

History of Pickens High School

Have you ever wondered when and how our school began? Well for those of you who have, it all started around 1870. This was the year the first academy was built in Pickens. Professor James H. Carlisle was one of the first to direct the school. James P. Carey, who became principal around 1881, fought endlessly for much needed improvements in the school system. Along with Professor Dreher of Liberty, Carey pushed for a graded school system used by various schools throughout the state. His plan, which would divide the students into separate classes or grades, each taught by a different teacher, was abandoned after many unsuccessful attempts.



The original Pickens Academy in use from 1871 through 1881.

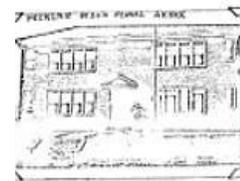
Carey resigned from his position in October of 1881 and soon after, a plan to leave the dilapidated building was made. The start of 1882 brought Professor W. Miller McCaslan to the new Main Street Pickens High School. McCaslan brought many new and exciting changes to the school. Two equal sessions divided the school year that was now to run for 10 months. The school began to flourish, boasting a rising student population, which brought higher tuition and more State money to be used towards the school. In mid-October, attendance was reduced; students were forced to leave school to pick cotton.

During the previous interim of 1883, Pickens High School had informally adopted the name "Pickens Institute," or "Piedmont Institute." Dedication Day was April 20, 1883 and honored the opening of the new Victorian-style school building. Many classes offered to students included Latin, Greek and Mental and Moral Sciences, topographical and mechanical drawing, mathematics, military training, and music, along with the traditional courses. During 1884, the enrollment reached 137 pupils. The rules and regulations impended on the students by McCaslan were still in effect, including a rule preventing female students from going out during the week.



The Piedmont Institute sold at an auction to the Carey family.

Before the second term of 1887, the McCaslan family left the Piedmont Institute. The retired Dr. Riley and Dr. Neil W. McCauley took over operations of the school. The debt on the school left by McCaslan was still under mortgage and it was up to Riley and McCauley to deal with. The stockholders decided to put the school and its property up for sale in September of 1887. Efforts to raise money to keep the school were unsuccessful. Former principal James P. Carey bought the property at the auction. He and his family moved in shortly after.



Pickens High School Annex

The school was conducted at an unknown location by Miss Laura Ellis, followed by Miss Sallie Robinson on the bottom floor of the Masonic Lodge. This is where the Pickens Drug Store stands today. The house of former Attorney R. A. Child was soon purchased as the new location of the Piedmont Institute. The following years brought as much exciting and new experiences as the previous. The school continued to flourish and thrive, gaining more and more students every session. Mr. Dendy was superintendent of the school from 1900 through 1905, followed by Mr. Swittenberg, serving from 1906 through 1910. Many other men who served in this position over the next years followed him.

Football became a lasting part of Pickens in 1923. In the late 1920's, Gary Hiott, Sr., editor of the *Pickens Sentinel*, wrote the Pickens team charged through the opposing defense "like a blue flame." It was this man that coined the team name, Pickens Blue Flame. The dawning of area football sparked a whirl of frenzy between Pickens and Easley. The school rivalry was, however, at its peak in the 1920's. The 1926 game, which drew a record of 2,000 fans, ended in a 6-6 tie.



PHS in the 1950's

On Friday, September 8, 1950, the dedication of Bruce Field brought 1,500 fans to Pickens. The Blue Flame scorched Pelzer-Williamston in the stadium's debut game 21-0. The Bruce family donated the land to the school. Pickens High School moved into the new building at the current location in 1954. In 1973, the Pickens City Council, in honor of the football team, named the street in front of the high school Blue Flame Drive.



PHS in the 1960's

Additions and renovations throughout the 80's and 90's improved the look of the school and increased the size of the facility. With the addition of 8 portable classrooms in the 2000's, the school accommodated more than 1500 students.



PHS in 2000's