
The Broward County Public School System

The First Quarter Century

by *Cooper Kirk*

The Broward County, Florida, public school system with its 130,000 plus pupils in 1988, began unspectacularly in 1899 as a part of the Dade County public school system of education. With the creation of Broward County in 1915, from Palm Beach and Dade counties, local school patrons and taxpayers assumed the full obligation of public education. In 1899, Dade County stretched from the upper Keys north to St. Lucie Inlet and comprised the present counties of Martin, Palm Beach, Broward and Dade, an area of 5,934 square miles excluding Lake Okeechobee, and in 1900 inhabited by 4,995 people, a population density of less than one person for each square mile.

Because of its intractable watery wastelands, Broward County became the last portion of extreme southeast Florida to become extensively settled. With eighty-nine percent of its area located in the official Everglades, the topography of the county retarded settlement except by the hardiest pioneers anxious to carve out their destiny on a cruel frontier inundated with water. Although extollers of public education beat loud the drums for frontier children to attend school on a regular basis, the harsh necessity of struggling with a hostile environment kept regular attendance low until shortly after World War I, when compulsory education became an inexorable fact of life.¹

After the extension of the Florida East Coast Railway from West Palm Beach to Miami in 1896, only a trickle

of settlers braved the Broward County elements. A census of Pompano [Beach] in November 1899, by localite Paul Jacobs, who like most of his neighbors lived in a palmetto log hut with dirt floors, revealed the presence of 106 settlers, a growth of eighty settlers within the preceding three months. The official census of Fort Lauderdale in 1900 gave a total population of ninety-one hardies for the unincorporated community situated on and adjacent to New River. Other portions of Broward County, such as Dania and Hallandale, could boast of hardly more than 120 inhabitants altogether. Many of the settlers found the going too tough and pulled up stakes for more promising locations, thus settlement remained meager and the need for public schools continued marginal.²

Quite expectantly, the operation and facilities of the Dade County public school system which began in 1885, in 1900 mirrored the primitive conditions of the county and made the conduct of an efficient system very difficult. A paucity of transportation facilities and crude living quarters matched the scarcity of population. Except for an overgrown and unused dirt road running from Lake Worth to Biscayne Bay, the single-track railway furnished the only practical means of transportation. Although at the turn of the century Americans owned 15,000 flimsy automobiles, backwards Florida possessed only one of these horseless carriages, and that one was in Jacksonville. In January 1901, the first automobile

Beginning with two schools as part of the Dade County educational system, Broward County's public school system has developed into one of the state's largest. Recognition of the impact which the school system has had on the overall history of Broward County has been manifested in numerous class reunions and in the preservation of several early school buildings. Most recently, two school buildings — the Davie and Oakland Park elementary schools — have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In "The Broward County School System: The First Quarter Century," County Historian Cooper Kirk, himself a retired Broward schoolteacher, examines the formative period which witnessed the establishment of fifteen schools, the creation of Broward County and with it a local school bureaucracy, the imposition of compulsory education, and the transformation of the region's economy from agriculture to tourism and real estate. As this article vividly illustrates, schools both reflected and shaped the community around them and thus served as a focal point for the early development of Broward County.

arrived in Dade County, imported by J. F. Plummer, Jr. of Miami, whose fragile "Locomotive" first startled and then fascinated his neighbors. Aware of the necessity of better public transportation facilities to develop and bind the far-flung county together, in 1902, the Dade County Board of Commissioners began the construction of the first county rock road, which they termed the "Appian Way." The sixty-eight mile long and eight foot wide non-paved road from West Palm Beach to Biscayne Bay was completed in 1906, and eventually became the basis for the Dixie Highway. In the domestic arena the increased use of Dade County pine and imported lumber for home construction resulted in a gradual replacement of the settlers' log huts with more of civilization's amenities.³

The initial impulse for the formation of a public school in a Dade County settlement came as a result of the citizens of the settlement petitioning the school board to establish a rudimentary school. The school board generally required a minimum of ten pupils from ages six to twenty-one years before it acted favorably. Upon the approval of a school, the school board then obligated itself to furnish the building materials and a teacher, and on its part the community chipped in with the land on which to locate a one-room schoolhouse and then threw together a makeshift house within a week or two, if farming conditions permitted. Local artisans and laborers nailed together crude desks and completed the interior by hanging a chalkboard. Eventually, the school board got around to painting the exterior of the primitive educational structures, but not the adjacent outside privy.⁴

In both Fort Lauderdale and Pompano the public schools opened for business on October 2, 1899, to the rejoicing of the inhabitants who valued this harbinger of an emerging civilization. The river settlement located its school on Andrews Avenue south of the river, while the northern edge of Lettuce Lake or Lake Barbara became the site of Pompano's first schoolhouse. Fort Lauderdale had as its teacher eighteen year old Miss Ivy Cromartie of Lemon City, Florida, who had a third grade teaching certificate, and in Pompano Mrs. Mary (George O.) Butler sported a second grade certificate. Both certificates had been issued a few days before school opened and immediately after Miss Cromartie and Mrs. Butler had taken the two day examination for certification. Miss Cromartie opened the river settlement school with nine pupils enrolled in grades one through six, and it is probable Mrs. Butler had about the same

number in the elementary grades. Instruction began during the very lethal yellow fever epidemic which struck southeast Florida in mid-1899.⁵

