

My Years of Teaching at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri

by Hazel McLaughlin Wade Gomes

My name is Hazel (McLaughlin) Wade. I was born at Palace, Missouri in Pulaski County on September 30, 1919. I attended Palace Elementary School. I finished the eighth grade and then rode horse back five miles to Bloodland High School. In my last two years of High school, there were school buses available. In my senior year, I went to the county superintendent's office in Waynesville to take the teacher's exam. I took the teacher's examination earning a second grade teacher's certificate. The certificate allowed me to teach in an elementary school providing that I would attend a ten week semester in a teacher's college during the summer. I graduated from high school in April 1938. I attended Springfield Teacher's College that summer and sent my application to the Rolling Heath School directors. They hired me for the 1938-39 school term.

I found a place to board at Charley Wade's home which was about a mile up the river from the school. The family at my boarding house consisted of Charley and Cora Wade along with their three children. There was one small infant, one first grader, named Dorothy, and one seventh grader, named Eula. Dorothy and Eula were my students. Charley Wade's home sat at the foot of a Missouri hill. Across the road in front of the house flowed the Big Piney River. The home was a three room house with a long screened porch across the front where we sat and watched the river go by.

I walked to and from school on the road between Charley Wade's home and the river. I enjoyed the walk down the road to school. It was beautiful in the mornings. The fall leaves were turning colors. The squirrels and birds hustled back and forth gathering their food for winter. Ducks flew up from the water in the river. Wild grapes hung from their vines that draped from the trees along the hill and river bank.

A week before school started, I arranged the seats and furniture. I sorted books and put up charts and pictures on the walls. I made my lesson plans to begin the school term in the fall. On the first day of school, the board members came along with my thirty-six students. All eight grades from first to eighth grade were included. Some of the eighth grade boys and girls were larger than I was. I was only seventeen years old at the time. After the students were seated at their

desks, the board of directors wished us a pleasant day and departed.

The sixth, seventh and eighth grade students were seated in the big wide seats and desks in the back of the room along the walls. Some desks had three students in them. In front of those seats were middle-sized seats and desks, for the third, fourth and fifth grade students. The smaller seats in the very front seated the first and second graders. Some of the smaller desks sat in the middle of the room in front of the heating stove. The blackboard and "recitation bench" sat in front of the room behind the teacher's desk. In the



The exterior of Rolling Heath School looks much the same as it did when built of concrete blocks in 1911. The building is located on the Big Piney River near the water intake plant and golf course. Photograph by Terry Primas.

left hand corner from the teacher's desk was our library.

I soon found out that all my students large and small were very obedient and respectful. They were very eager to do jobs for the teacher. The "recitation bench" was a very busy place all day as well as the library. It was a pleasure teaching the students all subjects from first to eighth grade.

Our playground equipment was well worn from being used the previous term. We planned a program of dialogs, songs and verses for entertainment to earn money for new playground equipment. It was called a "pie social." Girls and women brought pies in pretty decorated boxes with their names on them to be auctioned off. After the students' program was performed, the men and boys bought pies. They got to eat the pie with the girl

whose name was on the box. That's how we obtained the money for our playground equipment as well as a world globe and water fountain. Big and little students performed their parts very well. Their parents and friends of the community enjoyed it. They complimented the students.

The students and community informed me that November was the best time for "pie socials" as the "city men" would be there for bird and deer hunting. The hunters from the club house at Charlie Wade's place came and seemed to enjoy our "pie social." The students received lots of applause from

gram. Santa came. All of the students had a Merry Christmas.

My older students were good at helping bring in the wood. They stacked it by the wood heater for me to build a fire early the next morning in order to warm the room before the students arrived. They also filled our new water fountain each morning before school. Everyone had a job to do. The upper grade students helped the lower grade students while I was busy. All the students were cooperative.

Spring came and so did Easter. The art classes were busy coloring, cutting, and drawing eggs and rabbits. Each picture was given an explanation of how it represented Christ's resurrection. Now schools are not allowed to mention Christ's resurrection in any way or form. Our world has changed in many ways these past seventy years.

Spring came with birds singing, butterflies and bees flying. Wild flowers grew along the road and riverside. Even the students had grown in many ways. It was time for the eighth graders to go to the county superintendent's office to take their final eighth grade test for graduation. If they passed the test, they went on to high school the next term. The superintendent gave the test. The test tested how well they had performed in the learning that school year. It also tested how well the teacher had taught them.

