

Burgaw High School Fire - 1973

In July 1926, a Notice to Contractors was issued to receive sealed bids for the construction of the new Burgaw High School. It was required that each of those bids contain a check for three percent of the amount of the bid to be made payable to T. T. Murphy, Superintendent of Schools. The check of the successful bidder would be held by the School Board until a satisfactory bond, as required by law, had been furnished by the contractor. The School Board had approved the construction of the new building as presented by Leslie N. Boney, hired architect. Mr. Boney assured the board that the new school building would be modern and keeping with the latest ideas for school house design. Construction was completed and the school opened in 1927.

Over the course of 47 years, the school would grow and educate thousands of students in the Burgaw area. On January 7, 1973, the Burgaw area received around 2 inches of snow. This closed school for a week and students returned on Tuesday January 16th. The nearly 700 students had just settled back into their routines and began their mid-term examinations when early in the morning on January 19, 1973, a fire ignited completely destroying the main building that housed classrooms, administrative offices and the auditorium. Firemen were able to save the three other buildings on campus.



One building containing the cafeteria, home economics department and classrooms. Another building containing the gym and the third containing the vocational education and agriculture department. Burgaw Fire Department, at the direction of Fire Chief John Frasier, was aided by other surrounding area departments— Pender County, Wilmington and Wallace.

According to newspaper accounts of the fire, the State Bureau of Investigations was called in to assist in the determination of where and how the fire started. It was thought that the fire was caused by faulty wiring starting in an electrical switch box in the main building.



Then firefighter and Assistant Fire Chief, and now Commissioner, Bill George remembers responding to a fire of an outbuilding on a farm in Rocky Point that same cold early morning. While returning to Burgaw to respond to the school fire, smoke and an orange glow could be seen from Hwy 117 in St. Helena. Burgaw Fire Department was the first on scene, but unfortunately, not much to be done to save the main building of the school.

Students returned to makeshift classrooms on Monday January 29, 1973. The cafeteria building was outfitted with partitions to form six classrooms and a library to replace a few of the destroyed classrooms. In addition, the nearby American Legion building was used for additional classroom space and six to seven mobile units were brought in.

Many of you have wonderful memories of Burgaw High School. Or maybe you remember the night the school building burned down or you were affected by the changes that took place after the fire.