Income and length of school term presented problems to teachers owing to the low property valuation, scarcity of pupils who had to work in the farm fields much of the year to help eke out a livelihood for the family, and to the unstable northern markets whose recompense for farm products at times made farming unprofitable. Dade County schools closed for the year in April 1900, after a school term which county-wide varied from four to six months. No teacher received payment for more than six months, some for less months. Both Mrs. Butler and Miss Cromartie worked five months, and for their onerous labor each received \$40.00 per month or a total of \$200.00 for the school term. In the summer of 1900, after being constantly wooed in a surprising fashion by diffident Frank Stranahan, Fort Lauderdale's only merchant, Miss Cromartie married him and did not return to teach. For years Stranahan joked he had broken up Fort Lauderdale's first school through the marriage. Mrs. Butler, whose husband was a surveyor for both the county and the railroad, taught in Pompano several more years before she returned to West Palm Beach, where she resided for many years. Although these salaries seem puny in many respects, yet when measured against school Superintendent Z. T. Merritt's salary of \$600.00 for twelve months service, they seem in line with the ability of taxpayers to meet school expenses. Indicative of the money scale of this period is the fact that the school board contracted in March 1900 for the painting of the Fort Lauderdale and Pompano schoolhouses, and for this labor and that of painting three other widely scattered schoolhouses, the contractor was paid \$120.00, and in addition he obligated himself for the materials and travel expense.⁶

The second year of Broward County schools witnessed a teacher change and a rising school enrollment both locally and county-wide. In September 1900, Miss Esther Bryan, daughter of Nathaniel C. Bryan of Hallandale, and a cousin of "movers and shakers" Reed A. and Tom M. Bryan of Fort Lauderdale, succeeded Miss Cromartie at New River, while Mrs. Butler at Pompano saw her enrollment increase but teachers' salaries remain constant. A Dade County school census in December 1900 revealed a total of 1,375 children of school age, then from six to twenty-one years, a surprisingly broad age group eligible for public



Fort Lauderdale's first schoolhouse, built in 1899.

education at public expense in light of the few resources of the county. Of those eligible for public education, 1,036 were white and 339 were Negroes, and they lived from the upper keys to St. Lucie Inlet, a distance of approximately 175 miles. By early 1901, twenty wood schoolhouses for whites and six for Negroes dotted the vast landscape of Dade County, and school enrollment had risen to 997, a figure which reveals that all those eligible for public education did not avail themselves of its benefits. Of this sum, Miss Bryan taught eighteen at Fort Lauderdale, and Mrs. Butler's one-room house at Pompano was crowded with twenty-eight fidgety pupils.⁷

A signal event occurred in June 1901 when Rev. B. F. James of Deerfield [Beach] took and passed the teacher examination in Miami and received his coveted county teaching certificate, even though his employment in Deerfield was deferred for several years. State issued teacher certificates hardly existed at this time; the state for the most part left it in the hands of counties to license teachers. Local school boards secured qualified teachers by announcing in newspapers the dates of the two-day examination, along with a list of books in which the aspiring teachers would be examined, and on the day the exams began, hopefuls were examined at the county office, and the superintendent and other certificate holders graded the examinations. Under such improvisation, combined with the fact that often the examinees had very little formal education themselves, it is little wonder that often as many applicants failed as passed the examinations.⁸

The lure of teaching, however, beckoned many despite the rigors of the frontier. Opportunities for switching teaching locations were many, for on the moving frontier teachers rarely taught for long in one community. One reason for teacher switches lay in conditions of the close-knit communities. Local school patrons, as they were called, would not abide a teacher who fell from favor and the school board invariably removed those in disfavor. In addition, teachers did not expect to remain in the same settlement very long and consequently did not own homes in the community. This meant they had to board or rent from localites who generally had children in the school. The familiarity with teacher weaknesses and foibles on the part of school patrons and their children which evolved in the close living quarters did not remain in the provincially-minded community. Only the strong could survive the gossip. Another factor limited teacher tenure and this stemmed from sex. Because female teachers predominated on the frontier, and many of these only taught until they could find a suitable suitor for their hand, teaching opportunities abounded for the tough and persevering.⁹

School board receipts and expenditures chased each other as operating costs and teacher replacement ate away at the increasing tax returns. In September 1902, for the first time, the school board picked up the transportation costs of Hallandale students. Compensation for contracted wagon owners to transport them southward to the Ojus school first shows up in the record at this time. Owners received \$20.00 per month transportation allowance for the several hours a day trip. At the same time Dade County property valuations rose over thirty per cent from the previous year to a total of \$3,197,645, while taxes were assessed at twenty per cent of property market value. Changes occurred that year in teachers for the Fort Lauderdale and Pompano schools. In the former school Miss B. Montague replaced Miss Bryan and she received a stipend of \$45.00 per month, and Miss Vallee Habbitts succeeded Mrs. Butler in the latter school, and as a beginning teacher her monthly stipend amounted to \$40.00.¹⁰

A public school came to Dania in the summer of 1903, when localites built a one room frame building alongside the Florida East Coast Railway track, an unfortunate location which proved to be nerve-racking because of the noise and dust from the trains which upset school decorum quite as

much as it did the learning process. Miss Blanche Burtshaw, the first Dania teacher, quit after several months of mental torture endured under taxing conditions. Succeeding her came Miss Bertha Mulliken, sister of future Mayor John Wesley Mulliken of Dania, who obtained the position for her when he insisted that the school board hire his relative. Meanwhile a change took place in Fort Lauderdale in the fall of 1903. Miss Habbitts married, and as Mrs. Perry she replaced Miss Montague, and Miss Haddie Tucker took over in Pompano. The latter opened school on October 19th because the September 9th hurricane damaged the schoolhouse and repairs were delayed because almost all the structures in Pompano were blown down amid heavy rains. Each of these worthy school marmes drew down \$40.00 each month for the five month school term. Also in 1903, the first school for Negroes in Broward County opened in Deerfield with the Rev. B. F. James as the teacher. But he did not last long, for in November 1904, James, a district Baptist preacher, after being robbed aboard a train en route to a religious conference in Daytona, left for Titusville where he took up the pastorate of a Negro Baptist church.¹¹

The difficulties of school transportation sometimes led to the formation of new schools. Wearied almost to distraction by the transportation of the children through the dreary woods in ramshackle wagons, school patrons in Hallandale petitioned for and received material for a schoolhouse and the promise of a teacher. While the patrons built the building in the summer of 1903, Miss Bernice Strahan came into the Scandinavian community in September ready to teach. Among her pupils were the numerous Palmquist children drawn from two families. Probably, the arrival of the Palmquists speeded the establishment of the school, for only several months before school opened the Palmquists arrived in Hallandale from central Florida where they had stopped in transit from Sweden. For years these families played a crucial role in the development of the school and Swedish settlement.¹²

