

Hampton Spring Bluff Academy **By Bettye Perrine**

In the very late 1800's the Meridianville Community, so named because the eighty-seventh meridian runs directly through the community, decided it was time to begin a school. John M. and Maria O. Hampton gave land for this purpose. The deed signed on the 17th of September 1892 reads as follows:

This indenture made and entered into this the 16th day of September 1892 by and between John M. Hampton and his wife Mary O. Hampton, of the one part and R. M. Strong, G. N. Jones, James A. Strong, W. J. Potts, Charles H. Powell, John P. Hampton, Frank Smith, and Alexander Mitchell as Trustees of Hampton Spring Bluff Academy of other part.

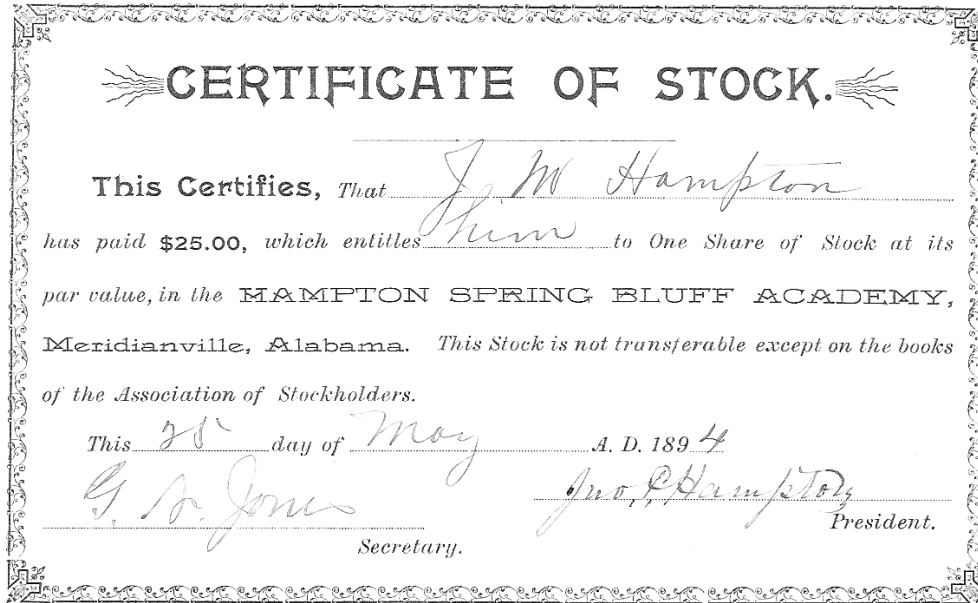


John Menoah Hampton and wife, Maria Rebecca Otey Hampton

It is described as:

Beginning at the center of the Pike an [and] Meridian line on the west boundary of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 19, T. 2 [S], R. 1 east and running along the south boundary of the lot owned by S. D. Warz and M. A. Bently S 89 degrees E 9 chains and 45 links to the SE corner of said lot, thence S $\frac{1}{4}$ degree W 5 chains and 30 links to a stake, thence N 89 degrees west 9 chains and 45 links to center of Pike on Meridian line thence along said Meridian line 5 chains and 30 links to the place of beginning containing five acres.

The purpose stated as, “erecting thereon a school building to be conducted as an unsectarian and undenominational school for white people”. According to an unfinished manuscript started by Madison County School teachers, “it was to cost not less than \$2500...” Also J. M. Hampton gave “a donation of money. Thirty-seven additional citizens gave donations to help build this school” in the form of stocks.



Copy of Stock Certificate bought for \$25.00 on the 25th of May 1894 by J. M. Hampton signed by Jno. P. Hampton, President and G. N. Jones, Secretary.



Jno. P. Hampton

“The school was built in 1898” as stated in the unfinished manuscript, The History of the Schools of Madison County and used until 1910 when it burned. The following article is taken from page 4 of the Feb. 9, 1910 issue of The Weekly Mercury, a newspaper of Huntsville, Alabama:

**“Meridianville School Burns
Hampton Spring Bluff Academy Goes Up in Smoke
Origin of Fire Unknown
Blaze Lighted Up Heavens Sunday Night
and Firemen Were Called Out**

The Hampton Spring Bluff Academy at Meridianville was burned to the ground Sunday night entailing a loss from \$2,500 to \$3,000. The blaze started from a light used by crap shooters who secretly entered the house.

