



PRO VIRILI PARTE P • A • P • E • R • S

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of
Birmingham University School

Issue No. 4

Birmingham University School Alumni Recall Feeling of Family

More than 200 alumni, faculty, and friends gathered in the Patton Gymnasium of The Altamont School for the Birmingham University School centennial celebration. The event included a vintage car exhibit, dinner, and dancing. Also included were addresses by Altamont Head of School Cecil Stodghill; dinner host Bruce Denson; and Centennial Chairperson Tim Callahan. “We had an overwhelmingly positive response from all who attended,” Callahan reflected later. “They seemed to leave with a sweet taste in their mouth, having experienced a night of joy.”



The celebration required a year of planning. Altamont Alumni Specialist, Allison Abney, developed a website dedicated to the school's history and legacy. Tim Callahan made hundreds of contacts to update addresses and build enthusiasm for this event among B.U.S. alums. Chris Thomas, historian and former teacher at Altamont, created a film – Legacy: A Century of B.U.S.— that he premiered at the September 10th dinner. Amanda Davis, who has longtime connections with the school, is contributing six issues of a centennial newsletter, the Pro Virili Parte Papers, based on Chris Thomas's 2010 book A History of Birmingham University School. When he spoke that evening, Tim Callahan described these efforts as “devoted collaboration,” an important feature of the school itself. Speaking in the film, Callahan, recalled how “contributions by volunteering parents, and by teachers who would stay after school to put on this or that – debate team, glee club, or ‘Troubadours’ – were essential for this small school that often struggled for funding and staff.”



Welcome by dinner host, Bruce Denson (B.U.S. 1968)”



Left to right: Chris Nicholson, (Altamont 1999) Chair of the Altamont Board of Trustees; Lynn Callahan; and Tim Callahan (B.U.S. 1966), Centennial Chairperson



A second celebratory event was the December 10th dedication of an historic marker erected in front of the 1925 school building which is still standing just off Highland Avenue at the south end of Rhodes Park. In 1954, the school moved just over Red Mountain to a Montclair Road campus which had space for athletics and expansion. Most of those attending the dinner remember their school days at 3609 Montclair Road. Only a few of those who were present at the September 10th dinner celebration remembered being in that first school building.

The evening's distinguished guests included Frank Marshall, now in his nineties, who joined the school's English faculty in 1957 and served as Headmaster 1963-68. Many B.U.S. students remember him fondly for instilling in them a love of literature. "The whole thing was an absolute joy to me from the time I started," reflected Marshall. B.U.S. allowed him to use reading lists and programs he had not been able to use in public schools. Furthermore, class sizes of ten or fewer students created semblances of panel discussions of books. "That takes time," Marshall said, "but it pays off."

Marshall also remembered significant growth of the school during his years there – in reputation as well as enrollment. "We had some wonderful students at B.U.S. in those years," he said. Later in life, one of those students helped save his vision when others saw no way to prevent Marshall's growing blindness. His former student, physician Dr. Michael Callahan in the Class of 1964, offered hope and medical expertise. "I'm so grateful to him for saving my sight," Marshall said. B.U.S. alumni also enjoyed reconnecting that evening with Bill Haver, who came to B.U.S. as headmaster in the fall of 1971 and acted as a facilitator in the merger with Brooke Hill. Haver went on to serve as the head of Altamont from 1975 to 1991, the longest serving head in B.U.S., Brooke Hill, or Altamont history.



Danielle McCormick and Milton Bresler, (B.U.S. 1968) a member of the “Fab Four”

young women) to numerous state championships. He also became a legend for his instructional strategy that several generations of Altamont students remember as “The Palmer Paper.”

A B.U.S. Family

Even after the move from 1211 28th Street, South to Montclair Road, B.U.S. remained a small school and many students and their families lived close by. In Chris Thomas’s video, Tim Callahan referred to the importance of parent volunteers for B.U.S. success. When interviewed at the September 10 dinner, Mort Jordan, Class of 1962, also reminisced about the family-like atmosphere at the school. “The most I ever had in my class, in any given year, was 13,” Jordan said. “Students were athletes because everybody was needed.” Then he laughed, “I was a 145-pound tackle on the football team, and a 190-pound classmate was viewed as ‘Godzilla.’ We tried our best. We weren’t very good, but we put everything into it.” After graduating, Jordan often returned to campus to cheer Mulkey’s athletes on. This school-as-family idea was particularly visible on long-ago winter Friday nights as cheering fans crowded into the Quonset-hut gym. “I was proud of them, Jordan, said, “and it’s a pride that has carried on, a pride for both the kids who went there and for the school itself.”

