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*Anacostia Community Museum Archives*

## **Birney School Life Newsletter, November 1950**

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our own area, but city wide for civic development, improvement, and mutual help. We have had only one president for the two years of our existence. He is Joseph S. Bussey.

W.A. Patterson  
Interview with Mr. R. L. Paxton  
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### The Co-Ordinating Committee of Anacostia

When Mrs. A.B. Finlayson was appointed principal of the Birney School she founded the following civic association functioning in the school area: The Erie Civic Association, the Barry Farms Citizen Association, and the Hillsdale Civic Association. Each was doing good work by itself entirely isolated from one another. Realizing that in union there is strength, she called representatives of the three groups together and formed the Birney School Co-ordinating Community. In organizing this group she had the valuable assistance of two of the ministers in the community, the Rev. Millard F. Newman, vicar of St. Philip's Chape and first president of the committee and the Rev. Howard Hickerson, pastor of Mathews Memorial Baptist Church.

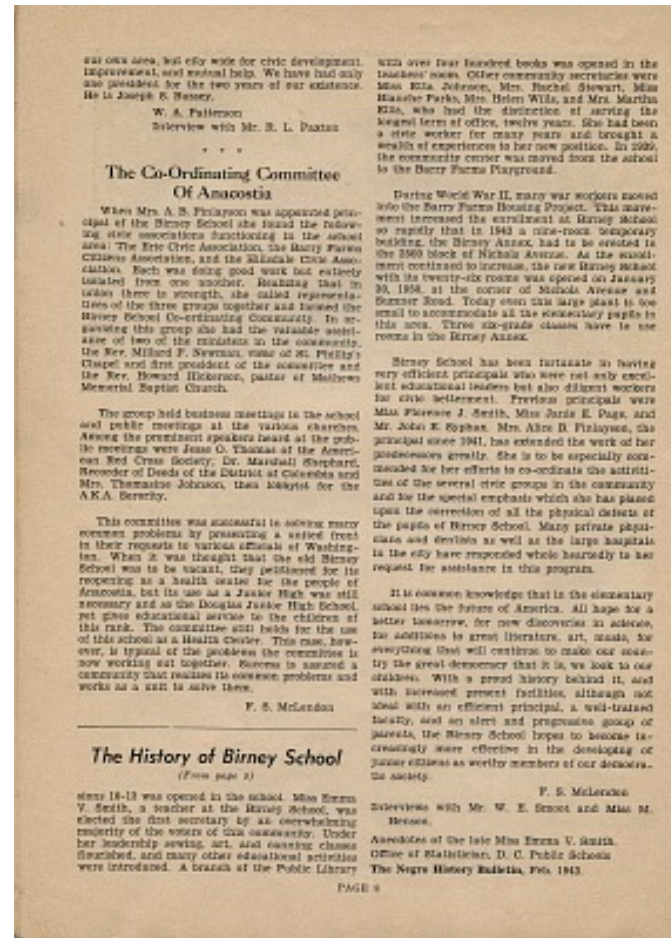
The group held business meetings in the school and public meetings at the various churches. Among the prominent speakers heard at the public meetings were Jesse O. Thomas of the American Red Cross Society; Dr. Marshall Shephard, Recorder of Deeds of the District of Columbia and Mrs. Thomasine Johnson, then lobbyist for the A.K.A. Sorority.

This committee was successful in solving many common problems by presenting a united front in their requests to various officials of Washington. When it was thought that the old Birney School was to be vacant, they petitioned for its reopening as a health center for the people of Anacostia, but its use as a Junior High was still necessary and so the Douglas Junior High School, yet gives education service to children of this rank. The committee still holds for the use of this school as a Health Center. This case, however, is typical of the problems the committee is now working out together. Success is assured a community that realizes its common problems and works as a unit to solve them.

F.S. McLendon  
[[line]]

### The History of Birney School (From page 5)

sions 10-13 was opened in the school. Miss Emma V. Smith, a teacher at the Birney School, was elected the first secretary by an overwhelming majority of the voters of this community. Under her leadership sewing, art, and canning classes flourished, and many other education activities were introduced. A branch of the Public Library with over four hundred books was opened in the teachers' room. Other community secretaries were Miss Etta Johnson, Mrs. Rachel Stewart, Miss Blanche Parks, Mrs. Helen Wills, and Mrs. Martha Ellis, who had the distinction of serving the longest term of office, twelve years. She had been a civic worker for many year and brought a wealth of experiences to her new position. In 1939, the community center was moved from the school to the Barry Farms Playground.



During World War II, many war workers moved into the Barry Farms Housing Project. This movement increased the enrollment at Birney School so rapidly that in 1943 a nine-room temporary building, the Birney Annex, had to be erected in the 2500 block of Nichols Avenue. As the enrollment continued to increase, the new Birney School with its twenty-six rooms was opened on January 30, 1950, at the corner of Nichols Avenue and Sumner Road. Today even this large plant is too small to accommodate all the elementary pupils in this area. Three six-grade classes have to use rooms in the Birney Annex.

Birney School has been fortunate in having very efficient principals who were not only excellent education leaders but also diligent workers for civic betterment. Previous principals were Miss Florence J. Smith, Miss Janie E. Page, and Mr. John E. Syphax. Mrs. Alice B. Finlayson, the principal since 1941, has extended the work of her predecessors greatly. She is to be especially commended for her efforts to co-ordinate the activities of the several civic groups in the community and for the special emphasis which she has placed upon the correction of all the physical defects of the pupils of Birney School. Many private physicians and dentists as well as the large hospitals in the city have responded whole heartedly to her request for assistance in the program.

It is common knowledge that in the elementary school lies the future of America. All hope for a better tomorrow, for new discoveries in science, for additions to great literature, art, music, for everything that will continue to make our country the great democracy that it is, we look to our children. With a proud history behind it, and with increased present facilities, although not ideal with a efficient principal, a well-trained faculty, and an alert and progressive group of parents, the Birney School hopes to become increasingly more effective in the developing of junior citizens as worthy members of our democratic society.

F.S. McLendon  
Interviews with MR. W.E. Smoot and Miss M. Henson  
Anecdotes of the late Miss Emma V. Smith.  
Office of Statistician, D.C. Public Schools  
The Negro History Bulletin, Feb. 1943

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