On the last day of school the parents came with lunch baskets. We had a picnic lunch out on the lawn under the big oak tree behind the school house. Everyone visited and talked about how they would spend their summer. Good-byes and best wishes were given to all.

In the summer of 1939, I attended Teachers' College in Springfield again. In the fall, I returned to Rolling Heath for my second term of teaching. That was another term with thirty-five students. I was welcomed back by the students and the community. The parents in this area were very involved with school and their neighbors. The slogan was "I help you and you help me." They exchanged their work and pleasure with each other. They invited all the community into their homes once or twice a month taking turns having square dances. The women prepared their best desserts and donated to that home for their refreshments. All the families from little tots to adults attended and danced. When the small children got sleepy, they were put to bed and the dancing went on. There

the "city men." These men helped us sell the pies at higher prices. The pies sold at prices from ten cents to six dollars. The highest priced pie was mine. I ate my pie with Mr. Charley Wade's nephew, Cray Wade. Years later, he became my husband.

The winter months came and the walk to school got a little nippy with the snow and ice crunching under foot. I still enjoyed the walk when the trees and bushes were laden with snow and the river edge with ice. On bad winter days our recesses and lunch times were spent playing indoor games like spelling matches and math games. Christmas came and we went up on the hill above the school and cut a big cedar tree to put in our classroom for our Christmas Tree. The students made ornaments and decorated the tree with them. We had a short Christmas Pro-

might have been a few bootlegged bottles stored outside in a secret place. But, there were no problems. Everyone enjoyed the party from six to twelve o'clock that night. If guests came from across the river, the host boated all of them back across to their cars.

In October of that year, a family moved into our district with two children, one sixth grade girl and an eighth grade boy that became our students. Soon after they entered, a board member came and told me these two students had been smoking on their way to and from school. The parents met with me and the school directors. The children admitted that they were smoking on the road home. After the session with the parents, they were asked what they wanted done about the situation. Their reply was to have the teacher take a "switch" to both students in front of the board members. I felt like a criminal myself, not having known about the problem. The other students never told on them. The students did admit that they saw them but were afraid to tell. I gave the first "switching" to the girl with the board members standing watch. She let out a scream. I felt like I had killed her. The same light "switch" went to the boy. He stood straight, looking out the window. He did not make a sound. I never used a "switch" again. In spite of the "switching," I remained good friends with the students and parents afterwards.

After Christmas that term, some parents from the Tribune School District came to the Rolling Heath Board Meeting. They asked to transfer five of their students to our school. With the board's permission, my class increased to forty students. Tribune School was about five miles up the hill from Rolling Heath School. The mothers took turns driving them down to school and back each day. The five new students were one first grader, one fourth grader and three eighth graders. The eighth graders were big overgrown fourteen year olds. But they were all well-behaved students. The new students were very pleased to be the teacher's helper like the Rolling Heath students.

Our Easter was well planned and spring was showing with the hills and river edges green and blooming. It was time for the eighth graders to go for their final eighth grade test. The report from the county came back with all eighth graders passing. They had to decide which school to attend the next term. The term of school went by very successfully. My plan was to continue teaching the next year. I had my choice between Rolling Heath School or Trib-



"Me, Hazel McLaughlin, on my way to Tribune School in Pulaski County where I started my third term of school. Fort Leonard Wood Army camp moved us out in 1941. I drove this '37 Chevy to work in Fort Wood the rest of my term of school." Courtesy of Hazel McLaughlin Wade.

une School. I chose Tribune School which was a two room school. I took the first to the fourth grades and Mr. Sparks took fifth to eighth grades. My reason for the change was to be close to home. I could drive each day. I also received ten dollars more per month in pay. I would be earning eighty dollars a month instead of seventy dollars.

I attended Warrensburg Teacher's College that summer. In the fall of 1941, I began my third term of teaching. The school was located on the left off of Highway Seventeen between Adkins Store, the filling station and Tribune's Post Office. I enjoyed my class. I had only twenty-eight students and only

four grades. I enjoyed everything about the school term. I even enjoyed the drive each day in my father's thirty-seven Chevy coupe through Bloodland, my old high school town.

