

Personal Memories of the Pacolet Mills Elementary School

Before First Grade

I never went to the school there as a regular student. However, I did attend for a special two weeks program intended for students that would start the first grade the next year. This program was held in May toward the end of the 1941-1942 school year. The classes were held in the first grade room of the new Annex Building. I don't remember much about it except that we sat at a big round table that had a large hole in the middle of it. I do remember that I had a good time.

I never got to go to the school in the regular first grade. World War II had started and my dad had gone to work in the Charleston Naval Shipyard ship yard in January of 1942. My family moved to join him in North Charleston in the fall of 1942. I started the first grade at North Charleston Elementary in the fall of 1943. When the war was over, my family moved back to Pacolet in January of 1946. However, we did not live in Pacolet Mills but what was later known as Central Pacolet. Since I lived there, I entered the third grade in the Pacolet High School building at Pacolet Station. Grades 1 through 12 were all in the same building. (At he time it was Grades 1 through 11). I graduated from PHS in that same building in 1955.

Summer Job While in College

My dad was the Maintenance Superintendent for Spartanburg County School District 3 which included that the Pacolet Mills Elementary School. I worked for him during several summers while I was in engineering school at the University of South Carolina. A large part of the work that I did in the summer of about 1958 involved working on a special project at the Pacolet Mills Elementary School. A new heating system had been installed in the school. The old, steel boiler had to be disposed of. It was roughly the size of a pickup truck and coated with a thick cover of asbestos insulation. My job that summer was to dispose of the boiler. There was a special room for the boiler in the basement of the school. My first task was to tear off and dispose of the two or three inch thick asbestos covering. This happened before the health hazards of dealing with asbestos were recognized. I took no special precautions or wore any sort of protective clothing that is required today in dealing with asbestos.

I do remember that sometimes the asbestos dust was so thick in the room that I could barely see and it was like being in a snowstorm. I was extremely fortunate not to have any sort of long-term health problems later on because of exposure to the asbestos. (Medical tests many years later when I was an engineer for the US Navy revealed that I had no asbestos related health issues.) I don't remember exactly how I disposed of the asbestos but it probably was putting it in the back of a truck and taking it to the local trash dump. Nowadays, there is a very detailed and controlled EPA method of removing and disposing of asbestos waste.

Removing the asbestos was just the first and easiest part of the boiler disposal. The steel boiler had to be cut up in small parts that could be easily moved from the boiler room. My dad furnished me an oxygen acetylene cutting torch and gave me brief instructions how to use it. When mixed together and lit, the oxygen acetylene flame produced was hot enough to melt and cut through solid steel. I began to dismantle the boiler and in a fairly short time learned to use the cutting torch properly. It was hot work but it was also lots of fun. Gradually, I cut the boiler into small pieces and carried them out of the boiler room. The pieces were later loaded into a truck and sold for scrap steel. I don't recall how long the job took but I think it must have been two or three weeks.

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