assure you that our presence at the meetings is prompted by our desire to help the children of Biloxi. We know that you understand our motive in attending, but we want to offer our services again in every way that the Board may see that we can be useful to them in the advancement of our schools. As this year is drawing to a close and we are looking forward to the new one, we shall strive to work even harder with you for the progress of our schools and our school children" (Board Minutes, November 27, 1941, 93).

On June 19, 1941, the School Board was informed by City Clerk F.A. Tucei that a total of \$1073.12 in unpaid bills left the schools in a very poor fiscal position, with a balance of only \$39.01 in the School Fund, and that there would not be sufficient funds to pay salaries for June.

Also on June 19, a committee from the PTA Council appeared before the School Board to request that the three-year tenure for teachers be continued. The policy, according to the committee, had been established some years earlier upon recommendation of the PTA. In its regular July meeting, the Board submitted to the city attorney a copy of the three-year contract for teachers.

Salaries at the beginning of the 1940s were still pathetically low. Virtually no increase in salaries had taken place in the preceding decade. Board records show that high school teachers were hired at beginning salaries of \$1000 per year at the beginning of the 1940s, and the beginning elementary teacher pay scale was even lower.

The fact that the schools were operating in a deficit position did not deter the PTA Council and members of the Biloxi faculty from requesting a twenty percent increase in salary for the coming year. The letter, submitted by the group on July 8, 1941, gives a great deal of information about life during this time:

This increase in salary is necessary due to increased living expenses, including foodstuffs, house and room rent, taxes and repairs, clothing, gasoline and automobile accessories, and other items for which teachers must provide. Government experts have stated that, prior to June 1st, living expenses had increased 10% generally and

25% in defense areas, with a greater increase anticipated. We have all experienced here in Biloxi in the last few weeks an increase as high as 50% and more in the cost of many items. It would be impossible for Biloxi teachers to live at the level expected of them by the public on their present salaries, which are a maximum of \$75 per month over a period of twelve months, for elementary teachers, and \$83 per month for high school teachers. [Note: The salary schedule listed in Board minutes shows a slightly higher average salary than the letter indicates.]

We feel that this increase in salary is further justified by the increase in school enrollment, which has steadily grown, and will be much larger this coming school year. Every school employee expects to work hard, and is happy to do his part in National defense work. However, the overloaded condition of our schools and classrooms calls for an undue amount of physical and mental strain and nervous energy, thus cutting the productive years of the teachers' lives.

With an increase in salary, teachers will be better able to improve themselves professionally. Teachers wish to attend summer schools, take educational tours, and attend meetings and conventions by which they, the school system, and children of Biloxi will be benefited. They are required by contract to subscribe to professional magazines, and to read professional books.

When this increase in salary is granted and the teachers' minds are relieved to this extent of financial worry, Biloxi's children will be benefited. They will benefit from the security of teachers, because teachers can do a better job of teaching if they are assured a salary large enough to take care of their expenses. Certainly all of us—teachers, parents, and members of the School Board—are primarily interested in the welfare of our children.

The teachers and PTA Council believe that the citizens of Biloxi appreciate the excellent service rendered by school employees, and that they are in sympathy with this request. (Board Minutes, July 17, 1941, 45, 46)

The letter was signed by Vera Baker, Eleanor Wheeler, Mrs. W.J. Elder, Mrs. Presley E. Werlein, Mrs. Grace G. Shove, Veronica Lacaze, and Ida Cornelia Rush, identified as chairman.

In an addendum to the letter, the group noted the increased costs of food from 1940 to 1941, with a pound of tomatoes having increased in cost from one cent per pound to four cents; a dozen eggs from 17 to 23 cents to 32 to 40 cents. Increases in costs of other foods averaged twenty-five to fifty percent during that period.

The committee noted that teachers had been paid in scrip during the depression, "with no complaint." They also noted that one teacher had been forced to give up the house she had rented for eight years; another had been forced out of her apartment; one teacher's rent had increased sixty percent; and hotel rooms had increased from \$18-\$20 to \$36-\$40.

Superintendent Ditto on July 17, 1941, reported that work on the Junior High School was progressing very slowly.

The estimated budget for 1941-1942 was \$103,235.15.

International and national events were having immediate and direct effects on Biloxi and on the school system. On September 8, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had declared a state of emergency for the nation, and defense activities began to occupy much of the national attention and effort. Pursuant to the Lanham Act of the 76th Congress, authorized to develop housing to accommodate persons engaged in national defense activities, land was to be acquired and owned by the federal government and exempt from taxes. A government administrator was authorized to enter into agreement to pay appropriate sums to local entities in lieu of taxes.

On December 16, 1941, the Board acted regarding new federal housing to be built in Biloxi, noting that the Federal Works Agency was authorized and proposed to develop and administer a housing project within the territorial limits of the Biloxi Municipal Separate School District, consisting of approximately 175 dwelling units. Further, it was noted that the project was necessary to the public health, safety, and welfare of the School District in that the living accommodations were to be provided for persons engaged in national defense activities.

The Board went on record as determining "that for the purpose of aiding said Administrator in his efforts to develop a housing project in the School District, the school district shall cooperate with the Administrator by furnishing educational services and facilities for the Project in consideration of the payment of certain sums by the Administrator to the City and School District in lieu of taxes, all as provided in the agreement between the Board and the FWA. The agreement specified that the government shall pay to the City annually a sum equal to 14.5 percent of the total annual dwelling shelter rentals charged for occupied units in the Development—not to exceed the amount of taxes that would be paid upon such property if it were not exempt from taxation. All city services were to be provided, and the agreement was to continue so long as the emergency declared by the President on September 8, 1939, was in effect.

In a meeting of Mayor Louis Braun and Commissioner F.A. Tucei and John Swanzy and members of the School Board on March 10, 1942, at 10 p.m. Central War Time, bids were opened for the new junior high school to be constructed directly east of Biloxi High School. It was to be for students in grades seven through nine.

The bid of Tri-State Construction Company of Biloxi and Atlanta in the amount of \$96,600 was the lowest bid on the general building contract; Cotter Plumbing and Heating Co. of Memphis, the lowest and best bid of \$25,300 on the plumbing and heating contract; and Schwan's of Biloxi, the lowest and best bid at \$10,461.35 on the electrical contract. With lowest bids totaling \$132,361.38 and with only \$93,000 available for the work described in the contracts (the money available being made up of \$18,000 from the City of



Biloxi and \$75,000 from a Federal Works Agency grant), there was a deficiency of \$39,361.38. The Board immediately decided that no better bids would be forthcoming by further advertisement and that it would request the Federal Works Agency to make a further grant of \$39,361.38 so that bids might be accepted and contracts let and the work done. The bids, therefore, were accepted, subject to approval of FWA and of the additional grant. (*Pictured is Central Junior High, later Dukate Elementary.*)

Teachers' contracts adopted by Board on September 30, 1942, specified that "the teacher shall, during the school year, give her full working time to the school and do no other work." If the school should be closed by an unavoidable cause, said "Teacher agrees to deduct the lost time from her salary, or make up said lost time later." In addition, the contract stipulated:

The Teacher agrees to make a diligent study of such parts of the course of study as pertain to his work; to read not less than two professional books during the current year; take and use at least two professional magazines during the current year; to attend all meetings called by the Supervisors or Principals or by the Superintendent; to join annually the Mississippi Education Association; to join annually the National Education Association; to join annually the Red Cross, and to join annually the P.T.A.; to remain in the employ of the Trustees for the entire term as above set forth, except that, for reasons accepted by the Board, the Teacher may resign, if notice thereof has been filed in writing thirty days previous to the date such resignation is to take effect; to be absolutely loyal to the school system of Biloxi, to those in authority in the system, and to cooperate with the school in making school work in Biloxi a success. (Board Minutes, September 30, 1942)

All this on a salary of \$100 a month or less, though some teachers did make \$111.00 per month, with the increases in salary that the Board had authorized. Teachers in the colored school made no more than \$55.00 per month. All except one janitor made \$65 per month—while a "janitress" (as specified by the Board) made \$33.00.