Negroes in Fort Lauderdale petitioned for a school in the summer of 1904, but for some publicly undisclosed reason the board stated it "found it impossible to open a colored school in Fort Lauderdale this year." Possibly, the abundant farm returns for that year might have influenced the board's negative decision, for some whites felt the farm fields suited Negroes better than "book-learning." Except for

Dania, where Miss Mulliken persevered, Broward County schools had a change of white teachers for the 1904-05 school year. In Hallandale Miss Laura Bryan prevailed, Miss Ellen B. Pratt succeeded Mrs. Perry in Fort Lauderdale, and Miss Enice Worley took up the teaching chores in Pompano. Teachers lamented the diminishment of their income as the agricultural fields beckoned youngsters more forcefully than did the educational field, for all Dade County schools closed prior to the end of April 1905, and the Pompano school closed much earlier so that children could labor in the farm industry. Commenting upon the early school closing, a less than enthusiastic school board declared that while attendance had been normal for the year, "it could have been higher except parents want the children to work in the fields."¹³

By late 1905, Governor Napoleon B. Broward had deposited materials on New River with which to build two dredges to be used in the drainage and reclamation of the Everglades. Dredgemen arrived with their families and an optimistic attitude permeated Fort Lauderdale at the prospects of drainage which when completed would make life more comfortable and thus result in an increase in population and subsequent development, and these prospects found reflection in the school. Consequently, *The Weekly Miami Metropolis* in December 1905, in an article titled "New River School To Be Enlarged," reported upon the progress of the burgeoning Fort Lauderdale school. Beginning in 1899, with a one-room schoolhouse, the increase in pupil enrollment to forty-eight necessitated a 20x20 foot addition to the building. While the school board agreed to furnish the materials, school patrons were required to build the addition during the Christmas holidays. Two teachers now instructed Fort Lauderdaleians in their "A, B, C's," and related subjects: Miss Sue Hopkins, principal, received \$50.00 monthly, and Miss Lizzie Kyle, assistant, drew \$10.00 less. Several years' experience in the classroom for Miss Bertha Mulliken in Dania resulted in a raise in her salary to \$50.00 per month, not an inconsequential income considering the \$65.00 monthly wage drawn by Dade County Superintendent R. E. Hall. Hall, however, received remuneration for twelve months each year while classroom teachers got paid only for the months they actually taught.¹⁴

The fall of 1905 also witnessed the establishment in Broward County of an additional public school for Negroes and a generally upbeat attitude toward education in Dade County. In Dania,

Asa Rickard, Jr., taught all grades in the elementary school for Negroes and drew the usual monthly salary of \$40.00 for beginning teachers. Agitation for a school for Fort Lauderdale Negroes produced a decision by the school board on July 10, 1906, "that a Colored School be established at Ft. Lauderdale for four months to begin Aug. 6th." But whether such a school was actually begun in August 1906, is open to question. Neither in the official records nor in the news media is it specifically said who was appointed the teacher, although a case might be made that C. R. Ross, in drawing check number 2895, for \$40.00 in August might have been assigned to the Fort Lauderdale school, although the evidence is very tenuous in support. W. B. Burns, however, received the nod in February 1907 as supervisor of the Fort Lauderdale school. Nor is there any clear evidence from the school board minutes that a Negro school operated in Fort Lauderdale in the 1907-08 school year, although *The Miami Metropolis* stated on July 7, 1907, that Mrs. Nora L. Jackson of Miami had been appointed to the Fort Lauderdale school at \$140.00 for the term, but two days later the school board reappointed her to the Washington High School or the Miami Colored School. The first teacher certainly to teach in the Fort Lauderdale school, also known as Colored School No. 11, was Mrs. Emmie Robinson, educated at the Live Oak Institute, who began teaching in August 1908, the same month that Joseph A. Ely became the first teacher at the Pompano Negro school at \$30.00 per month. In preparation for the fall session of 1906 the school board decided to dress up the schoolhouses of Hallandale and Dania and accepted the bid of T. A. Tribble to paint the former for \$23.00 and the latter for \$37.00. Simultaneously, *The Weekly Miami Metropolis*, in an editorial titled "Send Your Children to Schools" pointed to the disadvantages of not attending school regularly.

It has been charged to the discredit of Dade County that some parents hold their children out of school and force them to work in the fields or follow other pursuits of livelihood . . . Remember that in bringing up your children in ignorance you are rearing a man or woman that will not amount to much in the world; one who can never attain social or business prominence, and who throughout life will eke out a measly existence by the sweat of his or her brow.

And although this influential newspaper went along with the policy of

the school board to have the white schools in session one or two months longer than those for Negro pupils, nevertheless, the paper extolled schools as beneficial to white and Negro pupils alike.¹⁵

In the summer of 1906, the board made significant appointments and released some revealing population and school statistics. Customarily the board appointed or re-appointed teachers every summer, but appointees could never be certain of the length of the school year or of their annual income until the last moment. At this summer meeting the board informed school patrons the school term would last six months. School expenses for this period would be paid out of tax revenues. If, however, there was an average attendance of thirty per cent or better for six months, the state would pay for an unspecified additional time of schooling. Concurrently, the board appointed for the 1906-07 school year the following Negro teachers for the "colored" schools: Mr. M. R. Mahaffey for the Dania school; and Miss Bertha Ely, daughter of Rev. and Mrs. L. J. Ely of Deerfield, to the Deerfield teaching position. Miss Ely had formerly taught in West Palm Beach but she now returned to the area in which she had grown up. The board had received the results of the recent county census which revealed the population disparity of Miami, the county seat, with the struggling Broward County settlements. Out of a total Dade County population of slightly over 12,000, Miami had a population of 6,228 compared with population figures of 219 for Fort Lauderdale, 193 for Dania, with Deerfield and Pompano bringing up the rear with 78 and 73 respectively. Furthermore, Miami's dominance is reflected in Miami having Dade County's first high school graduating class in 1904, whose proud graduates were: Misses Grace Rader and Florence Stephens and Mr. Ralph Rader, all of whom hailed from Miami. At the same time the census revealed that Florida had a total population of 614,845, and of this figure the Dade County schools enrolled 3,097 pupils, 2,059 whites and 1,038 Negroes.¹⁶

