

## MOUNT TABOR SCHOOL--A NEW BEGINNING FOR ME

By Kiree Hartley Brown  
with  
Ken and Joy Brown

PREFACE: I read with interest Buck Kester's recollection of Mount Tabor School in the May, 1987, Douglas County Journal. I wanted to let everyone know that like the several teachers listed in Buck's article, I too had the opportunity to teach at Mount Tabor School. Teaching there in the 1950-51 school year, I can never forget that the Mount Tabor School, students, and community provided a major turning point in my life. Dwelling on how much Mount Tabor meant to me and the events that led up to my being a teacher there, I decided to prepare this article for submission to the Society. Since my eyes and hands will no longer allow me to undertake any serious writing, my son and daughter-in-law, Ken and Joy Brown, have graciously taken the time to transcribe, type, and edit my story about Mount Tabor School.

### Good Advice

I had a partial year's teaching experience prior to Mount Tabor School. In 1931, at the age of 20, I taught a six-month term at Arden; the term was shortened because the school district ran out of funds. In 1932, I married Orville Brown, son of James Lihu and Amanda Morris Brown of Squires. Seventeen years later, in the spring of 1949, Orville died of tubercular meningitis, leaving me with five children to raise ranging from 4 to 16 years of age.

The following year was the most depressing and difficult period of my life. During that time, I tried to support my family by laundering shirts and through an assortment of school-, church-, and house-cleaning jobs. We wouldn't have made it that first year if it hadn't been for the help provided us by our many fine friends and relatives. That year was filled with periods of deep depression and prayers of desperation.

Orville's cousin was Jessie Morris Croslin. Her husband, Lawrence Croslin, ran Croslin Dairy in Ava. In early 1950, Lawrence said to me, "Kiree, you're not going to be able to support those children on the type of work you're doing. Didn't you use to teach? You need to get a job teaching." Even though I no longer had a teaching certificate, Lawrence made me promise to go see the County Superintendent, John L. Dunn, that very day. I did.

Mr. Dunn was very encouraging. He determined what extra college work I would need, and told me that if I could regain my teaching certification, he could guarantee that I would have a school ready for me in the fall.

Within two weeks, I was enrolled in the Spring 1950 term at Southwest Missouri State Teachers College in Springfield. Classes in the summer term and in the three-week August 1950 term followed. The credit hours I obtained during that period qualified me for teacher certification. While the number of hours were small compared to today's standards, college was

very difficult for me. After all, I had been out of school for nearly 20 years.

#### Mount Tabor School Term

As was the practice of the time, school contracts were signed on School Meeting Day, which was the second Tuesday in April. On April 14, 1950, I signed a teacher's contract (Exhibit "A") with Johnny Cox, President of the Mount Tabor School Board, to teach an eight-month term to begin on September 4, 1950, and to end in April, 1951. The contract was attested to by C.V. Herrell, Clerk of Douglas County School District No. 63, Mount Tabor's official designation. The contract was signed before I had regained my teacher certification and without specifying a salary, which turned out to be around \$200 per month. Another director at that time that I recall was Lester Jenkins.

A first grade report card which I issued to my five-year-old son, Kenneth, shows that the school term lasted 160 days. The card was signed on April 13, 1951, which must have been one of the last days of the school term. Class started at 9:00 AM each day and ended at 4:00 PM. We had a one-hour lunch period and two 15-minute restroom breaks, which the students quickly managed to use as recess periods.

#### Happiest Students I Ever Had

When I drove in the school yard that first day of school, the group of children were out in front with big smiles and were eager to meet me. They were the happiest group of children I ever worked with; I think everyone in the school must have been back of me. They were at school early and

were always ready to do things. Those students just lifted me, took my sadness away, and helped me through my depression. I feel that there was a higher power in that school all through that year.

Different from some of the other schools that I taught, the big boys just loved to carry in the wood and keep the fire rolling. I don't know whether or not the parents had told the children to help me. They just weren't any trouble; they were happy to be there and to learn. Those kids were medicine to me.

#### The School Building and Grounds

The Mount Tabor School building was typical of the schools in the county both then and for decades earlier. Compared to the four other one-room schools that I would eventually serve, Mount Tabor was a little on the small side. As I recall, the school yard, however, was nice and smooth, unlike the rough and rocky school yards of the other schools.

