

The Birth of Pumpkin Center

(We are indebted to Easter Fisher for suggesting this story and furnishing the information for it.)

Many folks are not aware that the [Pumpkin Center](#) community of the Pacolet area owes its existence to [WWII](#). In 1940, with the eminent threat of the War, the Federal Government decided to build a huge army training base in Spartanburg County. It was named [Camp Croft](#) and it would have a huge impact on the surrounding area. The camp was scheduled to be built between [Pacolet Station](#) and the town of Spartanburg just outside of [White Stone](#).

The camp was to cover a huge area but there was a big problem. The place where the camp was to be was already home to a number of families and their homes and farms. If the camp was built the people would have to be moved. An army training base is a dangerous place with artillery, rifle, pistol and grenade ranges.

Many of the people did not want to leave their homes. However, even before the War in the Upstate, most folks believed in doing what they could for their country. Willing or not they were going to have to leave their homes. The Government bought their land and paid them for it. They also built a number of prefabricated homes outside the proposed Camp area for some of them to live in. That is where the Pacolet connection comes in. The prefabricated homes were built in the area that would soon be called "Pumpkin Center". The location was south of "downtown" Pacolet Station and to the east of the old Spartanburg - Union highway and the railroad.

If your family was affected or involved with Pumpkin Center we would love to hear your story.

We are fortunate to have a photographic record of the building of the new houses and some of the folks involved with them. A photographer, Jack Delano, was working for the Farm Security Administration and was in Spartanburg County when the families were being moved.

The story of some of these photos is told in a *Spartanburg Herald Journal* column by Gary Henderson on September 27, 1997.

Images of Home

Photos Stir Memories of Mass Movement in 1941 to Build Camp Croft

William White had nearly forgotten a young photographer taking his family's photograph in the kitchen of a government-built house in Pacolet.

He was only 7 years old in 1941, when the young man took the picture. White was past 60 and the mayor of Cowpens when he saw the image for the first time.

"It made me look hard, especially after I saw it was me," White said. "When I saw it, the memories came back."

White, 63, and his family were among hundreds of people moved off the farms in eastern Spartanburg County to make way for Camp Croft Training Center, a World War II military base.

Jack Delano, a 27 year old photographer working for the Farm Security Administration, took the photograph in the White's kitchen.

The photograph was part of a series of pictures Delano took of families who had to leave their farms and homes to clear the way for Croft's construction.

White remembers when government representatives notified them about the move.

“They came to the house on Good Friday,” White said. “They said the area would be part of a firing range by Monday.”

Some of the displaced families, including White’s, were relocated to small prefabricated houses built by the government in Pacolet.

The settlement of houses became known as Pumpkin Town after White’s grandfather, Tom White, said the houses looked like pumpkins lying in a field.

“We had to act quickly, moving all the (stored) corn and mules and our furniture,” White said.

I will never forget passing by the Methodist Church on Easter Sunday morning with all our possessions piled on Ed Hood’s old truck. As we drove by, the women were out front in all their Easter finery.”

Delano’s photographs of the Whites and others were included in “A South Carolina Album, 1936-1948.” The book was published in 1992 by the University of South Carolina Press.

A friend showed White the picture in the book three years ago.

In Delano’s picture, White, his mother, Vienne White and farm hand Arnold Petrie are shown eating dinner in their new home. Vienne White died in 1993. She was 85.

The book is a photographic essay of South Carolina life as seen through the camera lens of nine FSA photographers who traveled the state to document the 12-year period.

Delano photographed the families displaced by the building of Camp Croft in the Upstate and construction of a dam in the Santee-Cooper River Basin.

White’s family were landowners who were paid for their property when the Army took it for military use.

Others were sharecroppers who had lost farms years earlier, during the Great Depression.

Claude Lee, 75, and his brother Albert Lee, 86, recall working with their nine brothers and sisters on 190 acres their family sharecropped with a large landowner.

The Lees’ brother, the late Arthur Lee, is pictured in the book, driving a mule-drawn wagon loaded with his family’s belongings, as he leaves the farm.

