

BILOXI SCHOOLS

1970-1979

Biloxi Schools In The 1970s

Biloxi – Population, 1970 Census – 48,486

Mayor, 1970 – Daniel B. Guice

City Council, 1970 – Dominic A. Fallo, Pete Parker

Superintendent, Biloxi Public Schools – R.D. Brown, 1960-1975
Olon Ray, 1975-1987

Biloxi School Board –

1970 – Fred Carron, Charles D. Hollis, C.T. Switzer, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman,
Irvin Fink

1971 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman,
Irvin Fink

1972 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman,
Irvin Fink

1973 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman,
Irvin Fink

1974 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman,
Irvin Fink, John Pettus

1975 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman,
John Pettus

1976 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, John Pettus,
Mrs. Emile Rousseau

1977 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, John Pettus,
Mrs. Emile Rousseau

1978 – C.T. Switzer, Fred Carron, Mrs. Emile Rousseau, Elijah McGee,
Alton Bankston

1979 – Fred Carron, Alton Bankston, Mrs. Emile Rousseau, Elijah McGee,
Ernest Henley, Jr.

Student Enrollment in 1970-1971, reported in "Enrollment History" – 9,598

Total Budget, Biloxi Public Schools, for 1970-1971 - \$4,582,550.00

VII. THE BILOXI SCHOOLS – 1970 - 1979

After the 1960s, one suspects that the people charged with directing Biloxi's school operations hoped for a period of relative inactivity—a quiet time, perhaps. But a review of the records for 1970-1979 shows that these years were no different from years past. There were always new challenges, new problems, new programs requiring constant attention from the Board and the administration.

In one area, however, things did appear to slow down. On December 14, 1971, Superintendent Brown reported to the Board that in view of declining enrollment, he saw no need for additions to the long-range building plan. In view of the increasing population north of Biloxi Bay, however, he did suggest that the district begin to plan for future building in that area. (A review of student enrollment figures for the 1970s shows a very pronounced decline from more than 9,000 students in 1970 to fewer than 7,000 in 1979.)

After the previous two decades of extensive building in the school district, when no year passed without the Board's planning and carrying out construction of new schools and costly renovation of facilities, it is not surprising that the early 1970s were not years remembered most for large construction projects. Building needs and subsequent construction centered primarily in expansion of existing schools and renovation and repair. There was always, of course, some of this work being done, some additions to schools, some building needs to be met; however, no bond issues were passed during this decade for school construction. The R.D. Brown Vocational-Technical Complex was added to the Biloxi High School campus in 1974, with extensive additions of classrooms, offices, and shop areas in 1977; the media center was constructed on the Biloxi High School campus in 1977, and the library/media center for the high school was expanded; in 1973-1974 two classrooms were added to Gorenflo to take care of enrollment increases that had required utilization of temporary facilities.

There was a reduction in the number of school plants from 14 to 12. The Dukate Elementary School building was no longer used for students, and Central Junior High School was converted to an elementary building; Perkins Elementary School became part of Nichols Junior High (*Open Doors* 5).

Attempting to reduce district expenses, in 1970 the Board voted to discontinue busing students within the corporate limits, other than those students required to be bused under the federal court order, and also to eliminate the instructor and the strings program, together with restructuring and curtailing the media program. Student assignments to the elementary and junior high schools were being made under a Federal Court Order dividing the district into attendance zones (Board Minutes, March 1972). In an interesting and not unexpected change in policy, the Board on May 11, 1973, ended the practice of extra pay for collateral duties performed during the work day. The

result of a letter from the United States Labor Department, the move effectively ended the "200-dollar extra pay for men teachers" that had a long history in the Biloxi schools.