For years a controversy raged in Florida over textbooks, particularly in the areas of uniformity, sale and purchase. Also, no little disagreement was evidenced on the score of the management of the local school. Pupils customarily furnished their own prescribed textbooks and at the beginning of the school year sold their books to students of the lower class and purchased books from students of an upper class. Dade County school authorities rejected uniformity of text-

books for the county and left the final determination of textbooks to the discretion of the trustees or supervisor of local schools. The board furthermore required teachers to oversee the sale and purchase of books by pupils. These 1907 decisions by the board were followed by a change in the supervision of local schools. Hitherto trustees had been appointed to oversee local school affairs. Beginning in January 1907, the school board instead appointed a single supervisor for each school. Thus, a local farmer, merchant or artisan had a head-grip on school matters in his community. The first Broward County supervisors appointed for a two year term were:

Town	Supervisor White School	Supervisor Negro School
Dania	P. H. Roper	C. Chambers
Hallandale	J. B. Wofford	—
Pompano	C. L. Lyons	—
Fort Lauderdale	E. T. King	W. B. Burns
Deerfield	—	P. E. Williams ¹⁷

With money in short supply, due partially to the 1907 "panic," the Dade County school board's sumptuary mode of operation accelerated. While recognizing the need for a new school facility at Dania due to growth and the noxious railroad siding location, the board, in response to a petition by Danians, agreed to furnish only \$300.00 of the projected \$1,000.00 needed for the new schoolhouse. Whereupon the Florida East Coast Railway, through its agent Andrew C. Frost, agreed to contribute land valued at \$400.00, while the Dania school patrons agreed to contribute \$300.00 in cash, later augmented by an additional \$195.00 contribution which they splurged on decorative stone walls. The 30x60 foot schoolhouse was constructed of concrete block, the first non-wooden school building to be constructed in Broward County. In a rare display of largesse, the board voted to begin a school for whites in Deerfield in the fall of 1907, the board to furnish the materials and the school patrons the labor to erect the frame schoolhouse.¹⁸

In the same year two new Negro teachers began service in Broward County schools. At Hallandale Miss Anna L. Jackson, principal, received the princely figure of \$60.00 monthly, while her counterpart in the Hallandale white school, Irene Bennett, pulled down only \$40.00 monthly. Despite this show of liberality toward Principal Jackson, white schools for the 1907-08 school year received almost all of Dade's school budget of \$55,103.93. The school expenditures divided as follows: white schools, \$42,607.59; Negro schools, \$6,684.27; and administrative costs, \$5,812.07, the latter figure, however, included the maintenance of existing facilities.¹⁹



Students gathering by Fort Lauderdale's second school building, c. 1912-1915. This building, which later became the first Broward County courthouse, is also pictured on the cover of this issue.

On July 1, 1909, the Pompano and Deerfield schools left the Dade County school system for six years when Palm Beach County was created from the northern part of Dade County, the division of Dade County falling mid-way between Pompano and Fort Lauderdale. Relative little change occurred in these two schools during the time they were a part of the Palm Beach County school system.²⁰

Fort Lauderdale grew rather slowly during the years immediately after the drainage and reclamation of the Everglades began, although dredging operations at first centered in the New River town. But it had grown enough by 1910 to warrant a new schoolhouse. The first "modern" school building for Broward County was built that year, authorized by the Dade County school board when Tom M. Bryan and E. T. King, prominent Fort Lauderdale entrepreneurs, appeared before the board in April to plead for an adequate facility to house a school which would in the fall of 1911 institute a high school with the addition of the ninth grade. To make room for this two-story concrete structure, the old two-room frame building was moved slightly northward. The board allotted \$5,000 toward the construction of the \$7,000 structure, school patrons making up the difference. As in the case of the Dania concrete school building, the Fort Lauderdale school owed much to James M. Holding of Dania, who was a member of the board and looked after school interests in the northern part of Dade County. When Broward County was created in 1915, the Board of County Commissioners of the new county purchased this structure for \$12,000 and turned it into the county courthouse.²¹

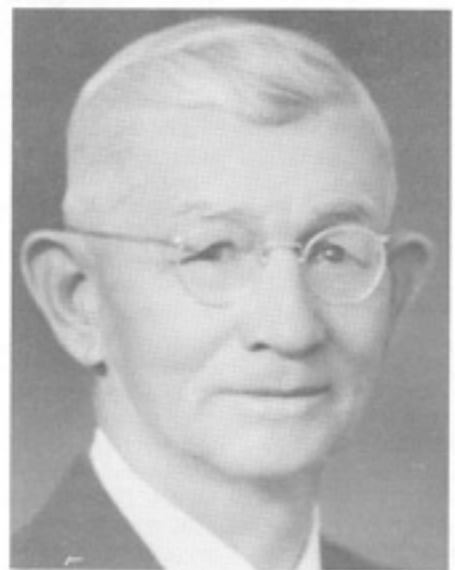
Would school-age children rather

"work in the fields" than go to school where an economically bettering education could be secured through application and perseverance? Probably the majority opted for the classroom. Untutored opinion would likely conclude whites attended school more regularly than did Negroes, particularly since much more money and better facilities went to white schools than to Negro schools. But surprisingly to contemporaries, in 1910, Negro pupils opted more than their white counterparts to the classroom, with all its heartburn and travail, over the farm fields. For both colors, parents and pupils alike scrimped and sacrificed for educational advancement. W. M. Holloway, superintendent of Florida public schools, reported in 1910, that while Negroes liked "to frolic," they also voted for the school with their attendance and surpassed white children in their regularity. He averred: "'Average' attendance is not known among the colored schools. They keep it well up toward the perfect mark." Perhaps, Negro diligence to some extent stemmed from their having to work in the farm fields longer and more often during the planting and harvesting season, that is, in late winter and early spring, and thus they may have valued education more than did white pupils.²²

