

**Memoir of Bertha Doubikin**

*University of Missouri Extension Home Economics teacher, assigned to Pulaski County during World War II and the establishment of Fort Leonard Wood.*

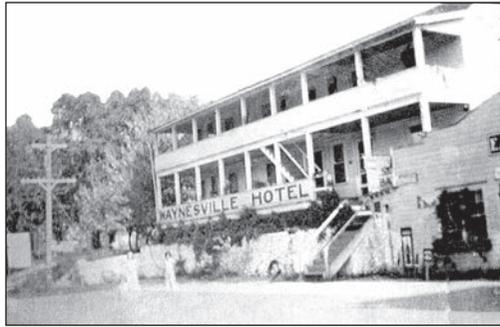
**WE, THE CHEVY AND ME**

It was February 14th 1940, the mercury 14° below 0°, when I awakened in the Waynesville Hotel, my only possessions a little Black Chevy Coupe setting outside the window and a suitcase of clothes. We had left the University of Missouri with a B.S. in Vocational Home Economics degree and a major in Chemistry. The sleeping town and beautiful hill were covered with a deep white snow. Little did we know what lay before us, except we had a tiny office, a part-time secretary and the whole Pulaski County our classroom. We were an humble University teacher, a salary of \$1,600 a year, a debt of \$40 per month for Chevy and before us, the beautiful Ozark hill country, Pulaski, full of wonderful Ozark people, no matter



Bertha Doubikin

how wealthy or how poor, wanting to learn from us. After two weeks, were acquainted with our office and many country folks. We had



Waynesville Hotel operated by Steve and Flora Gounis. It was located between present day Bo Peep Ceramics and Reinke Accounting near the Roubidoux bridge.

a home with a sweet little elderly lady, at \$25 per month including breakfast. We had eight Home Economics clubs and two working 4-H clubs. It was going to be fun and this was our responsibility under the Missouri University Extension program. Mileage for Chevy would be reimbursed by the county. Gas was 15 cents per gallon.

We now were on our way. New clubs sprang up rapidly, like mushrooms in a shaded fertile valley. New homemaking techniques spread from community to community with a beautiful town and country relationship. It was fun and more fun for Chevy and Me as we covered the pretty countryside and worked with these wonderfully enriching homemakers. We loved it. Ever awaiting the beautiful morning to start anew. Now we had 20 Home Economic clubs and 8 working 4-H clubs. 4-H Achievement Day came in August, then the Ozark Empire Fair

in Springfield. The little Chevy was loaded to the “gills” and we brought home our share of ribbons and prize monies.

One day the County Agent, who shared the office with us, said in a low voice, “In a couple of months, soldiers will occupy the greater southeast part of our Pulaski County.” We were stunned. “No one must tell.” Chevy and Me had been here only seven months and we had learned to love our county and every person in it. We worked in a daze the next two months. We knew every part of our county, the rows of old rail fences covered with grape vines, the squirrels scampering from tree to tree, the quails rustling through the fallen leaves, the bittersweet hanging over the trail ways, the rippling spring branches rushing down the hillside, the fruit jars beside the sugar maples gathering juice for syrup. We loved it all so much. Just in a few days, it would all go away. Our beautiful Pulaski County! Chevy and me were sad. The crisp morning sky, the glittering fragments of a rainbow, the metallic haunted humming bird, the quiet peace of the hills, valleys and rivers, the county’s beautiful heritage of rock formations, the densely sculptured forest, the intriguing creatures of the wild and the silence of the twilight hours as the sun was sinking in the evening became a beautiful part of Chevy and Me. We loved those winding back roads overhung with

fragrant blossoms and sweet berries. It was a wonder world in the midst of which nestled a country home with a small group of wonderfully pleasant homemakers awaiting our arrival with a demonstration like making leather gloves that cost only \$1.30, beautiful of real leather, or cleaning sewing machines or testing pressure cookers for home canning. The clubs now number 25 and the 4-H some 18.

