

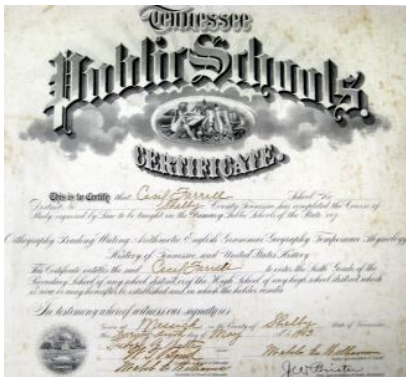
# Memphis City Schools

## History Of Messick

Teddy Roosevelt was President, the War Between the States (NOT yet generally called the Civil War in Memphis at that time!) was very much still a living memory, and E. H. Crump ruled Memphis and much of Tennessee with a benevolent but iron hand ... and Messick opened its doors!



Messick's 73 years of existence encompass and influence much of Memphis' 20th century history. The class of **1970** was Messick's **51st** class of high school graduates, the **FIRST** class to graduate **African-American** students and - following 11 more years (1981) - became the **"Penultimate Decade Class"** in Messick's history!



Messick started as a Shelby County school. Located in what was then called Buntyn, Tennessee, the elementary building was erected in **1908** to consolidate the elementary schools of Buntyn, Fleece Station, and Avalon. **It very probably was the first consolidated school in the Southeastern United States!**

For 51 years - from the beginning of the Great Depression until the election of Ronald Reagan as President - Messick was the oldest high school in Memphis (though not the "oldest city school"; Central opened in 1912, Messick did not come into the city system until 1930.)

The new school was named for Miss Elizabeth Messick, then Shelby County Superintendent of Schools. Miss Messick was severely criticized for spending \$30,000 for a building which could "never be filled"! In **1970**, the school was full almost to bursting, and the most recent building project - a new gym - had cost **\$300,000!**

While Miss Messick never had anything directly to do with Messick beyond its building, she went on to quite a career after her marriage (after which she was known as Elizabeth Messick Houck).



Messick High School  
from the 1947 Messick Panther Yearbook

Built to replace the little one room multigrade school, **Messick was the first consolidated school in Shelby County.** Small truck farms covered the surrounding area. Those living too far to walk to the new school were "bussed" in - in horse drawn wagons. Lunches were provided by Messick students' mothers who brought freshly prepared hot food to the school at lunchtime - an interesting concept for earlier classes ... who ever heard of a lunchroom boycott against your own mother? Their efforts to organize the lunch system brought the first school cafeteria in West Tennessee to Messick!



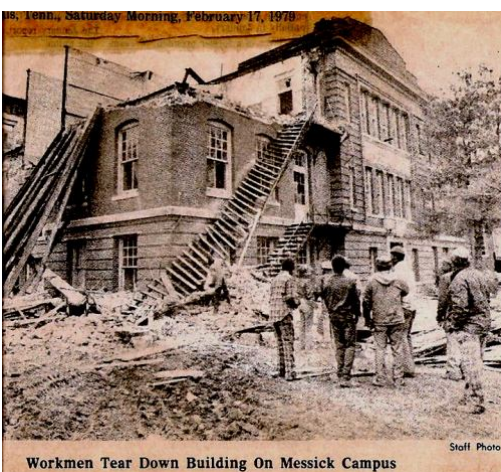
The well-stocked library we used in our Messick days, so well administered by Mrs. Moreno, had **humble beginnings.** Three hundred books were bought by the county school board, put in 30 lockboxes (10 books per box), and were shared by ALL the schools. A box could stay at each school for one month.

Study hall and the school offices were first located on the third floor of the elementary building.

In our day Messick was not only a full and bustling high school but was known as one of the best public schools around anywhere in the country! In fact "our" Messick boasted not only the teacher chosen by Yale University as the best high school teacher in America - the unforgettable **Alice B. Rogers** - but also a future **Tennessee Commissioner of Education, Ada Jane Walters!** The quality of education we were given was the best public education available in the country!



We were one of the last classes to enjoy Messick at its greatest. In the 1970's the neighborhood and the school began to decline. **Messick's last graduating class was the class of 1981,** and the main building was demolished in **1982.** The **Messick Adult Education Center** now occupies the remaining buildings.



Workmen Tear Down Building On Messick Campus



[www.Messick1970.com](http://www.Messick1970.com)

**Messick High School  
Class Of 1970  
40-Year Reunion  
Committee**