



Rendering of the “new” Palmetto High School which opened in 1959. Provided photo

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NEWS

History Matters: The beginnings of Palmetto High School

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The Alice V. Myers Archive Center is located within the Carnegie Library at the Palmetto Historical Park. It is home to a very eclectic collection of information, which has been gathered by the Palmetto Historical Commission over the years. The most popular items in the archive center are the yearbooks. Visitors stop in just to look around, and end up spending hours reminiscing. You never know whose senior picture you might come across as you peruse the collection. Just don't come hoping to find Palmetto High School class pictures from 1948 through 1958, or you will be sadly disappointed.

There was, in fact, no Palmetto High School during those years. In 1948, Palmetto High School and Bradenton High School merged to create Manatee County High School. Teenagers, who in the past would have been Palmetto Tigers, were now Manatee Hurricanes. In those days, high school consisted of 10th, 11th and 12th grades. Children who lived in Palmetto attended kindergarten through ninth grade in Palmetto, and then went across the river to Manatee County High.

Time passed, the population grew, and in 1957 a new Palmetto Junior-Senior High School was built right where it sits today. The administration decided to have Palmetto residents, who were in 10th and 11th grade, stay at Manatee County High School. There are probably many Palmetto students who were happy that they were allowed to stay at Manatee, and graduate with the friends they made there. However, there are also those in the class of 1957 and '58 that, to this day, complain about not being Palmetto High School alumni. In the course of my job at the Palmetto Historical Park, I have heard this complaint more than once.

Members of the class of '58, in particular, recount being told that they would attend the new school. Unfortunately, the project was delayed, and rather than being the first class of Palmetto students to graduate from the new Palmetto High, they were part of the last combined class to graduate from Manatee County High School.

So it was the class of 1959, and not the class of 1958, that started 10th grade in Palmetto. Instead of being on the bottom of the heap at Manatee, they got to be the “top dogs” on campus at the brand new Palmetto High School. Perhaps the distinction of being upperclassmen three years in a row contributed to the fact that many of members of this class are still close friends today. I can personally vouch for this statement, because my mother, Neta Faye Young Bailes, was a member of the class of 1959. Go Tigers!

The Carnegie Library is currently undergoing renovations, but when it reopens, if you have a little time, stop by and enjoy the yearbook collection, which includes 1959 with the foreword:

“Our pioneer class of the new Palmetto High School has chosen for the theme of the '59 Palmetto Leaves, ‘New Horizons.’ Surrounded by modern, new buildings, a growing faculty and student body, we have opened wide the door first for the many classes which will follow in the years and generations to come. Thus it is with great pride that we present to you — our schoolmates, faculty, family, friends — the ‘new horizons’ of our high school adventure.”