

BACK IN TIME

Beaver Creek School District 1898

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

In my story in the summer *Applegater* about attending first grade, the McKee School mentioned was actually Beaver Creek School. McKee School was an earlier school, on the other side of the river, that my mother and her brothers sometimes attended and was the first school building in the Beaver Creek School District.

By 1898 the census indicated that about 35 eligible students between the age of four and 20 lived in what is now the McKee Bridge area. Beaver Creek School District 82 was organized that year, and a building was constructed on government land that would become part of Deb McKee's homestead. (Deb was an older brother of my grandfather Amos.) The builders, Charles Pursel and Oliver Dews, used rough lumber from the Pursel Mill for the board-and-batten construction. The building had windows on two sides, and my mother thought a roofed porch was added later. There are no pictures of the entire building, just a photo with students standing along one wall.

The first teacher, in 1898-99, was Miss Daisy Walker. Later in 1899 Miss Kate Buckley of Ruch taught at the school. Her salary was \$30 per month. The school year consisted of two three-month terms: spring (March, April, and May) and fall (September, October,

and November). In summer, school was closed because most of the boys and girls had farm work to do, and in the winter, the weather was harsh enough to keep people home. Many times the boys would be young men by the time they graduated because they attended school only when they had time off from their chores. Girls sometimes didn't worry about graduating because they would be helping with their siblings or even starting their own families while only in their teens, such as my mother did.

The school clerk took a census every year, and county school funds were paid based on the number of pupils in each district. The 1898-99 count had family names like Lewis, Sargent, Pursel, Thomason, Silva, Carter, Dews, Buck, Creed, Bendick, and Kleinhammer.

There were 14 students for the September 4 through November 25, 1899, school term—quite a large class considering the transportation mode of the students. Students walked or rode horses, and, if a student lived on the opposite side of the river from the school, that student would most likely ride in the trolley.

The trolley was a wooden box suspended above the river by large cables from big trees or the highest rock outcrops. Students pulled themselves across with a pull rope. Then

the students waiting to cross next would pull the empty trolley back so they could get in the box and, of course, pull themselves over the river. One photo (top right) shows teacher Ina Stoker Pursel pulling a trolley to her near what was the Nick Wright crossing. The second photo (bottom right) shows Orpha Lewis, Aletha Buck, and teacher Maud Harr on their way across the Applegate River near the school and what is now the cement McKee Bridge.

In 1903 my great uncle Deb McKee settled on his homestead on the east side of the river. His children began going to the school with my mother, Pearl McKee Byrne, and her brothers, Floyd and Earnest. That the land the school was situated on belonged to the McKees and a large number of McKee children were going to the school are the most likely reasons the school building became known as the McKee School.

Some of this historical information was gathered from Marguerite Black's book, *Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley*, originally published in 1989.

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Trolley rides across the river. Photo, top: Ina Stoker Pursel, Beaver Creek school teacher, 1906-07. Photo, bottom, left to right: Orpha Lewis, Aletha Buck and teacher Maud Harr in trolley with others in the background waiting their turn.



School children at McKee School 1906.

Front row, left to right: Lulia McKee, Doris McKee, Fern Phillips, Ora Phillips, Vernie Stephenson, Homer Stephenson, Lenard McKee.
Middle row: Aletha Buck, Orpha Lewis, Lydia Lewis, Harold Bostwick.
Back row: Floyd McKee, Henry Bostwick, Fort McKee, Clarence Buck, teacher Maud Harr.

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