Enrollment figures for each Biloxi school in the 1970s were included in the district's annual report required by the Federal Court Order which continued to be in effect in school operations after 1964 and which required breakdowns by race, together with total enrollment figures. Total enrollments are listed below (figures are for December of the years indicated, not beginning enrollments):

School	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Biloxi High	1846	1718	1743	1728	1751	1761	1676	1651
Fernwood	934	883	862	879	860	817	761	725
Michel	556	507	488	504	474	399	368	328
Nichols	847	895	872	813	722	695	675	619
Beauvoir	783	769	520	643	638	632	615	612
Dukate	692	624	542	494	432	342	633	630
Gorenflo	678	601	513	493	491	494	424	476
Howard II	357	330	295	285	272	287	285	305
Jeff Davis	554	591	620	597	506	516	603	583
Lopez	310	289	393	273	262	279	320	306
Popp's Ferry	766	719	632	632	635	633	610	623
District	8603	8244	7871	7754	7394	7169	6960	6858

It is possible to characterize the 1970s as a time when building took second place to other matters for Board consideration, including instructional management and curriculum expansion and policy development. In the 1970s, the academic program of the Biloxi Public schools, according to the district publication *Open Doors*, emphasized the fundamental concerns that had traditionally held top priority in American schools—together with innovative additions to the over-all curriculum designed to meet the needs, interests, and capabilities of all Biloxi students.

Basic concerns of the schools were most clearly found in the areas of citizenship, character and personality development, preparation for change, career planning, aesthetics, recreation, physical development, and evaluation. The staff believed that schools must help prepare the individual student as a cooperating, responsible, contributing member of a democratic society; provide a challenging environment for academic work; and give all students equal educational opportunities. Wide-ranging programs of student activities, interscholastic competition, exploratory experiences, counseling, academic and extracurricular programs, and sound methods of evaluation were pointed toward meeting the needs of Biloxi children.

An item of particular interest to Biloxi students was discussed in a March 10, 1971, article by Bill Gosnell in the *Hi-Tide*. Following approval by the Biloxi School Board on February 17, a slightly modified version of the dress code was in place. It had been drawn up by a dress code committee and modified the existing dress code in six ways: (1) it incorporated the girls pants suit privileges as a permanent part of the code; (2) it allowed boys wearing the new "sockless" shoes to wear them without socks; (3) it permitted modest moustaches for high school students; (4) it allowed sideburns, unless extreme; (5) longer hair, unless worn to the length of "absurdity" was permitted; (6) award letters from Nichols High School could continue to be worn for the next two years. The modifications were presented and formally defined by principal T.J. Smith at an assembly for boys. A discussion concerned the wearing of socks when appropriate was defined as "if something shows (meaning the ankle) it better be cloth."

During these years the Biloxi schools operated on a 6-3-3 plan, with grades 1 through 6 in the elementary schools, 7 through 9 in the junior high schools, and 10 through 12 in the senior high school. The curriculum represented the best efforts of a dedicated staff to provide sound educational opportunities for students.

The high school curriculum was expanded. It included such courses as calculus, advanced physics, aerospace education, research chemistry, four foreign languages, theory and harmony, marine sciences, special education, varied vocational and technical courses, advanced English, accounting, dramatics, advanced art classes, and other required and elective courses. Students could choose a general course of study, a vocational program, or a college preparatory curriculum. Physical education, as it had always been, was a part of the over-all curriculum in every Biloxi school, with a full sports program complementing the physical education classes. A stringed instrument program begun in this decade started in grade 5, and band was offered in grades 6 through 12. Vocal music and art began in grade 1, with courses continuing through every grade level in all the secondary schools.

Students were given extensive counseling as they made course selections at the beginning of their high school years, and parents were kept advised as to the many options open to students in the schools.

Though special education programs had long been a part of the Biloxi schools, it was in the 1970s that the programs began to include some remedial courses, programs for students with disabilities, psychological evaluations, homebound assistance for students absent for extended periods because of accident or illness, and an extended school nurse program

On February 11, 1974, the R.D. Brown Vocational Annex was dedicated. Without Mr. Brown's knowledge, the Board had voted to name the vo-tech complex for the retiring superintendent, who had headed the administration for fifteen years, during some of the most demanding years in the history of the schools and during years of remarkable growth and expansion.

With the addition of the Vocational-Technical complex, students were offered greatly enriched opportunities for training through on-the-job courses, including occupational home economics, distributive education (sales and marketing), trades and industry, clerical office practice, and secretarial office procedures. On-campus vocational programs included building trades, industrial drafting, auto-body, repair shop, welding shop, intensified business training, vocational office training, metal trades, marketing, auto-mechanics, and special education (vocational rehabilitation) and building trades for the disadvantaged. Programs in cooperation with Jefferson Davis Junior College included air conditioning and refrigeration, industrial electricity, and plumbing.

