

The History of Dowling School & Crane Hill, Alabama

The community of Crane Hill, AL can trace its history back to circa 1806 when the first settlers recorded their land titles and established their churches and small businesses.

Today, there are as many as 100 licensed small businesses and stores in the area. Many of these are "cottage industries" and are home-based manufacturers whose products and services extend nation-wide. Crane Hill community covers about 43 square miles with more than four churches serving approximately 4800 residents. Crane Hill now has 1,073 registered voters and four fire stations.

The area is best loved for its natural beauty and simple lifestyle. Nestled at the very foot of the Appalachian Mountains, it offers a landscape with rock out-crops and graceful meadows all well endowed with indigenous plants, wild flowers and a wide variety of wild animals. Smith Lake and many fresh water streams wind through the hills and rocks offering residents an opportunity to fish and enjoy one of the most attractive locations in Alabama.



One of the earliest residents of Crane Hill was the blue crane who fished the streams and roosted on a hill located just north of Mt. Zion Road and part of the Mr. Kirby Lay property. It was from this large hill of roosting cranes that Crane Hill took its name.

The *Cowcumber Magnolia* grows prolifically along the hills with its magnificent large white blooms in late spring and dates back to prehistoric times. With about 250 of the total 570 miles of shoreline on Smith Lake located in Crane Hill, the area offers families a healthy atmosphere in which to raise their families and enjoy their quality time in retirement.

It is estimated that several families have the distinction of having lived as many as six generations in this area. Crane Hill is also home to many important political and industrial leaders in Alabama and beyond.

The first Crane Hill Jr. High school was built in 1904 and is now the Masonic Lodge. It was relocated to its present site highway 222 in 1934. That same year, it was replaced by a brick structure near Mt Zion Road (County Road 946) and was simply known as "Crane Hill School."

Just four years later, in 1938, this structure was destroyed by fire. The fire was reported to have been started by an electrical problem. The community of Crane Hill once more pulled together and in 1939 its



citizens using trees on the site and a saw mill owned by Mr. Ivan Williams, built a new red brick school and named it after the then current Superintendent of Education in Cullman County, Mr. H.G. Dowling.

On Labor Day, September 2, 1996, Dowling School became victim to vandalism, and was burned to the ground. The crimes of the dark hours before dawn ravaged Crane Hill and even extended several communities beyond, leaving local families without the personal dedication and support of a local school. On Labor Day, September 1, 1997 the citizens of Crane Hill dedicated a memorial created on the front steps of the old school and celebrated the inaugural "*Sweet-Tater Festival*" destined to become an annual event at *Dowling Memorial Park*.

Community pride, family values and a commitment to raise families with firm moral and religious values will continue to be the best reason to live in small communities like Crane Hill, AL.



“The Lodge”
A Crane Hill building with lots of history.



This brief history was collected by Donna Peters, 2014
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