In 1950, the school building had eight double-hung windows on the south side to provide light and ventilation. The north-side windows had been removed and closed up in previous years. The front of the school building faced west and contained two doors spaced several feet apart. There was a pump house set to the left front of the school building (about the only trouble I had with the students was getting them to use their individual tin cups to get drinks of water; they were used to sharing the dipper that hung on the pump handle).

Like all one-room schools of its time, the Mount Tabor School had a wood stove; it was situated toward the front of the room in



the middle aisle between rows of the old-fashioned, double-seated school desks. There was no electricity in the school at that time. Therefore, lighting came from the south windows, and kerosene lanterns were available for evening activities. However, unlike other schools that I would serve in future years, I do not recall any evening activities at the school during that school year.

Outdoor toilets were at the rear of the school yard.

At that time, there were woods or brush on each side of the school yard. While I believe the school was originally built next to a main country road, State Highway 76 was later built about  $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile south of the school (see Exhibit "B" for area map). This caused the school building to be rather isolated. In 1950, we went to the school by using a narrow dirt road that started north of the intersections of State Highway 76 and County Road KK, and went through the school yard. Although I never used it, I believe the dirt road continued down to the Butler Cemetery on Beaver Creek.

### The School Children

Recognizing that the need to recall as many of the children that I had in 1950-51 is more important than the risk of leaving someone out, I will attempt to identify them, their families, and the location of their homes.

As I recall, the children all walked to school--although I recall picking up Carl Clemens' girl, Reba, as I passed their house on Highway 76. The four Hicks children would come up through the woods to the northwest. They lived over by the

Cal Neiman place across Beaver Creek. I don't know if they were driven across the creek or had some way of fording the creek on foot. Jimmy, Jackie, and Betty Haden lived at the corner of the school road and Highway 76. Their house was diagonal from my Uncle Charley Gunnels's grocery store.

Jerry and Charlotte Applegate lived between the Mount Tabor Church and the school. Across from the church lived two little boys by the name of Leach. Their parents had an orchard and garden and were always giving me fruits and vegetables. Across Highway 76, down an eastbound gravel road which leads to the Black Oak Church and State Highway 5, lived the Jarman girls, Margaretta and Janette. Their family's chocolate cake recipe I used as long as I could still bake things. Also in that direction were Johnny Cox's girl Mary, the McCullough girl, Lena Fae Hodge, and C.V. Herrell's two girls and a boy.

Further west on Highway 76 lived the two Denney boys, Ben and Lonnie (one of whom I recall vowed to stay out of trouble before school started and went through the year with only one whipping). Further west on Highway 76 lived Harold Hutchinson and Jack Cox's son, Paul. Across the Beaver Creek Bridge, not far down the Jackson Mill Road, lived Virgle Cox's daughter, Donna Faye. She had beautiful blonde hair. Further west at the top of the hill abover Beaver Creek Store lived Lester Jenkins' daughter, Sue. Counting my son, there were 27 children that I recall attended Mount Tabor that year.

### School Finances and Procedures

Although my four oldest children could attend Ava Public Schools, where I lived at the time, my five-year-old was considered too young to be enrolled there. The Mount Tabor School Board, however, said they would be glad to have the additional student (enrollment was a factor in financial allocations among the county school districts). This was also a great benefit to me, personally.

My monthly salary check was written by Mr. Herrell, but I would have to take it to Mr. Cox for his signature before I could cash it. Mr. Herrell was also the person I would see if I needed chalk or other basic school supplies. He would see that the items were ordered and obtained for me.

#### Miscellaneous Remembrances

The school did not have any recreational or playground equipment, but the Mount Tabor students got along well and were quick to devise games to play. Besides the standard tag, hide-and-seek, and steal the bacon games, they played baseball. The students used an old board for a bat, and like many Douglas County teachers before me, I made them a ball out of old socks.

Like all of the one-room schools, wildlife and other examples of nature were present in and around the school yard. One of God's wild creatures decided to become part of my lesson one afternoon. A big black snake crawled through a hole in the floor up at the front of the room one day. After getting everyone's undivided attention, the snake was corralled by the older boys and escorted from the premises.

A special treat in the rural schools during those years were the periodic visits of the Bible missionaries. These two women drove a jeep to get to all the schools and would give the students a Bible lesson using Biblical figures made out of felt cloth and placed on a felt-covered board to depict the Bible scene. They always had little Bible story books, pencils, and other little Bible gifts for the children. The students were always excited and pleased when they would see the jeep drive in the school yard.