Designed for students planning to work in the fields of their training after graduation, not for college-bound students, the vo-tech curriculum required candidates with definite vocational goals and positive attitudes toward the world of work as they achieved entry-level job skills.

The bonded indebtedness of the Biloxi Public Schools in the late 1970s was at its lowest point in many years. In 1970, for example, the bonded indebtedness stood at \$1,649,000. In October 1977, it was \$800,000, reflecting bonds outstanding from the school bond issue of 1959 only. The 1959 bond issue was expected to expire in the 1983-1984 fiscal year.

Assessed valuation of the Biloxi Municipal Separate School District for the 1976-1977 fiscal year was \$81,745,243, an increase of \$8,490,871 over the \$73,254,372 valuation of 1975-1976, which did not include exempt property.

Like everything else, costs of school operations continued to increase. The Board of Education made tireless efforts to see that expenses were controlled, that operations were efficient, and that the public received full value from its taxes. During this decade Board members included Mr. Fred Carron, Mr. Dixie Hollis, Mr. C.T. Switzer, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman, Mr. Irvin Fink, Mr. John Pettus, Mrs. Emile Rousseau, Reverend Elijah McGee, Mr. Alton Bankston, and Mr. Ernest Henley, Jr.

A breakdown of revenues and expenditures for school years 1972-1973 through 1976-1977 reveals the following:

<u>Revenues</u>	<u>1972-1973</u>	<u>1973-1974</u>	<u>1974-1975</u>	<u>1975-1976</u>	<u>1976-1977</u>
Local	\$1,289,780	\$1,391,322	\$1,378,006	\$1,736,627	\$1,790,595
State	\$2,713,055	\$3,198,987	\$ 3,333,609	\$4,025,444	\$4,114,577
Federal	\$1,415,063	\$1,495,394	\$1,450,953	\$1,751,011	\$1,883,961
Cafeteria	\$601,844	\$656,917	\$682,252	\$793,541	\$803,513

In the mid-1970s a faculty survey revealed a number of interesting facts about the staff of the Biloxi Public Schools, giving a unique insight into the backgrounds of the professional personnel employed by the district (*Open Doors* 14, 15).

Results of the survey showed that of the 457 certified personnel in the schools, about 220 teachers held advanced degrees and approximately 130 were working toward advanced degrees or higher certification.

Colleges attended by the Biloxi faculty underscore a group picture of people with widely different backgrounds, influenced by travel and by educational contacts with people in other areas, thoroughly prepared in their fields. More than 230 different colleges and universities had been attended by these staff members, together with schools in several foreign countries. Biloxi teachers had studied at colleges and universities in 37 states, Washington, D.C., Guam, the Canal Zone, and a number of foreign countries. An exceptionally large number of the faculty had traveled in other countries.

One fact revealed by the survey was that 79 of the faculty members were graduates of either Biloxi High School or Nichols High School. Native Mississippians on the staff numbered 255, with 32 states and four foreign countries listed as places of birth.

It was also interesting to note the reasons the teachers themselves gave for having chosen Biloxi as the location for their teaching experiences. Among the most obvious reasons, cited by a very large number of teachers, were the location and the opportunities for water-related activities; the fact that military service had determined the assignment of families in this area; and the return home for longtime Biloxians or Coastal residents who wished to teach in a familiar and well-loved place. The importance of the system's participation in student teaching programs was reflected in the fact that 74 faculty members had completed their student teaching in the Biloxi schools.

Job openings, attractive pay scale, good curriculum, and capable administration—all of these reasons were cited over and over in the survey as determining factors in teachers' choosing to work in the Biloxi schools. But perhaps the most frequently stated answers in the survey were

these: "I had heard very good things about the system and wanted to be a part of it" and "I had friends who taught here and who liked the schools."

Biloxi students during the 1970s found increasing recognition as they participated in state, regional, and national competitions and won honors and awards in English, speech, science, art, mathematics, foreign languages, vocational programs, essay contests, vocal music, band, athletics, journalism and history. More than 125 courses were offered to Biloxi students in grades 9-12 in the 1977 curriculum.