Much of the business of the administration and the Board in 1942 was centered in plans for and problems connected with construction of the new junior high school on Howard Avenue east of Biloxi High School. On January 4, 1943, in a recess meeting, the Board was informed by architect John Collins that the junior high school should be ready for final inspection or or about February 15-20, 1943 (Board Minutes 201-202). Mr. Collins earlier had explained the wartime conditions that had resulted in construction delays as materials became scarce or unavailable. He noted that he was reporting for Navy duty on December 21, 1942, and that his brother, W.J. Collins would inspect the building and perform any duties required that would otherwise have been handled by John Collins himself. By the end of February, however, it was obvious that the school was not going to be finished so soon. Changes were made in the plumbing contract because materials were not available and other wartime emergencies were continuing to cause delays (Board Minutes, February 25, 1943, 213).

In April other changes were made in the contract to furnish the junior high school cafeteria. This time it was because steel stools were not available (Board Minutes, April 21, 1943, 218). In what seemed to be a never-ending series of problems caused by the war, in the same meeting it was announced that the general building contractor faced frustrating delays in completing construction due to difficulty in getting materials. Tri-State asked for an extension on the building contract, noting that the start of construction was delayed from April 13 to April 20, 1942, due to changes in wage scale. The War Production Board ruling freezing all lumber also delayed construction work during June and July of 1942. The first release of lumber was obtained on August 19 and it was not until September 21, 1942, that a priority rating high enough to permit purchase of all lumber required was obtained (Board Minutes, April 21, 1943, 222).

While Professor M.F. Nichols continued to head the Biloxi Colored School, as he neared the end of his tenure, he was not without critics in the community. On July 28, 1943, in a regular meeting of the Board, a delegation of patrons of the Colored School headed by L.H. Delphia met with the Board to complain that there was a lack of respect shown by students and that Professor Nichols was lax in controlling them, that promotions were being made regardless of thoroughness, that students were being allowed to roam the streets during school hours, and that facilities were not kept clean. And all of this, the complainants said, while the principal was kept on in the face of such deficiencies (237). At this time the Board was considering plans for a new colored school, in conjunction with other construction under a bond issue that would be put before the voters later.

On September 8, 1943, the new Biloxi Junior High School opened its doors to 568 students in grades 7, 8, and 9 for the first time, with Mr. Cyril Carvin, principal. Other principals were A.E. Scruggs, Biloxi High School; Miss Margaret Speir, Dukate; Miss Alma Ritch, Gorenflo; Miss Ida C. Rush, Howard I; Mrs. Delphine Russ, Howard II; Mrs. W.G. Grayson, acting principal of Lopez for Miss Helena Brander; Miss Beatrice Denmark, coordinator for junior and senior high schools. There were 2,722 students in the Biloxi Public Schools, while an additional 1,211 students were enrolled in the parochial schools (*Daily Herald*, September 9, 1943).

When Mr. Ditto was reelected superintendent on January 14, 1943, the Board's vote revealed a split that was to have long-reaching consequences. With Mr. H.M. Toche, Mr. August Parker, and Mr. C.L. Campbell voting to elect Ditto, two of the Board members, Mrs. W.D. Collins and F.B. Reed, voted against his reelection. Immediately after the election, Mrs. Collins and Mr. Reed submitted their resignations, each member stating that the resignation was caused by "conditions beyond my control that I consider to be detrimental to the school system of Biloxi" (Board Minutes 204).

The City Commission appointed Mr. Stanley Butte and Mr. E.H. Tardy to succeed Collins and Reed.

Although most of the business of the Board during this period, as in all years, consisted of routine and ordinary matters—payment of bills, election of faculty, repairs to schools, purchase of equipment and supplies, ordering coal for heating systems, and the like—it is clear that there was in

place a less than satisfactory relationship between Board and superintendent. Mr. Ditto was criticized for his frequent trips and absences and his failure to communicate with all Board members.

When on January 27, 1944, a motion was made to increase his salary to \$3600, with a three-year contract, the vote was three to two in favor. Mr. Butte and Mr. Tardy voted against the motion. At the same meeting, with no reason given, the record shows that the Board asked the superintendent to request police protection for the schools, particularly Lopez. Police chief Laz Quave, who later became mayor of Biloxi, responded that he had detailed police to Lopez and would try to have other schools protected. In March, Toche and Butte protested the vote hiring Ditto and the eligibility of August Parker as a member of the Board, since he did not reside in the school district, as required by law. The protest, however, was ruled out of order. By this time, it appears that Mr. Toche had changed his mind about his previous support of the superintendent.

The School Board minutes of April 27, 1944, continue to reflect a period of intense discord between some members of the Board and the superintendent. In an apparent attempt to resolve their differences, the Board and the superintendent signed an agreement that Board members would give the school system and the superintendent their wholehearted support *so long as the superintendent adhered to clearly delineated provisions* [italics added].

1. Appoint each principal custodian of his or her particular school, to be in complete charge of and to be completely responsible for same both physically and academically.
2. Each principal to be accorded the privilege of selecting and requesting his or her own preference of teaching and janitorial personnel, such requests to be respected and granted insofar as possible subject to final decision of the Superintendent of Education and the School Board.
3. Scruggs to be made principal of both Junior and Senior High Schools with Carvin assistant principal to him and office of coordinator abolished.
4. All matters coming between Superintendent and teachers to be handled through the principal and all matters between teachers or principals and board members to be channeled through the Superintendent of Education.
5. All teachers and principals now holding three year contracts (active or on leave of absence) and those entitled to them by having completed the necessary period of probationary teaching to get new three year contracts.
6. Superintendent of Education shall call a meeting of all principals at least a month before new session begins to line up teachers to the various principals' satisfaction insofar as possible.
7. In all calls of Superintendent or Board members on various schools, the principal of that school shall be the first person contacted on arrival.

The Board then voted on the question of whether to rescind the previous election of George Ditto for Superintendent of Education for three years beginning July 1, 1944, and hold the office open for further consideration. With Mr. Stanley Butte and Mr. H.M. Toche voting yea and Mr. Tardy and Mr. C.L. Campbell voting nay, the motion failed.

A motion then passed by unanimous vote that the election of George Ditto as Superintendent of Education for three years beginning July 1, 1944, be amended to include the stipulation "So long as he carries out the instructions of the School Board to the letter and carries out his promises to the School Board."

With the School Board split into two camps at this meeting, motions were made (1) that each principal be appointed custodian of his or her school, to be in complete charge of and responsible for same both physically and academically, and each principal to have a voice in the selection of teachers for his or her school; (2) that all senior and junior high school athletic and band activities, senior high school commencement exercises, supervision of the head coach and band director be left solely in the hands of the high school principal; (3) that all future meetings of the School Board be recorded by a competent stenographer, who would record deliberations verbatim and furnish each member with a certified transcript; (4) that the Biloxi City Commission have the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools make a complete survey and investigation of the Biloxi School System and make any recommendations necessary for the good of the system or that the Biloxi School Board make such a request. All the motions failed, with Mr. Butte and Mr. Toche voting in favor, Mr. Tardy and Mr. Campbell opposed (Board Minutes, April 27, 1944, 276).

By June 29, 1944, the Board apparently had been informed in regard to its functions under the law and under Accreditation Commission regulations and unanimously adopted an "Approved Statement of Policy of Biloxi School Board":

1. Function of the School Board

The School Board shall be the legislative, judicial, and policy making authority. It shall exercise the following functions.

1. Interpret the needs of the community and the requirements of the school system.
2. Adopt policies, carefully defined and recorded.
3. Select the chief executive, who shall be the superintendent of schools.
4. Upon recommendation of the superintendent of schools the Board will select principals, supervisors, and teachers.
5. Require the superintendent to prepare the annual financial budget and to pass upon, improve, or modify the budget.
6. Advise with the superintendent of schools regarding the recommendations for extensions or readjustment of the educational activities of the schools and to amend, approve, or reject these recommendations.
7. Require such reports from the superintendent of schools and others, if they deem necessary, to keep themselves informed of the working conditions of the schools.

8. Approve the list of bills and expenditures which have been previously authorized when the same shall be properly approved by the auditing committee.
9. Represent the needs of the school before the public.
10. Act as a court of final appeal for teachers and patrons, in cases where the superintendent has been unable to adjust or which may have been appealed from his decision. All such appeals and petitions must be made in writing, or by personal appearance before the Board.
11. Appraise the efficiency of the schools and their officials in terms of their value to the community.