“When they told us, my dad went all over the place looking for someplace where we could stay,” Claude Lee said. “I ended up in the Flatwoods Community up there by Whitney. Some of the family came over here to Pacolet.”

Today, members of the Lee family live in places throughout Spartanburg County. None of them ever returned to the farm in White Stone.

“When we left, we left for good,” Claude Lee said. “I got married and went to work at Beaumont Mills.”

Albert Lee still lives in one of the prefab homes left in Pumpkin Town Community. His son lives in one of the original prefab houses next door to him. Both homes have been enlarged and renovated.

This week, White and the Lee brothers walked around Albert Lee’s yard and talked about the Easter weekend more than 50 years ago, when preparations for war uprooted their lives.

“This used to be planted in corn,” Albert Lee said, pointing toward the settlement of homes. He noticed a rusted water pipe protruding from the soil. “I helped put the water pipes in out here for these houses.”

Lee's brother joined in the conversation.

"People were real close back then," Claude Lee said. "We all helped our neighbors. Everybody helped bring in crops or any kind of work that had to be done. We all helped one another move over here."

While his brother and White talked, Albert Lee went inside his home and returned with things he brought from the farm and kept as family treasures.

First, he opened a well-worn Bible and pointed to a journal of family milestones printed on the last page. One of the entries was recorded the day his family left the farm and moved to Pacolet.

"Look at this," Albert Lee said, pulling a small accordion from a box. "This was my mama's. I can still remember hear her play it."

The Lee's mother, Annie Lee, died in 1935.

Albert Lee keeps his mother's accordion stored in the original box it was mailed in from Pennsylvania in the 1920s.

The Lees said the move from the farm was not as difficult for them as it was for people who owned their land.

"It didn't bother me that much," Claude Lee said. "I was used to moving around every year or so."

For the boy William White, the move to Pumpkin Town in Pacolet was an adventure. Today the man sees it differently.

"Everybody gave up a lot," White said, his voice breaking with emotion. "My grandfather took it the worst. He was 80. He cussed and did everything he could to keep his land, but he couldn't do anything but leave.

Tom White died in 1946, shortly before people were allowed to buy back their land from the government and return home. He was the first person buried in White Stone's Lebanon Cemetery after the war was over.

'It was important for him to be buried here,' White said this week, standing at the foot of his grandfather's grave. "My granddaddy wanted to be here with my grandmother. This was home down here, for my folks."

The photographer, Delano, seemed to understand those feelings, White said.

A Russian immigrant, Delano lived most of his life in San Juan Puerto Rico. He died Aug. 5 (1997) from kidney failure at the age of 83.

Delano spent the last few years of his life writing his autobiography, "Photographic Memories". The book was recently published by Smithsonian Institution Press. A traveling Smithsonian exhibit of Delano's photography will open later this year in San Juan.

Delano's compassion for the people he photographed is evident in the words of a letter he wrote to a friend shortly after his visit to Spartanburg County.

"It's pathetic to see what's been happening to the people in these areas," Delano wrote.

"In Spartanburg ... it's the same story. They have lived there so long, are attached to their neighbors and friends, have after many years, perhaps, reached the stage of owning their own little piece of land, an now comes the 'gub'ment and tells them they have got to move.

The newspaper article discusses a book that contains some of Jack Delano's photos about Pacolet and Camp Croft. However, with the help of the Internet many more of Mr. Delano's photos are available on our computers. Yale University particularly has a large collection online. We have used some of the photos for this story. There are many more than we can use on the Yale site. You can see more of Mr. Delano's interesting photos at [Jack Delano's Photographs](#).

The photograph below is the one discussed in the article. The little boy is William White. At the table with him are his mother, Vienne White, and farm hand, Arnold Petrie.

The official caption on the photos says *"April 1941. Pacolet - A family having lunch at their new home. They have moved into one of the houses which the Farm Security Administration is building for families who have had to move out of the military Reservation area."*



The article also discusses a photo of Mr. Arthur Lee driving a mule drawn wagon with his family's belongings as he leaves their farm in what will soon be Camp Croft. The boy in the wagon has not been identified. This photo is shown below.

