

The Greensboro Center

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When Starkville was founded, there were no real structured forms of education. Throughout the city and county some small schools had been set up, but no major learning establishments. Starkville had been established for 60 years before the first form of public school existed. Around 1925, a need for structured public education became apparent, therefore spurring the movement to build what would come to be known as the Greensboro Center.

The Greensboro Center was to be the first building established and built by the city solely for the purpose of a public education. The progression did not come easy. On August 4th, 1925, the mayor and board of aldermen issued a bond for one hundred thousand dollars for the construction of the building. The building was to be built to higher standards than previously established schools in the surrounding areas around Starkville. Not all of the citizens of Starkville agreed with the new building and its location. These variables presented a difficult task to get the project passed.

Once the idea was established and barely voted in, it took over one year for the city officials to come to an agreement on where they were going to build the building. Furthermore, a year's worth of attorney fees and members of the school board losing wages amounted up to four thousand dollars. In the end, the building cost one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars to complete, twenty-five thousand more than what was planned.

Once complete, the building stood to be the first Starkville High School, and the early years were pretty eventful. The first class to graduate from this building was in 1928 with 43 students. There was much progression in store throughout the next decade. In 1934, the first

band was established. In 1937, the band received their first uniforms. In 1956, the band hall was built for \$30,000 and a gymnasium was added for \$100,000.

The building did not go through many changes or renovations throughout the time it was a school. Starkville High School moved to its current location on the corner of Yellow Jacket Drive and Louisville Street in 1962. The Greensboro Center then became the location for Starkville Middle School. The building was abandoned in 1979, falling into almost complete disrepair. A seven-foot tall chain link fence was erected by the city around the entire structure to keep out vandals. Rocks were thrown through the windows from a distance, and the roof eventually began to rot and collapse in some places.

City officials decided the building should be torn down. The public got involved, and concerned citizens formed an interest meeting to see what they could do to resurrect the building. A young architect living on the same street as the center took a personal interest in the restoration of the structure. His name was Gary Shafer. He had moved to Starkville taking a position as a professor of architecture for Mississippi State University. Mr. Schafer presented his ideas and from there it took 8 years for him and the group to change public opinion about the building.

The Starkville High School had begun to get too crowded in 1984. It needed a wing added to accommodate the number of students as well as their administrative staff. This concern created a bond issue in the board of aldermen for the city to vote on. The citizens concerned about the Greensboro Center were able to add funds to the bond in an amount of \$900,000 that could fund the renovation of the Greensboro Center, and a plan was made turn it into the new location of the District office building, and the wing could also be added onto the high school.

Once the funding was in place, the city chose Mr. Schafer as the architect for the job. He took it upon himself to get permission to enter the building and measure each and every dimension of the building. With this information now in hand, he could lay out the building for office space and to host community events. The old, unattractive iron fire escapes that were added on the front of the building to meet codes for occupancy were removed to get the building back to its original state. The occupancy was now much lower so no additional fire escapes were needed. However, an elevator was put in and the new open area known as the mezzanine was created. The auditorium was renovated to its original state, even keeping the wood seats.

Mr. Schafer designed a new layout for the Greensboro Center that would be conducive for office spaces rather than the classrooms it had been in the past. Some of the flooring was rotten from the roof leaks. This presented the opportunity to take out a portion of the second floor in the North front part of the building to create the mezzanine area that was better suited for the new arrangement of rooms. Within the first year of the building being renovated, over 400 meetings were held there. This was evidence that the building renovation was a success. Since the District offices have moved there the various departments include, Child Nutrition, Family Centered Programs, Accounting, Superintendents office, SPED, Technology, Professional Development Center, Public Relations, and Extended Day Programs.

Today the building is still in sound structural shape. Many events are held there such as, School District Administration meetings, pageants, political debates, community meetings, dance recitals, and concerts. Throughout the last eight decades of Starkville history, the building has meant a lot to its citizens. The building marks the beginning of the Historic District for the Greensboro Street. Without the buildings integrity the street would not be the same.

References

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