II. Duties of the Superintendent of Schools

1. The superintendent shall be the chief executive officer of the Board with authority to manage and direct all affairs of the schools, under the policies and regulations established by the Board of Education, and subject to final approval by the Board.
2. With the counsel and cooperation of his faculty, he shall prepare, adopt and amend, if needed, the program of studies, curricula, and course of study.
3. He shall nominate all employees of the Board for election, shall determine and assign their powers and responsibilities, and supervise and direct them in the performance of the same. He shall select and employ all substitute and emergency teachers, pending a regular Board meeting.
4. He shall prepare a financial budget for submission to the Board and for approval, amendment, and final adoption.
5. He shall be responsible for the safety, proper care, upkeep, repair, and use of all school property, so far as means at his disposal will permit.
6. He shall assist the Board in reaching sound judgments, establishing policies, and shall place before the Board, when needed, helpful facts, results of investigations, information, reports, and give personal advice on technical matters when needed.

III. Approved Policies

1. The Board of Education shall adopt rules and regulations for determining its own organization, procedures, and policies.
2. The Board shall hold regular monthly meetings at a designated time and place. Special meetings may be called by the superintendent, by the president, or by the secretary of the Board, or by any other two members of the Board.
3. All meetings and minutes shall be open to the public except when meetings are declared in executive session.
4. The Board functions only when in official sessions. At other times its members have no authority except as specifically authorized by the Board.
5. It is the duty of the superintendent of schools to recommend personnel and to make nominations for appointment, and it is the duty of the Board of Education either to accept or to reject the superintendent's nomination.
6. Individual members of the Board of Education will not consider applications made to them as individuals, but will refer applicants to the superintendent who will make recommendations to the Board.
7. It is the duty of the Board of Education to keep in as close touch as possible with the actual work of the school system, requiring such reports from the superintendent relative to the physical and instructional work of the schools

- as they deem necessary.
8. The Board of Education will hold the superintendent responsible for the discipline of its schools and will not consider individually complaints or recommendations that have not been presented to the superintendent or Board for consideration.
 9. The Board and superintendent of schools shall formulate regulations regarding the use of the school plant and other use of the school property.

It is apparent from the record that one of the underlying factors related to difficulties between the Board and the superintendent stemmed in some way from differences between the superintendent and the high school principal.

At this point, it seems clear that Superintendent Ditto had prevailed, as the Board received a letter of resignation from Principal Scruggs on July 25, 1944, in which he wrote:

I hereby present to you my resignation as Principal of the Biloxi Senior High School. I have served the youth of Biloxi for a period of ten years. During that time I have given my entire time and thought to the building of a good high school. I know that I have served faithfully and well the whole system without stint or favor to any, but with a consuming desire to be fair and just to all. However, if I failed to any degree it was an error of the head and not of the heart. During my tenure in the Biloxi Schools I have kept my attention and thought on the job which was mine, High School Principal. At no time was I disloyal or unethical; at no time did I seek promotion or public favor. I worked winter and summer for the Biloxi children, five summers of which, as I recall it, was without remuneration. I knew that there was a job to do and I was anxious to do it. (Board Minutes, July 27, 1944)

It would not be long until Mr. Ditto was apparently forced out of his position and Mr. Scruggs became superintendent. The situation would eventually result in still other controversies that surrounded Mr. Scruggs as superintendent.

In 1944, members of the Biloxi Colored School faculty were actively trying to get support for better working conditions and more equitable treatment in the matter of salaries. On October 25, 1944, a letter was received by Mr. Ditto and presented to the Board. The delegation noted in its comments to the superintendent that "On October 3rd, 1944, we, the undersigned teachers held a conference with you relative to our salaries and we are expecting you to use your influence in presenting our case to the School Board so that they will react favorably." It was signed by Elmea B. Hatcher, Ruth O. Johnson, Leola Spears, Aurabelle M. Caggins, Ruth O. Jones Gilner, Mary L. Harper, Fannie L. Nichols, and Norwida Nichols (Board Minutes, October 26, 1944, 300).

The delegation also directly confronted the School Board in a letter to the Board, in which they recounted their meeting with Mr. Ditto about salary raises that had been given to teachers according to years of service or seniority.

The teachers in our school appealed to you last session for a living wage, therefore we expected it for every teacher. We feel that our situation is not the same as other

teachers in the system, because we have never received a living wage, hence the manner in which the raise was made does not seem fair to us.

The salaries in our school vary as follows: \$71.88, \$78.54, \$81.88, and \$92.88. These are the salaries paid on a nine months basis. The difference between the lowest and highest salaries is \$20.00 and in many cases the teachers in the lower salary brackets are carrying the heaviest load. We know that the highest paid group earn and deserve what they are paid, but we feel that we too should be paid the same, since that has been the policy in our school for many years.

The cost of living has increased and we cannot live up to the standard expected of teachers on the salaries we receive.

We know that there are other jobs that pay much better, but we feel that it is our duty to be loyal to the profession, especially during these times.

Knowing that the state appropriated funds for teachers' salaries we expected to share in it equally, and when we did not, we felt like resigning.

We hope you will make it possible to give us a raise equal to that of the highest paid group. (Board Minutes, October 26, 1944, 301)

With only three Board members present, Mr. Butte, Mr. Tardy, and Mr. Toche, the Board voted to increase the salaries of colored teachers to a \$60.00 minimum, retroactive to September 1, 1944. It hardly seems likely that such an action would be perceived favorably by the teachers in the Biloxi Colored School, who still received an average of only one-half the salaries paid to white teachers.

The Board had been faced with numerous complaints about the condition of the Colored School, although as late as August 31, 1944, Superintendent Ditto was reporting to the Board that "the school buildings are in a general good condition for the opening of school. The regular maintenance men have worked very faithfully during the summer." (*Pictured – Biloxi Colored School*) That report seems totally at odds with a record in the minutes of October 26, 1944, when a delegation from the Colored School, including Mr. Clarence King, Dr. W.P. Kyle, Mrs. Elmear B. Hatcher, Mr. Curtis Herbert, Mr. John Brown, and Mr. Henry Beck met with the Board to discuss the poor condition of the school, and the Board immediately voted to request Superintendent Ditto to write the principal of the Colored School that due to the condition of the building, the Board requested that basketball, dances, and other activities of the sort be discontinued.



On January 25, 1945, Professor Nichols wrote the Superintendent and the Board, notifying them that because of his health problems he needed to have a substitute during his absence from his

school duties, adding that he would like his daughter Norwida to be given that position temporarily. The Board accepted his recommendation.

The budget for 1945-1946 totaled \$193,980.46, with the superintendent's salary \$4500.00.

Administration of the various Biloxi schools remained fairly constant, with only a few changes in principals during the 1940s. Following the death of her husband in 1945, Mrs. Fannie Nichols became principal of Nichols High School, a position she held until her retirement in 1963. Miss Ida C. Rush succeeded Miss Ethel Arguelles as principal of Howard No. 1 in 1940. Miss Rush in turn was followed by Miss Lily Bowen. Following the death of Miss Helena Brander in 1944, Mrs. W.G. Grayson became principal of Lopez Elementary School. In 1944 Mrs. Mary L. Michel was named principal of Biloxi High School. *(Miss Bowen, shown at right in a 1954-1955 Lopez School picture, was appointed Howard No. 1 principal in 1945. She was a graduate of Biloxi High School and Mississippi Southern College. She began her teaching career at Howard No. 1 and also taught at the high school and junior high school. Later she served as principal of Lopez and was named coordinating principal for the school district.)*



In an attempt to remedy a situation that was no longer acceptable to concerned citizens, the School Board in 1945 asked the city to call an election to issue bonds for building a new Colored School and two new schools for white students, one to replace Howard I and the other in West End. The bond election was held on September 11, 1945.

Prior to the vote, the Board and administration, together with civic clubs and city leaders, made an extraordinary push for support. At a meeting of the Lions Club on September 5, for example, Dr. D.L. Hollis and Mr. E.H. Tardy, of the School Board, Superintendent Ditto, and band director Marion Carpenter spoke in favor of the proposed construction.

