

Huggins, James Dwyre, Sr. ^[1]

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by Francis B. Dedmond, 1988

24 Aug. 1874–19 Apr. 1932

James Dwyre Huggins, Sr., teacher and educational administrator, was born near Camden, S.C., the son of Theodore Norwood and Martha Joy Huggins. While growing up on a farm, he injured one of his legs in his middle teens and for nearly a year was bedridden. For four years thereafter Huggins was an invalid, but when able to get about on crutches he returned to school until he obtained a teaching position near Lynchburg, S.C. Later, for a year, he attended Welch Neck High School (now Coker College) at Hartsville, S.C., before entering [Catawba College](#) ^[2], then located at Newton, N.C. When his old injury began to trouble him again, he went home for treatment and stayed to teach for one session near Clyde, S.C. Afterwards, he returned to Catawba where he received the bachelor's degree in 1903. From 1903 to 1905 he was principal of the Bethany, S.C., High School. Two years later he accepted a post in Boiling Springs, N.C., where he remained for the next quarter century.

At a meeting on 10 July 1905 held in the First Baptist Church of Shelby, the board of trustees appointed by the Kings Mountain Baptist Association to select the site for a new denominational high school chose Boiling Springs. Not long after the ground-breaking ceremony early in the spring of 1907, Professor Huggins—as he came to be called—was hired as field agent until the school opened. However, at a meeting of the Boiling Springs High School board of trustees on 25 July 1907, he was elected principal and was authorized to select a faculty. Although the school building was not ready, classes began in October with 135 students, 4 teachers, and the principal. In the early summer of 1909, the board of trustees made Huggins and F. A. Brown, who taught mathematics and science, joint principals for a two-year term. By then enrollment had increased to 219. Yet, the board did not feel it could assume financial responsibility for the teaching staff. The principals agreed to do so, and to employ the teachers with the board's approval. This arrangement was short-lived, for in the summer of 1910 the two men resigned and the board appointed the Reverend J. M. Hamrick principal for the 1910–11 school year. Huggins consented to serve as assistant principal.

In the summer of 1914 Huggins again was elected principal of Boiling Springs High School. One year later, after becoming critically ill from a resurgence of his youthful injury, he was hospitalized and his right leg was amputated above the knee. That summer he could not do his usual public relations work and student recruitment, but by the fall he was back at his desk. Under Huggins's guidance, the institution remained strong during [World War I](#) ^[3]. By the 1920s, however, it was obvious that the school could not compete with the tax-supported state high school system, then rapidly spreading into all areas of North Carolina. On 2 May 1928 Boiling Springs High School closed its doors after twenty-one years of operation; in the fall, it opened as a junior college.

On 3 Sept. 1928, Boiling Springs Junior College (now [Gardener-Webb College](#) ^[4]) began its first session, with the Reverend James Blaine Davis as president and Huggins as dean. But in June 1929 Huggins resigned. A year before, he had understood from Dr. James E. Hillman of the [North Carolina Department of Public Instruction](#) ^[5] that it would be acceptable if only three of the five department heads held M.A. degrees provided the other two were working toward graduate degrees. A year later, however, President Davis was informed by the State Department that Huggins should not head a department without an advanced degree. Six weeks before, Davis had sent Huggins a letter, dated 26 Apr. 1929, stating that the trustees had elected him dean and head of the mathematics department at a yearly salary of \$2,200. On 13 June Huggins wrote the board, requesting that he be released from the position. As he explained in another letter, he felt that in order to remain at the college, he would have to continue graduate study—even at the sacrifice of his health.

On 5 May 1930 Huggins was again elected dean, as well as principal of the high school division of the college. He died two years later. After his death, the trustees declared that to Huggins, "more than to any other man or group of men" who had been attached to the institution, Boiling Springs High School and Junior College was indebted for its "material, intellectual, and spiritual achievement." *The Kalarathea*, the college newspaper, observed that "it is impossible for anyone to understand or even imagine all that must be meant when we say 'Professor Huggins and Boiling Springs High School and College.' When we speak of this school, we invariably think of it as a group or institution with Professor Huggins as father."

Huggins married Bessie Atkins on 27 Dec. 1906, and they had three children: James Dwyre, Jr., Evelyn Louise Prince, and Rachel Barron Hedrick. When Huggins died, there was talk of burying him on the campus in front of the building that bore his name. But wisdom prevailed over sentiment, and he was interred in the Boiling Springs Cemetery.

References:

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Additional Resources:

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