Surplus cotton through the U. S. Triple A Program came to our county, bales and bales of beautiful white raw cotton, the first our county had ever seen. We could help the southern farmer and our own people, too, we were told. The University Extension would do the teaching. Little Chevy and Me, with a bale of cotton, became familiar figures at each county group teaching leaders the making of cotton mattresses. In our hurry we even landed at the bottom of a huge sink hole beside the road that we did not know existed. Suddenly we were upside down. We managed Me out and up the 30 foot bank leaving Chevy at the bottom. In the dark at a nearby farm home, “We fell into a ditch!” “Not that sink hole!” they exclaimed. Soon a wrecker came and with a cable to a tree, Chevy came up the side, having rolled, Chevy was a mess. Soon top and fenders rolled out, we were going again.

“There are workers on my farm making roads and digging holes.

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They will not talk. What are they doing? What are we to do?" Excitement and confusion filled our office. They trusted us most of all. Those were our people, the people we loved with all our heart. We cannot let them down. "That part of Pulaski County will be an army camp, as ordered by the government. Your farm will be condemned. You will receive a good sum of money," they were told. Farm families were stunned. Some agreed to sell even though it hurt. Others so sad refused, it had been home for generations.

World War II had swooped down on us all and down on Pulaski County like a monstrous bird, sinking its rough claws into our beautiful good earth. Some 90,000 acres, almost a third of our county,

would become a huge army camp as monstrous bulldozers overturned farm after farm. Farmers tried to understand. It was hard, as our office became headquarters for affairs between the owner and the government, helping the displaced owners to find farms and homes. We obtained lists of available lands. The elderly were hurt most. Surely there will be a rainbow behind that awful black cloud. "Do not let our wonderful people break," we prayed. It was almost an impossibility for some did even though they tried to understand. Some bought farms nearby, others far away. The government property buyer worked from our Extension office.

It was now late October 1940. The construction of the huge army camp

was in full swing. Workers from all over the U. S. came to find work and get rich. Waynesville became a beehive of swarming people which soon overflowed to other towns and out into the countryside. There were carpenters, mechanics, electricians, painters, machine operators and every walk of life swarming in with no place to live. The earth turned in Pulaski County as monstrous bulldozers plowed through the clay for streets and buildings.

The windy chords that had echoed through tossing boughs of tuneful pines down the trail to Bloodland and Cookville could be no more. Only someday a memory for some of us. This monster had cut our county in two parts. It was sad but we must be loyal for Chevy and Me and we must get through to all the county. With tears we finished the last mattress at Bloodland, where the school became a firing target changed to a typical German town, constructed for firing practice, German names on cafes, stores and business places. Big Piney was on the opposite side and travel could be done only at night after the firing. Chevy and Me got there even if caught in the firing trying to get to Cookville where their mattresses were completed. Sometimes only an army escort could take us through. We can still see an army guard come running waving both hands. "Stop, Stop," he yelled. "You are in the firing range. I must get you out." Never afraid, we could get there

before daylight. They must leave their home tomorrow. Chevy and Me said, "Good-by, good luck," and they were gone but not before one of two little twins who picked up a "fired" shell losing a hand. No one was afraid, although a hurried tension gripped us all for a quiet beautiful county overnight became overrun with thousands of people, millions it seemed of every human color and then the soldiers.

University Extension work and homemaking must go on. All learned to live with the turmoil with a level head as Home Economic clubs continued. Not one thought of stopping, even with added responsibilities of renting rooms, cooking for workers, farmers with jobs at camp and farming. Loyalty existed, money chimed. Each year the Home Economic Achievement Day grew bigger and bigger.

In that late October 1940 rains came, day after day, weeks of them with mud, mud, and more mud, red clay, wet and soggy, deeper and deeper. Automobiles of every description now became a clay brown from top to bottom. Little black Chevy was now brown, too. The narrow roads were 3 deep, a one way traffic that pushed a downed car to the side and went on. The road signs read, "Not over 35 and not under 30" per hour. Roubidoux flooded and overflowed the whole valley at Waynesville. Cardboard shacks and old jalopies went sailing down to the big river below, and those were where



This elderly couple (he was 77 and she was 67 years of age) was one of 304 families displaced by the building of Fort Leonard Wood. They had lived in this house on their 76-acre farm since 1914 and raised eight children. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri.



