



Romayne Hamilton
Interview by Janet Hardin, Brianna
Terry, and Allison Buckley

Hardin: You were the principal here.

Hamilton: For 10 years. I don't actually know which 10 it was.

(At this point Brianna and Allison begin asking questions.)

Terry: What was one of your favorite experiences as a principal at Ambler?

Hamilton: I better not say that on tape. Enjoying the children—playing with them—in PE also.

Hardin: So you taught PE at the same time you were principal?

Hamilton: Right.

Hardin: What sort of things did you do during physical education?

Hamilton: Mostly we just played.

Buckley: Do you have any stories about Ambler?

Hamilton: Well, you have a secretary here when she came to kindergarten, I had to take her out of mama's arms and take her to the kindergarten. I'm not going to tell what name she goes by now. She was a sweet little ol' girl. That's one of the things I remember.

Let's see—there were some good boys and some bad boys. But most of them were OK if I looked at them. They knew I meant business. And we had fun. I tried to treat all of them like I wanted mine treated.

Terry: Mine's kind of like hers. Do you have any sad or happy stories?

Hamilton: Only sad one I have is when I found out I had to leave Ambler two years short of my retirement. So I went to Crosswell Elementary and finished out as just a PE teacher.

Hardin: You had told me when I talked to you before you thought highly of Ambler.

Hamilton: Of all the schools I've taught at as principal or coach, Ambler was my favorite. The children—99% of them—were just wonderful. And of course there

was one bad apple in the crowd, but we won't mention him—or them. And the community and all the parents and everything were nice. And the teachers were great. I had a good set of faculty members here.

Buckley: Did you have any other jobs?

Hamilton: This is the only school I was principal in. I started out teaching in the lower part of the state in a little school called Bluffton, which is right across the river from that big ol' thing called Hilton Head. But, it was good country down there and now it's too many Yankees.

Hardin: What other schools have you taught in besides Crosswell and Ambler?

Hamilton: Ford High School in Laurens and Easley Junior High in Easley and on the coaching staff at Easley High School. When the boys lost a game or two, I let my blood pressure get up and the doctor made me get out of it. So I got into driver's training, which is not as hazardous. I could cut the switch off or stop the car with my own brake. So I taught driver training in junior high and Easley High School. And I did in Laurens when I worked at Ford High School. And I started out teaching driver training in Bluffton. That was fun—dodging the deer in the fog.

Hardin: Did you run up on deer when you were with the students?

Hamilton: Yeah. They can do some damage to cars, but luckily we never hit any.

Terry: If you taught a grade, what grade would you like to teach?

Hamilton: Anything from 6th grade on down. They believe you and listen to you.

Buckley: What do you think is the most important thing about being a principal?

Hamilton: Seeing that everything runs smooth and looking out for the children.

Hardin: Did you have any trouble with safety issues?

Hamilton: Not like it is now. I don't know who to blame that on! Used to they weren't as strict about the paddle.

Hardin: I heard that you wielded a very good paddle in your day.

Hamilton: Most of the parents here said if so-and-so needed a paddling, let us know and we'll give him another one at home. I didn't follow up on that second part much unless they really asked me.

Terry: Did you like being the principal?

Hamilton: Oh, I loved it! It was great fun!

Terry: What was the best part?

Hamilton: The students and some of their parents and the faculty I worked with. They were real great folks.

At this point we look at the Christmas card. (See Brianna's write up of the interview for the actual card.) Mr. Hamilton had these comments about the teachers.

Elaine Horton—Evelyn was her mother-in-law.

Susan Hughes—(see below)

Irene Hiott—She was the secretary. Robert Hiott was her husband from Pickens.

Pauline M. Findley—She was a great first grade teacher.

Evelyn R. Horton—That was Elaine Horton's mother-in-law. She was a real strict fourth grade teacher if I remember correctly.

Azilee Evette—She worked in the lunchroom. Lives right down the road there.

Frieda Posey—I think she came in and out as one of those extra teachers who come in and out—one that the district office had rotating around.

Aldine Brown—She was a lunchroom lady and made good biscuits.

Viola Wright—She lives right down the road. Used to be in the lunchroom. She made sure they had plenty of food and the children loved it—especially the principal did!

Mike Mahaffey—He was first man we had on the faculty after I came that I remember. He ended up as a principal down at Liberty, I think. He was in the fifth or sixth grade.

Ola Faye Williams—Oh you better watch out for that fourth grade teacher! She was a math teacher and meant business—lived over at Dacusville.

Fran Burdett—She was a second grade teacher. She commuted back and forth from Greenville here every day.

Elaine Chambers—Oh she was a good 'un! I had two Elaines. They were my pair of "Es." Her husband worked at the high school and I think now they're both living in Liberty.

Anne West—Now that name rings a bell. She was part-time, I think.

Ellen Parry—They were a custodian family, I believe. (We still have a Perry here as a custodian.) John Perry's family, I guess.