The blaze lighted the whole country from miles around as the burning structure was located on a commanding eminence. From the central part of Huntsville it looked as if the fire was in the northern part of town and an alarm was turned in to headquarters, the fire department making a run out to Patton Grove, where the mistake was discovered.

The Hampton Spring Bluff Academy was used as the public school of Meridianville district and owned by an association. Its value was almost \$3,000 and the insurance carried on it amounted to about \$1,500. It was erected about a dozen years ago on land donated for the purpose of the late Dr. Hampton and in this, the recognition was desoignated [sic] as the Hampton Academy. Prof. Parks was principal. It was the pride of the Meridianville district and the people of that thriving community will lose no time in taking steps looking to rebuilding.”

Hampton Spring Bluff Academy

"Otium sine litteris mors est."

To Whom these Presents Come, Greeting

Be it Known, That _____
has completed the Course of Study prescribed for the Hampton Spring Bluff Academy, and is therefore entitled to receive this

DIPLOMA

Conferring upon _____

_____ by order of the Board of Trustees this _____ day of _____, 1898.



Principal
Secretary

**Copy of Diploma, which reads:
"Hampton Spring Bluff Academy,
'Otium sine litteris mors est.'**

To Whom these Presents come, Greeting: Be it Known, That Fleming White has completed the Course of Study prescribed by the Hampton Spring Bluff Academy, and is therefore entitled to receive this Diploma Conferring upon him the Degree of Bachelor of Science, Given by order of the Board of Trustees, this 13th day of May, 1898, R.C. Acuff, Principal, Jno. P. Hampton, President of Board, Jno M. Hampton, Secretary."

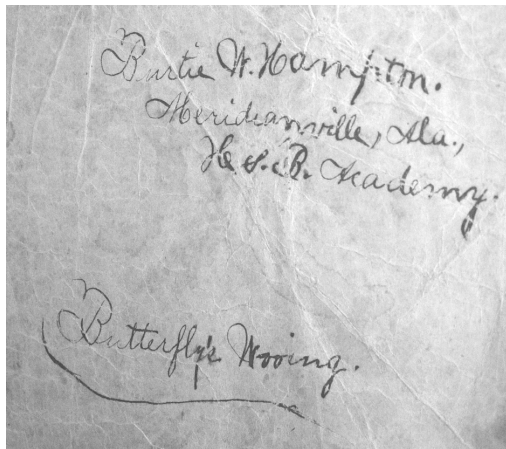


**Fleming Muir White, diploma recipient
Born: 01 Aug. 1877, Madison County, Alabama**

The community lost no time replacing the burned building. This new building was a two-story frame structure which became known as “The College” according to Grimwood Sketches. Also stated in The History of Madison County Schools “...there she [Emma Grimwood] took Latin, geometry, trigonometry, and Literature. Duanna Ellen White Grimwood, sister to Fleming Muir White also attended school there, states Bill Grimwood, her grandson, who was amazed she was able to help him with his algebra and other homework,” It also states “At this time the school taught grades one through eleven and offered Latin, geometry, algebra and literature.”

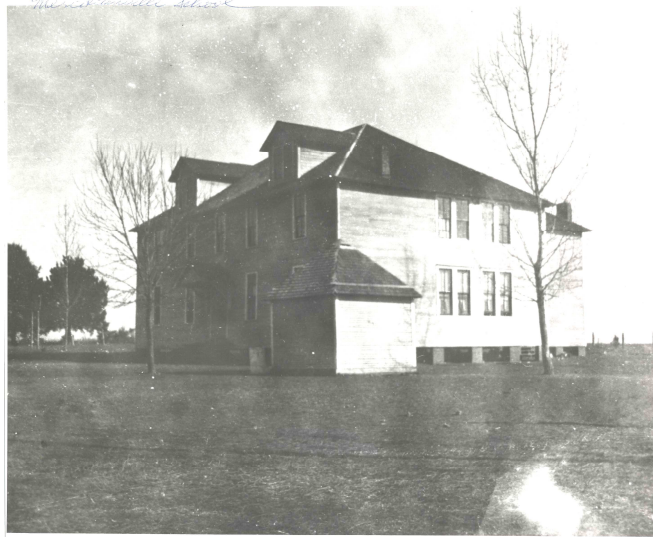
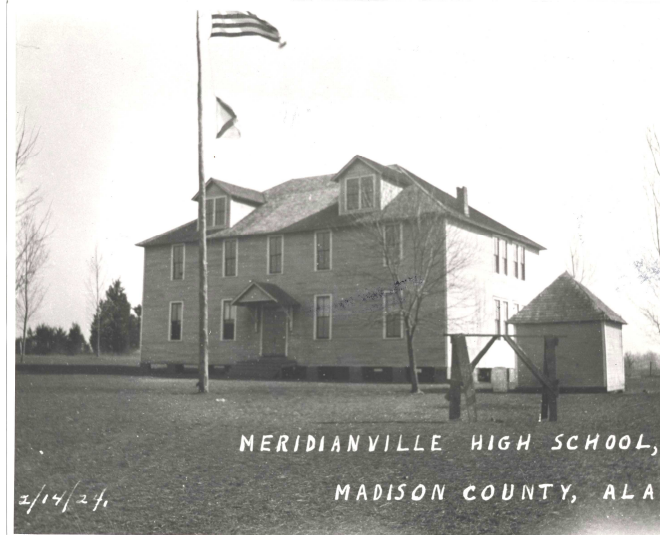


