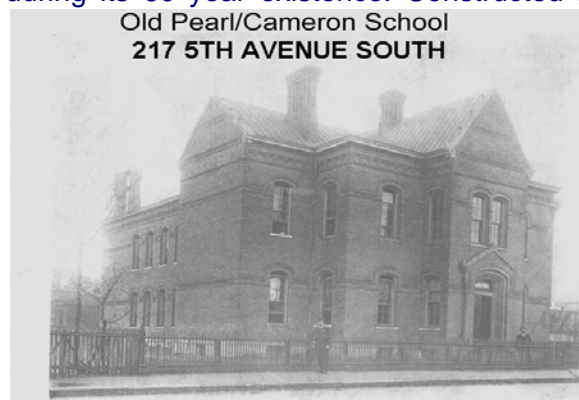


HISTORY OF CAMERON SCHOOL NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



CAMERON SCHOOL located in Nashville, Tennessee literally came into being on Monday night **November 26, 1928** when the Nashville City School Board voted by unanimous consent to rename Pearl Jr. High to Cameron in honor of **Professor Henry Alvin Cameron**, (photo at left) a black science teacher who taught at Pearl High School from 1897-1917. It was the fourth public school in Nashville named by the city school board after an African-American. Professor Cameron, who had taken a leave of absence from teaching at Pearl High in June 1917 to serve in World War I, was killed in the Battle of Argonne Forest, France on October 30th, 1918 - just two weeks before the war's end (search "*Henry Alvin Cameron*").

The first Cameron School (*formerly Pearl Jr. High*) was located at **217 5th Avenue South** - across the street from what is currently the Country Music Hall of Fame in downtown Nashville. The building underwent several transformations during its 60 year existence. Constructed in 1883, the schoolhouse began as Pearl Grammar School serving grades 1-8. In 1897, the high school department was transferred from Meigs to Pearl by the Nashville Board of Education due to student growth in the area (*Meigs was Nashville's 1st black high school from 1886-1897*) and the building became the first Pearl High. In 1917 Pearl moved to a new facility on 16th Avenue in North Nashville. The 5th Avenue schoolhouse remained vacant until the Fall of 1924 when it reopened as Pearl Jr. High School serving grades 1-9. Four years later on November 26, 1928, the Nashville City School Board voted during a regular meeting to rename Pearl Jr. High to Cameron in honor of Professor Cameron. This marked the beginning of Cameron School.



The old schoolhouse pictured above was a two-story brick structure with no indoor plumbing but one that the community was proud to have. The heating source consisted of several stoves and grates located throughout the building. Fourteen to twenty-two teachers taught there at any one time and though the structure was designed for 800 students, the student population consistently soared above 1,000 with a perpetual waiting list. The school continued to serve grades 1-9. The elementary grades 1-6 were taught on the first floor while the upper grades 7-9 were taught on the second floor. The campus consisted of the main building on 5th Avenue and a smaller structure in the rear called the **Annex** which housed the Home Economics and Industrial Arts departments and a small cafeteria. Cameron principals during its time on 5th Avenue South were **William B. Vassar** (1928-1929) and **Hugh J. Johnson** (1929-1949). Hugh J. Johnson would be Cameron's longest serving principal with 20 years of service.

In the Fall of 1940, with funding provided by the Federal Works Agency and the city of Nashville, **Cameron School moved into a new school building** (pictured at left) at 1034 1st Avenue



South. Mr. Johnson was Cameron's principal also at this time. This spacious Gothic Revivalist style facility was designed by one of the foremost architects in the country, **Mr. Henry Hibbs** who also planned numerous college and university buildings at Vanderbilt, Fisk, Peabody, Scarritt, Belmont, Meharry and many other southern schools. This facility "... had fire resistive construction, acoustical treatment, hardwood floors, radio and public address systems, and is fully equipped with the most up-to-date, comfortable and useful types of equipment" according to a school board publication. The new Cameron consisted of four floors with a combined area of over 106,000 square feet. It had 23 classrooms, 2 office areas, a large library, three Home Economics rooms, a clinic, two laboratories (General Science and Physics/Chemistry), two shops, a cafeteria, kitchen, boiler room, teacher's Lounge, storage and janitor's rooms. The campus comprised over 7 acres and was constructed at the former location of the old Walden University and Meharry Medical College.

In August 1949, Principal Johnson passed at the age of 65 and a distinguished, nationally recognized educator named **John C. Hull** was appointed Cameron's third principal in the Fall of 1949. During Mr. Hull's tenure **Cameron became a Senior High School in the Fall of 1955** finally fulfilling the community dream of such a school in South Nashville. The elementary grades (1-6) that had been housed at Cameron were moved that year to the newly constructed Johnson Elementary School on 2nd Avenue South - named in honor of former principal Johnson. Physical additions to Cameron such as the East Wing (consisting of the boy's gym, auditorium, band/vocal rooms and arcade) built in 1954, and the Stadium which opened in the Fall of 1956 provided the necessary resources for the school's upgraded status. In **June 1957**, diplomas were issued to Cameron's first senior high graduating class.



