

History Of Iberia Academy

Iberia's Fine Old School

By Peggy Smith Hake



The Iberia Academy's main building...built in 1920 after the first school (built of brick) was destroyed in a fire. It is constructed of native stones which were quarried locally.

The date was April 23, 1891, and the Articles of Agreement stated, "We, the undersigned citizens of Missouri, residing in Miller County, being desirous of forming a corporation to be known as Iberia Academy, do formulate the following as our Articles of Agreement...Article One: The name of the institution shall be called "Iberia Academy"...and thus began the saga of this wonderful old school, often referred to simply as Iberia.

The story of Iberia Academy actually began two years prior in 1889 in Galesburg, Illinois, the home of Knox College. George Byron Smith and Mable White were members of the senior class at Knox in 1889. He was a native of Princeton, Illinois, born there on June

7, 1865, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel J. Smith. Mabel was from the small farming community of Macomb, Illinois. Following graduation from Knox, George and Mabel were married; and, in a few days, were heading southwest on a train going to St. Louis. On board this train was a drummer (traveling salesman); and, when he learned G. Bryon was a newly-graduated college man, he asked him a very profound question..."Now you got it, whatchu' goin' to do with it?" G. Byron told the man he just wanted to teach among people who did not have much. When he spoke that sentence, the drummer perked up and said, "Sir, I get it, you're achin' for a place where folks ain't got nothin' and don't know nothin', am I



GATEWAY TO OPPORTUNITY, the entranceway to the Iberia Academy campus.

Deals, Wheels & Service



CHEVROLET

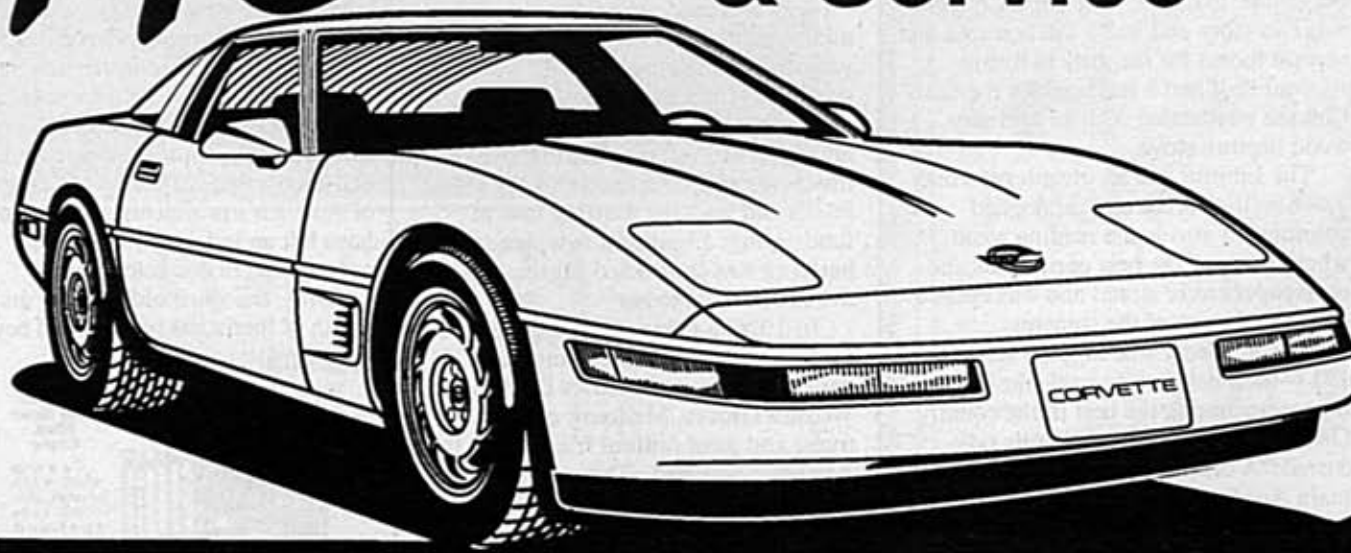
GEO

IBERIA

**HIGH-
WAY**

17N

AT:
HWY. 17 &
HWY. 42
in Iberia



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right? Well, young man, I guess you ain't never heard of a place called Iberia, Mizoury!"

The drummer informed him that the little village of Iberia was situated in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. He told him to catch a train to Crocker and then drive twelve miles north over those Ozark foothills. At the end of the twelve miles of the worst road he would ever again see, he would find "some little cabins, some women smokin' corn cob pipes, and some grown men playin' marbles to help 'em forgit they're alive. Son, when you reach that place, then you'll know you've hit Iberia!"

Geo. Bryon and Mabel Smith did indeed catch a train to Crocker and traveled those twelve miles north to Iberia, 'Mizoury', over what seemed like a thousand hills. When they finally crested a hillside, they saw Iberia located in a beautiful valley with little ramshackled homes sprawled here and there across the countryside.

The Smiths began their little school in the fall of 1890 in an old school that had been used in the past, but at that time was deserted. Their first year, they had only one student who qualified for Academy work and a handful of elementary-age children to teach. The Smiths gave them their full attention and taught them thoroughly. G. Bryon, later known only as Professor Smith, taught sciences, languages, and high mathematics. Mrs. Smith taught literature, history, and civics. In the early years, the Academy had no library or scientific items. The school yard was small, approximately one acre, and was unfenced.