Almost equally important were the extracurricular activities promoted by the school system. These were years of special emphasis on such programs, illustrated most particularly by the extensive band and choral music activities at the high school. It was during the 1970s that the high school band, under Professor Carpenter's direction, participated in such memorable events as the Presidential Inaugural Parade in Washington, D.C., in 1973; the Rex Parade in New Orleans; the Orange Bowl; Tulane football games; and Disney World band festival. The band also made other appearances equally exciting to band members and rewarding to the community.

The Biloxians Choir, under the direction of Hilda Barnes, also participated in award-winning competitions that spotlighted the schools and the community, represented the state in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as part of the national celebration of the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution in the "We The People" program (1987), and achieved national recognition as the choir visited Disney World and Opry Land and Six Flags Over Texas and swept honors in state and regional competitions. (The choir was also invited to represent Mississippi at the Bicentennial of the American Revolution celebration in Paris in 1989.) These were rich years for Biloxi students. (The Biloxians Choir had been formed in 1947-1948. Miss Lucille Gaines was the longtime director of the choir in its early years; later Mamye Rae Anderson was choir director before Mrs. Barnes began her years with the Biloxi schools.)

Indicative of the high level of student achievement among Biloxi High School students in the 1970s was the fact that in 1972-1973, the school counted twelve National Merit Scholarship finalists among its graduating seniors; in 1973-1974, there were nine finalists; in 1974-1975 the



school produced eight National Merit finalists; in 1975-1976, seven; in 1977-1978, five. This was a period of exceptional achievement for Biloxi students. A highlight for the school and the community during this decade was the selection of two Biloxi High School seniors, Patricia McVadon and Benson Massey, as Mississippi's two Presidential Scholars in 1975. Biloxi High School was the only school in the nation that year to produce both of a state's Presidential Scholars (only two students

from each state were selected in the program that was based primarily on the highest SAT/ACT scores in the state). Another activity which underscored the strength of Biloxi academic programs was the WALA-TV Quiz Bowl competition in Mobile, Alabama, bringing together schools from

Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi during the year. The Biloxi High School team in 1975 and 1976 was undefeated and won the tri-state competition.

In 1975 the Biloxi schools underwent the extensive self-studies and evaluations by visiting committees of educators from other schools throughout the region required for SACS accreditation, with highly favorable reports from SACS officials and continuing high level accreditation of all schools.

Principals of schools during this period included George Bullock, Beauvoir; David Hall, Central; Edwin Miles, Gorenflo; Raymond Carter, Howard II; Glendon Johnson, Jeff Davis; James Duncan, Lopez; Percy Howard, Popp's Ferry; Earl Hood, West End; Frank Sabbatini, Fernwood; Derbert Dilworth, Michel; Charles Benton, Nichols; T.J. Smith, Biloxi High School.

At the end of the school year in 1975, Robert D. Brown retired as superintendent of the Biloxi Public School District. Honored in a special community-wide program at the Buena Vista Hotel in May 1975, the retiring administrator was praised for the steady course he had followed in directing the schools through great changes and into uncharted waters. (*See "Biographies" later.*)

Mr. Brown noted that he was passing the leadership of the schools to a man who had already proved his worth to the district and who would, Brown said, provide a new and younger vision for the years ahead. The new superintendent would be Dr. Olon Ray, who had served the Biloxi schools first as teacher, then as administrative assistant, and finally assistant superintendent. It would be Dr. Ray who directed school operations through the remainder of the 1970s.

Board minutes show that on June 10, 1975, the old Dukate Elementary School Building was leased to a Senior Citizens group. It seemed a fitting end to the building that had grown old in use and that had served thousands of Biloxians for the past fifty years. On October 14, 1975, the Board received a report dealing with Hurricane Camille losses of \$508,299, with insurance paying \$136,705 to take care of those losses and the federal government paying \$371,594. It was also noted that insurance payments following a fire at Gorenflo Elementary School totaled \$191,441.

