

Photo cutline: The Homecoming Court for the Mooresville-Belle Mina School in 1941-42 included, from left: Carline Birdwell, unidentified, Effie Gordon, Martha Lou Jolly, Helen Ethridge, Sue Powell, unidentified, Queen Eugie Lawler, King Paul Peete, unidentified, unidentified, Betty Riddle, Ira Humphrey, Raymond Marsh, Richard Humphrey, Elbert Towe, unidentified.

Mooresville-Belle Mina ruins once were home of thriving school

By Rebekah Davis
Limestone County Archivist

Did you know the old Mooresville-Belle Mina School building is still for sale? Yep, a cool \$659,000 will buy you the school buildings and 6.99 acres surrounded by Huntsville city limits, right in the heart of rapid growth on Limestone County's southeast side.

My interest in the Mooresville-Belle Mina School was piqued the other day by a family photo album my friend Laurie Hudgins brought to the Archives to scan. The album included a photo of the Mooresville-Belle Mina girls' basketball team, Limestone County champs of 1941, and this photo of the 1941-42 Homecoming court at the school. The young lady fourth to the left is Martha Lou Jolly, Laurie's grandmother who compiled albums for all her grandchildren and recently passed away.

When this photo was taken, MBM School was still a long way from being the "empty spot and some ugly ruins" that Tanner native Maclin Horton described on his blog, *Light on Dark Water* (www.lightondarkwater.com).

"Our Christmas travels took us a couple of times up and down a road that I travelled every day until I was 15 or 16," Horton wrote in December 2009. "It's the road between the two tiny towns or villages of Belle Mina and Mooresville. They're only a couple of miles apart, and roughly halfway between them was the school I attended through the 9th grade. It was called, imaginatively, Mooresville-Belle Mina. When I was in school there it was a wooden frame building with one room for each of the nine grades. At some point in the late '60s or early '70s a new brick building was erected, directly in front of the old one, between it and the road, and the old one was abandoned. Eventually the old one was torn down, and then the new one was abandoned, so there's nothing there now but an empty spot and some ugly ruins."

The Mooresville-Belle Mina area had several private schools and a public school before MBM School was built. In her book, *Schools: Athens and Limestone County*, Betty Taylor writes that in August 1918 a contract was let to Johnson & Chambers for a Mooresville-Belle Mina School. The school opened in 1919, and the first commencement exercises were held in a new building in 1926.

The school made news a few times over the years: In 1928, long-time principal Prof. J.T. Blackshear left for a Madison County school; in June 1935, all MBM sixth-grade students were to participate in the county-wide graduation exercises at the Agriculture School in Athens; and of course, MBM's girls basketball team took home the trophy in the county championship tourney. In 1967, the school welcomed students to its brand-new brick building.

However, MBM was still sitting in the middle of cotton fields in 1991, the year that its attendance dropped below 200 and Limestone County decided to close the school in its effort to consolidate schools and make the county school system more efficient. It was used as a book warehouse for a while before being abandoned altogether for school system use and being put up for sale.

As the past 20 years has brought an eastward shift in Limestone County's population, ironically, MBM's location in one of Limestone County's fastest-growing areas means that if it were still open today, it would likely be bursting at the seams with young learners.

About the Archives:

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