As digging of Everglades drainage canals progressed westward, so did settlement increase along the canal banks. Settlers, mostly from the Panama Canal Zone, and the north and mid-west United States, flocked along the North and South New River Canals in 1910-11, as these drainage and transportation canals to Lake Okeechobee neared completion. Located about nine miles west of Fort Lauderdale, these adventuresome settlers

were not long onsite before they pushed for a schoolhouse for their children. Influenced by the Canal Zonians, canal residents of the Everglades named their community after the Canal Zone where the Zonians had been employed in the construction of the Panama Canal, then nearing completion. When Superintendent R. E. Hall visited nascent Zona in early March 1911, residents button-holed Hall and by their importunity prevailed upon him to yield to their petition for a school. Hall also agreed to furnish a teacher to begin school April 1 instead of in the fall, in lieu of not furnishing the building materials. On April Fool's day schoolmaster Milton Geere opened the school doors for the first session. The Zona school, shortly thereafter renamed the Davie school, under Geere received the accolade as "the first school in the Everglades."²³

In educational matters, Dania had an ace-in-the-hole. In 1902, James M. Holding settled three miles west of Hallandale in the newly formed community of Pembroke. Several years later, Holding, a graduate of North Carolina's Wake Forest College, moved to Dania where he gained the reputation of an outstanding "scientific" farmer, a remarkable occurrence for the former college Greek and mathematics professor. In 1909, he began a six-year stint as a member of the Dade County school board, and in that strategic position he championed the educational interests of north Dade County. In 1912, Holding obtained a new school



James M. Holding, Broward County's first Superintendent of Public Instruction.

building and site for an enlarged Dania school. On a high and dry location consisting of three acres, the school board constructed a two-story concrete building ornamented with massive corinthian columns at the entrance. In 1916, a large rear addition made the structure suitable for a high school. Danians provided little monetary outlay for the \$5,000 school building, for by 1912, the school board had begun to move along a double track in building construction. For small buildings the board provided the funds, but for larger edifices the board required the passage of a bond issue obligating property owners to foot the entire cost of construction. In keeping with Holding's agricultural perspectives, one acre of the Dania school property purchased from Andrew C. Frost became the location of the first agricultural courses to be taught in Broward County. Sited amid an experimental farm for pupils, and featuring a Spanish architectural motif conceived by August Geiger, Miami's foremost architect, the Dania school building made Danians the envy of north Dade County.²⁴

Expressive of the area's development, in September 1914, two small country schools made their appearance in the extremes of Broward County. To the south a school opened in the agricultural-sawmill community of Pembroke. Pembroke, settled largely by immigrants from Palatka, Florida, furnished fourteen students for the first year of the school's short-lived existence. To the north Mrs. Mattie Raulerson Baker opened the Prospect School in her brother's home at a location now in Oakland Park but then in a community known as Colohatchee. Mrs. Baker, among the first four-year college graduates to teach in Broward County, had moved to Fort Lauderdale in 1910, from Volusia County, after short residences in Pompano and Colohatchee. In Fort Lauderdale, her husband Harry began an automotive repair service south of the river, bordering the Andrews Avenue bridge. In grades one through six, Mrs. Baker taught fourteen students, including her son Harry Elmo. The Prospect School had cramped quarters in the Raulerson house sited amid a farm. In September 1915, this school moved eastward, but still in Colohatchee, into a converted barn belonging to Mr. M. T. Whidby. In this primitive but more spacious setting, Mrs. Baker's class increased to twenty pupils. Now that her husband operated the first taxi for hire in Broward County, Mrs. Baker and Harry Elmo could return home each night instead of spending the school week at the home of her brother as she did at the Prospect School.²⁵



The Dania school building soon after completion in 1913. Note construction debris still on the ground.

Children living a mile or two south of the Whidby School attended the Fort Lauderdale school. Their's was a pleasant, fun-filled trip to school each day. Mark Mahannah recalls those pioneering days when the Dade County school board hired E. A. Bras of Colohatchee to transport the Colohatchee children to school in a canvas-covered wagon drawn by small ponies. The children would jump in and out of the wagon, pick flowers, chase small game and fowls, and engage in "devilments" on their way to school.²⁶

As the war clouds gathered in Europe in early 1914, the meager tourist trade in Fort Lauderdale began to increase, with the result that some tourists settled or invested in property, thereby increasing the population to a point that school facilities became overcrowded. The town's ninth graders of 1911 looked forward to graduation in 1915, a graduation assured provided they remained in school and passed, not all of whom did. By mid-1914, attendance at the Fort Lauderdale school, which included grades one through twelve, neared 300. Consequently, a new school building was called for, and this need was highlighted by the necessity of renting the second floor of the *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel* building for overcrowded classes. William H. Marshall, the first mayor of Fort Lauderdale upon its incorporation in March 1911, spearheaded the drive to pass a bond issue for an adequate building. He and his cohorts' efforts proved successful, for on June 6, 1914, Fort Lauderdale's freeholders overwhelmingly passed by a forty-three to sixteen margin, the first school bond issue in Broward County, and Fort Lauderdale's could hardly wait to occupy their new \$55,000 structure. Like

the Dania school, it featured Spanish architecture conceived by August Geiger, and the construction contract went to the Biscayne Engineering Company of Miami. Included in the building was an auditorium capable of accommodating upwards of 700 people, and after 1915, the auditorium became the prime site for community cultural events and political rallies. The location of the building, however, caused a good deal of agitation. Because the majority of Fort Lauderdale's and suburbanites lived north of New River, the southside site was abandoned in favor of a northside location sited three blocks east of Andrews Avenue. Some additional dissatisfaction arose because the new school building was allegedly located too far from "downtown" Fort Lauderdale, in fact so far from the three block distant city hall that realtor C. C. Ausherman had difficulty selling lots adjacent to the school site for \$50.00 each.²⁷