The hill people of the Iberia area were poor folk in the late 19th century; so only a small tuition was charged. Everyone who wanted an education hopefully could afford it. In 1890, the full-term tuition was \$6.00 for the academy and \$3.00 was charged for the common school. Board could be had for about \$2.00 per week. By 1910, the tuition had increased to \$9.00 and board was \$1.85 per week at the ladies' dormitory. Self-boarding students often found sleeping rooms for as low as 15 cents per week!

In 1906, a new 3-storied building was erected as a boarding home for the girl students. It was christened "Alumni Hall" and was dedicated by Mrs. Stella Moore Garner, the Academy's first graduate (Class of 1893). Many of the young men who boarded in town took their meals at Alumni Hall. A second dormitory on campus was called "Girls' Cottage". It was a 6-room house used by the girls who wished to board themselves. Mrs. Samuel Smith, the professor's mother, acted as matron to the residents of Girls' Cottage.

There was a YMCA and a YWCA organized on campus and chapel services were held every school morning and all students were required to attend. For many years, Academy prayer meetings were held on Saturday nights, to which all students were invited.

The school had its own newspaper called "The Academy Student", which coincided with two other campus publications, "The Index" and "The Cad", printed by the literary societies (The Atheneum, the Philorhetians, and The Asteres—all with a Grecian influ-



Iberia Academy Football Team in 1915.



Iberia Academy Concert Band...circa 1915/16. They are standing on the front porch of Alumni Hall, the girls dormitory.

ence).

By 1912, the Academy and campus encompassed twenty acres, including three good buildings and an athletic field. The Academy Building contained 5 recitation rooms, a chapel, a library, and two laboratories. Alumni Hall was a well-built dormitory, which contained a parlor, music room, dining room, kitchen, china closet, and 3 rooms for Professor and Mrs. Smith on the first floor. The second and third floors were dormitory rooms for the girl students and the female teachers. The Girls Cottage was two-story and had a kitchen area and several rooms for the girls to live in. Alumni Hall had a furnace, but the Girls Cottage was heated with an ordinary wood heating stove.

The Library had an inventory of over 7,000 well-selected and catalogued volumes. It also had a reading room, where many of the best periodicals and newspapers were stored and was opened daily for the use of the students.

The Academy was in great shape in 1917—their debts were paid—the buildings were among the best in the country. On October 30, a great calamity occurred. A destructive fire destroyed the main Academy building. For awhile, the fire threatened to spread to the other building on campus, but men were stationed on the roofs of the other

buildings and kept the structures saturated with wet quilts and buckets of water. Mother Nature intervened on behalf of Iberia Academy when the area was deluged with frozen rain and snow. If the heaven-sent rain and snow had not fallen, the entire campus would have probably perished because there was not the necessary equipment available in those years to hold back a raging inferno. In 1939, much of Iberia's downtown area was destroyed by a great fire that could not be held back nor controlled.

A new Academic building was built and dedicated in 1920. In May of that year, the cornerstone was laid with special services on campus. It took a joint effort by the townspeople, the alumni, and Professor Smith to make this new building a reality. They joined forces and with the untiring task of fundraising, a beautiful new Academic building was constructed. It remains on the campus site today.

In 1926, a gymnasium was built on campus called "Martin Gymnasium", named in honor of Charles L. Martin of Webster Groves, Missouri, one of the truest and most faithful friends that the Academy ever had. The gym was built of native stone, cut from the Academy's own quarry and built by many students, who were instructed in stonemasonry by Phelix Pea and Frank Smith, local

stonemasons. The gym had a hardwood floor, a gallery on two sides, a stage for dramatics, and it seated one thousand people. It contained a full size basketball court and room for volleyball and indoor baseball.

In 1932, Mabel White Smith died at her home in Iberia. This marvelous team of two dedicated teachers was split by death. Sadness was felt by the many friends and students who had known her. She left an endowment of \$3,000 to the school, and it was used to beautify the campus with shrubs and fruit trees. She loved the beautiful landscape of the school and had planted many roses and shrubs herself before her death. Some of the fruit trees are still standing at the backside of the campus, which borders Highways 17 and 42.

In 1945, Professor Smith, who by this time was an aged man, decided to retire after having spent over 55 years of his life at Iberia. He loved his school and its students, but his health forced him into retirement. He reluctantly left Iberia and returned to the home where he was born 80 years prior in Princeton, Illinois. The school was converted to an agricultural "Conservation College" in the late 1940's, but it was a failure. The new board of directors wanted a new kind of college, but their ideas did not work at that time.

The last commencement at the Old Academy was held on June 1, 1951. It was the only one in the history of the school that Professor Smith had not attended and only death prevented his presence at the graduation service. On June 15, 1950, eight days after his 85th birthday, death claimed him at his home in Princeton. Thus ended a life of Christian unselfishness and dedication to the needs of the children of the Iberia community. We owe so much to Professor and Mrs. Smith and their memory will ever be in our hearts.

Iberia Academy will always be a part of the history of this land. Her story has been told in days past in various newspaper articles and national magazines. In fact, the school was given mention in the National Geographic Magazine in 1943.

Iberia Academy's old buildings are still standing on campus today. The administrative/academic building is empty, just begging to be recognized once again. If her walls could speak, I am sure they would say, "As you pass by, please do not ignore me. Did I not teach your children the values of their heritage? I took your untaught, unlearned Ozark children and produced teachers, doctors, ministers, industrialists, authors, farmers, legislators, missionaries, nurses, bankers, lawyers, state senators, professors, aviators, Supreme Court advisors, and even a Special Investigator for one of America's presidents. These students have left an indelible mark on our country and in our community."

Truly, the spirit of Professor and Mrs. Smith of Iberia has been spread beyond these hills!