Under state law, it was very difficult for cities to pass any kind of bond issue. Mr. Tardy pointed out that at least half of the Biloxi qualified voters must vote and of that number, at least half of those voting must favor the bond issue for it to be passed. He said that a new \$90,000 Howard I school, a \$100,000 Colored School, and a \$50,000 West End School were planned, with the possibility that other funding might be secured from the FWA. He also spoke of improvements that had been made to school buildings recently and of increases in teachers' salaries. Dr. Hollis informed the club about the athletic program, pointing to the improvements being made at the football field, where a new lighting system was being installed. Professor Carpenter talked about the band program. He noted that the band work was now one of maintenance, and that when he came to Biloxi, he had 38 band members. Now, he pointed out, there was a senior band of 80 members, grades 9-12; a junior band of 70 players; a 44-member grammar school band; and a 24-member unit in the Colored School. Mr. Ditto spoke about the overall school program and gave further information regarding the proposed new schools.

In other moves to get out the vote, the PTAs and the students made plans for special programs immediately prior to the Tuesday vote. Special assemblies were held in every school, with prominent Biloxians like state senator Howard McDonnell, M.H. Dees, Frank Corso, Judge Leslie Grant, Mrs. Louis Gorenflo, and the Reverend E.A. DeMiller highlighting the need for building the schools and encouraging people to vote. It was pointed out that voters had approved a bond issue, contingent upon federal funds, for these schools several years prior, but since federal funds were discontinued at the time the bond issue was passed, the bonds were never issued. An editorial in the *Daily Herald* on September 10, 1945, urged voters to back the bond issue, noting that veterans and their children should have the best educational facilities and that federal aid would probably be available to match the funds on a fifty-fifty basis. "Let every qualified voter in Biloxi go out and do his full duty for this needed school improvement," the editorial concluded ("Biloxi School Bond Election Tomorrow," *Herald*).

Unfortunately, the total vote was not sufficient to ensure passage, though only 75 votes were cast in opposition. The Lions Club, together with other organizations, immediately called for another vote as soon as possible.

One result of wartime conditions and of the development of Keesler Field was a change in the School Board's employment practices. The policy that had long forbidden unmarried women teachers to marry and retain their jobs inevitably gave way to necessity, as the demand for teachers grew and the number of teachers meeting those restrictive requirements did not keep pace with the demand. It was during the 1940s that the policy was changed, and the Board was pleased to be able to employ wives of men stationed at Keesler. "In other parts of Mississippi," Superintendent Ditto reported, "the supply [of teachers] has been exceedingly limited. It will be possible to secure our usual number of teachers. We will probably be disturbed by some transfers during the year. This is unavoidable." Some Biloxians remember that during this period it was not unusual for an elementary class to have several different teachers during the year.

On January 25, 1946, the Board voted to make Mardi Gras a legal holiday in the Biloxi schools.

In a February 21 meeting Superintendent Ditto reported to the Board that because of the withdrawal of federal funds, the nursery schools operated under a Federal Nursery Project would be closed as of February 28. In March, the Board received inventories of all the equipment that had been placed at Dukate Kindergarten, St. Michael's Nursery School and Kindergarten, West End and Harrison Court Nursery Schools, and other items automatically becoming the property of the school district following the end of this program. The School Board, on a motion by Mr. Butte, seconded by Mr. Swetman, voted to lend the items that were at St. Michael's to the St. Michael's School and, if needed, to lend additional surplus property if possible.

Mr. Ditto also reported that in a meeting with Mr. T.N. Touchstone, state high school supervisor, they had discussed credits allowed for military service. "Fifteen veterans now attend Biloxi High School," the superintendent said, "and the school receives no additional funding for them."

On April 25, 1946, the long-standing dissension between the superintendent and the School Board came to a head with a motion by Board member Stanley Butte. In a statement at the beginning of his motion, Mr. Butte said:

It has been my opinion for some time and it is still my opinion that Mr. Ditto, Superintendent of Education, has been inefficient, incapable, and/or negligent in handling certain duties entrusted to the office of the Superintendent of Education, principally in the employment and assignment of teachers, and unnecessary delays in getting the budget ready for submission to the Board, and with the above in mind, I would like to offer the following amendments to the "Approved Statement of Policy of the Biloxi School Board" as adopted June 29th, 1944:

Section I – Paragraph 4 – Amended to read

"The School Board will select principals, supervisors, teachers, and other personnel, and assign their duties, using the recommendations of the Superintendent wherever practicable and wherever it does not interfere with the judgment of the Board."

Section I – Paragraph 5 – Amended to read

"Require the Superintendent to prepare the annual financial budget and have it ready for submission to the Board at the JUNE meeting of each year and to pass upon, improve, or modify said budget."

Section II – Paragraph 3 – Amended to read

"He shall nominate principals, supervisors, teachers, and other personnel for election by the Board and present to the Board applications and references of those recommended, and he shall determine and assign their powers and responsibilities, except in cases where this selection and assignment would conflict with selections and assignments the Board would wish to make, in which case, the action of the Board would supersede any action or recommendation of the Superintendent. He shall supervise and direct them in the performance of their duties, and he shall select and employ substitute and emergency teachers pending a regular or called Board meeting."

Section II – Paragraph 4 – Amended to read

"He shall prepare a financial budget for submission to the Board at the JUNE meeting of each year for approval, amendment and final adoption by the Board."

Section III – Add a Paragraph 7

"The Superintendent shall require each principal to submit to the School Board just prior to the close of school, a complete list of the personnel working in that particular school with comments about each one's ability and work, and a request for the return the following year of those the principal wishes reassigned to that school."

Section III – Paragraph 2 – Add

"A quorum shall consist of any three Board members so long as all members have been notified of said meeting."

Section III – Paragraph 5 – Amended to read

"It is the duty of the Superintendent of Schools to recommend the personnel and to make nominations for appointment, and it is the duty of the Board of Education either to accept or reject the Superintendent's nominations and/or nominations made by individual School Board members."

Section III – Paragraph 6 – Amended to read

"Individual members of the Board of Education will not consider applications made to them as individuals, but will refer applicants or applications to the School Board for action."

The motion was passed by a vote of Butte and three other members of the Board: Mr. Glenn Swetman, Mr. Lewis Hood, and Mr. H.M. Toche. Dr. D.L. Hollis did not vote, reserving his vote until the next meeting because he had not been privy to the fact that the motion would be made at this meeting.

In its May 1946 meeting, the condition of the schools was again the subject of extended discussion, with Mr. Swetman recommending that Howard I be closed and Dr. Hollis suggesting that both Howard I and the Biloxi Colored School be condemned as fire hazards.

Federal support had dealt a blow to the Biloxi schools when the Federal Housing Authority cut its contributions to the city. Though the Board had notified the manager of the Housing Projects that residents of tax-free property in Biloxi would have to pay tuition next year for their children to attend Biloxi schools, the Board was informed through Mr. Creel that "we couldn't make this stick, because Louis Braun and his commissioners had signed a contract with the Federal Housing Administration to give them all the facilities of the city which were furnished to other citizens" (Letter from Mr. Butte to Board Secretary, June 11, 1946, Board Minutes).

That the schools were under continuing financial stress was apparent in Mr. Butte's letter to the Board secretary, in which he discussed meetings with city officials to revise the school district's fiscal policy in a way that would take care of overspending for the year—by changing the fiscal year from June to June rather than July to July, thus placing the June payroll and bills into the new budget.

The budget for 1945-1946 was \$192,718.06. The budget for the 1946-47 session would be increased to approximately \$213,000, with \$150,000 coming from the city and the balance from state, federal, and county sources. The salary scale ranged from \$1608 for men teachers with no degree to \$1848 for men teachers with master's degrees and eight years of experience. The school system added \$15 to the base salary for each year of experience up to eight years.

During the decade the increase in Biloxi's white population was 120.6 percent; for the black population, 77.1 percent (Associated Consultants 1).

