

Okolona High School

- The Okolona High School was built in 1890. "The Academy," a previous school institute, was torn down in 1927, and the owners deeded the site to the Okolona School District. A new brick elementary school was built on the site of the old Academy, and a new high school built nearby. As schools began to consolidate in the 1920s, Okolona became the center of a very large district.
- Simmons High School and Okolona High School consolidated in 1969, but the school remained the Okolona High School.
- In the mid-20th century, Okolona was declining in population and popularity. By 1987, all Okolona schools were closed and consolidated with other districts.

Simmons High School

- The first school for black children was a five-month term taught by Jim Townsend in the black Baptist church. Ap Weir served as the next teacher. Both Townsend and Weir were white. Okolona's first black teacher was named Tennison, and he taught in the early 1900s. Charles Cargile donated land for the first black school facility, which was located where the Simmons Building is today.
- In 1928 the Julius Rosenwald Fund built a school for blacks. This school had two large classrooms as well as a small lunchroom. In 1940 this school had four teachers, including the principal, Robert L. Wiley. The High School was accredited in 1948, and named Simmons High School in 1951 in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Simmons.



Okolona High School's mascot was a bear, and their school colors were black and white.

Arkansas Postcard Past 9/29/93

By Steven Hanley

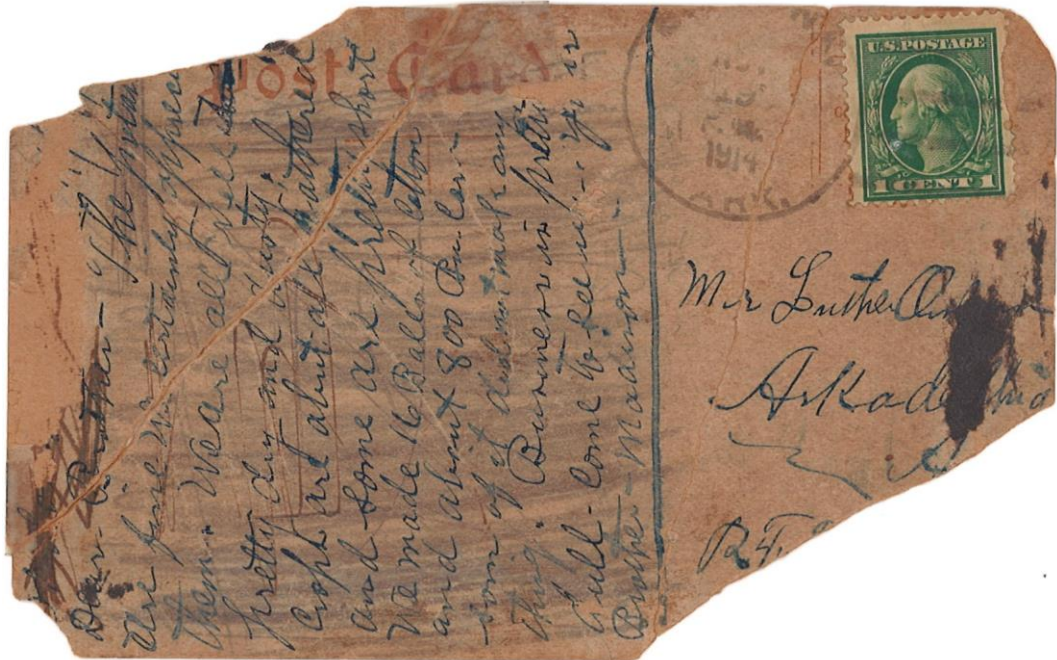
OKOLONA, 1911
— What were the boys doing clustered around the back of the school? This appears to be a cold winter day in the small Clark County community. The card sent to Argenta reads, "Garrison is not doing so well today." Note the large school building and the small number of buildings surrounding it.



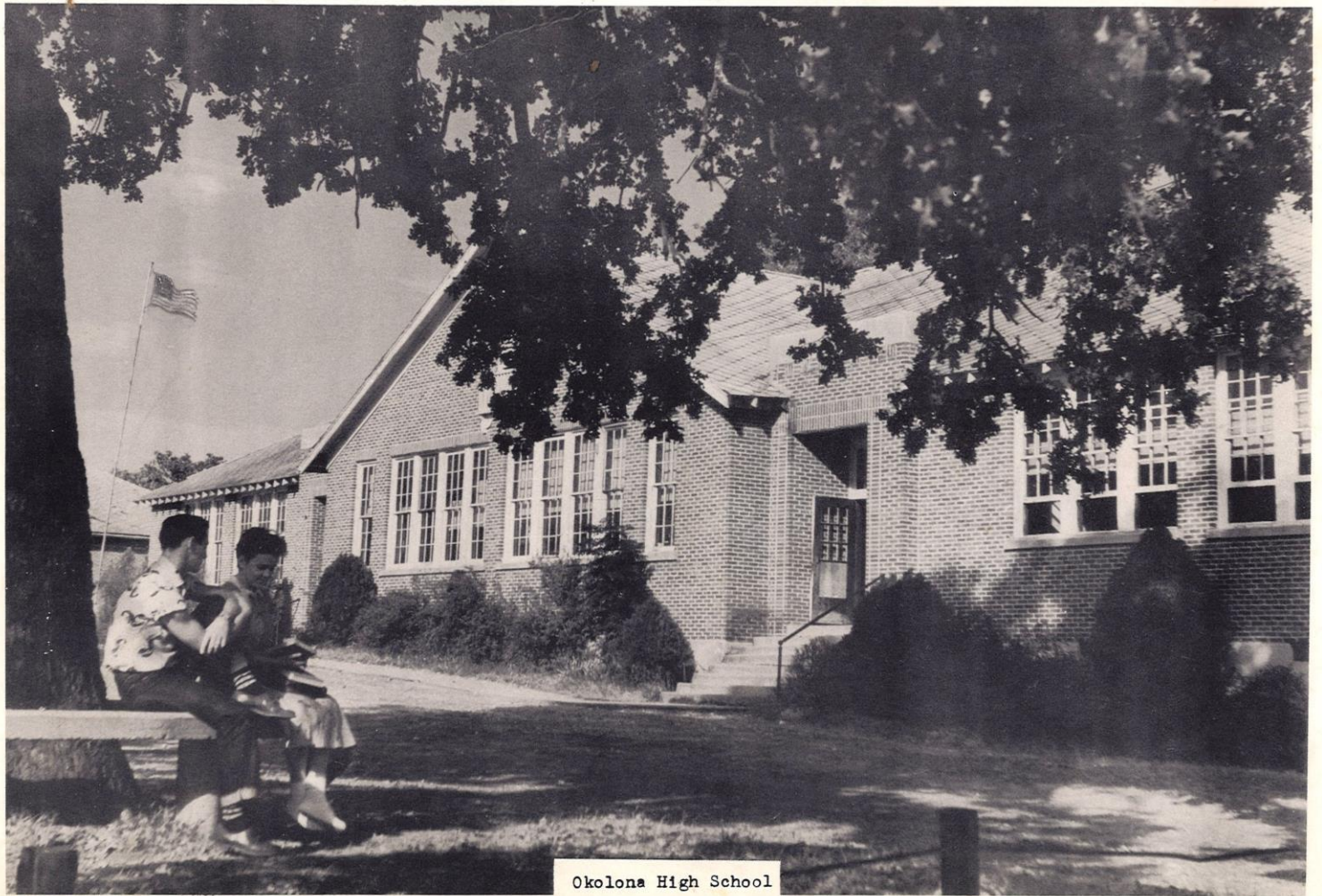
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OKOLONA

A postcard of the Okolona Public School
from 1911.



