

On the Path

Mountain Brook History

By Keith Hammer

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Since my last article about Peters Ridge and the Peters/Frank families, I reread "Babblings from Mountain Brook," a book of stories written by Mountain Brook residents past and present and compiled by the Mountain Brook Ladies Club. It paints quite a lively picture of life along the foothills of the Swan Range, especially in the area from Brown's Gulch to Krause Basin!

Alonzo "Lonnie" Brown moved to the area from Yew York in 1901 as a child, where his father built a house near Mountain Brook, a stream flowing from what would become known as Brown's Gulch. He started school at Cayuse Prairie, which was quite a walk! His walk became a short one when the Mountain Brook School was opened next door in 1908, offering a wintertime four-month school year through the fifth grade.

Adolph Krause in 1903 "proved up" his homestead of 160 acres along what would become Foothill Road, near what are now called Krause Lane and Strawberry Lake Roads. Indeed, Adolph Krause built parts of what would become Foothill Road, buying and deeding even more sections of it over to Flathead County. A number of other bachelors homesteaded in the area and the road that connected their homesteads to the Creston area via the Kauffman property and Kauffman's Pothole is still known as Bachelor's Grade.

In those days, the nearest Post Office for receiving mail was at the little town of Jessup, then a thriving community centered about a sawmill and flourmill where the Creston Fish Hatchery now sits. When the Post Office at Jessup closed, it was yet a few more miles to Creston to fetch the mail! (For a history of the town of Jessup, go to <http://www.swanview.org/reports/Jessup-Mill-Pond.pdf>).

Adolph Krause purchased and consolidated land in the Krause Lane area and deeded it to his six children in 1936. His son Harry received 70 acres on Krause Lane, where he over the years turned his portable sawmill into a permanent one that was run by the family until 1976.

In 1935 and 1936, by which time mail was being delivered and a high school bus run as far as Mountain Brook School, Fred Turner and his son Redford bought land near the foot of Peters Ridge. The Turner family built a sawmill there that is still run on rare occasion. Besides sawmilling, many area families made their livings from cutting Christmas trees and boughs, farming and gardening – especially raspberries, with the Frank family hauling up to 20 crates to the train in Columbia Falls from a single picking!

Central to the Mountain Brook community was the school, which is located on tilted Brown family property where Brown's Gulch spills out onto Foothill Road. Youngsters sledding the steep Gulch used to post a kid at Foothill Road because there was no stopping the sleds – not until they slammed into Mathwig's gate on the other side when they'd forgotten to open it for a much-needed run-out zone!

A number of members of the families already mentioned have taught at the Mountain Brook School. They include Helen Frank, Dorothy Krause, her son Jon

Krause, Joe Kauffman, and Georgianna Turner. While the school has since consolidated with Cayuse Prairie, its campus is maintained as an educational facility by the Mountain Brook Homestead Foundation.

Indeed, the Mountain Brook School and Library remain a vital part of the community, with the library for rent as a meeting room while the old school building is being restored. Among other events, Swan Range Community Potluck and Music Jam Sessions are held there every-other Sunday - which brings me to a story written by Helen Frank about Mrs. Rebecca Trablik, who taught both piano and school at Mountain Brook:

“It was easy to spot the parents of the performers at a recital. They were the ones who looked as if they were in great pain. They sat bolt upright, or twisted handkerchiefs, and breathed funny. . . A little boy was playing the piano. There was a repeat and he forgot the ending. He repeated and repeated a bit more slowly each time trying to find the ending. Then Mrs. Trablik went to the piano, and as he came to the ending, played the last note with vigor. Her big smile made us all feel good and he and Mrs. Trablik got a big hand.”

It is my pleasure to make my home on land my parents bought from the Trabliks and to learn more about the neighborhood due to the efforts of the Mountain Brook Ladies Club and others. Although “Babblings from Mountain Brook” is out of print, the Mountain Brook Homestead Foundation maintains a web site at <http://sites.google.com/site/mtbrookhomesteadfoundation>.

Keith Hammer grew up hiking, skiing, camping, hunting, and fishing in the Swan Mountains. He has worked a number of jobs, from Forest Service trail worker to logger to backcountry guide, and currently works as an environmental consultant and head of the nonprofit Swan View Coalition. His column appears regularly in this paper and is archived at www.swanrange.org. Keith can be reached at 406-755-1379 or keith@swanview.org.



The old Mountain Brook schoolhouse is currently being restored by volunteers. Keith Hammer photo.