Pro Virili Parte

The pride described by B.U. S. alumnus Mort Jordan, aligns perfectly with the school’s “*pro virili parte*” motto. In the first century before the Christian Era, these three Latin words resonated as a charge of the orator Cicero to Roman citizens and to future generations: produce to the best of your ability. Frank Marshall once described B.U.S. as being greater than its parts and everyone present in the Patton Gymnasium on September 10, 2022, was bound to feel that pride. Bruce Denson and Tim Callahan announced the total of gifts for a scholarship fund from members of the B.U.S. family exceeded \$200,000. Through the generosity of the B.U.S. family, deserving students will have the opportunity to attend Altamont, mentioned in 2022 by the Birmingham LEDE as one of the top-ten high schools in Alabama and the only one of these 10 within the city limits of Birmingham.

A sadness which intermingled with the toasts, testaments, and conversations on that special evening was the absence of Coach Phil Mulkey who died during the week following the celebration. Throughout the 1960s, Mulkey led B.U.S. to several state championships in track and basketball, a truly amazing feat for such a small school. Issue 3 of the is filled with stories and tributes for Coach Mulkey. Present at the dinner on September 10 was Mulkey protégé, Jim Palmer.

Palmer (Class of 1970) received a B.A. from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and then an M.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. In 1992, he joined the Altamont faculty teaching English and coaching track. During his career at Altamont, he became well known within the state for coaching Altamont track teams (composed of both young men and



List of Donors to the B.U.S. Scholarship

Carl Adams III (1967)
Donelson R. Adams
James C. Barton, Jr. (1970)
Graham Beene (1975, last class)
Dixon Brooke, Jr. (1966)
Charles S. Caldwell, III (1964)
Timothy A. R. Callahan (1966)
Malcolm N. Carmichael (1966)
Ramsey Cook (Class of 1972)
Craig Smith Crockard (1960)
Charles B. Crow, III (1962)
Charles W. Daniel, "Bill" (1957)
Robert R. deBuys (1965)
Bruce Denson (1968)
Richard C. Duell, III (1965)
Paul Elliott (1966)
Andrew E. Fies (1975, last class)
Robert P. Glaze (1950)
John Scott Greene (1970)
William F. Haver (Headmaster 1972-91)
David Henderson (1968)
James C. Lee, III (1966)
Frank C. Marshall, Jr. (Headmaster 1963-68)
Henry H. Perritt, Jr. (1962)

Allen D. Rushton (1945)
Deak Rushton Charitable Fund
Andrew C. Scott, Jr. (1969)
David Silverstein (1974)
Sydney W. Smyer
Southpace Properties, Inc.
George F. Wheelock, III (1969)
Sarah Ward Whiteside (Head of School,
2007-17)

Contributions in memory of
Herbert E. Smith, Jr. and Lee McGriff, Jr.
Meg McGriff North (Brooke Hill, 1968)
Lee McGriff, III (1969)
Jane McGriff (Brooke Hill, 1972)
Addie McGriff Walters

Contributions in memory
of Coach Phil Mulkey
Michael Bruno
San Hammond
Phillipa Raschker
Leila Watson



“The B.U.S. alumni were ‘the original knights,’ who gave The Altamont School not only its mascot but also many of its values.”

— Cecil Stodghill, Head of School —

Historical Marker Dedicated on December 10, 2022

For the last event of the Birmingham University School centennial year, The Altamont School dedicated an historical marker in front of the original school building at 1211 28th St. South. B.U.S. remained at this location – just off Highland Avenue at the south end of Rhodes Park – until moving to the Montclair Road campus in 1954. The new location – near the intersection of Montclair and Country Club Roads – offered the school much-needed space for athletics and expansion and was less than two miles from the original school building. B.U.S. remained at the Montclair Road location until the merger with Brooke Hill in 1975, when B.U.S. students and faculty moved to Brooke Hill’s building at 4801 Altamont Road. Today, however, 1211 28th Street, South is the only B.U.S. school building still standing. Following a short dedication program was a building tour.

Altamont’s Head of School, Cecil Stodghill, welcomed those gathered on a chilly December morning. “We now have a permanent sign that tells the story of B.U.S. and one of the buildings where students actually walked the halls.” Next, Stodghill thanked Tim Callahan (1966) and Bruce Denson (1968). Both Callahan and Denson attended B.U.S. when it was located on Montclair Road. Callahan served as chair of the Centennial Committee and contacted alumni, beginning with classes of the 1950s and ending with the Class of 1975. Denson, with the help of Callahan and others, led fundraising efforts.

The Oldest Living B.U.S. Alumnus

It was a great privilege at the marker dedication to have the presence of Dr. Merrill Northington Bradley the oldest living alumnus of the Birmingham University School. Dr. Bradley was accompanied that morning by his two sons, Merrill Bradley, Jr. of Birmingham and Lyons Bradley of Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Dr. Bradley recalled his days on 28th St. when the school was still known for rigid military discipline. His first memory was one of horror as he saw Headmaster Robert Johnson walking down the first-floor hall toward the entry way, intent on a conversation with the boy's mother about his first grade report.