This postcard of the Okolona Public School from 1911 tells about the number of cotton bails picked in Arkadelphia.



A photo of the front of the Okolona High School from the 1957 Bears' Memories annual yearbook.



The Simmons High School
Gymnasium was listed on the National
Register of Historic Places in 2011.



Photo belongs to Van Malcolm, Okolona, AR
 Okolona High School
 1930-31 Basketball Team

Front Row: Tom Gill Hopkins, Mann Weeks, Sam Covington,
 Ross Grier, James May

Second Row: Bill Roberson, Claud "Red" Burton, Van Malcolm,
 Wallace Shackelford

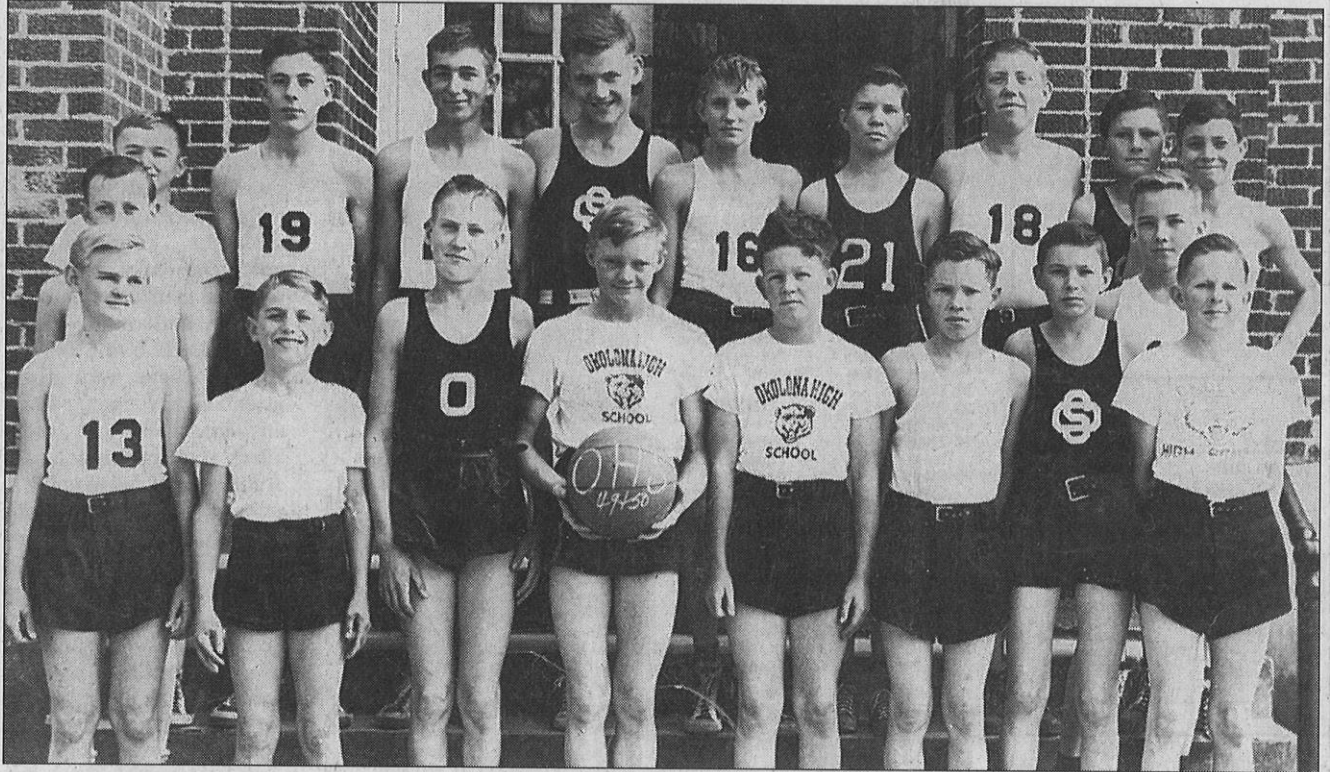
Back Row: Jewell "Joe" Tarpley, Paul Garrett,
 Ross McKinney, Paul Mann

Coach: Louie Baker - married Esther Hill, sister of Ed + Charlie Hill

Superintendent: J. O. Kelly.

married Gertrude Mann, sister of Paul Mann

Okolona High School 1930-1931 boys basketball team



Okolona basketball team

The Okolona High School basketball team from the late 1940s or early 1950s included the players in the photo. Those who could be identified are: William Norman, front row from left, Marcus Frazier, Billy G. Russel, Bob Shackelford, Jerry Malcom, (possibly Porter McAfee) and Mack McCauley; on the left on the second row is Kenneth R. Spradlin

and the player on the right is unidentified; Dewey Russell, back row from left, first name unknown Morris, Acee McNabb, Bobby Smith, Wendal Dickerson, Harold D. Bolt, "Red" Orsburn, Paul Rowe and Kenneth Kelly. If anyone can identify any others in the photo, please call the newspaper at 246-5525. The photo is courtesy of Nancy Kelly.

Okolona High School basketball team from the late 1940s or early 1950s.

ACTIVITIES OF 1948-'49

As we look back over the school year, we see many outstanding school activities.

The first one was the annual Hallowe'en Carnival, Carol Rushing and Buddy Hill of the senior class were crowned as queen and king of the carnival. The junior class had as their representatives Marietta Hardin and Preston Baumgardner. The candidates from the sophomore class were Martha Clark and Jerry Shope. Filling the freshman ranks were Mary Harrington and Bobby Breeding. Patricia Patterson, Homer Jackson, Alta Park, and Paul Rowe were the candidates from the eighth and seventh grades. The crowning was a climax to several hours of fun and frolic. The crown bearers were Carol Stockton and Frank Bell who had won miniature king and queen contest.

The Home Economics Club planned, prepared, and served a Christmas Banquet for their mothers and fathers in the Home Economics Cottage. Forty of the parents were in attendance. After eating a delicious meal, the guests played card games.

On December 21, the seniors, juniors, and sophomores had a Christmas party in the auditorium. Games of all sorts were played and the climax of the evening was the giving of presents. Everyone there received a present from under the tree. Cokes and cookies were served.

December 22, the elementary school presented an operetta entitled, "O Come All Ye Faithful." This was enjoyed by all who attended. Grades one through six took part in this presentation.

February 10 Jack Hathaway's trained donkeys arrived on our campus for a donkey ball game between our high school team and the town team. All eyes were on the donkeys as they ran up and down the court. Laughter was loud and long during the entire game. I don't think anyone bothered to notice which side won.

February 25 was the climax of our basketball season. At a banquet sponsored by Coach Merritt and the ball club, those who had made the basketball squad were presented jackets. Mr. Merritt gave the introduction, followed by Rev. Muey with the invocation. Bobbie Shope then gave a summary of the games won and lost. Mr. Jacques then gave a short talk on "Teaching Through Sports." The ending of the evening was the happiest moment of all as this was when Mr. Merritt presented the teams with their jackets. Eighty parents and friends of the players attended.