In the meantime diligent efforts in behalf of the creation of a new county to be carved from Palm Beach and Dade counties paid dividends when the state legislature in April 1915, created Broward County, effective October 1, 1915. The people living from Hallandale north to Deerfield settled upon the name of Broward County with little difficulty because of the influence Napoleon B. Broward, Florida's governor from 1905 to 1909, had in beginning the drainage and reclamation of the Everglades in July 1906, then the world's largest drainage project, which when completed in 1915 made it possible for pioneers to settle permanently north of Biscayne Bay.²⁸

The new Fort Lauderdale High School building, which was occupied in September 1915, was the only high school

in the sixty-eight mile stretch between Miami and West Palm Beach, and as a consequence, became the educational pride and center of Broward County. Even before the effective date of Broward County's birth, Fort Lauderdale High School graduated its first class in May 1915, consisting of five boys: Dale Redman, Charles Crim, John Davis, Martin Davis and Raymond Russell. Since Fort Lauderdale, the county seat, had the only high school in the county, graduates of the eighth grade in other communities trekked to the New River town to complete their education. Fort Lauderdale High School in 1915 could draw students from a county area of 1,220 square miles and a population of 4,763, 1,870 of whom resided in the county seat. With the exception of Hallandale, open-sided buses transported high school students to Fort Lauderdale High. Pupils from Hallandale, however, took the train to the new high school, and Edith Palmquist, now Mrs. Foster Hunter, has nostalgic euphoria when she recalls her arduous, time-consuming train rides of three years' duration to Fort Lauderdale. In 1916, she became one of the first non-residents of Fort Lauderdale to graduate from Fort Lauderdale High.²⁹

Statistics, titles which ostensibly conveyed the appearance of status and authority, and sports assumed an increasing prominence in education as the twentieth century progressed. In December 1915, the Broward County school board took the first school cen-

sus of the county. In confirmation of an obvious fact, the two county seat schools dominated enrollment.

School	White Pupils	Negro Pupils
Deerfield	55	59
Pompano.....	99	50
Whidby	20	—
Ft. Laud.	421	75
Dania	93	26
Davie	73	—
Hallandale	61	37
Pembroke	13	—
TOTAL	835	247

In a rural setting which could not provide many students for high school sports, track competition proved the most popular sport, and such competition between the lower grades of county schools furnished bragging rights for towns and cemented relations among younger pupils. Principals promoted competition, and because all male principals, whether high school or elementary, bore the dignified title of Professor and had a high level of honor in a community, their promotion of sports generally carried the day. When the Fort Lauderdale school added the ninth grade in 1911, the school track team competed against the lower grades of Miami High School, and the team had only one goal: "beat Miami," and when it became a full-fledged high school under Professor James S. Rickards, the Fort Lauderdale track team changed its goal to "beat Miami High School," a goal the team often accomplished. Then, under the aegis of assistant principal Professor Walter Wright, the high school organized a basketball team in November 1914, and it had the same goal as the track team. When the local team engaged Miami High School at Stranahan Field, interest peaked and much of the citizenry turned out to cheer on the locals. Fort Lauderdale High School, a David pitted against a Goliath, more than held its own in early contests with the veteran Miami High School teams. But the basketball team went into a slight eclipse several years later when teacher-coach Wright married an eleventh grade student, had his status and job thrown into jeopardy, and found it the part of wisdom to accept the principalship of the Larkin Elementary School located in northwest Dade County.³⁰

Public education in the United States found birth through the womb of politics, and the Broward County school system continued the tradition in 1916, when two men ran for the county superintendency. In a fiercely contested political campaign which revolved around whether Fort Lauderdale High School

had been properly accredited by the southern accrediting association, as Professor Rickards claimed and claimed credit for, and which Superintendent James M. Holding vehemently denied, Rickards went down to defeat before Holding's strength county-wide. Rickards, however, ran strong in Fort Lauderdale where hardly any community event witnessed his absence. Rickards, who was later to gain state prominence in educational circles after his superintendency of the Broward County schools from 1921 to 1929, had become principal of the Fort Lauderdale school upon his arrival from Indiana in 1913, and he quickly gained acclamation as an orator of ability, churchman par excellence, and educational innovator, which meant he was a "progressive" educator. But these qualities could not wrest the superintendency from Holding in the 1916 election. After his defeat Rickards left Florida for a year, but returned to Fort Lauderdale in 1917 to become the secretary of the Napoleon B. Broward Drainage District before his election to the superintendency in 1920. Holding, on the other hand, drew praise for his advocacy of agricultural classes and his gentle disposition. Also, he drew accolades for his selection of the Fort Lauderdale High School faculty for 1916-17, which was the first in which every high school teacher held a bona fide college degree. He also instituted a Domestic Science course, later known as home economics, which enrolled both boys and girls, and hired as the teacher Miss Myra McIlvaine, later Mrs. Myra Marshall, who taught for well over thirty years at Fort Lauderdale High School. Holding's calling, however, seemed to be agricultural, and he responded to that call by resigning in 1919 to devote himself to his farming enterprises. By interim appointment, attorney and former Mayor of Fort Lauderdale, C. E. Farrington, succeeded Holding as county school superintendent, but Farrington did not seek the post in the election of 1920. Meanwhile Rickards had developed a county-wide constituency prior to 1920, and in the election of that year he easily captured the position he had so coveted in 1916.³¹

As public education began to preempt the educational arena in the United States, it gained prestige and increasing influence both as an educational instrument and as a socialization agent, and state after state began to impose compulsory attendance laws. Rickards early advocated such laws, and served on county and state committees which exerted pressure on the state legislature to require regular school attendance under sanctions. In 1915, bowing to teacher political power,