It was soon apparent that many changes were going to take place in the instructional arrangements of the district under the new administration headed by Dr. Ray. At Biloxi High School, with new principal George Cannon, the transition in library services from the traditional library to an operational media center was underway. Meeting with media center director Ann Denison and media specialist Sue McClure, BHS teachers were introduced to staff members of the Mississippi Authority for Educational Television. ETV would begin to play a more prominent role in providing media services to the schools, and new audio-visual equipment was exhibited for all teachers. The school had spent approximately \$25,000 for new media center equipment and \$8,000 for audio-visual materials. Video cassette recorders, video cassette players, television monitors, and portable taping equipment were among the new materials teachers would begin to use in increasing numbers. ETV programs could be recorded for use by teachers throughout the

system, adding an invaluable dimension to the total instructional program ("BHS Arrow," Fall 1976).

In May 1977, bids were received for a media center addition at Biloxi High School. J.O.Collins was awarded the contract with a low bid of \$137,362; he was also awarded the Fernwood renovation project at a cost of \$93,317. By October 5, final inspections of the media center and the Fernwood renovation were held (Board Minutes 7019). The Biloxi High School science wing addition was contracted to Lewis Lee on November 17, 1977, for \$192,850 (Minutes 7039). Contract for band hall renovation was awarded to Lloyd T. Moon on May 4, 1979, for \$124,722 (Minutes 7276).

Only three years after the dedication of the Vocational-Technical Complex on the Biloxi High campus, a major renovation was undertaken, adding a new wing to the facility through a contract awarded to Starks Construction Company, with Thomas Compton as architect. The expansion would mean major additions to the total school curriculum, Dr. Ray noted. Included in the new programs would be a paint and body fender program, intensified business training, and marketing programs. The new wing would also house the vocational office training program and the new welding shops and administrative and secretarial centers. Approximate cost of the renovation was \$700,000.

Designed to blend with the existing buildings on the high school campus, the vo-tech additions featured covered walkways, air-conditioned classrooms, office space for instructors, storage areas, and the most modern technical and business training equipment. A vocational guidance center, training display windows fronting marketing classroom areas, an administrative center containing secretarial offices, the director's office and the teachers' lounge, and an enclosed marketing area for student training and display of student projects—all these were features of the building. It was anticipated that the building would be occupied in the fall of 1977 ("BHS Arrow," Fall 1977).

Following completion of the vo-tech complex, the school moved immediately into major renovation of the media center, a project which would double the size of the center for the coming school year.

Located next to the high school media center, the district media center was designed to provide office facilities for district media personnel, recording equipment, an ever-increasing videotape library, equipment repair facilities, and supplies and materials. Savan Tynes was media director for the Biloxi school system. Ann Denison would later hold this position in a program that would effectively reach into all the Biloxi schools with increasing importance, particularly as the library services in individual schools were expanded to meet accreditation requirements ("Arrow").

Late November 1977 was the beginning date set for construction of the new science wing to be added to the Biloxi High School building. Located east of the library, south of the new media center, the science wing included four laboratory-classrooms for marine biology, biology, physics,

and chemistry. Approximately 6,000 square feet of laboratory space was included in plans for the wing, at a cost of approximately \$234,000. ("Arrow").

Completed in early fall 1978, the science wing classrooms and laboratories provided Biloxi students the most up-to-date facilities for work in biology, physics, and chemistry. The marine biology rooms were unique, it was reported, in that they were the only supply rooms in the state to accommodate the complete laboratory activities associated with marine education. Specific design considerations were given in the placement and operation of marine aquariums, necessary in order to maintain the largest marine aquariums in the state, science department chair Della McCaughan noted. Under Mrs. McCaughan's creative and energetic direction, the high school had offered the first marine sciences classes in the state, widely recognized as models for other schools.

The physics room was a combination lecture-laboratory classroom with laboratory tables for individual student experiments and research. General science and biology rooms were equipped with laboratory service islands with gas, water, and electricity, allowing individual students to become involved in laboratory activities.

All of the building additions completed in the mid- and late-1970s were outgrowths of determined efforts by the School Board and the superintendent to strengthen the instructional program of the Biloxi schools, to enrich opportunities for student exploration and achievement, and to provide the best possible educational environment for students as preparation for future lives that would include vocational choices as well as college work.