Alma H. Lynch—She used to live up at Pumpkintown. She was a good fourth or fifth grade teacher, I forget which but I never had any trouble out of that class. She was a great lady. She used to teach at Oolenoy before the schools combined.

Hardin: Do any other teachers stand out in your mind that you had on your staff?

Hamilton: Susan Hughes—She lived on the Pumpkintown Road or the Dacusville Road.

Buckley: How are you different from other principals?

Hamilton: Well, we used to have principal's meetings and we got along pretty good. I didn't check on what they did. I tried to run my school like I was supposed to and just have a big time doing it—hard work. The other principals seemed to be getting along pretty good.

Hardin: The building you were in when you were here—it was this same building but with just the one long hall?

Hamilton: One long hall. Then we added a few of these portables. I think the first time we had two and I let one of the Elaines have one of them—I forget which one.

Terry: What is your favorite thing about being a principal?

Hamilton: Well the paycheck looked pretty good! (laughs) No—just getting to know a lot of nice people.

Hardin: Did you have an active PTA then?

Hamilton: Oh yeah!

Hardin: What sort of things did they do for the school?

Hamilton: Well we had a Fall Festival. One day I had Monty Dupree on the radio—and he says "...yeah, Romaine Hamilton—up at Pumpkintown Tech." They were having a hot dog supper I believe it was.

Terry: Did you have any fundraisers?

Hamilton: Yeah, that was one of them—hot dog supper. The teachers handled all that and I went along with it. So I don't remember it too well. They all went along and the parents cooperated—great.

Buckley: Why did you start wanting to be a principal?

Hamilton: When I was on the coaching staff at Easley, I ended up in driver training. We came up here to deliver something when I was over in Dacusville. And I saw this school and I said, "If I ever get to be a principal, that's where I'd like to be." And sure enough, this is where I ended up.

Hardin: How did you finagle that?

Hamilton: My wife worked in the district office and she let the Superintendent know. Of course, I had to go back to Clemson and get my Master's Degree in Elementary Ed., which was fun. They let me do something I always wanted to do. They let me backpack on the Appalachian Trail. They told me to do something I wanted to do. I'd camped up there before, but I started backpacking.

Hardin: You did the whole trail?

Hamilton: No, I couldn't go that far. I was going to when I retired, but my knee said "no"—especially when it became artificial!

Hardin: Do you still backpack any?

Hamilton: I haven't in about 3 or 4 years.

Buckley: What college did you go to?

Hamilton: Presbyterian College in "Clemmons" (Clinton), SC. They call it PC. That's where I met my wife. She finished before I did, but I kid her and tell her she's older than I am, but she didn't spend any time in World War II.

Hardin: So you must have served in...?

Hamilton: Naval Air Force.

Hardin: Where did you go?

Hamilton: All over the Pacific Northwest. Luckily the Lord kept me in the States. Came home on leave one time and when I got back the marines said, "Where have you been?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, your squadron's gone." They had no more than got in the North Pacific than a Kawasaki killed some of my friends where I had been. So that was the good Lord looking after me.

Terry: My Papa was in the air force.

Hamilton: That's a good branch to be in either the army or the navy. I like the naval air force first. I ended up on shore patrol.

Hardin: What shore did you patrol?

Hamilton: I looked after the bad sailors.

Terry: When you were in school, what was your favorite subject?

Hamilton: Math and then Physical Education and then PE and then football and basketball.

Hardin: Did you coach football, baseball, and basketball?

Hamilton: At Ford I had basketball and baseball. I was at a little school that didn't have football then but they do now. At Ford High I had football, basketball, and baseball. And I was glad I didn't have to coach girl's basketball but one time.

Hardin: You don't like coaching the girls?

Hamilton: Well, down at Bluffton I had to have the girl's basketball team. I had 3 sisters—well they weren't sisters—their little sisters were ninth graders and they were seniors. They were my forwards. That's when they had 3 forwards and 3 guards. It was the first time that little C school had beat that A school. And it's halftime. My little forward couldn't hit the basket. That little senior and that other one—they were just throwing the ball everywhere.

I asked their sister, "What in the world is wrong with Dottie and Carolyn and Evelyn?"

"Didn't you see their boyfriends come in at halftime?"

I said, "Get 'em out!" That's why I didn't like coaching girls.

Hardin: Seems like it would get the boys upset, too. Didn't the boys get upset?

Hamilton: No, it didn't affect the boys. They knew what they were doing.

Buckley: How does the school look different?

Hamilton: It has grown by leaps and bounds! It's got more students—I imagine a bigger faculty.

Hardin: How big was your faculty?

Hamilton: Count that right there! (Pointing to the card again) That's faculty and staff.

Hardin: 16. We have about 30 now.

Hamilton: About doubled. But it's still sitting up here on the same hill and still got the same foot trail. I started that one—the walking trail.

Hardin: He's talking about our Nature Trail.

Hamilton: Yeah, that's what it is! We saw a lot of nature down in there!

Terry: We have stumps down there where the teacher can teach us.

Hardin: Outdoor classrooms. What made you decide to start the nature trail?

