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history of ardsley

By Melinda Whalley Schneider,
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I feel blessed to have grown up on 46th Street in Ardsley Park and attended neighborhood schools with my friends. Many of these friendships have lasted over 70 years ... Ann Bracey Miller and Pam Maxwell Boyette (deceased), to name a few. When we were children, we would walk to each other's homes and play in the park in front of Savannah High School and in Daffin Park. Some favorite hangouts were the "This N That Variety" Store and the Soda Shoppe on Waters Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets. On Saturdays, we would walk to the Victory Movie Theater on Bull Street. We attended Charles Ellis School, Washington Avenue Junior High and Savannah High School. Ann and I enjoyed our recent weekend together attending our SHS 55th Year Reunion with 79 fellow 1961 graduates. We had over 500 fellow senior classmates in 1961. One-hundred and twenty-one have passed away ... over the last year we lost Denis Braslow, Janet Sharpe Jones and Bill Daugherty. I am happy to have the email address for 308 and the snail mail address for over 100. We are one very large family!

Savannah High School was built by my Grandfather, Richard James Whalley (1864 - 1942). R. J. Whalley Company originated in Darwen Lancashire, England. Mr. Whalley began the company's prosperous image by erecting the Darwen Tower in England in 1808. The famous tower was built as a commemoration of the

openings of the Darwen Moors and Queen Victoria's reign of England for 60 years, which took place in 1807. Mr. Whalley brought his wife and 9-year-old son Jack Whalley to Savannah, Georgia in 1913. It is believed that one reason he left England was because of the shortage of lumber and he chose Savannah, Georgia since the lumber had been shipped from the Savannah port.

Savannah High School was originally located on Washington Avenue between East and West Atlantic Avenues. The original building, built by the World Progress Administration (WPA) and designed by William Bordley Clarke, Sr., was once the largest public school building in the United States. The foundation of the original building had been built as a luxury hotel, but the owners went bankrupt in the Great Depression and the City of Savannah took over the unfinished building. The three-story brick and mortar structure included two interior courtyards, one of which held a rifle range for the ROTC, as well as several circular interior fire escape slides, which have since been sealed off. The distance around the interior hallway was in excess of one quarter mile. Today, that building houses the Savannah Arts Academy, the only public high school for the arts in Savannah.

In 1937, when Savannah High School was dedicated at 500 Washington

Ave., it was the largest high school in Georgia. A history of the school offers these bits of trivia: the distance around the perimeter of the building is just under a quarter of a mile and "Gone with the Wind" could have been written in its entirety on the 12,800 square feet of chalkboard. Many beautiful homes and business buildings were built in Savannah by Whalley Construction Company as well. 27, 93 and 37 East Victory Drive, 525 East 46th Street, 302 East 46th Street, 2903 Abercorn Street and the Kress 5 & 10 Cent Store building on Broughton Street to name a few. 302 East 46th Street - Ted Turner's mother was an owner in past years. My brother Bill Whalley, now age 87, actually taught Ted Turner how to sail and was the contractor for Ted's first CNN in Atlanta. My brother also built the Harbor Town Lighthouse on Hilton Head Island.

Nine-year-old son, Jack Whalley, went on to be another prominent builder with Whalley Construction Company and built homes for Mr. Dale Critz, Sr., 3208 Abercorn Street and Mr. Joe Espy, 2 East 46th Street. The Espy home was the first residential building permit in Ardsley Park for over \$100,000. Most of the Savannah Elementary Schools and the "new" Armstrong College were built by Whalley Construction Company.