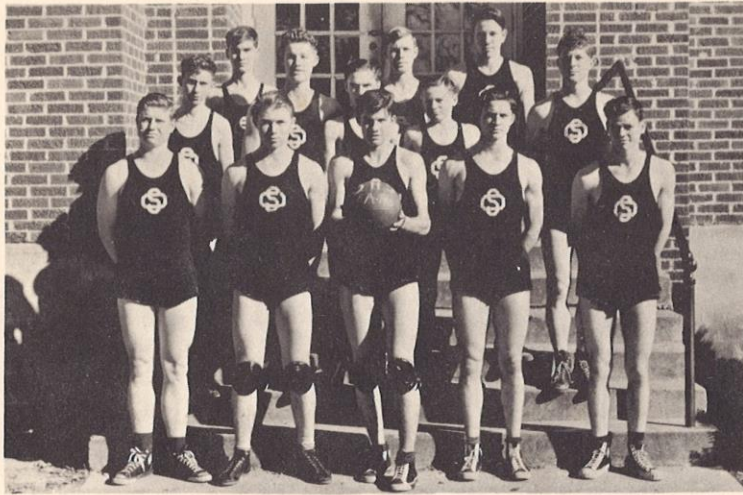
On March 10 the Choral Club presented an operetta entitled "The Gypsy Troubadour." Everyone there enjoyed this presentation. This was one of the outstanding features of the school year and showed outstanding effort on the part of Mrs. Fred Dillard, who sponsored the program, and the club as a whole.

The 1949 Bears' Memories lists the activities of the year, including the exciting sports banquet and presentation of the team jackets.



ATHLETICS

The 1949 Bears' Memories Athletic section



BOY'S SENIOR TEAM

FRONT ROW (Left to right) J. C. Smithpeters, Billy Hipps, Paul Park, captain, Billy D. Killingsworth, George Barfield, co-captain.,
SECOND ROW: Lawrence Hudson, Top Spradlin, Lloyd Carter, Lonnie Wingfield, Preston Baumgardner.
TOP ROW: Ivan Hudson, Austin Wingfield, Floyd Tarpley.



THOMAS L. MERRITT
 "Coach"



GIRL'S SENIOR TEAM

FRONT ROW: (Left to right) Pat Clark, Bobbie Shope, co-captain, Helen Howard captain, Martha Nan Clark, Julia Ann Bolt.
SECOND ROW: Carolyn Frazier, Leatrice Howard, Wanda June Mathis, Linda McElhannon, Pat Morris.
THIRD ROW: Margaret Dickerson, and Jewel Dean Frazier.

REVIEW OF THE BEARS GAMES

The Okolona Bears first game of the season was with the Independents, November 23, 1948. The girl Independents won by 17-12. Linda McElhannon was high scorer for the school with 6 points and Reva Andrews was high scorer for the Independents with 6 points.

Our next game was with Laneburg. The girls won, but the boys lost. Linda McElhannon was high scorer for the girls with 10 points. The scores were 24-22. Barfield was again high for the boys with 4 points. Their scores were 19-22.

Next we entered the tournament at Kirby. Our boys won their first game with Umpire by 27-30. Paul Park was high scorer with 18 points. Our girls played Murfreesboro and won by 25-23. Bobbie Shope was high scorer with 6 points. After defeating Umpire in the tournament, our boys played Murfreesboro and lost by one point. Floyd Tarpley made 11 points. Next the girls played Dierks and won by 2 points. Linda made 24 points. After defeating Dierks, we beat Newhope by 26-15. Linda Mc. was again high with 14 points. After winning that game, we played in the finals against Delight. We lost by 25-46, with Linda Mc. still high scorer with 16 points. The guards-Helen Howard, Patsy Clark, and Julia Ann Bolt-played brilliant defensive games all during the tournament.

The next week Amity came down on Saturday night. We won both games. The girls scores were 39-21. Linda Mc. was high scorer with 15 points. The boys were 45-18 with Floyd Tarpley high scorer with 12 points. All the guards played a good game.

Reader came to play us next. Since they did not have a girls team, we played the Independents. The school girls won by 51-42. Linda made 20 points. Our boys also won by 36-15. Tarpley made 19 points.

Our boys entered a tournament at Arkadelphia the next week. They lost their first game to Catholic High by 21-24. Paul Park and Floyd Tarpley made 7 points.

January 7 we played Delight. The girls lost again and the boys won. The girls lost by one point and the boys lost by 3 points. Linda made 20 points and Paul made 17 points. Clark, Howard, and Bolt played a very good game.

January 11 Delight came back, The girls lost by 26-23, and the boys won by 20-10. Linda made 15 points, and Barfield made 6 points.

Our boys went to the Laneburg tournament and played Willsville and lost by 40-24. They went to Hot Springs the next day. They won by 49-19, with Tarpley making 13 points.

Our next game was with Donaldson, The girls game was a tie of 31-31. Shope and Clark made 12 points. The boys game was also good. The scores were 31-26, with Parks high scorer with 12 points.

The next week we entered a tournament at Murfreesboro. Both teams played Langley and won. The girls won by 20-22. Linda made 12 points. The boys won by 24-10. Parks made 11 points. The guards played a good game. The boys played Saratoga next and lost by 38-27. Hipps and Parks made 8 points. The girls played Dierks and lost by 13-14. Linda made 9.

January 28 Gurdon came here. The girls lost by 35-22. Bobbie Shope was high scorer with 12 points. The boys also lost by 31-19. Parks made 5 points. The guards played a very good game.

The next week we returned the game with Gurdon. We lost both games again. The girls scores were 41-29 with Bobbie Shope making 13 points. The boys lost by 28-30. Parks made 9 points.

We returned the game with Amity the next week. The girls lost by 33-29. Linda made 14 points. The boys won by 39-13. Hipps and Spradlin made 8 points.

Our junior boys played their first game of the season against Amity. They lost by 42-3. Jack Park made two points.

We returned Donaldson's game the next week. We lost both games. The girls scores were 43-29. McElhannon and Shope made 12 points. The boys lost by 57-20. Hipps made 6 points. Bolt, Howard and Clark played a good game.

Delight boys came down the next Tuesday and beat our junior boys 30-18. Courtney was high with 7 points.

Our next game was the night of the donkey ball game. The town team beat our boys 4 points, but the girls beat the town team by 7-19.

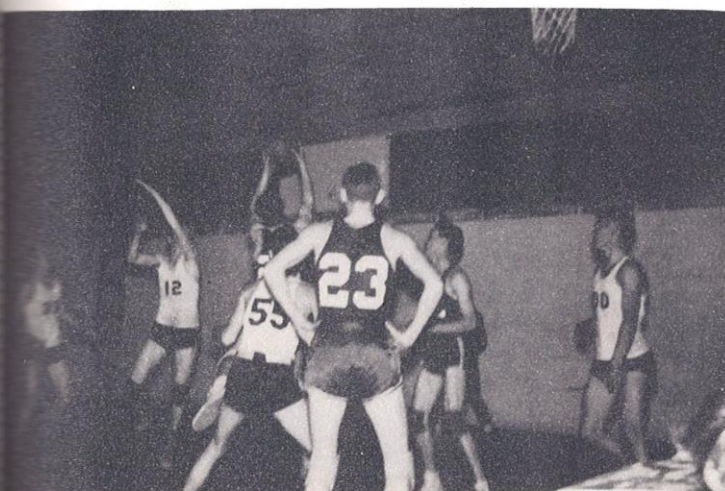
We do not have the scores of the Gurdon tournament. The boys have played 19 games and won 8. Paul Park was high scorer for the year with 145 points. Floyd Tarpley was next with 124. The girls have played 19 games and won 8 and tied one. Linda McElhannon made 210 points all year with Bobbie Shope next with 145.

