



CITY OF SMITHVILLE APPLICATION – HISTORIC MARKER/DESIGNATION

HISTORIC PROPERTY/INDIVIDUAL/EVENT NOMINATED:

Name of Nominated Entity: Mary A. Brown School

Address (Street & Number-Property Only): 403 SW 4th St., Smithville, TX 78957

APPLICANT INFORMATION:

Name: Alta Yevett Alexander

Address: 3804 Panther Hall
Leander, TX 78641

Phone: 512. 825. 6622

Email: ayalexander1913@gmail.com

OWNER (If different from Applicant):

Name: % Smithville Independent School District Superintendent Cheryl Burns

Address: 901 N.E. 6th St.
Smithville, TX 78957

Phone: 512. 237. 2487

Email: cburns@smithvilleisd.org

Nomination for: ☒ Historical Structure(s) ☒ Historic Location ☐ Individual ☐ Event

(Historic Structure only) Date Structure Built: 1896 Current Zoning of Property: commercial

Architectural Style or period: _____

Why is this structure/location/individual/event historically significant? (Brief summary; add pages if needed)

See attached

Attach clear and organized complete documentation as appropriate. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Pictures - if structure/property, taken from all sides; if individual, portrait or other likeness.
- Deeds, plats, maps, or other papers relating to property.
- Letters, news accounts, or other pertinent verifications of facts – either property or individual.
- For individuals - biographies including details of lives and their contribution to the history of Smithville TX: birth/death dates and places, education, occupations, military or civic service, news accounts, etc.

Acknowledgments

I certify that the above information is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and ability and that I am now or will be fully prepared to present the above proposal at the Historic Preservation/Design Standards Advisory Committee Meeting and City Council hearings. I further certify that I have read and understand the following information concerning the procedure for consideration of my marker request and that I am currently in good standing with all taxing authorities.

I understand that the application for historic marker/designation will first be submitted to the Smithville Historic Preservation and Design Standards Advisory Committee (HPDS) and that the case will be submitted to City Council for consideration at the subsequent City Council meeting.

I understand that I am encouraged to be present or represented at the public hearings.

I understand that if the HPDS recommends approval of the designation, the recommendation will be submitted to the City Council for final determination. If the HPDS recommends denial, I understand that I may appeal the recommendation of denial to the City Council by submitting a letter of appeal to the HPDS within 14 days after the Board's action.

I reserve the right to withdraw this proposal at any time prior to 14 days after the schedule filing deadline for the HPDS meeting, by filing a written request with the Chair of the HPDS Committee. I understand that such withdrawal shall immediately stop all proceedings thereon.

I understand that people, places and events nominated, reviewed and disapproved three (3) times in succession are not eligible for review panel for three (3) years.

I understand that, if accepted, City or Chamber of Commerce historic tours may call attention to the nominated property as an example of Smithville history, and I will allow the City and Chamber to use any images of the marker and its surroundings to help market the program or other kinds of City/Chamber-related publicity.

If the nomination is approved by City Council, I agree to pay for the approved City Historic Marker from the approved vendor at current cost, and I agree to install it on my property in an area that is publicly visible. I understand that the marker will remain with the property structure at its recognized location unless extenuating circumstances, approved by HPDS prevent it from remaining at the historic location.

SIGNATURE OF PROPERTY OWNER/AGENT

**SIGNATURE OF PROPERTY CO-OWNER/AGENT
(if applicable)**

Print Name: Superintendent Cheryl Burns

Date: 3.10.2025

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

HPDS Approved on (Date): _____

By HPDS Committee Members (Signatures): _____

Mary A. Brown School

Historical Marker Summary

Submitted by Alta Yevett Alexander | March 2025

(Attachment to City of Smithville Application - Historic Marker/Designation)

Introduction:

The Smithville Colored Schools have a rich history that reflects the struggle for educational equity and the resilience of the African American community in Smithville. Established in 1896, these schools served as vital institutions for the education of Black children in the area, adapting and evolving through decades of change.