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many workers lived and slept, often in two shifts, but construction went on.

Waynesville in the “shock” began to change. Cafes, stores, shops sprang out from every nook. In a night-time the town made a complete flipflop from a quiet little sleeping Ozark mountain place of a store, a doctor, a county seat, a post office and a hotel into a beehive of wandering people seeking to get rich. A cafe took over our little quiet office and a wood structure built hurriedly on the courtyard housed us upstairs. Much of the beautiful surrounding countryside became a shamble of little shacks for rent, often only one small room. Nearby grew a Negro shack settlement. Before there were no Negroes in Waynesville and they were refused service, which soon changed. Other towns were similar only less. University Extension stayed firm. Only clubs in the camp area closed in moving away, but each formed a new club.

Winter came with deep snows. Much of the camp was now livable as thousands and thousands of young men came for military training. A huge U. S. O. building occupied a corner of Waynesville.

Home Economic members became volunteers. The Red Cross moved in with supplies for classes in teaching soldiers’ wives. Again Chevy and Me were found at the evening classes teaching nutrition and clothing construction for 20 pregnant soldiers’ wives. One wife said, “How does one quit off in sewing this seam?” And another, “How can I drink milk when I don’t like it?” No High School Home Economics. The work was fun. Each month new classes were formed and Home Economic Extension Clubs continued to grow. The officers’ wives and the enlisted men’s wives formed clubs.

Soon after the beginning rush, little Chevy and Me had no home. The room for \$25 a month vanished. First our room became a couch in the living-room as four construction workers from Nebraska took the room at \$100 per month. Then coming home from club one evening a double bed had been moved into the living-room as four Patrolmen, two sleeping days and two night, had the living-room for \$100 per month. The Chevy and me had no home. Chevy and Me had friends, lots of them. They knew us as a part of their family. A Home Economic member

invited us to live with them, five miles out in the country, so out we went. It was pleasant and they were wonderfully kind. This family knew how it felt to be displaced for they too were taken. Their farm that lay in the Roubidoux valley, beautifully overlooking the spring fed river, was not bought in the original buying of the camp. After a few months firing on the range, shells were landing on their farm among their cattle. They could get out or back in only at night. The same buyer came back to our office to condemn their farm. “The government is out of money,” he said, designated to buy farms, but gave them notice to move out in three days and move at night. Under those conditions they bought a few acres five miles from Waynesville. Thirty truck loads of livestock, machinery, feed and furniture came out in three nights. That was when Chevy and Me told off a government land buyer. He had been our Economics instructor at the University, but that was under the bridge now.

The county University Extension work successfully progressed as Chevy and Me made it to the Rolla Radio Station each Tuesday morning at 10:30 and for 15 minutes our voice came clear and plain, “Nutrition Update,” “Victory Gardens,” and the “Live at Home Programs” sounded throughout the listening area. Letters of enthusiasm for the programs came from everywhere. Although five counties shared the week’s programs, Pulaski County was often doing three or four each week, as the station called saying, “Can you take tomorrow’s program? We get no response from the other county.” The answer was always, “Yes,” even if it meant after midnight preparation. Chevy and Me loved it. Gas and many other necessities were rationed. Chevy and Me always received anything we asked for, those county people were wonderful.

While the Home Economic clubs were over 30 and the 4-H clubs numbered 18, Chevy and Me were familiar sights at the Methodist Church as president of the Ladies

Wesleyan Guild, a monthly meeting group, and at the Baptist Church as the recreation leader for the Adult Sunday School Class for those were the only two churches in Waynesville. Every day making rounds to Home Economic clubs, even the isolated ones beyond the Fort for now it was Fort Leonard Wood in name. Chevy and Me were sometimes lost trying to maneuver through to Big Piney. Housing areas now in the Fort asked for help in their organized groups. The Extension work grew and grew. Although different from rural groups these army wives were fun to work with, too, and we loved it all. “A breakfast down on the beach,” they would say, which was a gravel bar on Big Piney River and with an empty gallon syrup bucket, four little windows at the bottom and a door cut at the top when turned upside-down formed a wonderfully nice little cook stove. The bottom with a rim now at the top, fired four slices of bacon and then two eggs, nicely for two homemakers who each had a little stove. Carrying sticks to make a little fire in the open door of the little stove was fun which was cut at the top and now was at the bottom. Ten to twenty homemakers had fun, and an unforgettable good time followed by a nutritional demonstration that made the morning worthwhile.