The Basketball Club sponsored an Athletic Banquet, Friday night, February 25, to make up money to help pay for our ball jackets. There were eighty parents and friends present. Mr. Thomas Merritt, the coach, awarded our jackets to us at the Banquet. They are black and white.



SENIORS

Front Row--Left to Right--Johnny Womble, Leon Moore, C. Louis Dickerson, Tommy McMaster, Billy Whitlock, Back Row--Left to Right Porter McAfee, Wm. Robert Orsborn, C. Dean Morris, Bobby Smith, Ray Neil Wingfield, Floyd Bobo, Tom Park, Coach



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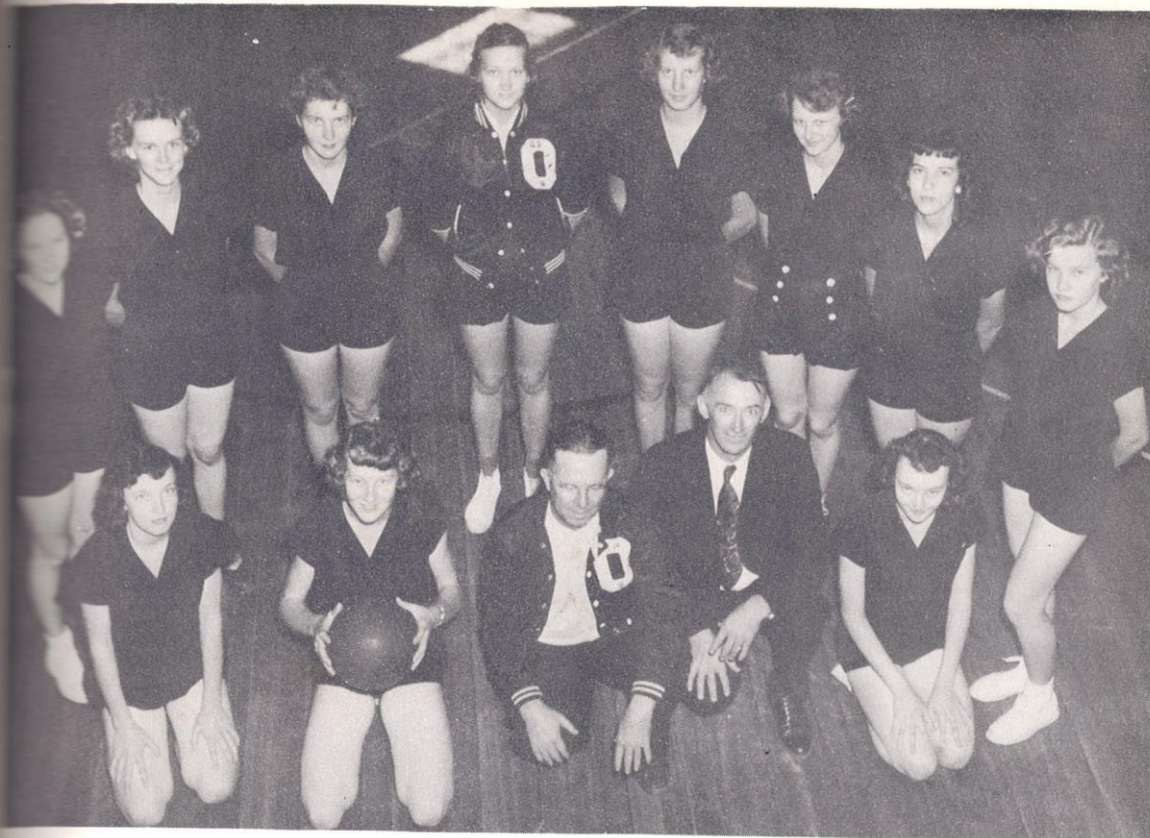
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SENIORS

Back Row--Left to Right, Frankie Burton, Marilyn Wilder, Patricia Patterson, Sue Spickard, Barbara Shope, Settia Frazier, Sarah C. Crowley, Alta F. Park---Front Row--L. to R.---Nina McMaster, Alene Burton, Tom Park, Coach, Calvin Jacques, Margaret May



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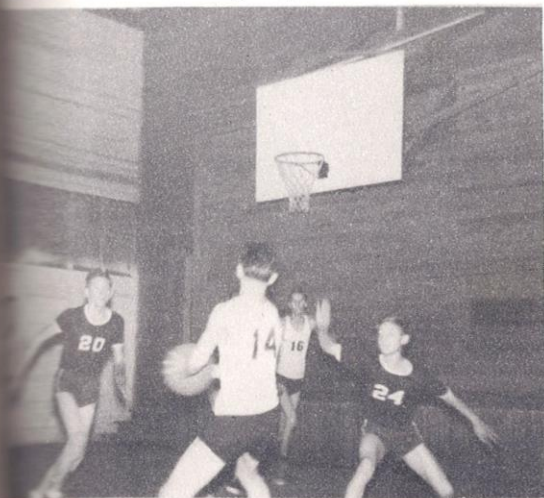
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JUNIORS

Front Row--Left to Right--Kenneth Spradlin, William Norman, David Scott, Bud Hipps, Jerry Malcom, Back Row--L. to R.--Calvin Jacques, Kenneth Smith, Wyndell Dickerson, Harold Bolt, Tom Park, Coach



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A photo from a 1952 Thanksgiving banquet held in the gymnasium, where we can see the court and basket.



Dedicated
to
MR. TOM PARK

In appreciation of his work as a teacher and
his untiring efforts in behalf of the Okolona
Basket Ball Teams during former years and the
seasons since his return in 1951.

In 1953, the Bears dedicated their
yearbook to Tom Park.



Junior Girls Basketball Team

First Row--June Wingfield, Clara Mae Cook, Vannette Anderson-Captain, Judy Huffman, Doris Norman, Second Row--Becky McMaster, Beverly Dickerson, Edna Mae Frazier, Barbara Spradlin, Sue Moore. Third Row--Mr. Calvin Jacques, Lavelle Shackelford.



Junior Boys Basketball Team

First Row-Jerry Park, Johnny Kelly, David Scott, Joe B. McNabb, Roland Patterson, Back Row-Ray Wingfield, Harley Frazier, Mr. Park, Charles Golden



Senior Girls Basketball-Team

Barbara Shope, Marilyn Wilder, Settia Frazier, Alene Burton-Captain-, Phelsa Hignight, Shirley Pentecost, Sarah Carolyn Crowley, Mr. Tom Park-Coach-, Barbara Jean Tarpley



Senior Boys Basketball Team

Wyndle Dickerson, Kenneth Smith, Harold Dean Bolt, Frank Lesmak, William Norman, Leon Moore-Captain, Tommy McMaster-Co-Captain, Bob Shackelford, Kenneth Spradlin, Porter McAfee, Paul Rowe, William R. Orsburn, Floyd Bobo, Mr. Tom Park-Coach.