Historical Overview:

The first Smithville Colored School was constructed in 1896, following the purchase of land in August of that year. This modest two-room wooden frame building laid the foundation for educational opportunities for Black children in the community. By 1912, the school expanded to include additional classrooms, reflecting the growing demand for education.

Prominent educators such as Mrs. Allen Jackson and Professor William Anderson taught at the school in 1907, with the highest grade offered being the eighth. In 1924, the original wooden building was dismantled, and its materials were repurposed for the new Rosenwald building, a testament to the contributions of Julius Rosenwald, a philanthropist dedicated to improving educational conditions for underprivileged children, particularly African Americans.

Significant Developments:

The establishment of the Rosenwald building marked a significant advancement in educational facilities, featuring a porch, a large auditorium, and numerous classrooms. The Smithville Independent School District (SISD) records reveal that E. L. Mellous was appointed principal in 1925, earning \$1,000 per year, while his wife, Mrs. Mellous, taught for \$75 monthly. Over the years, various educators contributed to the school's legacy, with Mr. Marshall M. Thomas serving as principal from 1928 until 1950.

Educational opportunities were not limited to the main school. Children from surrounding rural areas attended neighborhood Black schools, such as Colored Lake School and Sweet Hill School. After completing seventh grade, students would often move to town to continue their education, relying on relatives for lodging.

Despite the systemic inequalities, the school fostered academic achievement. By 1932, students graduated after completing eleven grades, with the first class to wear caps and gowns that year. Curriculum included subjects such as Algebra, Geometry, English, and Latin, although students often used hand-me-down textbooks from the white school until the mid-1950s.

Integration and Transformation:

The mid-20th century brought significant changes as the "separate but equal" policy began to dissolve. The SISD initiated gradual integration, allowing students from Mary A. Brown High School to enroll in Smithville High School in the 1964-1965 school year. The transition culminated in a landmark decision in 1965, paving the way for complete integration across grades.

Following the closure of the Mary A. Brown School in 1968, the buildings were repurposed for various community programs, including Head Start and Special Education. A significant renovation in 1980 improved the facilities, which now serve as a hub for education and workforce training.

Current Use:

Today, the site of the former Smithville Colored Schools is utilized by the Smithville Independent School District Tiger Academy, an programming endeavor related to students facing specific challenges that might hinder their ability to graduate, and the District Alternative Education Program (DAEP), an alternative placement program as part of the District's disciplinary process. The institution was recently home to the Smithville Workforce Training Center, where programs were hosted to support the community's educational and professional development.

Conclusion:

The Smithville Colored Schools stand as a symbol of the determination and perseverance of the African American community in Smithville. Their legacy is a testament to the importance of education, equity, and resilience in the face of adversity. Recognizing this site with a historic designation marker honors the contributions of countless individuals who fought for educational access and quality in Smithville.

CITATIONS for MARY A. BROWN SCHOOL

Saunders, Leslie. Photo of Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church cornerstone. Smithville Independent School District. March 2025.

Gosch, Nancy. Spring 1981. "A Black History of Smithville, Texas"
<https://search.app/5VEmlW2qYS57aw1s7>

Culberson, Willy. 2024, January and 2025, February. Interview by A. Y. Alexander discussing the history of Mary A. Brown. Smithville, TX.

Culberson, Willy. 2024, January. The history of the Smithville Colored Schools.

Culberson, Sr., E. 2025, February. Interview by A. Y. Alexander discussing the history of Mary A. Brown. Smithville, TX.

Hagerty, Terry. Smithville Black History Walk. Photos of Mary A. Brown Church. <https://www.statesman.com/picture-gallery/news/local/bastrop/2024/02/18/smithville-hosts-community-runwalk-for-black-history-month/72652753007/>. February 2024.



Jose Rivera, Smithville's community engagement coordinator, listens during a talk at the Mary A. Brown Primary School during the Black History Month Walk in Smithville.

Terry Hagerty/Special To American-Statesman



Alta Yevett Alexander speaks on the history of the Mary A. Brown Primary School during the Black History Month Walk in Smithville.

Terry Hagerty/Special To American-Statesman