In late summer of 1946, one particular source of concern occupied a great deal of the School Board's attention, as it dealt with problems connected with the resignation of popular band director Professor Marion Carpenter, position only if he received a accede to what it called—in a "conditions which Mr. Carpenter Board" (Board Minutes, August to employ Mr. John Walters as That the action was to be consequences was apparent as member Glenn Swetman *Daily Herald* announcing Mr.



followed by an offer to return to his higher salary and the Board's refusal to resolution adopted by the Board— had attempted to impose upon the said 22, 1946). The Board had voted earlier the new music director for the schools. controversial and to have unintended early as August 1, 1946, when Board introduced a news article from the Walters's appointment and wrote a

letter to the superintendent recounting what had led to the decision, implying that the news announcement had been intentionally slanted to cause a negative reaction to Mr. Walters before he began his work with the schools. In addition, Mr. Swetman presumed that Mr. Ditto had sanctioned the article and the whole situation was evidence "that our school is lacking in cooperation among the personnel and between the personnel and the School Board" (Board Minutes, August 8, 1946, 436).

The announcement that Professor Carpenter was being replaced resulted in a divisive and contentious community reaction, with delegations of parents appearing before the Board to request that he be retained as music director, noting the remarkable increase in the number of music students since his employment and the reactions of band students, many of whom were dismayed to learn of the new band director and many of them deciding that they would not continue participation in band programs under a new director. One delegation meeting with the Board on August 22, 1946, was headed by Mrs. W.W. Burgess, with Mrs. U.S. Fayard and others requesting that the Board rescind its action in hiring Mr. Carpenter's replacement and reading letters from students in favor of the man most Biloxians affectionately knew as "Prof."

At the same meeting, following the plea by band parents and students, the Board adopted a resolution by Mr. Swetman, with only Dr. Hollis voting against it, tracing the series of events that had precipitated extensive controversy and community involvement.

According to the resolution, the Board had reelected Mr. Carpenter for the 1946-1947 school year at a salary of \$3,000.00 per year. After the Board had been informed that Carpenter had tendered his resignation and that the matter had not been brought before the Board, the Board demanded that Mr. Ditto ascertain what the band director's intentions were. Mr. Ditto on June 28, 1946, had informed the Board that Professor Carpenter had tendered an oral resignation some weeks previously but that he would reconsider his decision to resign if the Board accepted two conditions: that his business connection as a partner in the newly established Band Instrument and Music Supply Business in Biloxi would have to be accepted by the Board since his business interests

would not interfere with his duties in the schools and that his salary be increased to \$3,600.00 per year.

The Board resolution further noted that after consideration of the band director's situation, it could offer no more than \$3,000.00 per year for the position and that principals and teachers were being paid at a much lower figure because of budget limitations. It also referred to the conflict of interest which would result from the band director's business connection. Having considered its actions in the case of Prof Carpenter, the Board resolved that "under no consideration will he be reemployed by the Biloxi City Schools" (Board Minutes, August 22, 1946).

The controversy went on, with Board minutes reflecting pressure from Biloxi residents, including Mr. Burgess, Miss Carrie Blass, Mr. Howard McDonnell, Mrs. Marian Gorenflo, Mrs. Bert Byrd, and Miss Florence Arguelles, at the September meeting. It was Mr. McDonnell's contention that the schools, in accordance with state requirements, "should exercise all diligence to get a man with a degree before employing a non-degree person."

The Board received a letter of resignation from Mr. Walters, and superintendent Ditto noted that he had no further applications for the position of band director. On September 19 the band had participated in the Fireman's Parade under student leadership and also played at the September 20th football game. David Balius, a former band student, had volunteered to work with the band at the football game. The Board authorized Mr. Ditto to appoint David Balius as leader in charge of the Junior and Senior Bands and Miss Frances Everett to be appointed as the teacher in charge of this group.

In October, the Board was still faced with the fact that there was no replacement for Mr. Carpenter. In its October 21 meeting, Mr. George Wimberly from Lafayette, Louisiana, appeared before the Board as an applicant for the position, after a series of miscommunications because of what the Board seemed to consider Mr. Ditto's fault. The Board gave Wimberly permission to work in local dance orchestras during the two summer months when he was not employed by the schools.

Obviously very much concerned about discipline, the Board questioned the new band director about his ability to handle discipline problems. He was advised that he would have the 100 percent cooperation of the Board, and Mr. Hood suggested that in case he had any trouble with any individual student or group of students the names should be turned in to the superintendent—and if he did not receive immediate action, he was authorized to contact the School Board (Board Minutes, October 21, 1946). Apparently the situation was not remedied with the employment of the new band director, as the Board on March 13, 1947, received a recommendation that Mr. Milton C. Barbee be employed as band director for the coming year.

Dr. Hollis gave a report to the Board about student behavior after a football game the previous Friday night, when he was near a McComb bus filled with students chaperoned by several adults. "He said he was greatly humiliated by the action of a group of Biloxi boys and adults who threw firecrackers and torpedoes into the windows of the bus injuring one of the McComb students and

endangering others. After throwing firecrackers, one group lit a ball of grass and threw this into the bus. The Board felt that in the future the visiting teams should be provided a police escort from the athletic field in order to avoid fights and other disturbances after the football game" (Board Minutes, October 21, 1946).

Though the controversy surrounding the band director's position seemed to take most of the Board's time during this period, other important business was also being conducted. And the differences separating the School Board from the superintendent were increasingly apparent. On August 8, for instance, the Board adopted a policy for elementary school cafeterias, in which the first item stated that "In each elementary school, the principal shall be in supreme control of the teachers, janitors, grounds, and cafeteria, and the principal's instructions shall be carried out with the right to appeal to the School Board in case of any controversy." The remainder of the policy actually did deal with cafeteria operation and management, but it was clear that the Board was not finished with its attempts to control the schools in every way.

Among the most important items under continuing discussion was the condition of Howard I Elementary School and the Biloxi Colored School. Since the previous bond issue had not been approved by voters, the Board met with city officials, Mayor Chester Delacruz and Commissioners J.A. Creel and John Swanzy, and others on October 1, 1946, to discuss the possibility of the city's calling an election for a bond issue for construction of a colored school to replace what Board Member Lewis Hood called "a disgrace to the city of Biloxi."

A detailed discussion involved whether the bond issue should also include plans to replace the Howard I Elementary School, but eventually that idea was discarded for later consideration. Members of the Board felt that the bond issue would have a better chance of being passed if it was only for the new colored school.

The Board was advised that the bond issue election had to be legally advertised at least thirty days prior to the date of election and that in order for it to be passed, only a majority of votes cast had to be in favor, without a requirement that a majority of the qualified voters had to participate in the election as previously required. Following a discussion concerned with the rising costs of construction (the previous bond issue had called for an \$85,000 building), the Board voted to "authorize the City Commission to call an election for a bond issue amounting to \$135,000.00 for construction of a Negro School; time of bond election to be set at the discretion of the City Commission" (Board Minutes, October 1, 1946).

At the October 1 meeting, Mrs. Mary L. Michel's resignation as principal of Biloxi High School was accepted. She asked that it be effective immediately, if possible. "The Biloxi High School with all its fine students and teachers will always be nearest to my heart and I hope you will see fit to retain me there in some capacity. I assure you I will do everything within my power to assist the person you place in my position." She noted that another teacher was now needed in the high school

and she knew she could fill that position. She had served as principal of the high school since August 1944, and her resignation was for personal reasons only.

In one of those curiously inappropriate (by today's standards) actions of the Board, on a motion by Mr. Hood, seconded by Mr. Toche, and also approved by Mr. Swetman and Dr. Hollis, the Board voted that in "filling the vacancy for position of High School Principal, a man be secured to fill this vacancy."

Beginning a practice of asking principals to meet with the Board at one time during each year, on October 24, 1946, the Board heard reports from all principals. BHS principal Mrs. Michel, in what must have been a real understatement, said that she was glad that a band director had been secured and thought Mr. Wimberly would do a good job. Other principals were concerned with building needs, but all of them reported cooperative and supportive faculties. Some concern was expressed about diseases, in particular "polio and typhus and Indian fire."

