



### **The History of Summer Hill School – 1922 - 1968**

Black residents of Cartersville's commitment to individual and community achievement drove the creation and gradual expansion of a local school. Started informally, by the 1880s the school had its own frame building just east of Wofford Street, near the corner of Jones and Carter today. The Cartersville "colored school" re-opened as a public school in the fall of 1889 with 55 students, though the property was not acquired by the city until 1892. The school served grades one through six. By 1893, enrollment reportedly had blossomed to 250, and parents were already petitioning for addition of more grades. By 1920, the school served 358 students, but still was largely outfitted with desks and books discarded by the white East Side and West Side schools.

Many students continued their schooling after finishing at Summer Hill, even in these early years. In 1925, Thomas Kiser reported to the Atlanta Independent that Annie Hutcherson, Ada Thompson and Harriet Edwards were off to Spelman Seminary, while Florence Gassett, Eva Gassett and Robert Morris were headed for Atlanta University. School board records and newspapers suggest that the school was known as the "colored school" until the building of the new Summer Hill School in 1922.

On May 20, 1922, the Cartersville School Board accepted a proposal by the Colored Committee and the Julius Rosenwald Foundation to build a new school building. The Rosenwald Foundation created in 1917 to support African American education in the rural South, provided matching funds to communities seeking to establish or improve black schools. Summer Hill residents raised \$1500 through donations and fundraising events, garnered various materials, and helped build the school; the Rosenwald Foundation provided a matching cash grant. The new Summer Hill School was opened just north of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church (on what is now Aubrey Street) in late 1922.

The Cartersville School Board hired J. Stanley "Fess" Morgan to replace principal S. L. Young in 1925. In this role as principal, Professor Morgan (as he was known) and his wife, teacher Beatrice Morgan, introduced a range of extracurricular activities – including band, choir, interest clubs and men's and women's sports – to develop well-rounded, civically engaged students. Morgan retired in 1962 and was succeeded as principal by his son, J. S. Morgan, Jr.

The Summer Hill School grew and evolved from 1922 to its closing in 1968. High school grades were added through the 1940s, and by 1951 Summer Hill had established all 12 grades. This growth eventually exceeded the capacity of the 1922 building, now almost thirty years old. Pressures from physical expansion and a region-wide political movement to bring black schools up to par with their white counterparts led to the opening of the new Summer Hill High School in January 1956 – less than two years after the Supreme Court declared school segregation unconstitutional in its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Located just down the hill from the original school, the new building served as the high school, while elementary students continued to attend classes in the 1922 building. In 1961, the new building was enlarged to accommodate the lower grades, and the decaying and now too-small 1922 schoolhouse was vacated.

In 1946 Summer Hill School parents, teachers, students, and friends raised \$1300 toward the building of a gym for the Summer Hill School, and the Cartersville School Board recommended that the city match the citizens' contributions up to \$2000. The gym was dedicated as the John Morgan Memorial Gym in 1948, remembering the principal's son, who had died in World War II. Students took great pride in building the 1940s frame gym, and Summer Hill was reputedly the only African American school in Northwest Georgia to have a gymnasium. When the gym was lost to fire in early 1953, the John Morgan Memorial Gym was rebuilt as a masonry structure just south of the original site in 1955. Both gyms were central to school and community life, serving as home to basketball games, dances, and weekly assemblies.

Summer Hill students, parents, and local residents provided for school needs when the local school board failed to do so. Band boosters, the Parent and Teacher Association (PTA), and other groups worked to raise money for band uniforms, classroom materials, building improvements, and school trips. The Summer Hill PTA, founded in 1923-24, was the backbone of fundraising and student support efforts. At its peak, the PTA boasted 348 members, some of whom traveled throughout the U. S. to work with other associations.