One day in October an army car drove up to our school while we were out for recess. A couple of army officers asked Mr. Sparks if they could teach his boys a new game. They lined them up and marched them around the school grounds in army style. The boys enjoyed that game with commands of "right, left, and halt." Then they said, "We are just showing you what will be your future soon." There was no more explanation. They drove away. A few



Students at Union School in Tribune, which was near the present airport, in 1941. We used this picture last year in an article about the displacement of families for the construction of Fort Leonard Wood. That was before we knew the backstory about the army officers teaching the boys the marching game as related by Mrs. Wade. *Springfield News and Leader*.

days later, the postmaster handed me a newspaper, "The St. Louis Post." It had maps and pictures of where Fort Leonard Wood Army Camp was going to be built.

The government notified my dad, Columbus McLaughlin, who lived south of the fort, that they were going to take his place. He would have to move so he should go find another place. They told him that the place must not be vacant until his final notice came to leave. Columbus bought a place in Cabool, Missouri in Texas County. It was sixty miles south of our home. He left my mother, my youngest sister and me at the Palace home. He moved with his farming equipment to Cabool. He sowed his spring crop for the year.

My students and Mr. Sparks came each day with the news of their families moving. Two or three moved each week. By Christmas, we had no students left. The government told us they would give us a job at the army camp. Mr. Sparks was given a job at the PX. I was a clerk at the Officers' Diner. I drove the same road that I had driven to school but it was further into the fort. The traffic of big machinery was often crossing in front of me. I met two girls working there looking for a place to board. Mother and I took them in. They rode to their work with me. One rainy day through the mud and slush of the torn up road some big machinery turned very quickly in front of me. I slammed on the brakes in time to stop but with no seat belts in cars at that time it threw the two girls into the dashboard. One of the girls broke her arm. After that she moved back home up in Northern Missouri.

I thought my family would be moving any day to Cabool where my father had moved. So when the summer was over I put my application in for a teaching job at Grand View School which was closer to the Cabool farm. I quit my job at Fort Leonard Wood and found a place to board for the beginning of my fourth teaching term. In the next few days, my dad received notice from the government that the fort was moving north toward Waynesville. The government was not going to take his place. What a shock this was to our family and about eight other families who were our neighbors. Several families had moved and had to return to their farms that were in a terrible mess. Fences were torn down. Fields were plowed up with big ditches where the tanks had driven over them. It was a sad time for that part of our little Palace Community.

I finished my fourth term of teaching at Grand View School. I married Cray

Wade, Charley Wade's nephew, on February 14, 1942. He was a wonderful husband. I taught my fifth school term at Craddock School near Licking, Missouri. That year my husband was drafted into the army during World War II. I was expecting my first child so he got a deferment until the baby was born. Before the birth of our son, peace was declared and my husband did not go into the Army. I was living with my folks waiting for his call. So we continued living there from April to February of the next year. It was difficult living there. All night the marching soldiers tromped by our front yard. The firing range was so close that our dishes rattled when the big guns were fired all day and night. Windows got broken. We began losing our pigs that were in pens near the fort's line. Finally, a sergeant told us that soldiers in a camp near the pig pens had been having roast pig at their camp. He told us to go to the headquarters and report it. We reported it. We felt badly when they brought us a gallon can full of dollar bills and change. They passed the can around the group in their camp. The guys had to drive up to our house and pay for our pigs.

We moved back on the farm by Big Piney River [in Texas County] only about sixty miles south of the little

Rolling Heath School on the hill. I taught for the next six years at Craddock School [near Licking]. In 1953, my family and I moved to California where I finished thirty-eight years of teaching. I have made many trips back to Missouri since 1953. I never had a chance

to go back to Rolling Heath School until the spring of 2008. I was back for a visit with my sister, brother-in-law, nieces and nephews. During this visit, I heard that the Rolling Heath School was open for visitors. My nephew, Scott Wade, took me to visit the school.