Hamilton: I thought it would be a good thing...I used to like to play in the woods myself. And I knew it was time for the children to have a place to go and we'd mark it off.

Hardin: How long was it—where did it go?

Hamilton: We kind of followed that little creek. Weren't too sure whether it was on our property or somebody else's, but...

Hardin: We found out the hard way that there are about 3 different tracts there and part of it doesn't belong to anybody! We had to decide which part was ours and stay on it.

Terry: What was your favorite activity?

Hamilton: Lunch! (laughs) No, that's not an activity, that's a "have to."

Terry: I thought you would say recess. Most of the boys say recess.

Hamilton: Well, playground.

Terry: Why?

Hamilton: You get to play with all of them—girls and the boys.

Hardin: Did you have music and art classes back then?

Hamilton: We had different teachers would come in from outside the district to teach art. Some of the teachers would work on art, too. I believe that was the way Von Bolding started.

Terry: When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Hamilton: That's a good question! I just loved to play in the woods—shoot my slingshot.

Terry: Did you want to be a cowboy?

Hamilton: No, I didn't want to be a cowboy. My daddy used to work on the railroad. He was a section foreman. He got killed when I was four years old in a wreck down at Latham Crossing. I had to go and live on a farm and was raised by Grandpa and Grandma, five aunts, and three uncles. Of course, my older brother was always picking on me. And I was redheaded—got in a lot of scraps by people calling you, "Red!" But, they didn't pick much!

Terry: So you don't know what you wanted to be?

Hamilton: I just wanted to be a good little boy and get through school and find something to do.

Terry: What was your favorite hobby?

Hamilton: Fishing. Fishing and hunting.

Terry: Is it still now?

Hamilton: Well, I'm not able to do much of it any more.

Hardin: Did you ever go hunting and fishing with any of the kids or parents around here?

Hamilton: There were some I went dove shooting with and I can't remember who they were. They invited me out on their farm for dove shoots.

Hardin: Were most of the parents farmers?

Hamilton: Farmers or either worked in the mill. A lot of them were farmers.

Brianna Terry asks again about art and music teachers.

Hamilton: I'd visit each room and check in on the art teacher and music teacher. We put on some good musical programs here. I forgot who that teacher was. I've been out of this business for quite a while now.

Hardin: Was Mrs. Clement the principal before you?

Hamilton: She was before me.

Hardin asks about the building and shows him an article with pictures of it.

Hamilton: Yes, they had that lounge and we had an ice cream box there, too. I sold ice cream. We had ice cream every day at recess. That's where we got money to buy some of the things we needed that we couldn't afford from the district office. Popsicles, ice cream sandwiches—Some bad boys broke in one night. They could track them by the ice cream sandwich papers they'd thrown down. And I think the police "cotch" (caught) them.

Hardin: How many did they eat?

Hamilton: There's no telling. There must have been several of them. They just left their trail.

Hardin: Now I heard another story about that ice cream freezer—that was where you went for corporal punishment.

Hamilton: That was kind of a bad place to go. It was a good place when you weren't in trouble.

I think one of my uncles used to live out near the playground—up on the hill across the highway. That old home place, I think, is where one of my uncles used to come. Jones, I think it was.

Hardin: Prue Jones?

Hamilton: No. Martin—that was uncle Martin Jones. He made pretty things out of wood. They were from up in the Oolenoy area.

Terry: What was your playground like?

Hamilton: Just like a good old cotton field—plowed up and leveled off—lot of rocks on it. We didn't have much equipment at all.

Hardin: What were the favorite games the kids played?

Hamilton: They loved to play soccer I think it was. Kickball. And baseball or softball.

Terry tells about a piece of equipment with four seats that you bounce on.

Hamilton: Yes, it was here then. Mrs. Clement must have put it there because it was here when I came.

Hardin: We got our money's worth out of that one!

Hamilton: Yes, they built better equipment back then.

Terry: What advice do you have for children at Ambler?

Hamilton: Pay attention to your teachers and obey your parents. And don't get too upset with them.

The interview with the girls ended here. Mr. Hamilton walked around the school then and talked to some teachers he knew. He made a few other comments along the way.

Hamilton: We didn't have a faculty restroom. We had to go in the boys' or girl's.

Mrs. Rodgers said that Mr. Hamilton is the one who hired her. She's been here ever since. Mrs. Rodgers tells how they used to have a lot of children for bus duty. There were only one or two car riders then.

Yvonne Bolding tells about Mr. Hamilton hiring her.

“When I first started here I had five different schools. (Itinerant) The next year they put me down to four and I just fell in love with Ambler. I decided I wanted to go to a regular classroom. So, I went to him and that was the year that Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Hughes retired. And who else—Ola Faye—were all retiring the same year, so I went to him and said, “I would love to be full time at Ambler.”

So he named the grades. It was fifth grade, fourth grade, and third. He said, “Which would you like?”

I said, “I would love third grade.” So, I got Mrs. Horton's classroom.

Hamilton: I knew that story needed to be told! See, she remembered it. She's younger than I am!