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1953 teams



Bears' Memories
1954

The 1954 Bears' Memories yearbook cover



The 1954 Bears' Memories Athletic section

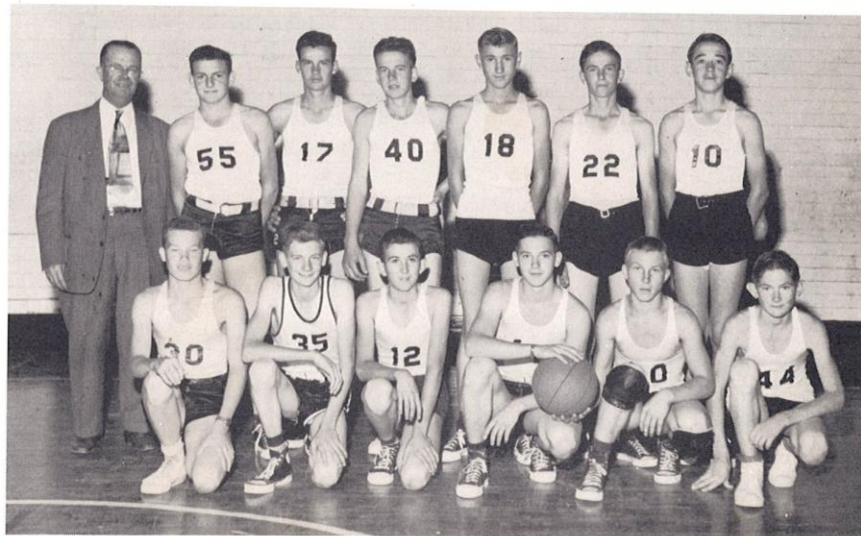


SENIOR BOYS BASKETBALL TEAM

Front Row: Porter McAfee, David Scott, Bob Shackelford-Captain, William Norman, Tommy McMaster, Jerry Lee Malcom.
 Back Row: Mr. Tom Park-Coach, William Robert Osborn, Kenneth Ray Spradlin, Wyndle Dickerson, Paul Rowe, Kenneth Smith, Parker Phelps.

JUNIOR BOYS BASKETBALL TEAM

Front Row: Phillip Smith, Richard Earl Harrington, Jeremiah Crowley, Troy Hignight, David Stewart, Bobby Neal Rowe.
 Back Row: Mr. Tom Park-Coach, Talmadge McDaniel, Richard Shope, Rufus Miller, Travis Davis, Wayne McCauley, Bill Jacques.





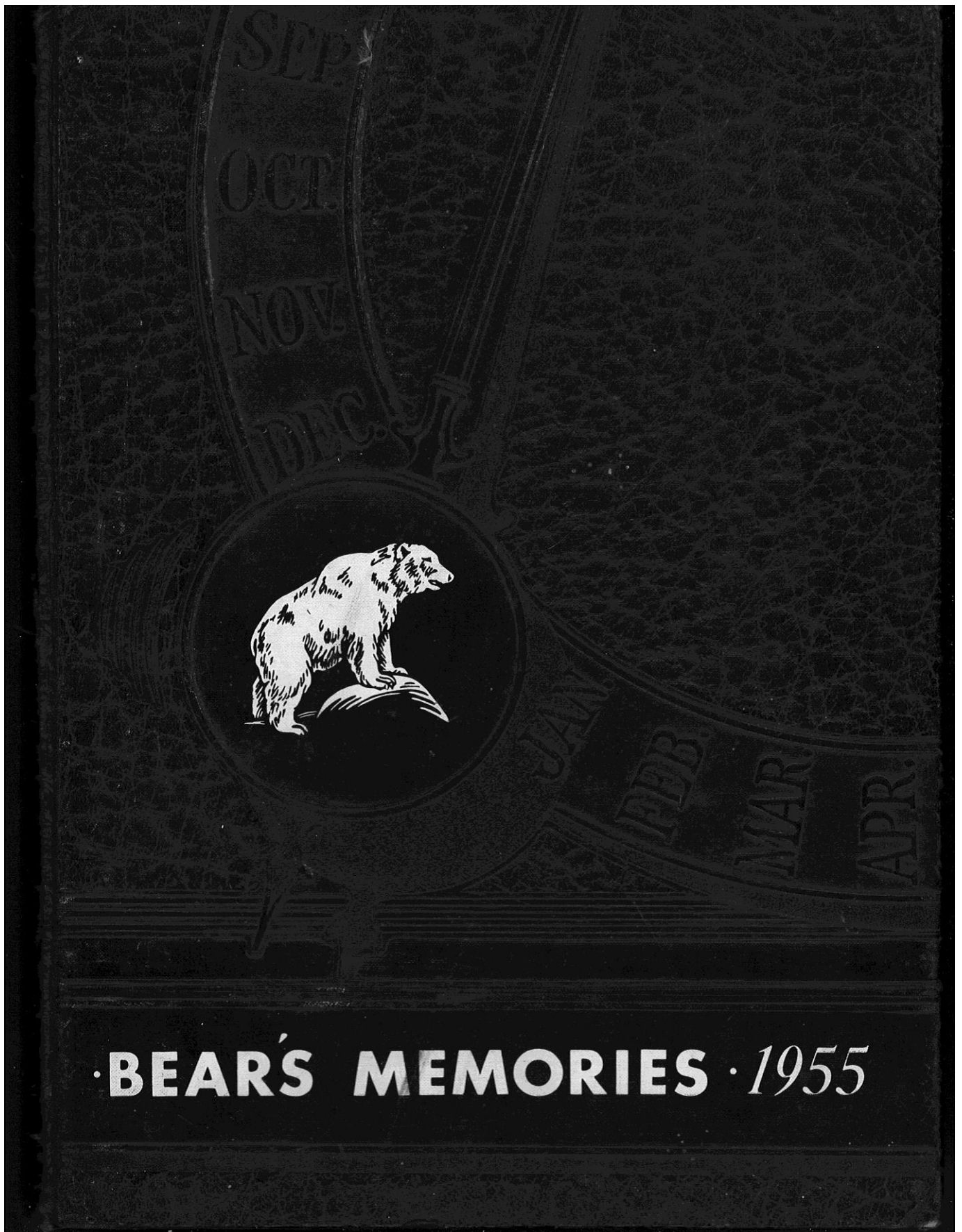
SENIOR GIRLS BASKETBALL TEAM

First Row: Doris Norman, Barbara Tarpley, Alene Burton-Captain-
 Sherrell Jean Harrington, Phelsa Dean Hignight.
 Second Row: Judy Huffman, Clara Mae Cook, Sarah Crowley-Co-Captain-
 Vannette Anderson, Shirley Pentecost, Jessie Little,
 Betty Huffman.



JUNIOR GIRLS BASKETBALL TEAM

First Row: Janie Spickard, June Wingfield, Lavale Shackelford.
 Second Row: Becky McMaster, Carolyn Tarpley, Sue Moore, Beverly
 Dickerson, Sharon Clark, Joyce McMaster.
 Third Row: Lulabelle Jackson, Edna Frazier, Alta Little, Barbara
 Spradlin, Brenda Hipps, Annita Hardin, Judy Malcom.