Music was included also. Betty Wikle Ratchford Merchant, great-grand daughter of John M. Hampton and great-great-grand daughter to Jno. P. Hampton still plays from a couple pieces of sheet music, with Hampton Spring Bluff Academy handwritten in one corner.



Corner of sheet music, ‘Butterfly’s Wooing’, which reads Bertie W. Hampton Meridianville, Ala. H.S.B.Academy. Bertie W. Hampton, above right, was Betty Merchant’s great-aunt, a graduate of Hampton Spring Bluff Academy.

This school continued in operation until around 1917 when it was turned over to the Madison County Board of Education. At this time it became known as the Meridianville High School but was actually used by grades one through twelve. In the late 1940's the building was once again replaced with a concrete block structure and used as a Junior High School. It ceased to be a school around 1981 when the property reverted back to the Hampton family heirs. It is now a ball park for the children of the Meridianville Community.



The second structure housing Hampton Spring Bluff Academy, “The College”, as it appeared in 1924 as Meridianville High School.



**A 1940's snapshot of the spring and bluff
for which the school was partially named.
This park-like site behind the school
saw many yearend school picnics.
Students unknown.**

Sources:

Deed copied from Record Book XXX, page 225-230 found in the Madison County Courthouse Records Room, Huntsville, Alabama.

Stock Certificate given to author by Betty Wikle Ratchford Merchant, great-granddaughter of John M. Hampton.

Pictures of "The College" copied from the originals found in the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library. Thanks to William Sibley

for informing the author of their existence and the following news article, also.

Newspaper Article copied from **The Weekly Mercury**, February 9, 1910, page 4 found in the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

Diploma was copied and given by Joe Oliver, Redlands, California, grandson of Fleming White.

Picture of the Bluff Picnic Area was in possession of the author probably made by her mother who was a principal at the Meridianville School in the early 1940's.

Picture of Fleming White was in the possession of the author. It is about 2 x 4 inches printed on card stock with the following on the back: "**So-Kute Photos. Only 25¢ A Dozen. How to Get Them.** Send any ordinary photograph WELL WRAPPED, with 25¢ and a 2-cent stamp. I will promptly *return the original* photo with 12 "So Kute" Photo copies, same size as this, Post Paid to any part of the world. Groups same price. No TIN-TYPES copied. **J. M. House, Photo Studio, Gadsden, Ala., U. S. A.**"

The unfinished and unpublished draft copy of, **The History of the Schools of Madison County** was found in the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library. This was a project begun to collect pictures, records, etc. and record for posterity The History of the Schools of Madison County by a group of teachers. Thanks to William Sibley for informing the author of this source and its location.

Grimwood Sketches, 1562-1982, The Lineage of William H., Isaac O., & Joseph C. Grimwood, page 126 by James Maurice Grimwood, Houston, Texas, 1982, published by McDowell Publications, Utica, Ky 42376.

Note:

The author and Betty Wikle Ratchford Merchant were classmates in the 1940's in the old building pictured earlier. At this time there were four classroom's for the nine grades, two up and two down, with front and rear staircases, an auditorium upstairs and a library down. Each room was heated with a potbellied stove, water was obtained at the

pump-house in front, with outhouses for boys and girls behind. Students rode the bus to school and brought sack lunches.

The author further wishes to thank Betty Merchant for her kind and willing assistance in allowing the author to photograph her family photographs and paintings, etc. and generous gift of the stock certificate plus much information.

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