And on October 29, at a special called meeting of the Board, Mr. George Ditto tendered his resignation, effective January 1, 1947. It was the conclusion of what had for several years been a frequently adversarial relationship between Board and superintendent. It was Mr. Ditto's twenty-third year with the Biloxi schools, he noted, and he praised the teachers and the PTAs and graduates of the high school, some of whom, he said, had "made the supreme sacrifice that Democracy might live." He noted that the Biloxi schools had received the highest accreditation rating and were "held throughout the Nation with the highest esteem." It is particularly noteworthy that he expressed his appreciation only to the president of the Board, Dr. Hollis, adding that "You have been progressive, fair, and encouraging."

The Board noted that interest in the superintendency had already been expressed by both a Mississippi and a New York administrator.

That Superintendent Ditto would resign and controversy would no longer be an important factor in Board considerations was a vain hope, however.

On December 4, 1946, the State Director of Instruction, Mr. T.N. Touchstone, wrote the Board:

I am in receipt of some data in the mail this morning from Superintendent George W. Ditto of the Biloxi Schools requesting that it be presented to the Central Reviewing Committee of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools at its annual meeting in Memphis on December 7. This data includes copies of letters sent to the Superintendent of Biloxi Schools on January 5, 1943, and on January 20, 1944, signed by Mr. E.R. Jobe, chairman of the State Committee of the Commission on Secondary Schools of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. These letters warned the Biloxi High School on a seemingly disregard in the community of suitable professional attitudes, with special reference to policies governing the action of the Biloxi School Board.

The data includes, further, a statement of policies by the Biloxi School Board adopted June 29, 1944, and a statement showing the amendment of policies, adopted

April 26, 1946. It also includes a notice of election to Mr. George Wimberly, band director, under date of October 26, 1946, and a copy of policies for operation of the elementary school cafeterias, adopted August 8, 1946.

As requested by Mr. Ditto, I shall attach this information to the annual report of the Biloxi High School and it will be presented to the Central reviewing Committee of the Southern Association, which meets at the Peabody Hotel next Saturday morning at nine o'clock. Members of your school board or other interested citizens will be heard by the Central reviewing Committee, if they desire to appear. For your information, I might state that the Committee is comprised of eleven members, one from each of the eleven states which make up the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. (Board Minutes, December 12, 1946)

Following receipt of the letter, a committee composed of Board member Lewis W. Hood, Jr., A.E. Scruggs, and F.G. Collins was appointed to appear before the reviewing committee in behalf of the Board. Mr. Scruggs later reported on their meeting with the Southern Association committee and with Mr. Touchstone. They were informed that there were several steps that would be taken in the process of reviewing the Biloxi situation, with a visit to investigate the Biloxi schools in February or March. Dr. Hollis then read a letter from the State Committee, addressed to the president and the secretary of the Biloxi Board, which informed the Board that the State Committee would be investigating before the end of the year.

Accreditation of public schools was a process that had begun in Indiana as early as 1880 and the Southern Association [of Colleges] was the first regional accrediting agency to be organized (Report of Standards Committee, Commission on Secondary Schools 1). At first, each college in the Southern Association simply kept a list of approved schools. In 1906 a report by the Carnegie Commission produced what is still known as the Carnegie unit. It was not until the 1930s that discussions of accreditation agencies and organizations began to be centered in the idea that high school graduates had "little other than sixteen units to show for the years spent in high school; that quality of work and the broader interest of secondary schools were being neglected" (Standards Committee 1). In 1932 the regional accrediting agencies began efforts to determine what standards might be established to determine what good schools were. Accreditation of schools was a powerful weapon; no school district took the threat of potential loss of accreditation lightly. For the Biloxi schools at this point, the threat was immediate and troubling.

At the beginning of the year, Mr. A.E. Scruggs, former principal of the high school, was appointed superintendent. Mr. G.B. Barrett became principal of the high school. Among Mr. Scruggs's first responsibilities was the shaping of responses to the SACS Committee's investigation of the Biloxi schools. The report of the SACS Committee was read at the Board's meeting on March 13, 1947, and a statement was authorized for the press:

The Biloxi School Board Thursday night received and reviewed the report made public this week, of the findings of the state executive committee on the conditions that existed in the Biloxi High School as of December 31, 1946.

A report was given by Superintendent A.E. Scruggs on progress made since January 1st to correct weaknesses found by the visiting committee, and the machinery being established for future work in building up to the minimum or above the minimum standards [for] the Biloxi School System.

The Board of Trustees went on record as endorsing the program and strongly recommended that the superintendent, principal and high school faculty use every possible means to give to the Biloxi boys and girls an educational institution as good as any in the state. The Board pledged itself to use its position and power as representative of the people in bringing about these desired results. (Board Minutes, March 13, 1947, 497)

In other action in March of 1947 the Board established a new salary scale for teachers, including three classifications: degree, non-degree, and emergency. The scale provided for small increases in salaries for holders of master's degrees and retained the differential that paid high school teachers more than teachers in the elementary schools and junior high school received. Salaries ranged from \$1450 for a woman with no degree and no experience to \$2450 for a man who held a master's degree and had ten years of experience.

Continuing the pattern the district had followed for years, men teachers were paid \$200 more per year than women teachers, a condition that would exist until the early 1970s (and was changed then only after formal complaint was made to federal officials).

Perhaps because the School Board had been sufficiently warned by state and Southern Association officials, the Board revisited its former policy regarding operation of the schools and Board-superintendent relations and duties.

On April 10, 1947, the Board voted to rescind the policy adopted on June 29, 1944, and the amendments to the policy adopted on April 25, 1946.

It is not surprising that the Board then revisited its earlier 1944 policy, which limited the School Board's ability to control school operations and deferred to the superintendent in matters of faculty selection, day-to-day management, responsibility for policy enforcement, and the like. Nothing was changed from the 1944 Approved Statement of Policy except one addition to Section II, Duties of the Superintendent of Schools. "He shall establish a file on each teacher and principal recommended by him to the Board, and shall have sufficient information to justify his recommendation." On April 10, Mr. Scruggs wrote the Board to remind them that he had accepted the position as superintendent on an interim basis and that he would accept the position on a permanent basis if the Board felt so moved.

It is of course an understatement to say that the almost continuous dissension between the Board and the administration during this period had affected the students and teachers and, indeed, the entire school community.

In September of 1947, the School Board again tackled the problem of securing additional federal money for children of military families and in federal housing projects.

It was estimated that 80 to 100 such children were, in the words of a resolution adopted by the Board, "educated at the expense of the City of Biloxi as a result of the influx of the population on the Post and on Government-controlled housing projects." Superintendent Scruggs was authorized to negotiate with officials at Keesler Field to secure whatever funds might be due for educating these children.

For much of 1947, the matter of building a new colored school occupied a great deal of the School Board's attention. The original plans had been made by DeFraithe Associates, architects under the bond issue that had failed to pass on September 11, 1945. For the third time during this decade the voters of Biloxi would be asked to pass a bond issue for the schools; but the Board this time decided to limit the issue to the colored school and to eliminate other construction plans (the original bond issue had included plans to build a new Howard I Elementary School and a new West End school).

The *Daily Herald* report on the day before the special election for the bond issue gave a succinct account of the situation:

On Tuesday at the same time as the Democratic primary, there will be a special election on the proposition of the issuance of \$110,000 of bonds at Biloxi for a new Negro school.

With this money and \$30,000 which the state has ear-marked for this purpose, a new colored school will be erected.

School officials point out that the need for the proposed school is urgent and that the last school census showed that in Biloxi, there are 2,100 colored children of school age. Of these, 430 are in public school and 300 go to the Catholic school, leaving 1370 who do not attend school. If the public school were in proper physical condition, it could accommodate 300. However, the building has been condemned for several years and the board operates it only because there has been no alternative. In rooms big enough for 30, there are as many as 72 pupils, it is pointed out.

The school board has expressed the hope that the voters of Biloxi will remedy this situation by voting for this bond issue and thus enabling the board to better carry out its duty.

A group of school officials, teachers and parents met this morning in the office of Supt. A.E. Scruggs and declared that the citizens should vote for the bond issue. The matter, they state, is not one of race or politics but rather of emergency and need.

The group pointed out that the present deplorable frame structure is an insult to the people of Biloxi. It was pointed out that the private schools see fit to maintain a better school for the Negroes which puts the public schools in the background.