The 1955 Bears' Memories yearbook cover

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David Stewart, 3rd row, Mr. Tom Park, Everyn Baumgardner, Bill Jacques
Wyndle Dickerson, Jerry Malcom, Kenneth Smith, Bob Shackelford



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 Carolyn Tarpley

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David Stewart, Charles Golden, Troy Hignight, Joe Belt McNabb, Captain, Talmadge McDaniel
Jerry Park--Back Row--Mr. Tom Park, Coach, Roland Patterson, Wayne McCauley, Bobby Rowe
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 Mr. Tom Park, Coach, Jimmy Rutherford, John Frazier, Jimmy McNabb, Jimmy Blanton, Jimmy
 Smithpeters, Arkie Jones

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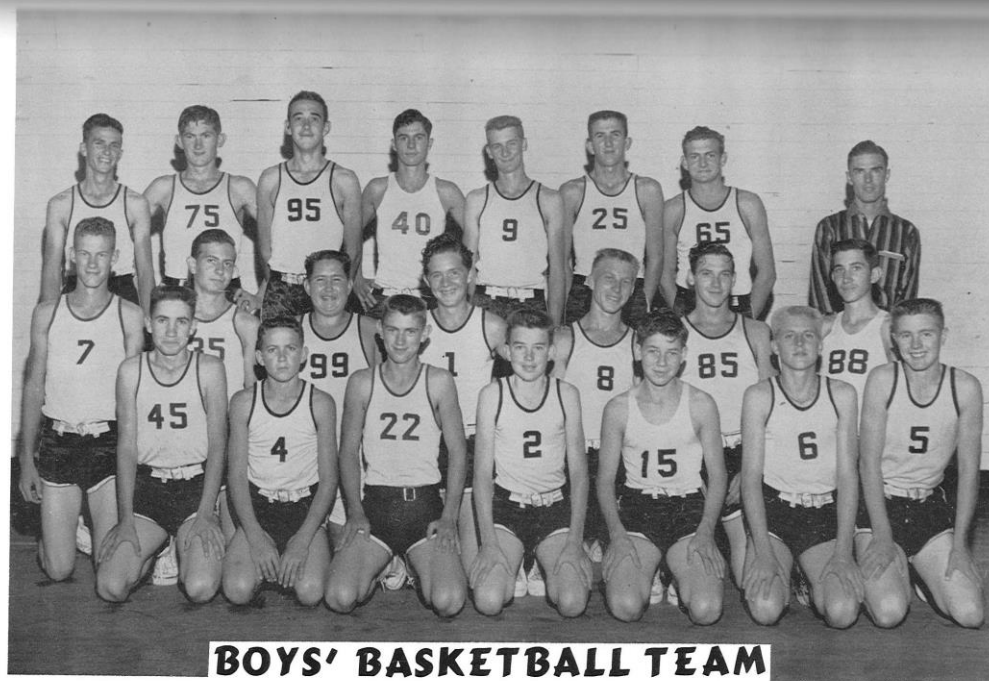
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 Middle Row: Pete Wrinkle, Larry Don McDaniel, Joe Clark, John Park, David Stewart, Troy Hignight, Jimmy McNabb
 First Row: Edd Park, Frank Bell, Jeff McMaster, Joe T. White, Arkie Jones, Jimmy Rutherford, and Jimmy Blanton



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Senior

Janie Spickard, Carolyn Tarpley, Judy Huffman, Co-Captain, Doris Norman, Captain, Edna Mae Frazier, Lavale Shackelford, Mr. Tom Park, Coach, Joyce McMaster, Judy Malcom, Brenda Hipps, Barbara Spradlin, Annita Hardin, Lula Belle Jackson, Sharon Clark



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Middle Row: John Frazier, Carroll Wrinkle, Bob Park, Tommy Burton, Jamie Jackson, Rex Williams, and Carl Ray Rutherford.
Front Row: Joe Grier, Sonny Robinette, Moots McCauley, Eugene Browning, Tommy Tarpley, Eddie Clark, Johnny McMaster, and Eddie McMaster.

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 Middle Row: Marjorie McNabb, Mary Sue Blakely, Pattie Fae Burton, Joyce Wrinkle, Vema Pennington, Judy Stewart, Helen Sorrells, Wilma Harrington, Patsy Rowe
 First Row: Judy Dickerson, Edra Beth Frazier, Lois Ann Norman, Linda Park, Mary Ruth Bell, George Ann Orsburn, Phyllis McCauley, Shirley Jackson, Margie Jacques, Diane Scott

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 McDaniel, Rex Williams; Coach Lloyd Carter, Joe Clark, Edd Park, Pete Wrinkle, Joe Cook
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Captain Carolyn Tarpley, Wilma Harrington, Ina Smithpeters, Joyce Russell
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ATHLETIC CLUB

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Reporter, Larry Don McDaniel; Sponsor, Lloyd Carter

1958 Athletic Club



To one who has helped in many ways to carry
on the Bears' spirit--coach, teacher, friend--
we affectionately dedicate this edition of
BEARS' MEMORIES

In 1965, the Bears dedicated their
yearbook to Wayne McCauley.

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Dean Clark, Manager, Coach Wayne McCauley, Johnny Harrington, Jerry Wingfield, Paul David Cox,
Stanley Moorman, Anthony Orsburn, Thomas McGlellan

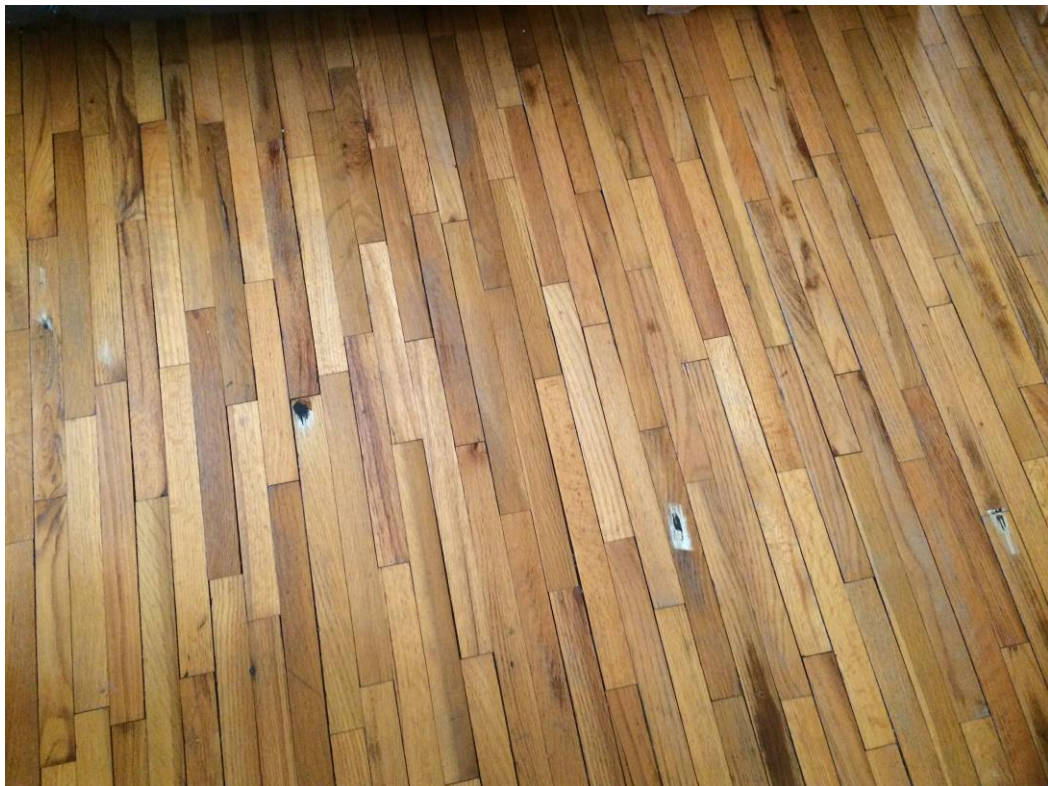
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Rose Stauber, Gloria White, Sandra Calvert, Captain, Patsy Myers, Diane Mercer, Ida Faye Daniel
Gayle McGuirt, Alice Faye McNabb, Kathleen Moorman, Linda McMaster, Coach Wayne McCauley



Sections of the old basketball court are now
in the McCauley home.