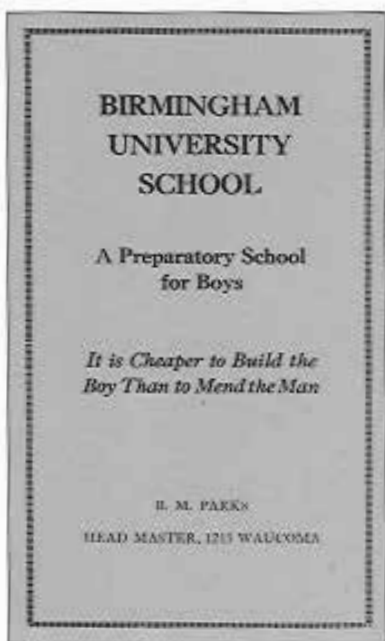


Dr. Merrill Bradley being interviewed, as Stephanie Brooks, Altamont's Director of Advancement (*left*) and Merrill Bradley, Jr. (*middle*) look on.

Bradley followed “Cap’m Johnson” expecting the worst but found his mother happy. Johnson had informed her that Bradley was first in his class and third in the school.

“It didn’t last,” Bradley said. Yet, he did go on to earn an M.D. at Columbia University before service as a U.S. Navy surgeon and, ultimately, as Chief of Surgery at St. Vincent’s Hospital, less than a mile from the site of his early education.

Captain Parks and his colleagues from Marion Institute who founded B.U.S. were not recruited by Birmingham residents but came to the new city as entrepreneurs to establish a college preparatory school. Their goal was to enlist the financial support of the families who were driving Birmingham’s rapid physical, financial, and cultural growth. Parks first rented space in a three-story building at 2144 Highland Avenue, also occupied by the Margaret Allen School (for girls); several private tutors; and the “Little Theater” drama troupe. This drama troupe was a parent organization for the Virginia Samford Theater, located today along Highland Avenue in Caldwell Park. In 1925, Parks persuaded a few of his school’s original patrons to purchase the U.J. Peters home at 1215 28th Street, along with its adjoining property. The vision Captain Parks presented to these well-to-do Birmingham residents in the 1925-26 school handbook was a second-to-none college preparatory education at home – without going away to boarding schools in states to the north and east of Alabama.



In 1943, at age fifteen, Merrill Bradley was recipient of the J. Frank Rushton Cup awarded annually to the school’s most outstanding student. In the fall of 1943, Bradley matriculated at Phillips Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire and received his high school diploma there in 1945. At this point in time, it was a common practice among B.U.S. patrons to choose an additional experience for their sons at a boarding

school, particularly if the school was the father’s alma mater. Such was the case for Merrill Bradley, whose father Lee Carrington Bradley, Jr. had graduated from “Exeter.” Chris Thomas for his 2010 book was able to interview several of Bradley’s schoolmates who went to Exeter and are now deceased, including Billy Rush-ton and Hobart McWhorter. Apparently, because of Captain Johnson’s superior teaching, there was some bragging on the home front about the “math wizzes” from Alabama. Furthermore, others who remained at B.U.S. until high school graduation reported being well-prepared for the colleges they attended, including Vanderbilt, Sewanee, Georgia Tech, and Princeton.¹

Building Tour and Reception

After dedication ceremony, the event’s attendees toured the building courtesy of current owners Beverly and Robert Shaffer and discovered many original features (almost 100 years later) both outside and inside. When walking up the front steps to the portico and then into the first-floor hallway, it was easy to visualize the students of long-ago changing classes – laughing and taunting each other as boys and young men tend to do. To the right of the entrance are two stairways, one leading down and one leading up. Down in the basement was the furnace, along with a bicycle room, cloak room, and lunchroom. On the top floor there was a library, auditorium, and a laboratory. The stage of the B.U.S. auditorium remains visible even though the 2nd floor had been divided into offices.



In the entrance area beside the stairs, Stephanie Brooks, Altamont’s Director of Advancement, set up a table with coffee, doughnuts, etc. Being in this building once again and remembering footsteps of students and teachers of long ago, offered a poignant way to end the centennial celebration.

Throughout 2022, alumni have reconnected, relived great memories, and revitalized all that is and was Birmingham University School. In closing, Cecil Stodghill recognized Dr. Merrill Bradley and his fellow alumni as “the original Knights” who gave The Altamont School not only its mascot, but also many of its values. “The standards of success you all set are very much part of the Altamont tradition that continues today.”

¹ Thomas, pages 56 and 57



The Altamont School

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The mission of the Altamont School is to improve the fabric of society by graduating well-educated individuals capable of independent thinking and innovative ideas. To this end, the school attracts, nurtures, and challenges students whose commitment to truth, knowledge, and honor will prepare them not only for the most rigorous college programs but also for productive lives.