Officials stated further that it is the Negro schools, such as the one Biloxi is now trying to do away with, that keeps the educational records of Mississippi very low in the United States.

The new school would face the Negro Housing Authority on Bellman Street between a proposed extension of Roy and a proposed Redding Street, two streets north of East Division. ("Negro School Bond Issue Before People of Biloxi on Tuesday")

On Wednesday, August 6, 1947, the *Herald* reported the results of the bond issue election under the headline "Biloxi Votes 2227 to 599 for Negro School Bond Issue." It had been far too long in coming, and there were still many matters to be considered before final plans could be put into place. Additional financing sources, the inclusion of an auditorium in the building, land acquisition problems, negotiations with city officials and housing authorities, refining specifications—all took more time.

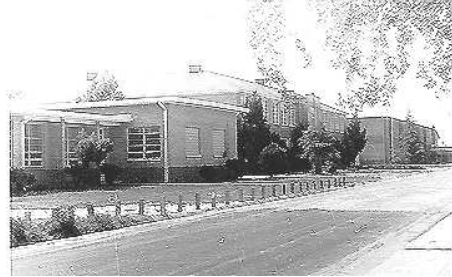
The original plans for the building as presented by DeFraités Associates Architects and the agreement with the Board were ruled inoperable, and on November 12, 1947, the Board threw open the opportunity for building design to other architects, adding that "the school building must be erected immediately, and that time and economy are the greatest factors to be considered in the preparation of such plans, and for this reason, the aid, assistance and instant action of the various architects of the City of Biloxi, as a public duty is [*sic*] requested" (Board Minutes 560).

In a letter to the Housing Authority of the City of Biloxi, dated December 26, 1947, the Board requested additional land for the new school be conveyed by the Authority to the City of Biloxi. The state required more land for the school, and the Board noted that the needs of the students for recreation and other activities made it imperative to acquire additional property. None of the land owned by the Housing Authority lying north of Roy Street and south of Bayou Auguste, the Board wrote, is required for the present set-up of the Authority and would likely not be used in the future for the housing project.

The firm of Collins and Collins of Biloxi was named as architect for the new building after specifications had been changed to add an auditorium seating 500 to 600 children, and H.J. Koski and Company of Selma, Alabama, was employed as primary contractor. The contract specified that work would be completed in 180 consecutive calendar days after the signing date.

On March 25, 1948, Mrs. Fannie Nichols, principal of the Biloxi Colored School, reported to the Board, "We are happy that soon we shall have a new school building. It was unanimously voted in chapel exercises that we ask the superintendent and the school board to name the new Negro school for our late principal, M.F. Nichols." The Board agreed, and the building was officially so named on August 29, 1948.

On Saturday, May 28, 1949, the *Herald* reported: "Exercises marking the senior class graduation and the opening of the new M.F. Nichols Colored School at Biloxi were held Friday night in the school auditorium. Dr. P.H. Easom, state supervisor of Negro education, was the principal speaker and told the graduates that the 'C' in commencement also stood for a continuation of their education, courage, contribution to humanity, and Christianity." He commended city and school officials, pointing to other Mississippi cities that had also recently constructed new schools. Dr. Easom also stressed that the state's economic progress would never be what it should be until all its people were trained and educated, not just half of its population. Superintendent A.E. Scruggs awarded diplomas in a ceremony that also included Glenn Swetman, School Board president; Dr. D.L. Hollis, Lewis Hood, Jr., and Leslie Grant, Board members; Dr. Wayne C. Sandefur, principal of Biloxi High School; Leo Muller, principal of Biloxi Junior High School; Father Joseph Smaurer, Mother of Sorrows pastor; and Cosman Eisendrath, *Biloxi Daily Herald* editor. (Pictured – Nichols-Perkins schools)



Mrs. Nichols expressed the community's appreciation for the new building and noted how happy her husband would have been had he lived to see it.

During this period, of course, other business had occupied the administration and Board. A guidance program for the Biloxi schools was begun in 1947-1948. An addition to the Fernwood School in West Biloxi (not then part of the Biloxi district) was constructed in 1948. The Board also in 1948, in response to requests from Supervisor Dewey Lawrence and city officials, strongly supported by business and civic leaders (though not by the Howard I PTA and Howard I parents), transferred school property to the city for a health center. The property, earlier projected as the site for a new Howard I building, was on the southwest corner of Jackson Street and Main Street. The land would later be transferred to the county for the purpose of building the health center.

The schools were also faced with several troublesome personnel problems, including a particularly unpleasant incident involving the Biloxi boxing coach's conduct at a boxing match with St. Stanislaus on February 5, 1948, resolved only after apologies from both the coach and the superintendent to Stanislaus school officials and students.

In August and September there was much evidence of conflict between the high school principal, Dr. Wayne Sandefur, and the athletic staff. A meeting of the administration and the coaches was held on August 24, with Mayor G.B. Cousins, Commissioners Gordon Dacey and J.A. Creel, Superintendent Scruggs, Principal Sandefur, Coach Willie Carter and other coaches, members of the football team, several interested citizens, *Daily Herald* sports reporter Jack Nelson, Board members Glenn Swetman, Lewis Hood, Frotscher Steckler, and Dr. D.L. Hollis. A resolution by the School Board on September 2, 1948, traced the sequence of events. Board minutes noted that Dr. Hollis had expressed his feeling against Professor Sandefur and made a motion that he be asked to resign. The motion did not receive a second, and the resolution followed.

It noted that in the August meeting recriminations were exchanged and later publicized in the *Daily Herald* and charges of "interference" were made by members of the coaching staff against the front office, that Dr. Hollis had reiterated the charges against Dr. Sandefur, and Dr. Hollis further offered to receive Dr. Sandefur's resignation, although the members present were not sitting as a Board. The resolution made clear the feelings of the remainder of the Board:

WHEREAS, the majority of the members present after hearing the differences expressed feel that the coaching staff and some members of the football squad have been badly advised and misled by persons having neither the interest of the school, of the boys, or the athletic staff at heart but have been fomenting this difficulty to vent personal spleen; and

WHEREAS, the School Board, now sitting as a Board feels that it must take cognizance of this afternoon discussion due to the publicity that accrued to it, and must reflect in its minutes the official opinion of these differences;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that it is the feeling of the Biloxi School Board that the athletic activity, or department, is only one of many departments which make up a present day complex school system but that it is an integral part of a school system and under State and Conference regulations and good administration procedure must be directed and controlled through the administrative offices of the school, and any attempt by the School Board or the school administrators to officially renounce such control and direction could subject the Biloxi City Schools to disciplinary action by the State Department of Education, the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges and the Big Eight Conference, and endanger the present fully accredited status of the Biloxi High School;

FURTHER, it is the feeling of the Board, that the demand of Dr. Hollis that "interference," which is actually supervision by the front office over athletic activities, be stopped is in itself unwarranted interference on the part of a Board member with the delegated duties and responsibilities of the school administrators and constitutes a threat, or by a member of the Board which is a policy making and financial administration body only, to manage or direct an integral activity or department of the school, and further, it is our feeling that we hereby express our extreme disapproval and strongly condemn any threat or attempt by any member of this Board to usurp the power of authority of the administrators duly elected by this Board, and further, that we also express, and spread upon the official minutes, our full confidence in our Superintendent of Schools, Arthur E. Scruggs, and our Principal of High School, Wayne T. Sandefur, both fully qualified under regulations of the State Department of Education and The Southern Association and holding master's degrees and the necessary professional training in education and school administration, and we further pledge our same full measure of

cooperation in the future as we have given them in the past toward the end that there shall be continued and continual improvement in the entire system of the Biloxi City Schools. (Board Minutes, September 2, 1948, pp. 635, 636)

The resolution was passed with votes in favor by Mr. Steckler, Mr. Toche, Mr. Swetman, and Mr. Hood. Dr. Hollis did not support the resolution. The longtime team physician and Board member was deeply committed to the athletic programs and always seemed to take a very personal interest in the welfare of the children in the schools and to support the sports programs in every way. He was instrumental in helping to provide better facilities for athletic events, to make school facilities available for several years for one of the Sugar Bowl teams to use as a practice field and for the Shrimp Bowl football game which was a special interest of Yankee Barhanovich and other Biloxi civic leaders, and to see that students participating in athletic programs were given the best equipment the district could afford. The incident recounted above does not appear to be definitive in regard to his dedicated service to the schools over many years.