The official caption on the photo reads "*March 1941 - White Stone (vicinity). A tenant farmer moving the last of his belongings away from his farm home in the Camp Croft area.*"



Many of the displaced families were being moved into brand new houses just south of Pacolet Station. Parts for these houses were shipped to the building site already partially complete and could be assembled fast. They were often referred to as “Prefabricated Houses”. The picture below shows pieces for a house being unloaded from a truck.

The official caption for this photo reads “*Sections of prefabricated house being unloaded from truck at the FSA (Farm Security Administration) project in Pacolet, South Carolina.*”



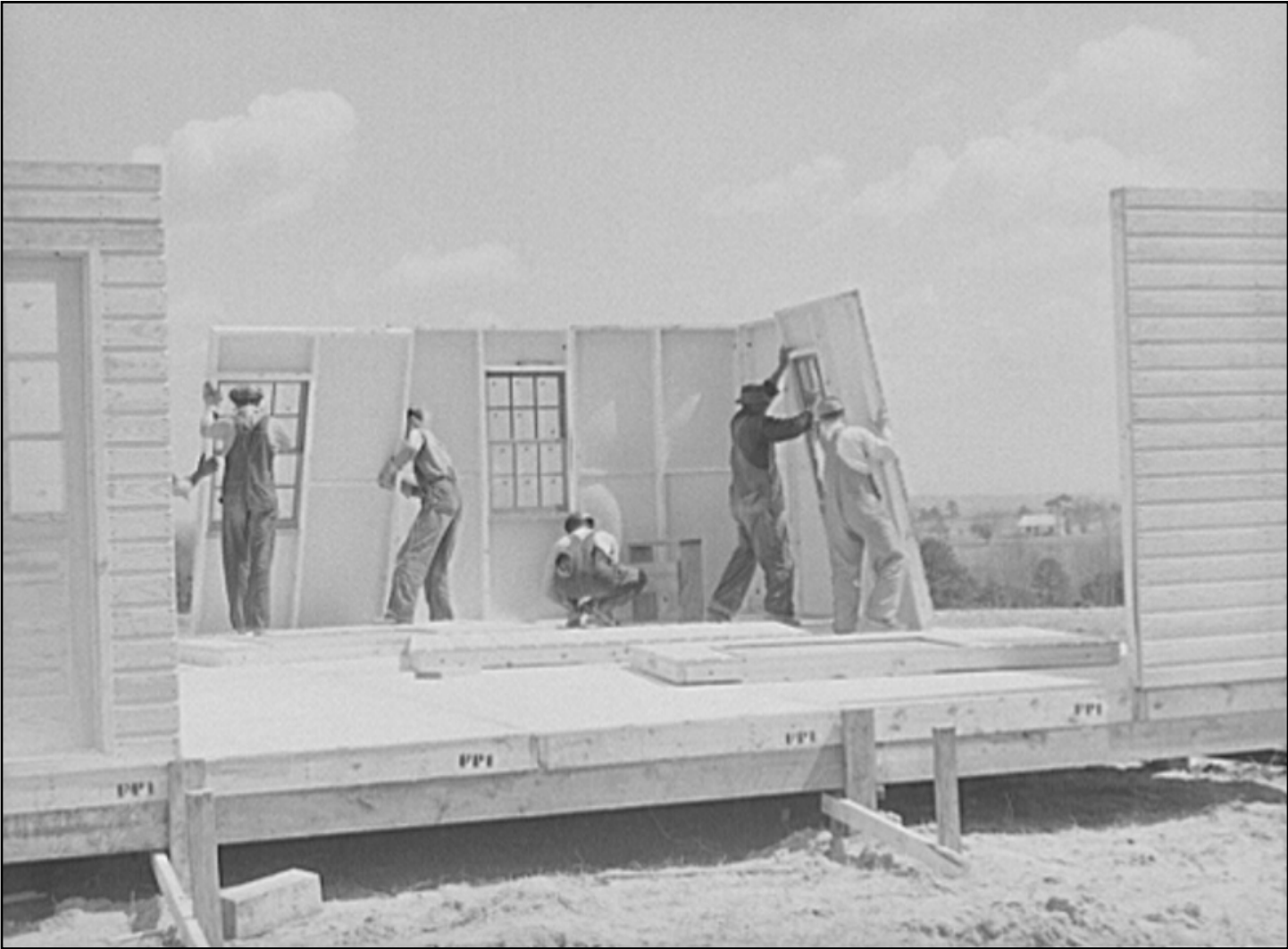
After the parts were unloaded and ready for use, one of the first jobs was building the foundation and the floor. This is the work that is being shown in the photo on the next page.