One unique building project occurred in the late 1970s, with the school district's and the city's joint effort—led by Biloxi Mayor Jerry O'Keefe and superintendent Dr. Olon Ray—to build the Biloxi Natatorium directly east of the Michel Junior High School. Discussed in detail at the December 12, 1978, meeting of the Board, the new swimming pool and the building would be a two-phase project. Phase One would include the Olympic-sized swimming pool and bathhouse; Phase Two would cover the building housing the pool. While the school district would provide the land and part of the funds required, the city was expected to contribute \$300,000 toward costs. The pool would be used for swimming classes and swim teams offered and supervised by the school; the public would be able to use the pool at designated times.

Another project of great interest to many Biloxians was the creation of the multi-purpose athletic field at Beauvoir Elementary School. In March of 1978 the Board voted to name the field in honor of Dr. D.L. Hollis, the longtime Board member and well-loved supporter of all Biloxi sports teams. Dr. Hollis had served for forty-four years as Biloxi High School football team physician.

With building projects taking a great deal of time, Dr. Ray also moved during these years to strengthen and expand communications between the administration and the staff, through staff publications and in-service programs centered in instruction. The development of an updated policy manual, coded for quick retrieval of policy items, was among Dr. Ray's early concerns.

Assistant superintendent Dr. Larry Drawdy and Zan Skelton were responsible for preparation and presentation of the earliest policies and procedures manuals. It seemed apparent in the light of ever-growing federal and state regulations, together with enormous increases in school litigation cases across the country, that such a change was imperative. (Federal mandates required more and more attention to endless details and resulting mountains of paperwork. One example of never-ending attempts to comply with federal regulations came on June 8, 1976, when the Board in response to Title IX requirements acted to bring about uniformity in presenting awards for students participating in sports. Title I, Title VI, Title IX—all would play increasingly demanding roles in school life not only in Biloxi but all over the country.)

Evidence of Dr. Ray's acute sense of the need for improved communication with the staff and the public could be seen in the creation of a regularly scheduled "Community Report" mailed to all Biloxians; the staff newsletter "Inside The Biloxi Public Schools"; revised brochures and pamphlets addressing particular school programs and needs; expanded efforts to inform the public through local news media; newsletters for parents; expanded and reorganized student handbooks for elementary schools, junior high schools, and the high school; inauguration of a Superintendent's Round Table to meet regularly and to include representatives from the faculty and support staff. Assistant superintendent Drawdy and administrative assistant Bob Cherry, working with Zan Skelton during these years, were responsible for these programs and publications.

In addition to his perceptive work dealing with policy revision and development, Dr. Ray created a Policy Research and Development Council, with representatives from each school, the support services staff, and the administration, to meet on a regular basis and discuss subjects in which staff members had expressed concern or sufficient interest to warrant inclusion in the agenda. Beginning on July 7, 1975, and working under the supervision first of Dr. Drawdy and later Mr. Cherry, with policy draft writer Zan Skelton, the R&D Council over the next few years would make recommendations, based on a consensus of members, that would then be directed to the superintendent. (It is important to note that the Council at no time was a policy-making body; the superintendent might disapprove a recommendation, return it to R&D for revision, or approve and submit it to the School Board.)

For many years the R&D Council effectively served the school system, often acting as the first body to consider a problem or foresee a need and creating policy statements that eventually were adopted. On December 9, 1975, for example, the Board adopted recommendations from R&D in the matter of due process for students, leave for childbirth and infant care, decreases in personnel requirements (reduction in force), and career development opportunities.

This was only the beginning of an exceptionally large number of policies that grew out of the experiences and expertise of faculty members themselves, with such policies as those governing staff leaves and absences, sick leave, safety, attendance, grading, performance appraisal, placement/promotion/retention in elementary schools, substitute teachers for music/art/physical

education programs, paperwork, insurance programs, curriculum choices, student discipline, student absences, and many other areas of student and faculty life coming first from the R&D Council. The arrangement of the Policy Research and Development Council was unique, with members taking turns serving as chairpersons in a predetermined order, with the chair free to bring up any topic for discussion he or she wished the Council to review; and the Council operated under the rule that discussions would be entirely open and free and not subject for comment outside the group, that no votes would ever be taken, and that all recommendations would be the result of consensus. It was in many ways a surprisingly effective organization that served the schools well for the next sixteen years.