The estimated budget for 1947-1948 was \$283,696.52, and as the 1940s came to a close, it was obvious that the school district would have to make arrangements to handle increasing numbers of children from military families connected with Keesler Field and to try to ensure that federal support for these children was forthcoming. In November of 1949, it was estimated that in five years the Biloxi schools would have at least a thousand children domiciled on government tax-free property.

Obviously the schools would continue to be in financial straits. As the 1940s ended, the district was forced to borrow \$5,000 from the First Bank of Biloxi in order to pay teachers' salaries, though the salaries remained very low. (The pattern of borrowing at frequent intervals in order to meet district obligations was one that would continue well into the 1950s.) And teachers could look forward to pathetically small retirement checks.

In fact, in 1948 Mrs. Michel had written the Board to note that she had looked into the prospects for her retirement, having contacted the state secretary of the Teachers' Retirement System. She was dismayed to learn that she would receive only \$33.94 monthly. "This seems a paltry amount to receive after thirty-five years of conscientious service in the Biloxi schools," she wrote (Board Minutes, April 29, 1948, 608).

In the late 1940s the Biloxi schools were highly publicized under the influence of Leo Muller, director of public relations, who taught journalism in Biloxi High School and who later became principal of Central Junior High School. In his community reports, *The Schools Are Yours*, 1947-1948, and *Let's Look At Our Schools*, 1948-1949, Mr. Muller kept the public informed about all programs in the school system and made Biloxians better aware of both needs and progress in the district, letting people know "what was going on in the schools they supported."

Nearing the end of the decade, the Board approved a resolution in which it recounted action that had been taken to make changes in the administration of the schools "to bring about a spirit of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between the members of the administrative staff of the Biloxi High School and Biloxi Junior High School." The resolution officially commended the superintendent, Mr. Scruggs, high school principal-elect Dr. Sandefur, junior high school principal Leo C. Muller and the staff, for their superb handling of this difficult and trying situation which enabled us to bring to a successful close the 1947-48 school year" (Board Minutes, June 24, 1948, 620, 621). For many people on the staff, no doubt, and for many other Biloxians, the Board, when it referred to a difficult period, might well have included most of the 1940s, not just one year.

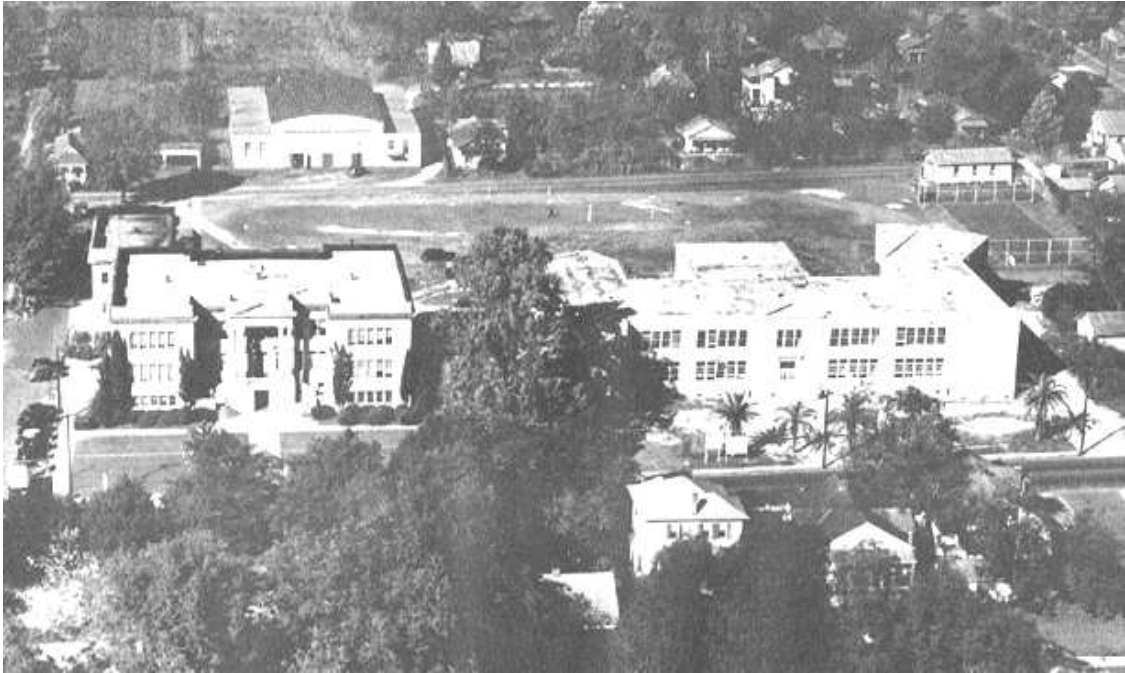
At any rate, for a while it seemed that the end of the 1940s would be the beginning of a better time for the Biloxi schools. There were many things to be done, however, and Superintendent Scruggs in a letter to the Board on January 27, 1949, gave a long and detailed list of what should be done to improve the Biloxi Public Schools, including such items as fences around the schools, complete renovation of the gymnasium to provide more space, increasing playground facilities, and the need for a new school in what was called "west end." The federal subsidized lunch program in early 1949 required extensive renovations in cafeteria sites and services.

"As you see," he wrote, "I started out to get to you some of the emergencies for next year, but I did drop in some items that should be in our long-range development program. We need to think these over and see how far we can go with the moneys we have at hand" (Board Minutes, January 27, 1949, 667).

As so often was the case, in the end it was money—or the lack of it—that shaped decisions and influenced change.



BHS Dance Band – 1946



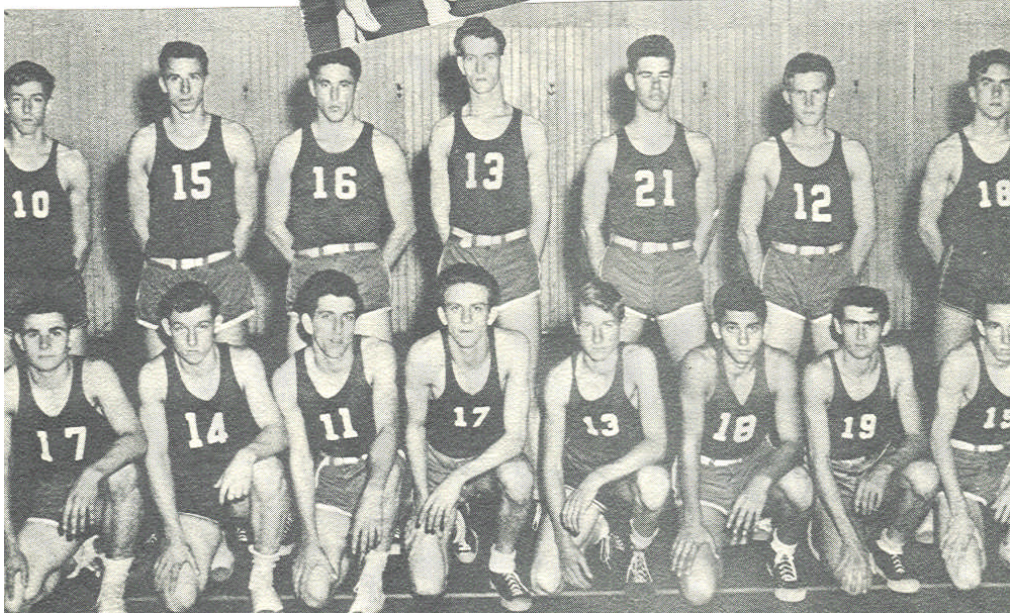
*Aerial View of Secondary Schools of Biloxi in 1948 –
Biloxi High School to the left, Central Junior High to the right,
the gymnasium directly behind the high school, scene not only
for basketball games and tournaments but also
for many a Homecoming dance and sock-hop in the 50s*



1946



1947



BHS Teams in 1946-1947 and Drum Major and Majorettes