

Primm Park Brochure Contents

Information provided by MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

From A.D. 900 to 1450, Primm Park and much of the area along Moore's Lane/Wilson Pike was the site of an enclosed town that was home to a relatively large population of prehistoric peoples known as the Mississippians. Over the centuries, the Mississippian people, a complex and sophisticated race, lived, hunted, fished, farmed, and buried their dead in this immediate area. By about the sixteenth century, these people had disappeared from this region and by the late eighteenth century, a group of white settlers had migrated west of the Appalachian Mountains and settled on and around the remnants of the ancient town. As Europeans and Africans, free and slave, came into the area, farms were established and small crossroads communities supported the farming families. Homes, schools, churches, businesses, and cemeteries were among the first concerns of early residents. Boiling Spring Academy, one of the earliest still extant brick schools, was built atop a prehistoric village surrounded by a series of Mississippian mounds later to be named the Fewkes Group archaeological site.

Located at the intersection of Moore's Lane and Wilson Pike in Brentwood, Boiling Spring Academy was constructed in 1832. The substantial two-story academy opened its doors to students in January 1833 under the direction of Mr. J.M. Tilford, a Cumberland University graduate. The academy offered classes at three levels with each term lasting five and a half months. The first level cost \$8 per term and students learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. The second level, at \$10 per term, incorporated the study of grammar and geography. The most advanced level taught students Latin and Greek languages, as well as sciences at \$14 per term. Archaeological excavations uncovered expensive porcelain dating to the use of Boiling Spring Academy, indicating that the students most likely hailed from affluent families. The combination of building size and enduring masonry construction resulted in the establishment of a notable and permanent educational building. Students from outside the community who required board were housed by families who lived in the vicinity of the academy.

By January 1887, the school changed from a private academy to a public school as Williamson County school records indicate that Miss Lillie Frost received payment of \$25 for her teaching services at "school #1 at Boiling Spring." The public school at Boiling Spring coincided with the building's use as a multi-denominational community meeting house beginning around 1900. At this time, the front entrance of the academy was replaced with a window and a new entrance was constructed on the gable-end of the building, reflecting the church members' desire to create the look and feel of a "proper church." Boiling Spring continued to operate simultaneously as a church and public school as late as 1918 as evidenced by receipts for a teacher's salary paid to Miss Willie Nelle McArthur.

In time the building was abandoned by the church and was absorbed as part of the Primm farm. For most of the twentieth century, Boiling Spring Academy was used as an agricultural building, storing feed corn and cure tobacco. The surrounding archaeological site was used as a pasture. In October 1920, archaeologist William Myer visited the site

and conducted a formal scientific excavation and testing of the mounds. His research produced important information regarding the different phases of mound construction, evidence of prehistoric dwellings, and detailed reports on artifacts and graves discovered on site. These reports were subsequently published in 1928 in the 41st Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology under the title "Two Prehistoric Villages in Middle Tennessee." Myer also made mention in his filed notes of the existence of the "old slave burial ground" located on the east side of mound No. 1. He indicated that this was a burying ground before the war (Civil War) but that only three had been buried there since the war. Since Myer's excavations, construction of farm roads and plowing has disturbed some of the mounds, but overall, the site still retains much of its historical and archaeological integrity. In 1980, this integrity was formally recognized, and the Fewkes Group Archaeological Site and Boiling Spring Academy were placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2003, much of the Primm farm was sold as part of the Montclair residential development. However, Boiling Spring Academy and the Fewkes Site were donated to the City of Brentwood to be developed as Primm Park. The Brentwood Historical Commission stated their objectives for the park to include historic research, park facilities planning, school programs planning, special events planning, and restoration of the academy. Leatherwood, Inc., a firm specializing in historic rehabilitation, replaced the academy's roof, completed masonry repairs, restored windows and doors, and reset stone foundation and exterior steps. Interior renovations included re-plastering of the walls, dry-walling of the first floor ceiling, renovation of the heart-of-poplar flooring, and installation of heart pine ceiling on the second floor. During restoration, Leatherwood, Inc. workers noticed archaeological fragments resting underneath the academy's floorboards. These fragments were churned up by small animal activity over the decades. Before any further restoration took place, MTSU archaeology professor Kevin Smith, along with several volunteers and students, undertook excavations which yielded several prehistoric and historic artifacts including pottery shards, slate tablet fragments, tobacco pipes, clothing rivets, a bone button, fragments of stained glass, and a glass marble.

In the case of Boiling Spring Academy and the Fewkes Group archaeological site, archaeological testing and historical research have combined to provide a more comprehensive story of the events that took place at this site spanning several centuries. Further testing and research are likely to yield even more details that convey the past. Therefore, it is important to tread lightly on these grounds as they hold important clues that give us insight to Williamson County's extraordinarily complex and rich heritage.