After 1975 a large number of Vietnamese students were enrolled in the Biloxi schools. The students were members of families of refugees who sought safety and new lives in the United States as a result of the end of the Viet Nam War. A great many of the immigrant families were helped by members of the Catholic community as they struggled to make their way into a strange culture. And many of the families became almost immediately involved in various aspects of the seafood industry.

Biloxi was home to the largest number of Vietnamese immigrants in the state, and it would be the schools that would do most to help young Vietnamese learn how to adapt to this new and uncharted world. One result associated with the influx of children from Viet Nam was the development in the Biloxi schools of English as a Second Language and Bilingual Education programs. Jude Lupinetti later helped to direct the project which served limited English proficiency (LEP) students in Harrison County. The largest percentage of Vietnamese children would attend Howard II Elementary School and Gorenflo Elementary School and Nichols Junior High (later Nichols Middle School). The district, often with federal assistance for special programs, made remarkable efforts to see that these children were assisted in every way the schools could provide. The story of the Vietnamese in the community and the schools was an important and successful chapter in Biloxi's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic history.

In 1975-1976 the tennis courts and the parking lots at the high school campus were completed, the latest in a series of expansion to the high school plant and campus. On August 9, 1977, the Biloxi High School media center was named for BHS administrator R.O. George (*pictured here*), who had served the school as teacher, acting principal, and assistant principal. The World War II veteran, a graduate of Mississippi Southern College, came to Biloxi in 1951 with his wife Retha, also a longtime Biloxi High School teacher who was for many years chair of the home economics department and later a member of the vocational faculty in work-related programs.



Dr. Ray on January 23, 1978, gave a detailed report on the constant decline in enrollment during the past ten years. He noted that since 1968, enrollment had decreased by approximately 2,400 students. He also noted that because of the age and condition of Lopez Elementary School, built in

1924, the school should be closed at the end of the school year and that students should be reassigned to other schools. Dr. Ray added that any reassignments would have to be approved by the Federal Court in compliance with the Court Order under which the schools had operated since 1964.

On January 17, 1978, the Reverend Elijah McGee became a member of the School Board following the death of highly respected and much admired Board member John Pettus (*See "Biographies" Section later*).

Among the most memorable events of the latter part of the 1970s were the decision to close Lopez Elementary School at the end of the school year (Board Minutes, January 23, 1978) and to change the names of Central Elementary School to Dukate Elementary School and West End Elementary School to Lopez Elementary School (Board Minutes, August 8, 1978), retaining the names of Biloxi families who were remembered for their invaluable gifts to the school system in its early history.

Architect Thomas Compton reported on May 19, 1978, information in regard to the swimming pool to be constructed on Michel property, half of the funds to come from the Community Development Commission, the other half from the Outdoor Recreation Commission. Compton noted that the project would be multi-faceted and would meet the needs of the handicapped. The School Board voted to convey the property to the city so that construction could proceed. An expansion of the band hall was discussed on December 7, 1978, with H.F. Fountain, Jr., architect; the expansion would cost \$94,973. The science building at Fernwood Junior High School was named the Robert L. Stevens Building (Board Minutes, February 22, 1979).

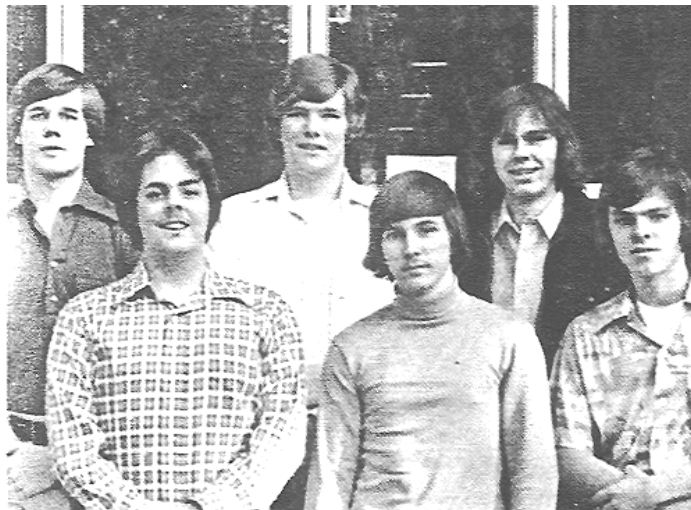
In a move that would have great potential for many students during the coming years, the administration and the Board approved the addition of the Air Force Junior ROTC program at Biloxi High School to begin in second semester of the 1978-1979 school year. Under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Thomas Varble, the program would expand and would bring many honors both to the students involved and to the school in the next twenty-two years.