Note that the house is being built in what until very recently, was a cotton field. The official caption on this photo is: *“Building the foundation for a prefabricated house that FSA (Farm Security Administration) is putting up to house some farmers who had to move out of the Camp Croft area region”*

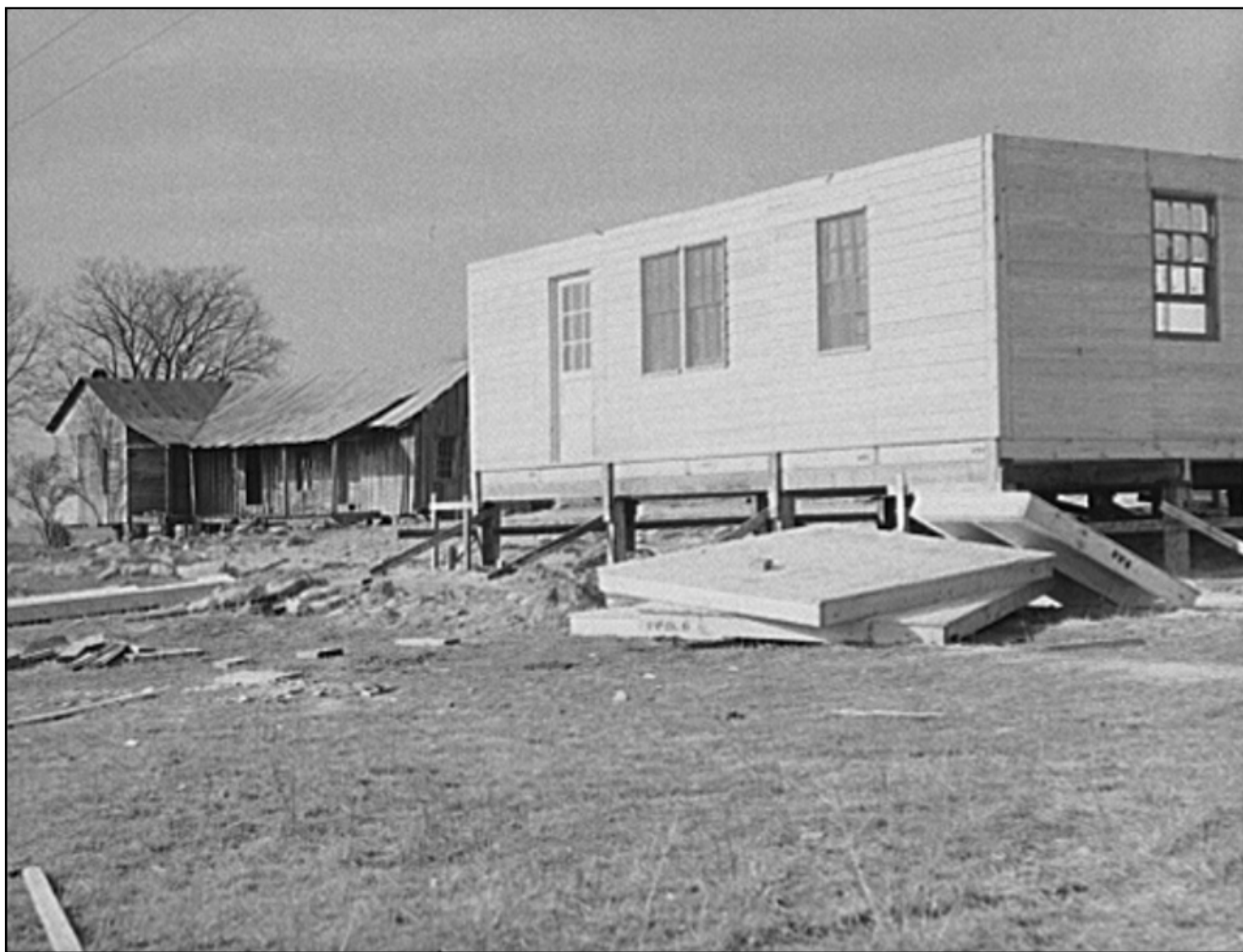


Once the foundation and the flooring was completed the prebuilt walls could be put in place. That is being done in the following photo.

The men below are putting up the walls that already include windows and exterior doors. The official caption reads: *“Getting up the walls on a prefabricated house being built by FSA (Farm Security Administration) to house some of the farmers when they move out of the Spartanburg Army camp area. Pacolet, South Carolina region.”*



House with the walls completed, waiting for the roof and porch to be installed. The formal caption for this photo reads: *Prefabricated house built by FSA (Farm Security Administration) to house some of the farmers who had to move out of the Spartanburg Army camp area. Pacolet, South Carolina*



House under construction with its new roof just installed. Prebuilt panels for other houses are stacked in the yard. Other new houses also under construction can be seen in the distance. New poles bringing electrical power can also be seen.



Men building the porch and its roof on a new house. The formal picture caption said: *Putting the porch on a prefabricated house built near Pacolet, South Carolina by the FSA (Farm Security Administration) for farmers who had to move out of the Camp Croft area. Pacolet, South Carolina region.*



Formal caption to picture: *One of the completed and painted prefabricated houses for farmers moved out of the Camp Croft area at Pacolet, South Carolina*



Formal caption on picture: *A pasture behind the prefabricated houses at Pacolet, South Carolina is being provided for cattle brought by many of the farmers out of the Camp Croft area.*



Picture Caption: *Prefabricated houses being built to house some of the farmers who had to move out of the Camp Croft area. Pacolet, South Carolina*



