

# Photo of the Month

**Birch Kirksey**



Birch Kirksey in the early 1950s. Neg. #N014999.  
Courtesy of Clifton Eoff.

For over twenty years Birch Kirksey served as superintendent of the Rogers Public Schools. He guided the district through the difficult days of the Great Depression. He also dealt with the challenges of absorbing the many small surrounding schools that were consolidated into the Rogers district during his years as superintendent.

Birch L. Kirksey was born at Brightwater in 1891. He attended high school in Pea Ridge and Waggoner, Oklahoma, before going on to earn a degree in education from what was then Northeastern State Teachers College in Tahlequah. In 1922 he came to Rogers High School, and that same year he became principal. Kirksey was appointed superintendent in 1932. That was during the Depression, when finances were so tight for the Rogers Public Schools that the Parent Teacher Associations paid the phone bills for each school.

Kirksey was an avid sportsman who enjoyed hunting and fishing. He rarely missed a football practice, much less a game! He also was a progressive educator who added music, art, and vocational training to the local curriculum. Both teachers and students of the Kirksey era remember him as firm but fair, strict but compassionate.

One former student, Arthur Deason, remembered years later that Kirksey once loaned a group of student athletes his old Studebaker sedan so that they could get to a game with Springdale. (There were no school buses in Rogers back in 1923.) Kirksey cautioned Deason that the car had no brakes, but assured him that if he slowed down and then pulled up the emergency brake it would “stop just fine.”

Unfortunately this technique failed, and on the way back home Deason ran into the curb, hit a tree, and totaled the car. The students offered to pay for the repairs, but Kirksey refused, saying, “No, it’s my fault. . . I should have had more sense than to let you out with that car and a carload of young people at that.”

The 1940s brought Kirksey and his wife personal tragedy when their son Phil was killed while serving in Europe in World War II. After the war, Kirksey correctly foresaw the impact of the post-war Baby Boom. At a time when many districts built new high schools, he instead focused on building new elementary schools.

By the mid-1950s Kirksey’s health was failing. Birch Kirksey died in 1955, not long after retiring as superintendent. That same year the building then used as the Rogers High School gymnasium was renamed in his honor. In 1996 Kirksey Middle School also was named in recognition of his contributions to the Rogers Public Schools. In the lobby of the middle school is a plaque aptly reading, “His wisdom and foresight left a lasting influence upon the Rogers schools.”