In March 1979 Leonard A. Collins, architect, was asked to study the long-range program of air conditioning the Biloxi schools. Also on the March 7 meeting the Board discussed assignment of students from the newly annexed area north of Biloxi Bay. Among the administration's and the Board's concerns were questions regarding facilities, proximity of students to existing schools, improving the racial balance at Gorenflo, which would assist in compliance with provisions of the amended Court Order of 1978, and transportation. On December 17, 1979, the Board voted to construct a school bus barn on Popp's Ferry grounds at a cost of \$266,000.

Almost exactly ten years after Hurricane Camille had ravaged the Gulf Coast and caused enormous damage to the Biloxi schools, another Hurricane—this time named Hurricane Frederick—tore through the area on September 12, 1979. The eye went inland at Pacagoula, according to a *Herald* article of May 20, 2001, and then acted as a "tree-mowing machine" as it

moved across the Coast. Leonard Collins reported on school damages on September 21, 1979, telling Dr. Ray and the School Board that the greatest amount of damage requiring immediate repair was to Fernwood, Nichols, Michel, Jefferson Davis, and Gorenflo. School officials moved quickly to repair damages. Later assistant superintendent Bruce Stewart was to report estimated damages to the schools at \$1,497,633.

Hurricane Frederick would not be the last such storm to hit the Coast and inevitably the schools, as Hurricane Elena struck on September 1 and 2, 1985, and Hurricane Georges on September 28, 1998. Fortunately, neither of those storms, however, was as damaging as Frederick and Camille had been. The fact that the Biloxi schools were in the middle of a hugely destructive storm at the end of the 1970s seems somehow not inappropriate—and curiously symbolic. At the risk of overworking the metaphor, it sometimes seemed that the schools always had some kind of storm to face—and somehow Biloxi's schools not only weathered those storms but emerged even stronger.



*Biloxi High School National Merit Scholarship
Finalists - 1976*



The Biloxians I Officers - Biloxi High School – 1979

The Biloxians Choir in 1979, under the direction of Mrs. Hilda Barnes, continued to win awards and bring recognition to the high school and the community. Mrs. Barnes brought a new level of commitment and dedication to choral music and to the total program of activities of the high school. Under her leadership, the choir annually made many local appearances before civic groups and other community organizations, in addition to achieving the highest ratings in state choral adjudications. The Biloxians also participated in award-winning competitions that spotlighted the schools and the local community, represented the state in Philadelphia, as part of the national celebration of the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution in the "We The People" program (1987), and achieved national recognition as the choir visited Disney World and Opry Land and Six Flags Over Texas and swept honors in state and regional competitions. (The choir was also invited to represent Mississippi at the Bicentennial of the French Revolution Celebration in Paris in 1989. The choir performed at Luxembourg Gardens in Paris on July 26, 1989, later going to London as part of their performance trip abroad.) The director was instrumental in developing a program of choral music that included superior ensembles, show choir, large chorus classes, and theory and harmony courses. Mrs. Barnes retired in 1991 after a distinguished career of twenty-five years as choral director and head of the choral music department for the Biloxi Public Schools.



Prof Carpenter and Governor Bill Waller looking over the invitation to the BHS Indian Band to participate in the 1973 inaugural of President Richard M. Nixon on January 20, 1973. (Jaye Gilich, who later served as a School Board member—Jaye Gilich Brice—was head majorette.)





Biloxi School Board – 1979

*Mr. Fred Carron, Rev. Elijah McGee, Mrs. Emile Rousseau,
Mr. Alton Bankston, Col. Ed Barnes, KAFB Liaison, Mr. Ernest Henley, Jr.,
Superintendent Dr. Olon Ray, Mr. Don King. Board Attorney*