Often the officers’ wives came to the office, “We want help with some particular craft at the officers’ club,” they would say. A somewhat sophisticated group, very lovely, a contrast for Chevy and Me, in our rural Homemaker groups. Somehow we felt the call to answer every request. It was fun. They had been in every part of the world and now were a part of our Pulaski County.

Fort Leonard Wood was now two years old and had become a beauty spot in Pulaski County. Landscaping and paintings beautified the buildings and, with recreational areas, made it more homelike for its inhabitants. Cultural and Educational Programs appeared at the Fort theaters and at the Fort U. S. O. Recreational Center. Little Chevy



First arrivals at Fort Leonard Wood fall out of trucks as they arrive at the mid-west’s largest new army camp. Men shown here are Headquarters Company, Sixth Quartermaster’s Battalion, from Fort Des Moines. April 4, 1941. Acme Photo courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

and Me were found at the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra on Saturday evenings for we held a permanent pass anywhere on the Fort Area which took away the Bang! Bang! noise of war preparation. In three years more than 320,000 soldiers received military training.

It was now 1943, war torn soldiers began to arrive from battlefields overseas, directly from the front lines for hospital care in the Fort Leonard Wood Hospitals. The Red Cross again was there, saying, "We need your help, please." Segments of the war-torn 8th Army came. The Chevy and Me went each Thursday night with the teaching of crafts at the Rehabilitation Center of the hospital. A 4-star general sat with shaking hands knitting as doctor's orders. A green uniform with a Red Cross emblem and a craft of arts labeled the volunteers. For these shell-shocked soldiers, crafts were their medicine. Our motto was, "We love people and

we love working with and for them." The homemaker is the backbone of our nation. Here we were near the front lines.

Then one day in 1946, the Bang! Bang! at Fort Leonard Wood ceased. 91,000 acres lay quiet and vacant. Only a few caretakers. The war was over. Soon the Fort began to deteriorate, but through some maneuvering it became a permanent military training base.

The counties now began looking for rural doctors and urged a medical center for Missouri. A struggle began, the big cities wanted the center. Rural homemakers among others came to the front. Chevy and Me landed at the State Capitol in Jefferson City with a load of Pulaski County homemakers, showing at the hearing, by our presence, we needed the Medical Center in Columbia connected with the Missouri University to reach rural people throughout the state. The legislators

saw and heard the rural voice, so in 1947 the University Medical Center in connection with our Missouri University in Columbia was born. Little Chevy and Me had a part in its forming.

Sometimes there was fun for Chevy and Me, like winning a \$10 wager that my Missouri Queen saddle horse would win first place at Richland and at Linn, winning the Ladies Fort Leonard Wood Bowling Tournament, being secretary followed by being treasurer, then vice-president of the Missouri State Home Demonstration Agents Association, getting triple honors at the State Annual Meeting, the only girl accepted into the State Honorary Fraternity Epsilon Sigma Phi, receiving state recognition and national recognition for outstanding service as a university teacher in extension and receiving a scholarship to study at Fort Collins, Colorado, a most enjoyable summer.

Although the beautiful woods

with its trailing gray fences of rails overhanging with wild grapes laden with fruits, the golden bittersweets and the red Virginia creepers are only a memory now, as is the little towns of Bloodland and Cookville, until someone like me will write a record of these memories of yesteryears more than 30 years later will in these golden years be living again the trials and tribulations of the birth and growth of an army camp, Fort Leonard Wood, in Pulaski County, where a young lady just out of college was a new University Extension teacher with a little black Chevy Coupe lived with it, through it and on for 15 years before leaving it all behind for a new life, more exciting and beautiful, a farmer's wife and homemaker at beautiful Caenby Corner, Miller County, Missouri, U. S. A.

Bertha Doubikin Harris  
Caenby Corner

*Courtesy of the Miller County Historical Society*

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