Note from Easter Fisher: *This was the house that Katherine Kirby's mother and father lived in. (The new one shown in the window.) The two story house (beyond) was Perry and Belle Dillard's house.*

Caption: *While water pipes are being laid families had to get their water at one of the wells nearby. When water system is completed there will be a pump at every house. Pacolet, South Carolina. At the FSA (Farm Security Administration) prefabricated houses*



Note from Easter Fisher: *The house on the right was my mother's house. The house in the middle was where Orelina Fleming lived. Bob Harvey lived in the house on the left. My daughter lives in Mama's house now. Howard Lee first lived in this house prior to August 21, 1941*

Houses in various stages of completion. Prefab panels on the ground mark the site of future houses. Formal Caption for picture says: *Prefabricated houses built by FSA (Farm Security Administration) for farmers who had to move out of the Camp Croft area. Pacolet, South Carolina.*



Same view with more houses completed. The panels shown on the ground in the above photo have been used to build the two houses on the right. The dirt road in both photos is the old Spartanburg Union Highway, now known as East Main St. and SC State RD 42 - 227. Caption for picture says *Prefabricated houses being constructed near Pacolet, South Carolina, by the FSA (Farm Security Administration) for farmers*



A well machine drilling a well for the new houses. Caption reads: *Digging a well for families moving into FSA (Farm Security Administration) prefabricated houses from the Camp Croft area. Pacolet, South Carolina region.*



Editors Note: *In 1941, there were very few well machines like this in the Spartanburg/Pacolet vicinity. It is not known for sure but it is very likely that this is the machine owned and operated by Mr. Jack Easler of Pacolet. There is a possible personal connection to this photo for me. In 1941, when this picture was made, my Dad, Fred (Doog) Teaster helped Mr Easler run his machine. He worked in the mill at night and helped Mr. Easler in the daytime. There is the possibility that one of the men shown is my Dad.*

If this is Mr. Easler's machine, he would be killed by it 4 years later in 1945 in a terrible accident.