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# Bethlehem School served students east of Arkadelphia

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# Bethlehem School served students east of Arkadelphia

By Wendy Richter  
For the Siftings

In August of 1912, Arkadelphia's Southern Standard newspaper announced an upcoming event during which the cornerstone for the new Bethlehem School building would be laid.

A program featuring speeches by B.F. Condray, Farrar Newberry, and R.W. Huie, Jr., would highlight the occasion. The school was located about six miles east of Arkadelphia on Highway 51 at the junction of Highway 128 and a county road—in the heart of the Joan community.

The Joan area was settled in the 1830s by families who put down roots along Leau Frais Creek. The early residents established a Methodist church, a store, and a school. The land there was well-suited for cotton, and people prospered.

A post office opened in the community 1886 with Miles Hardy as postmaster. Others to serve included Mollie Blacknall, Henrietta Harris, Millard Aud, William H. Hudson, Sarah Hudson, and E.B. Finn.

In an area originally part of the Manchester School District, Bethlehem School District #38 was established in 1873.

While the memories of many long-time residents varied somewhat with regard to specific location, it is believed that the original Bethlehem School was located in the community's southwest triangle, where

**BETHLEHEM HIGH SCHOOL**  
DISTRICT NO. 38  
**Manchester Township,  
Clark County, Arkansas**

1919-1920

MABEL GERTRUDE HUDSON, Teacher

**PUPILS**

Lillian Green	Ethel Cox
Coye Dean Hudson	Flossie Johnson
Louise Williams	Vida Vanderslice
Mattie Cheeves Richardson	Juanita Green
Ruby Bettis	Dorris Lee Brewer
M. L. Richardson, Jr.	G. B. Audd
Henry Digby	Hayse McGhee Wilcox
Harry Digby	Wayne Thompson
Harrold Green	Paul Brewer
Granville Johnson	Wayne Williams
Bernice Bettis	Ray Cox
Clint Green	

**SCHOOL OFFICERS**

W. H. Hudson, Pres.	M. Audd, Sec.
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the Methodist Church stands today. That first school was built of logs and served as both a school and a church. When the building became outdated, it was moved to a local farm and used as a barn. The church was replaced with a plain, simple structure, and a new school was constructed across the road in the northwest triangle.

The Bethlehem School built in 1912 and mentioned in the Southern Standard was a frame, two-story building with a bell tower, and stood ap-

proximately where a store building stands today.

According to the 1989 Clark County Historical Journal, "the first floor consisted of two large rooms with raised platforms for the teachers' desks, an entrance, and a hallway to the back of the building. Each room contained a rather large cloak-room and a pot-bellied stove. Grades one through four were held in the room on the right of the entrance. Grades five through eight were held in the room on the left. The second floor housed the high



THE BETHLEHEM SCHOOL GROUP IMAGE IS FROM ABOUT 1911 AND IS COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Above right, left to right, front row: Henry Hudson, Chester Hudson, Ernest Green, Hubert Haltom, Irvine Haltom, Eugene Aud, Charlie Belcher, Clarence Daniels, Sidney Daniels. Second row: Horace Vanderslice, Warren Vanderslice, Harvey Parker, LeRoy Green, Carrie Nash (teacher), Harvey Haltom. Middle row: Neal Green, Myrtle Digby, Eunice Holmes, Beatrice Aud, Lula Morris, Lottie Parker, Geneviva Bettis, Bessie Digby, Dale Bettis, Annie Bess Holmes, Marie Haltom. Fourth row: Ethel Green, Celeste Parker, Corrine Holmes, Mabel Hudson, Elsie Digby, Vesta Vanderslice, Lucille Green, Dell Vanderslice, Mamie Haltom, Nell Digby. Back row: Bob Lee Hudson, Ernest Haltom, Nash Haltom, Mart Green, Tommy Digby, Hugh Williams, Claud Haltom, Pearce Green. At left, image of the

school."

"Two sets of stairs—one on each side of the double-door entryway—led to the second floor. This open auditorium with a stage and dressing rooms on each end housed the high school, probably into the 1920s. This floor was later used only as an auditorium for plays, programs, pie suppers, and graduations."

Former students recalled in later years their enjoyment of ringing the school's bell by pulling on the rope hanging from the bell tower. At recess, pupils played marbles, ball, and

rode a "flying jenny." Water came from a well in front of the school, and operated with a hand pump. A water bucket with a dipper could be found in the classrooms. Two large "four-holer" outhouses stood at the schoolyard's back corners. Wood for heating was usually stacked between two trees behind the building.

Bethlehem School District #38 consolidated with the Arkadelphia District in 1947, but the school continued to host elementary grades for a couple more years. After that

time, students attended classes in Arkadelphia.

The 1989 edition of the Clark County Historical Journal contains additional photographs and details about the Bethlehem School. To see the Journal or for more information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum ([www.clarkcountyhistory.org](http://www.clarkcountyhistory.org) or 230.1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library ([www.obu.edu/archives](http://www.obu.edu/archives) or 245.5332).