Oscar R. Jackson (photo at left) replaced John C. Hull as principal of Cameron in the Fall of 1958 following Mr. Hull's reassignment as principal of Pearl High. Mr. Jackson would become one of the most beloved and venerated leaders in the history of Cameron High. His tenure at Cameron is still referred today as the "Jacksonian Era" because of his dominant impact on the school. (In 1997, in honor of Mr. Jackson and Mr. John C. Hull, the new **Hull-Jackson Montessori School** was named after them). During his administration, several new programs were added to the curriculum at Cameron with many garnering national attention. The Fall of 1970 brought another change in leadership when **James M. Robinson** became the fifth principal of Cameron upon the retirement of Mr. Jackson in the Spring of 1970. Mr. Robinson served in that position until June 1971 when the last senior class graduated from Cameron High.

Cameron High School consistently earned a distinctive nationwide reputation for solid academics and competitive sports. To encourage the highest development of its students scholastically, Cameron participated in such programs as the Ford Foundation **Nashville Education Improvement Project** and the Danforth Foundation **Project Opportunity**. Cameron's faculty took part in the **Overseas Teacher Exchange Program** sending teachers to London, England and Frankfurt, Germany. The school's choral groups, marching band, athletic departments, honor societies, editorial staff and player's guild won numerous city, state, and national honors competing among the best schools in the country. Many faculty of the school served in administrative and supervisory roles at its Board of Education. The sports history of the school encompassed many regional titles in basketball, football, track and baseball years before Cameron was allowed to join the white statewide association TSSAA in 1966 including an undefeated football team in 1958 coached by Eugene Stevenson. After its admittance to the TSSAA, Cameron High won a 1966 TSSAA championship in Long Jump competition and back-to-back TSSAA championships in 1970 and 1971 by the men's basketball team coached by the former Pearl High and UCLA standout, **Ronald R. Lawson Sr.**

As a direct result of a federal mandate to desegregate public schools in Nashville, Cameron returned to junior high status as a ninth grade school in the Fall of 1971. In 1978, it became the pilot institution for the first Middle School in Nashville for grades 5-8 which eventually became the model for the entire system. As of 2005, it still serves as a Middle School accommodating one of the most ethnically diverse student populations within the Metropolitan Nashville system. Other principals that served at Cameron during these transition periods were **Luther "Dick" Hays** (1971-1972), **James Coots** (1972-1978), **Hoyte Snow** (1978-1985), **Gerald Martin** (1985-2003) and **Karl Lang** (2003-?). Also, during this time, both boys' and girls' athletic teams continued the school's heralded tradition by winning city championships in their division.

For over 75 years, Cameron's alumni and faculty have served with distinction around the world in business, medicine, politics, technology, music, education, law, science, religion and other fields of endeavor. It has incorporated all grade levels from 1-12 during its remarkable history. Beginning in 1928 until 1954, the school served grades 1-9. In the Fall of 1955 through June 1971, when the last senior class graduated, Cameron encompassed grades 7-12. From 1971-1978 the school comprised only the 9th grade. In Fall 1978, Cameron became a pilot as one of the first middle schools in Nashville consisting of grades 5-8. In **Fall 2003**, a \$4.5 million dollar **modernization project** was completed at the school that renovated *many* areas of the building. Also, in **2003** an **Alumni Room** was established at Cameron that houses memorabilia of the school including trophies from the 1940's, senior class pictures from all high school years and other items of historical interest to the school. **As of 2005**, the school is under review for listing on the **National Register of Historic Places**. As a Middle School, Cameron continues its commitment to serving the educational needs of the students of Nashville, Tennessee.



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CAMERON SCHOOL TIMELINE

Nov 1928 – Established by Nashville School Board on 5th Ave South as Jr. High

Fall 1940 – Moves to new building on 1st Avenue South

1947 (approx) – Mascot (**Panther**) and school colors (**Blue & Gold**) adopted

1951 – Alma Mater written by History/Civics teacher Elizabeth C. Reed

1954 – East wing constructed (Boys' gym/Auditorium/Band & Vocal rooms/Arcade)

Fall 1955 – Opens as Senior High School grades 7-11 (12th grade added Fall '56)

Nov 1956 – Athletic Stadium opens

Sep 1957 – Assigned one of three Asst. Principals in Nashville Schools (Jas. Robinson)

June 1957 – First Senior High Class graduates

1960 and 1961 – Region II State Track Champions (before TSSAA entry)

1966 – TSSAA Long Jump Track Champions

1970 – TSSAA Men's Basketball Champions

1971 – TSSAA Men's Basketball Champions

June 1971 – Last Senior High class graduates

Fall 1971 – Opens as a 9th grade school

Fall 1978 – First Nashville Middle School grades 5-8

June 1986 – Cameron Alumni Association re-established

2002/2003 – \$4.5 million modernization projected began/completed.

2003 - Cameron Alumni Room authorized by Metro Nashville School Board

Oct 2003 – Building modernization dedicated at Cameron

2004/2005 – Under review for listing on the **National Register of Historic Places**