#### After Mount Tabor

Even though I taught at Mount Tabor for a single school year, that job will always be special in my mind because of the wonderful Mount Tabor people and because it launched me on a 27-year career as an elementary school teacher. The following year, I moved to Dogwood School and Cinita Davis Brown taught at Mount Tabor. I was to teach one-room schools at Dogwood, Flat Rock, Hunter, and Frye before spending 11 years in Kansas (Sedgwick County and Wichita Public Schools), and 8 years in the Ava Public Schools.

I believe that the Mount Tabor Board and Mr. Dunn were happy with my work. I would have liked to have stayed longer at that school if a number of circumstances hadn't made it much more favorable for my family to take the Dogwood School position.

My mother, Minta Gunnels Hartley Breedlove, still lived on the farm that she and my father, Ira Hartley, had worked for years on Williams Hollow, just below Arden. She had a vacant house, complete with barn and chicken house on an adjacent piece of land across County Highway O. She said



if I would move there, she would give me a Jersey cow for milk and all the eggs that the family needed. By this time, my two oldest daughters were both married. The three younger children attended school with me at Dogwood.

The Dogwood School had a larger tax base at that time and, therefore, could pay a higher salary (\$240 per month). Dogwood was a larger school and I'm told was the first one-room school in Missouri to have a hot-lunch program. Two women came in daily to cook meals for the children. These meals typically consisted of corn, beans, and homemade yeast buns.

#### Conclusion

As with Mount Tabor School, I have vivid memories of all my years in Douglas County. But Mount Tabor is especially clear in my mind because the school represented the beginning of my long career in public education--a livelihood that gave me personal peace and satisfaction and a means to raise my family.

Like many of the Society's members, I want to record the locations and events that I observed and experienced in my wonderful years in Douglas County. Now, at the age of 75, my health will not allow me to travel Douglas County roads for any length or with any regularity. Therefore, I travel those roads and visit those places through my mind. Through my mind, I visit Mount Tabor School and its children and parents often.

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#### POST-SCRIPT

I want to take this opportunity to Thank Mrs. Kiree Hartley Brown, her son and daughter-in-law, Ken and Joy, for a most inspiring article about Mount Tabor School.

Kiree writes with a certain elegance and distinction, which most all rural-Schoolmoms always seem to possess.

I also commend Kiree for taking advantage of the opportunity to share with us her story which might have been lost, but it is now preserved for future generations to read.

I challenge any former Rural School Teacher: Write An Article, such as this, about your own experiences teaching in our remote areas. Kiree has proved that one doesn't need hands nor eyes to write, when an interviewer is available, or by using that great device....a tape recorder.

Once again, Thank You--Kiree! Whenever your mind decides to travel again, drop in on Douglas County, and send us another article.

Randy

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Mail Route #2 was organized on March 18, 1920. It began at the Ava Post Office and proceeded down Hunter Creek to Larissa, across the hills to the Black Oak Flat School, on to J.B. Hylton's, Pine Park School, back to Basher, Happy Home Church, and on into Ava. Basher Post Office was discontinued at this time. (Do. Co. Herald, March, 1920)

# TEACHER'S CONTRACT

Section 10342, R. S. 1939

THIS AGREEMENT, made the 14 day of April, 1950, between Kiree Brown, a legally qualified public-school teacher, of the first part, and the School Board of District No. 63, County of Douglas, State of Missouri, of the second part.

WITNESSETH: That the said Kiree Brown agrees to teach the public school of said District for the term of 8 months, commencing on the 4 day of Sept, 1950, for the sum of \_\_\_\_\_ dollars per month, to be paid monthly, and that for services properly rendered and reports correctly made, according to law, said Board agrees to issue warrants upon the Cassidy Treasurer in favor of the said Kiree Brown for the amount of wages due under this agreement.

This Contract is subscribed to with a full understanding of Sections 10337, 10340, 10342, 10343, 10366, 10367, 10368, 10429, 10433, 10615, 10625, 10626, 10627, 10628, 10631, R. S. 1939.

Done by order of the Board, this 14 day of April, 1950

Johnny Cox, President.  
Kiree Brown, Teacher.

Attest: C. W. Hurrell, District Clerk.