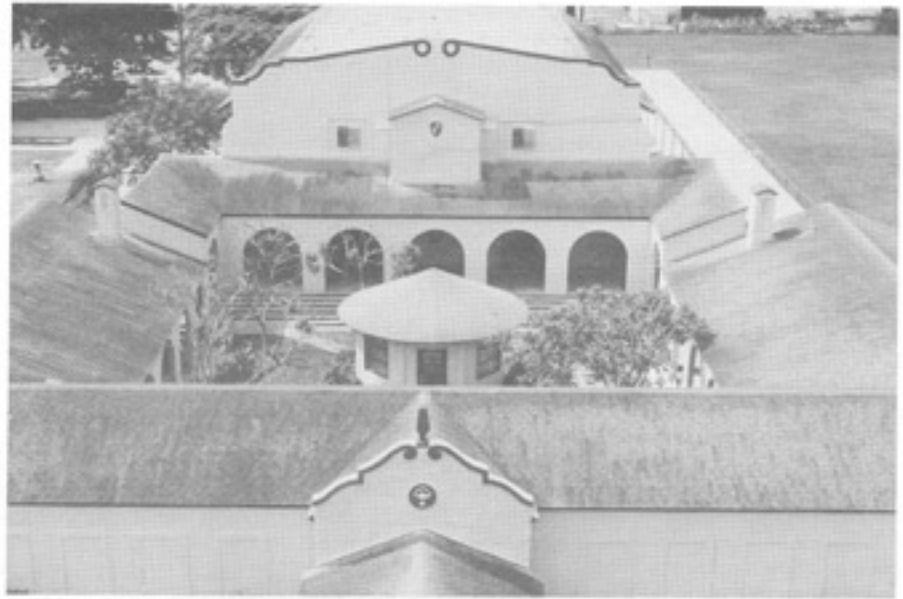


James S. Rickards, principal of the Fort Lauderdale school 1913-1916, and Broward County school superintendent, 1921-1929.

the Florida State Legislature eased into the controversial field by permitting individual communities to impose compulsory attendance. Immediately the community of Hallandale voted to require a minimum attendance of eighty days each school year, the first Broward County school to do so. Through the continued agitation of Rickards and other educators, in 1919, the Florida Legislature passed an act articulating compulsory school attendance by all school-aged children effective in the fall of that year. Now the school bureaucracy had the tool for which it had so long panted; it now had a captive clientele supported at public expense.³²

Three entities at this time controlled Broward County schools on the local level: the superintendent, the school board and a board of trustees, all elected, the latter by the community or district in which they resided. The trustees settled many matters concerning the local school, but on other matters it simply made recommendations to the school board. In the first county election of 1915, Broward County voters selected J. D. Butler of Deerfield, C. D. Kittredge of Fort Lauderdale and F. L. Neville of Dania school board members. The school board let contracts for the construction of concrete block school buildings in Hallandale and Pompano in 1915-16, for Davie in 1918, and for Deerfield in 1920, so that as the great Florida Land Boom began all the communities with schools had exchanged frame for concrete structures. The school board rigorously enforced racial segregation of pupils and teachers in concert with the philosophy of the South. The one exception, and a dubious one at that considering the party involved, was the admittance of Seminole Tony Tommie at Fort Lauderdale in 1915, but the decision to admit this seventeen year old Indian to the first grade came only after much investigation and soul-searching. Later several Indian girls were admitted, but the Seminoles eventually dropped out of school due to many pressures, not the least of which was tribal.³³

With the gradual population growth and development of the county, Fort Lauderdale could not forever hold a monopoly on high school education. After a long effort by some Fort Lauderdaleians, including youngster Boyd Anderson as a vocal leader, to prevent its occurrence, the school board established a high school in Dania in 1920, by permitting the ninth grade. This school served the interests of pupils in the south part of the county, and the Dania High School graduated its first class in 1924, four girls and



The Spanish-style Oakland Park Elementary School, opened in 1926, is the oldest school building in Broward County still used as a school.

one boy: Elsie Bellamy, Elsie Sherman, Rethel West, Velma Aspey and B. Frank Reames, Jr. With the establishment of the Dania High School, sports competition between it and Fort Lauderdale High School began, although the elementary schools throughout the county had competed for several years prior. Dania High School named its teams "Bulldogs," while the Fort Lauderdale school teams carried the sobriquet the "Flying L's," a name applied at least as early as 1917-18, and probably derived from the speed exhibited by the track team, particularly by Watt Gordon, who gained the reputation as the fastest high school student in Florida as early as 1916. Fort Lauderdale High School fielded the first student football team in the county in the fall of 1923, but in its first game the Flying L's lost to the Miami High School Stingarees by a score of 25 to 0. In 1924, however, the Flying L's pulled the upset of the decade by defeating the heavily-favored Stingarees 2 to 0 on the local field, which was covered by nine inches of rain water. In all sports competition, regardless of how the Flying L's fared against other teams, the season ranked a success if the local team beat the Stingarees, a feat not easily accomplished. So dominant did the Miami High School football teams become in the state, the Stingarees scheduled few Florida teams; instead they scheduled the most powerful teams in the eastern United States. For the Flying L's just to remain on the Stingarees' schedule, however, was in itself a victory of sorts.³⁴