OKOLONA INSTITUTE.

THE exercises of this Institution, situated at Okolona, Clark County, Arkansas, began on the 9th of January, 1871, and is now in successful operation, under the contröll and management of Mr. J. C. WRIGHT.

Mr. WRIGHT is a graduate of Emory College, Georgia, and comes highly recommended by the President and Secretary of that College.

Board can be had in the neighborhood at reasonable country rates.

RATES OF TUITION LOW.

- 1st Class—Spelling, Reading and Writing, &c., \$2 00 per month.
- 2nd Class—Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, \$3 00 per month.
- 3d “ Rhetoric, History, Phylosophy, &c., \$4 00 per month.
- 4th Class—Ancient Languages and Higher Mathematics. \$5 00 per month.

CHARLES CARGILE,
President Board Trustees.

Feb. 25th, 1871.-4w.

Newspaper article from 1871 tells of the success and rates of the Okolona Institute.

1-4-73 57d
On the Second Monday in January, Dr. W. B. CARPENTER will open a Male and Female School at Okolona, in this county. He will be assisted by competent assistants.— He comes highly recommended as an accomplished gentleman and successful teacher. Okolona is situated in one of the most healthy, wealthy and prosperous sections, not only of our county, but State. The society cannot be surpassed, and altogether there is not a more eligible site in the State for building up a first class school. Board can be obtained in the most respectable families at reasonable rates.

Newspaper article from 1873
announcing the founding of the Male
and Female School at Okolona.

Okolona Alumni ^{Dec. 5} 1963 Holds Annual Dinner

Officers elected for 1964 for the Okolona Alumni Association at their annual banquet held at the High School on Wednesday night, November 27th are: James Paul Grier, president; vice-president, Harvey Wayne McCauley; secretary-treasurer, Mrs. Arch McGill.

One hundred twenty-eight guests were present for a delicious meal served by girls of the Home Economics class of the high school. The meal had been prepared by the Parent-Teachers Association. Clinton Wingfield of the class of 1948 delivered the principal address.

Those attending from other localities were: Joe Malcom of Southern State, Mrs. Clara Kemmer of Marvel, Ark., Mr. and Mrs. El-

bert Osborn, Mr. and Mrs. Mack McCauley, Miss Phoebe Grier, William Robert Osborn, Mrs. Louis Weber, Mrs. Fannie Meeks, Miss Sandra Orsburn, Mr. and Mrs. William Bunn, Miss Annita Sue Hardin, all of Little Rock; Paul Grier of Helena; Mr. and Mrs. Clifton Kelly of Luling, La.; Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Stewart, Friona, Texas; Mr. and Mrs. Bill Jacques, U. S. Air Force, El Paso, Texas; Mrs. G. A. Hogg, El Dorado, Mrs. Archer Smith of Hot Springs; Mr. and Mrs. Lavern Wingfield, Benton; Mr. and Mrs. Bruce McElhanon of Pine Bluff; Mr. and Mrs. Jackie Harrington of Magnolia; Mr. Nelson, and Mrs. Myrtle Nelson Clark of McAlester, Okla.; Bill Grier of Farmersville, La.; Mr. and Mrs. Don Stell, Grand Prairie, Texas.

Many alumni could not be present, but sent their dues and contributions to the Dr. T. T. Toss Scholarship Fund.

S. Stanchard

Newspaper article from 1963
announcing the Okolona Alumni
Annual Dinner.

Superintendent Jacques Retires After 25 Years At Okolona HS

5/28/70

After a career of 42 years in the field of education, Supt. Calvin F. Jacques is retiring June 30, 1970. He has been superintendent of the Okolona school system for 25 years.

Mr. Jacques started teaching in October 1928 at Center, a two-teacher school in Howard County. This was the beginning of a long career in the field of education. His college training was interspersed with terms of teaching at Chapel Hill, Laneburg, Center Point, and Rural Dale. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Henderson State College in August 1937. He has done extensive work toward a Master's degree in the fields of administration and mathematics.

Mr. Jacques's work at Okolona began in 1941 as principal working with Supt. J. E. Smith. He served in this capacity for four years, succeeding Supt. Smith as superintendent in 1945.

When asked about living his life over, Mr. Jacques stated that if such were possible, he would again be a teacher, for teachers have the most wonderful things in the world to work with-- children.

Noteworthy among his many activities has been his work with the Okolona Student Council. He became sponsor of the organization in 1965. Since that time each year, he has accompanied delegates to summer workshops, state conventions, and Southern Association conventions. He has served as adviser many times on each level. In 1969 he sponsored a delegate to the National Student Council Convention in Baltimore, Maryland.

Supt. Jacques has been a member of both the National Education Association and the Arkansas Education Association. He has served twice as president of the Clark County Teachers Association. He is a charter member of the Ouachita Valley School Masters Club, having served twice as president of that organization.

Mr. Jacques married, Mary Conway Power, of Nashville, Arkansas in 1937. They are the parents of two children. Their son, William Thomas, is a captain in the United States Air Force. Capt. Jacques and Mrs. Jacques with sons Greg and Johnny, have been stationed in the Kingdom

of Turkey for the past two years. Mrs. Curtis Thomasson, daughter, Margie, is a coordinator and teacher in a kindergarten project in Andalusia, Alabama.

There will be a reception in the High School Library Sunday, May 31, 1970 2 till 4 p.m. honoring of Mr. and Mrs. Jacques. This is being sponsored by the Okolona Alumni Association. All friends and associates are invited to attend.



CALVIN JACQUES

Article honoring
Superintendent
Jacques after 25
years of work.

Group to seek petition to abolish Okolona School

10-15-81 SJA

A plan to abolish the Okolona school district and to divide it between the Gurdon and Amity districts has been proposed by a group of residents of the Okolona district.

"The plan calls for students and land north of Highway 26 to become part of the Amity district while the southern part will be annexed to Gurdon," Everyn Baumgardner, a spokesman for the group, said.

The Concerned Citizens for Quality Education, the group which is proposing the plan, expects to draw up a petition calling for a special election to allow residents of the Okolona school district to vote on the issue.

Baumgardner explained that the petition will be presented to the Clark County School Board which will be responsible for calling the election.

State Department of Education statistics show that, in estimates for the 1980-81 school year, only three districts in Arkansas (out of 370) paid lower average teachers' salaries than Okolona did. The average salary for a teacher in Okolona was \$10,556; in Gurdon it was \$12,454; in Amity it was \$12,949 and Arkadelphia it was \$12,953.

Also during the last school year, the Department of Education reports show that Okolona received no special education aid while Amity received \$24,000, Arkadelphia received \$130,298 and Gurdon received \$69,394.

In 1978, the Arkansas legislature commissioned a report titled "Educational Equity"

which examined the relationships between the number of students in a school district and the economics and the quality of education in district.

Known as the "Anderson Report," the special study stated as one of its conclusions, "In terms of the quality of the educational program, two indicators, accreditation of schools and number of curricular offerings, indicate that the small school districts of Arkansas possess educational programs not equal to those in larger districts. Larger districts possess superior ratings and offer significantly more curricular units."

