

Tales of Oregon Country - Hazel Bend and Brown School

by John Blalock

This history is written about the Hazel Bend area of the Blaine Road between the 5th and 6th bridges and about Brown School #32. This story was typed for the web during the winter of 2003 by Nestucca Valley Middle School technology students Robbie, Charlie and Carl and edited by Dean Bones.

When I was a boy we lived on the bank of the big Nestucca River in Tillamook County, Oregon, about half way between Beaver and Blaine. A short distance behind our house was the steep slope of a hill called "Camel Back." This hill came to an end just east of our place in a bluff about fifteen hundred feet high. A very precarious trail wound along the face of this bluff about 500 feet up, and along this trail we drove our cows to pasture in the clearings up a canyon behind the hill. The trail had been there when my father and mother moved on the place in 1901, and it was said to be part of an old Indian trail that ran from Tillamook across the hills to the Nestucca, then up that valley and over the Coast Range Mountains to Grande Ronde and the Willamette Valley.

At the foot of this high bluff the wagon road lay along side the swift Nestucca River that came against the hillside at that point. Often in winter the road here would be washed out so that it was impassable for wagons. Then it would have to be rebuilt.

During days of high water we could not go to school. The rain would fall steadily for a week or more, and the river would get higher and higher surrounding all the trees along the shore and covering our garden below the road. We children would sit and watch from our front windows the trees and logs going down the swift stream. Sometimes there would be parts of a shed or of a bridge, and there was a continual succession of interesting things like whole trees with roots sticking high in the air and animals riding along on top.

The school that we children attended was named "Brown School," and it was about three quarters of a mile to the east. The first part of our way to school was along the foot of the bluff by the river, then we came to the home of Charlie and Lizzie Sears, the nearest neighbors. Some distance beyond their place we crossed Bays Creek on a bridge and came to the Borba's home. The road went between their house and their barn. The house was on the right and the barn on the left. Then the road went up a low hill to the school yard and the school house at the top.

This school house had been built about 1916 and was painted white. It had replaced an old, unpainted shed of a building that had been the school house before. There was one large room in the building with tall windows on one side and a blackboard on the other. Inside the front door was a short hallway with cloak rooms on each side, one for boys and one for girls. A water bucket with a long handled dipper sat on a small table on one side of the hall where we could all get drinks as we came in from play.

I was janitor for a time at Brown School when in the sixth grade, receiving \$4 a month for my work. The teacher received only \$70 a month and paid her board out of that. As janitor I had to get to school early, start a fire and ring the bell half hour before school

started, then get a fresh bucket of drinking water from the spring down at the foot of the hill behind the Borba's house. In the evening I had to sweep out the school house and get in wood for the following day.

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The school house was topped with a belfry in front and on top of that a flag pole extending some six feet higher. A rope running through a pulley at the top of the flag pole came down to the front door, and when we had good weather our American Flag was run up there to wave in the breeze.

Half a mile down the river from us but on the other side lived the Chopard family. Gus Chopard had built a swinging bridge across the river for his children to come across and go with us to Brown School. They were our very best friends, four of us and four of them going to school together.

About 1920 a teacher was hired for Brown School who was a Roman Catholic. That meant nothing to us, for the Borbas were also Roman Catholics and were our very good friends and neighbors. But this teacher wanted to make all of us students Catholics also. She boarded with the Borbas down at the foot of the hill from school as all our other teachers had done, but she did not like it. They were too crude and unsophisticated. They did not like her either for she was afraid to sleep in the dark and had to have a lamp burning at her bedside all night long.

After a month had gone by this teacher left the Borbas to board with the Schmeltzers who lived almost a mile down the river from us. They had just built a nice new house, however she had to walk a mile and a half to school.

We all knew of our teacher's superstitions, how that she was afraid of ghosts and such, so my older sister and the oldest Chopard girl had us kids hide out in a patch of woods that the road passed through and wait for the teacher on her way home. All of us children crouched down behind a large log in the woods, and when the teacher was going by we started making squalls and moans. Down the road the teacher ran as fast as she could go. Within a few days she had gotten a doctor's certificate of ill health so that she could break her contract to teach school there, and the school board got us another teacher.

From up the river east of Brown School other children came to school also, but they had to go through a quarter mile of forest where the road was damp and the ruts were deep. In 1921 Lila McDonald, about 12 years old, was walking that way with her nephew and niece. Shortly after entering the woods they saw that a cougar was following behind them. Lila sent the two small children ahead of her while she walked backwards to school all the while facing the cougar and screaming at it. Just before they reached the school yard at the edge of the woods the cougar turned aside into the trees and left them. Neighbors took dogs and tried to hunt the cougar down, but they did not find it, however a few days later a large cougar was killed a couple of miles away.

When I was a boy I milked cows, sometimes twelve cows twice a day by hand. I hated that work and vowed when I was grown I would never do it any more. In our dairy country, Tillamook County, nobody milks by hand any more. All have milking machines.

When I was small my father bought a small town newspaper which he kept for about five years. I was soon helping at throwing back type and later at setting up type slowly picking the letters out of the boxes. Now days nobody prints that way any more, nobody, I say, except for a very few left in the AAPA (American Amateur Press Association), and

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a few of them, it seems, would have everyone print their way. No wonder the membership is decreasing.

The only way to grow and not die, in my opinion, is to encourage all members to use the most modern ways of printing that there are, to spread the news of the wonderful things that can be done with a computer and printer and encourage young people, who are already taking to computers everywhere, to start publishing. In the AAPA they will get experience and find those who will read what they write. I already read everything that comes in the bundles.