As Fort Lauderdale continued to out-

distance the other county communities in growth, so did the city's school population overshadow that of other communities, a result which necessitated the construction of an additional school building in the county seat. In 1922, Southside Elementary School was constructed as the first "ward school" in the county, followed by Westside Elementary School in 1923, and these neighborhood schools relieved congestion at the Fort Lauderdale Central Elementary School sited next to the high school. But after Joseph Wesley Young began Hollywood in 1921, that town grew rapidly and threatened Fort Lauderdale's hegemony. In the fall of 1922, founder Young donated land for the Hollywood Central Elementary School, and it opened that fall with thirty-seven pupils taught by Mrs. Frances E. Bell, who began school with "one box of chalk, 1 box of erasers, 12 desks and 4 home made tables." To the surprise of no one, Hollywood continued its spectacular growth, and by November 1925, or only three years after the first school began, the Hollywood school system engaged twenty-seven teachers to instruct slightly over 900 pupils. But unlike the white population of the county which dramatically increased due to the land boom, the Negro population only increased steadily, for farming was on the decline. To meet, however, the educational needs of Negroes, in July 1923, the school board awarded a contract for the construction of the "Colored School" in northwest Fort Lauderdale, the first Negro high school in Broward County, and one designed to serve all the county. The board bought the land for

this school from Frank and Ivy Stranahan and built a two-story concrete building which cost \$13,954.24. Eventually, this school was named the Dillard High School in honor of a southern white educator, and later the school was renamed the Walker Elementary School after a prominent local Negro principal.³⁵

The great Florida Land Boom became apparent in Fort Lauderdale in the fall of 1924, as the number of new residents and tourists rapidly increased and construction of all building types soared. Under the aegis of Superintendent Rickards many bond issues for the enlargement of the school system passed through the vote of freeholders, the largest in 1925 for \$500,000, and additions to existing school buildings proliferated, while a few new school buildings were constructed. In early 1925, the fast-developing Oakland Park community, which had displaced the community of Colohatchee, petitioned the school board for a school building. In July the board acceded and let a contract to builders Frank Norton and Charles Mills for the construction of the Oakland Park Elementary School building. The school opened the first week in January 1926, with a teaching staff of seven whose salaries ranged from \$175.00 to \$225.00 per month, figures almost equalling the wages of skilled artisans but a far lesser remuneration than was gained by land and construction speculators who made and lost fortunes within a matter of months.³⁶

As the land and construction boom entered mid-stage in June 1925, amid a giddiness which bordered on frenzy and unbridled speculation, Superintendent Rickards released a report of the amazing growth of the Broward County public school system during one generation. County schools which began in 1899, with two one-room frame buildings, presided over by two teachers who taught less than two dozen pupils, now boasted eleven modern school buildings valued at \$380,000. Of the 3,000 pupils enrolled, the Fort Lauderdale central schools, minus the Colored School, enrolled 1,050 pupils; 450 of these pupils were in the Fort Lauderdale Central High School and 600 were in the Fort Lauderdale Central Elementary School, with both schools employing a total of thirty-four teachers. When the 230 pupils of the Southside, Westside and kindergarten schools were added to the central schools, Fort Lauderdale pupils totaled 1,280, and each of the schools had its own principal, but the appellation "Professor" had fallen into disuse.³⁷



Fort Lauderdale High School 1914 baseball team at Stranahan Field, east of the school building. Bottom row (left to right): Charles Crim, 2nd base; John Davis, pitcher; Martin Davis, catcher; Watt Gordon, 1st base. Middle row: Walter Brock, right field; H. Gebert, center field; G. Fahrion, left field. Top row; P. Weimer, manager; R. Shull, 3rd base; Lawrence Rickards, shortstop.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century Americans discovered Broward County in large numbers and they, for the most part, liked what they had found. Subsequently, the new settlers transformed the county's topography by the construction of a myriad of canals, roads, homes and commercial buildings. Additionally, they partially conquered the menace of the Everglades. As an indication of the immigrants' liking for Fort Lauderdale, the city population almost tripled from February to November 1925, for within these ten months the city's population rose from 5,625 to 15,915. Although the growth of Fort Lauderdale was amazing, the population and growth of other Broward County communities grew rapidly, and that of Hollywood soared. This startling growth, which no one had predicted, or even dreamed five years previously, and which no one could accurately predict would last or end, contributed mightily to the numerical growth of the Broward County public school system. In addition, the compulsory attendance law of 1919, and concomitant legislation, more highly trained teachers who viewed teaching as a lifetime profession, and the rising wealth of the citizenry, all were instrumental in producing a higher quality education by the mid-1920s.³⁸

But a public school system is more than wealth and population, just as life is more than a concentration of economic concerns. Pioneer parents and

the childless in Broward County were plagued by insects, heat, disease, drought, floods, early mortality, the scarcity of money, and smitten by laborious work in the farm fields from sunup to sundown. These were only some of the most obvious bitter hardships pioneers of the public school system had to endure. Not only did they have to endure them, they had to overcome them and turn them to their advantage. In their stressful endeavors many pioneers professed they found strength in their trust in Almighty God. Witnesses to this professed trust included the pioneers' establishment of many churches, their insistence upon school chapel religious exercises and the printing in the newspapers of locally delivered sermons. In addition, teachers were expected to maintain high standards of conduct, conduct exemplary for pupils and townspeople alike. Radical deviants found themselves unemployed. As an example of this professed trust in Almighty God, in February 1923, Mrs. W. H. Blount, a highly respected pioneer of Pompano, wrote an article for the *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel* about Pompano. After describing the delights and advantages of Pompano, she declared: "Aside from every other advantage which might be mentioned, Pompano's greatest asset as a town of homes is the very dominant religious spirit which pervades. The people are a God-fearing and God-loving people." In the political, social and educational realms pioneers expected at a minimum that

their leaders would at least give lip service to the tenets of the Christian religion.³⁹

Religious matters have been and still are an element in the strength of a society, and when excluded in the recitation of a society's struggles, the recitation falsifies that society's history to a greater or lesser degree. Many pioneers of the Broward County public school system during the system's first quarter of a century of development saw no incongruity between public education and a firm adherence to organized religion, in and out of school, and their support of the system is a testimony of the strength of their conviction on this score.

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- Symbols
 BL Broward Legacy
 TWMM The Weekly Miami Metropolis
 FLS Fort Lauderdale Sentinel
 FLDN Fort Lauderdale Daily News
 BCHC Broward County Historical Commission
 DCPSP Dade County Public School Board
 BCPSB Broward County Public School Board
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