The report also stated that small school districts had high expense per pupil resulting from "(a) higher instructional costs per pupil, (b) lower pupil-teacher ratios, and (c) higher administrative cost per pupil."

For the 1980-81 school year, the Okolona school district employed 12.2 teachers for grades one through twelve, Department of Education statistics show. Average daily attendance for the same grades was listed as 117.

Okolona's expense per pupil for 1980-81 was estimated at \$1,943; Arkadelphia's at \$1,301; Amity's at \$1,267 and Gurdon's at \$1,242.

In 1948, all school districts serving less than 350 students were ordered consolidated by Arkansas law. However, no provision was made for closing those schools whose attendance figures dropped below that point in later years.

Newspaper article from 1981
discusses the plan to abolish the
Okolona school district and divide it
between the Gurdon and Amity
districts.

Okolona residents examine annexing school district

9-24-81 548

A group of residents of the Okolona school district has formed a committee to examine the possibilities of annexing the Okolona School District to other adjoining districts.

If accomplished, the move would eliminate the Okolona School System, Glen Pentecost of Okolona, a spokesman for the group, said.

Pentecost explained, "Our main reasons for merging the district with other school systems are the lack of educational opportunities and an extremely high cost of educating each child in the Okolona Schools."

Figures compiled by the Arkansas State Department of Education show that only seven districts in Arkansas (out of a total 370 districts) were estimated to spend more per child than the Okolona district during the 1980-81 school year. The estimates were released in the Annual Statistical Report of the Public Schools of Arkansas published by the Department of Education in January, 1981.

"This high cost stems mainly from extremely small classes," Pentecost said.

Only five school systems in the state serve fewer children than Okolona's does, the statistics indicate.

According to the Education Department report, Okolona spent an estimated average of \$1943 for educating each child during the last school year. The Arkadelphia school district's estimated was \$1301 per child and the Gurdon district's was \$1242.

However, both the Arkadelphia and Gurdon Schools routinely offer courses in foreign languages, music, geometry, chemistry, physics and advanced math.

"None of these courses are available to Okolona students who receive biology and second year algebra only on an alternate-year basis," Pentecost said.

He added, "The Okolona Schools also lack such extracurricular activities as band, football and track which are available in almost all Arkansas schools, although nearly \$600 more tax money is spent on each Okolona student than on the average Arkansas student."

The cost per child in Okolona in 1980-81 was estimated to rise over \$200 from the previous year, the Department of Education figures show.

The annual report also revealed that average daily attendance in the Okolona schools dropped 29 percent over the five years preceding the 1980-81 school year while the other three school districts in Clark County retained approximately the same attendance rates during the same period.

The committee which is examining the alternatives to the current Okolona School System is made up of both black and white residents of the Okolona District.

"Many of those involved are parents who are paying tuition to send their children to other nearby schools," Pentecost said. "Some of the others are property owners who are concerned by the lack of population growth in the area. They feel this is a direct result of an inadequate school system."

The committee members feel that more

young people will move to the Okolona District if they are able to send their children to a school which offers more academic and vocational choices than the current Okolona School can, Pentecost explained.

COMING

September 24— Clark County Fair Junior Showmanship Contest—7 p.m.
September 25 — Clark County Fair Livestock Judging—1 p.m.; Livestock Sale—6 p.m.
September 26 — Clark County Fair 4-H Poultry Chain Sale—10 a.m.
September 28 — Elementary Schools Open House, Perritt—6:30-7:30 p.m.; Central—7:30-8:30.
October 1 — Arkadelphia Board of Directors, City Hall—7:30 p.m.

Newspaper article from 1981 discusses the possibility of dissolving the Okolona School District because of its high costs without equal opportunities.

THIRTEEN NO. 32

Okolona group makes request

11-19-81 548

Representatives from the Concerned Citizens for Quality Education from Okolona made their plea to the Arkadelphia School Board to accept part of the Okolona students should the school there be closed but get no encouragement in return.

The board, meeting in special session on Thursday afternoon, made no commitment to Okolona one way or the other although they heard from both the citizens group and Bill Gibbs, Okolona superintendent.

Vicki Lynn acting as spokeswoman for the group read a statement to the board in which she asked for a commitment to accept the land and students for annexation that have been offered to Arkadelphia to "help offer the people of Okolona an alternative."

Mrs. Lynn, in answering questions put by the board, told that there are 50 people in their group seeking to close the Okolona school. Of these eight or ten are black. About 20 to 30 percent have children in the Okolona school and some have children in other systems.

This proposal has already been presented to the Gurdon and Amity school boards with no commitment from either at the present time. Originally the group had proposed dividing with Delight as well but had decided to keep it within the county.

School board president Mickey O'Quinn questioned how the group derived at the boundary lines that are proposed for division of

land and students among the three other school districts.

Mrs. Lynn explained that they tried to go with sections of people. If Gurdon got more students, it got more land. "We tried to satisfy members of the group."

There are 110 students in the Okolona school for 1981. The proposed division would send five black and five white students to Arkadelphia as well as the 22 black and seven white in the original Delight area. Six white students would go to Amity and 65 would go to Gurdon (about 40 black and 25 white, approximately).

The students in the Meek Community would go to the Arkadelphia school since Delight was not included, and according to Don Pennington, this would almost "eliminate these kids from school activities" because of the transportation problem. The Meek settlement is 25 miles from Arkadelphia.

When asked how the town feels, Mrs. Lynn said the town was split in half over the matter which had been brewing since it was voted on in 1968. The group has nothing against the administration and teachers, according to Mrs. Lynn, but feels that they just don't have enough students or money to work with.

She felt that one half of those who oppose the school closing have no children or grandchildren in the school. Presently 28 students pay tuition to attend the Gurdon schools.

Ed McCorkle, attorney for the Arkadelphia

school, explained the difference in consolidation and elimination of the school. In consolidation both side vote and it takes a majority of both sides to pass the issue. In elimination 10 percent of the qualified electors in the district must sign a petition and then the majority voting decide to dissolve the school. Only the board of the district that would be accepting the students would have to vote for acceptance, rather than the whole district.

The group is hoping to put the matter on the ballot in March of 1982 but must have commitments from the other districts before they put it on the ballot.

Bill Gibbs, Okolona superintendent, also present at the meeting, said he felt that this is a local matter that needs to be decided locally before they receive any commitments.

Board members and attorney felt that the matter had come up too quickly. O'Quinn said that he felt the board needed to take time and look at it with a great deal of homework, thought, and wisdom.

According to Don Pennington, this is a chicken and egg situation. The group needs a commitment from the other districts to put it to a vote but having these commitments could influence how the vote is cast.

The board accepted the recommendation of Superintendent Dr. Jim Ford to take the matter under advisement, get more answers, and take it up at a later date.

Newspaper article from 1981 discusses request to close the Okolona School. The issue had nothing to do with current leadership, but rather with the lack of funds. The town was split over the decision.

5-3-04



Long ago in Okolona

The photo above, loaned to the Siftings Herald by the Clark County Historical Association, shows an Okolona ball team. It was apparently shot in 1907. If anyone has any information about the photo or the persons in it, contact Bill Newberry at 246-2342 or the Siftings Herald at 246-5525.

OKOLONA

Sports didn't just exist within the school system. Pictured is an Okolona baseball team from 1907.