What a wonderful day it was to see the school for the first time since the last day of school in 1941. I was amazed that it looked the same. The surroundings had changed but not the building. The inside of the building had changed. The old blackboard was gone. They had built a fireplace there. Another door was made in the corner where our library had been. The big wood burner heating stove was not in the middle of the room. There was the metal pad with a table sitting on it. I was thrilled to see the school again. Many memories ran through my mind while there. I want to thank my nephew for taking me there and to Mr. Joe Profit for being there to show us the school. I also want to thank Mr. Richard Edging for giving me literature and a book about Fort Leonard Wood. He asked me to write this history of my teaching and life at Fort Leonard Wood. This is my memory of that time.



The picnic on the last day of school at Rolling Heath in 1941. It wasn't just the last day of school for the year but the last school day forever at Rolling Heath. The families on what was to become Fort Leonard Wood were displaced and all of the schools closed. Courtesy of Hazel McLaughlin Wade.

Hazel McLaughlin Wade Gomes, after teaching in Missouri for eleven years, left with husband Cray Wade for California in 1953. Hazel taught in California for 27 years, retiring in 1980. They had four children. Cray died in 1992. Hazel remarried in 1998 to Joaquin Gomes. Hazel's only daughter is also a teacher. At the age of 92, Hazel volunteers in her daughter's classroom.

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Hazel McLaughlin experienced first hand the coming of Fort Leonard Wood. The government told Columbus McLaughlin and his family that their farm near Palace would become part of the training camp and they would have to move. Then the young teacher watched as her students moved away until there were none to teach. Hazel witnessed the transformation of south central Pulaski County. The 2010 *Old Settlers Gazette* contains an article about the displacement of 308 families from the ground that became Fort Leonard Wood (available online.) The change had a profound effect on the rest of the county, too.

When construction began in earnest in January of 1941, the country was struggling to emerge from a worldwide depression. The 75 cents an hour labor wages paid by K. H. W. L. attracted 32,000 construction workers, which overwhelmed the rural area. The major construction was completed by May. That hectic time is now history but the small town life of Waynesville was changed forever. Those of us who were not here or not old enough to remember rely on those who remember those days and on snapshots that recreate some of the scenes. The four images on this page evoke a sense of early 1941 in Pulaski County.



Waynesville, seven miles from the cantonment, was a sleepy little Ozark mountain town of 462 people November, 1940. By February, 1941 the population was over 4,000. Traffic and parking was a major problem. In the picture above, notice the cars are parked in a double line in front of the commercial row of buildings, which contained a Western Auto, gift stores, and several bars.



Tent City had a restaurant, gas station, streets, parking spaces, and about forty tents, furnished with heat and electricity. Bunks rented at 50¢ a night and they housed over two-hundred men each night. Here, too, gambling was conducted on a wide open basis. *Springfield News and Leader*.



Mrs. Roberta Routh, County Director for Public Assistance, observed that "All through the rains and snow, carnivals kept their merry-go-rounds and Ferris Wheels running without a fare in sight. These were cover for gambling dens in some of the side show tents." This and the top left photo courtesy of Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Rolla.



This construction worker has a broad smile because his wife and daughter are living with him in their 10 x 10 foot temporary building. Courtesy of Fort Leonard Wood Museum.

Taxi Dancers

"There is usually some bad mixed with the good and the boom characteristics of the Army camp project brought gamblers and loafers. A few men begged on the street or led a drunkard's existence, day after day, but they were few when compared with the thousands of honest workmen who thronged the streets.

Another small group was made up of persons who felt that they should have special privileges because they were working on a defense program. They demanded immediate service, regardless of the number of people ahead of them, or the lack of equipment.

Of this type were three men that were caught fishing out of season. They explained to the game-preserve officer that they were working on the defense program and such laws did not apply to them.

Everyone was tired from working under great pressure and bad weather conditions that there was comparatively little gambling, drunkenness and immorality.

A few night spots, near the camp, and one tent theater were practically the only places offering any type of recreation. The Taxi Dance Hall was a favorite spot when it first opened. Most of the dancers were young, nice-looking girls. For street wear the girls wore white boots, that marked them as Taxi

Dancers. The girls made five cents on every ten cent ticket they collected on the floor. Sleeping quarters in trailers at the back of the tent was provided for the girls."

— from "The Army Comes to the Ozarks - As seen through the eyes of

the Pulaski County Social Security, Division of Public Assistance."

Written by Roberta M. Routh, County Director, June 1941.



Pictures courtesy of U. S. Army Engineer Museum, Fort Leonard Wood.

