

"Eleven Months in The Big Bend" by Lillian Odum

Ed. Note—This is a continuation of the article which began in last week's paper by Miss Odum, teacher in the Big Bend section for the past eleven months. Last week the article closed at the place where she just entered the Bend, and was being left alone there just at dusk in a heavy rain.

No there was no looking back, or regretting the move I had made in coming into the Big Bend section to teach in the school and help the fourteen families to make life more pleasant and brighter for them.

After looking around into the faces of those bright eager eyed children I knew I wouldn't go back that I could not disappoint them.

I soon hunted around and found enough dry clothes to change in, then seated myself by the stove in the kitchen to warm, of course it was August, but remember I had been in a drenching rain all day when I hiked those long weary miles through the rain to become the teacher of the first school in the Big Bend section. For two nights while they were covering the room I slept in the room with the man and his wife, naturally I was a little self conscious, it being my first experience. I know that I was welcome in that home and I couldn't ask for people to treat me with more respect than this family did.

Sunday morning found us gathered at the school house for our first religious service. There was no one to sing, or lead in prayer it all fell upon my shoulders. We had a wonderful service but a very simple one.

Monday, August 27, was a glorious morning, even the little birds and flowers seemed to be happy because we had met in our new school building for the opening of our first school. There were about 50 people children and parents who came out for this great event. There were bright eager eyed children who had never been inside a school but this was the dawning of a new day for them. We opened school with several short talks and R. H. Gibson offered the first public prayer ever offered in this section so far as we know. When the American flag was held up not a child could tell us what it represented.

School moved along smoothly and the children made wonderful progress. All their work had to be done during school hours because they had no one to help them at home.

My boarding place was about 1 1/4 miles from the school building on the opposite side of the river, the only means of crossing being an old leaky boat, or jumping from rock to rock. More than once I slipped off into the water, but as luck would have it the water wasn't very deep. In November I moved into my own quarters which consist of nice kitchen, living and bed room, with a porch facing river. They are connected with the school building on north side. The addition was not only for the convenience of the teacher but for cooking and sewing quarters for the people of this section. Immediately we began to furnish hot lunches for the children and I wish you could have seen how much they enjoyed it. They knew nothing about thanking God for the blessings of the day. We soon learned a school prayer and it wasn't long before they all wanted to return thanks each day so we took the roll and checked off as it came each one's turn.

It was very hard to get provisions

The Big Bend School, Teacher and Pupils



This shows part of the pupils with their teacher, Miss Odum, standing on the steps of the school. Until last August not any of the children even knew what the American flag was. Only two or three of the grown-ups in the community could read last August.

in and if it had not been for Mr. Gibson who arranged to oversee the transportation of them, it would have been almost impossible, but he was a loyal supporter through it all, willing to make any sacrifice not only for the material benefit of the children, but for the spiritual as well.

Christmas came and no one had ever seen a Christmas tree, in fact, they didn't know the meaning of Christmas. So with the co-operation of the Community Club, Sunday school classes and various individuals in Waynesville we were able to give them a wonderful treat in the form of a Christmas tree. On Tuesday, Dec. 18, we had our tree. We were to start at eleven o'clock, but about nine the children along with their parents began to arrive and continued to arrive until practically every one in the Bend was here. Oh, how their eager eyes did sparkle as they looked upon their first Christmas tree.

Miss Ida Jean Brown, of Waynesville, sang several Christmas songs, which held the entire audience, even the smallest child spell bound and Mr. Homer Henry played the part of Santa. Oh what a joy to watch those children as Santa presented them with their gifts. The parents enjoyed the tree equally as well as the children and were just as enthusiastic about every thing. The things received on this tree was all the Christmas the children had.

When the snow was eight inches the children came over mountain trails 4 and 5 miles, arriving by nine o'clock, and some of them crossing the river on ice. One morning when the river was very high the children were crossing and instead of wearing the shoes they were carrying them so

they could jump the rocks better. Suddenly one of the boys fell into the river and lost his shoes and those of his sisters. Down the river the shoes floated and have never been seen since. None of the children had shoes to wear until the E. R. A. gave them some.

A number of the children made several grades and many of them can read and write as well as some who have attended school several years. Discipline was a very small matter, for they are unusually well behaved children, willing to do everything we ask them. This accounts to a great extent for the wonderful progress which has been made.

On April 23 we held our commencement exercises. This was the first time the children had every experienced anything like this, but they did fine, not one forgot his part.

The children are so anxious for school that they are continually asking when we will begin our next term. Never a day passes but what we find some of them at the school house and usually they spend several hours.

We have a garden containing about five acres which is worked by the children and their parents and we hope to produce enough vegetables to supply the lunch room next year.

In February we made a survey of the entire community for adult illiteracy and found 26 of which only 4 could read and write and none having passed the third grade. The question was asked, "Why did you not attend school?" and each gave the same answer, "There wasn't a school." Up until this time I taught, kept house and ran the lunch room for around 25 children. Mrs. J. Odum, of Fairmont, took charge of all this in February and during the 3 months which she taught great progress was made in reading, writing and homemaking. The school is used as a center for recreation, which was never known before. Each Saturday night finds many of the people gathered at the building to enjoy the radio.

This spring the steel on the old railroad was taken up and that left us no means of transportation other than packing on the backs and shoulders. The trail is now grown up and there is nothing but a small path, but I can hike to Mr. Sterling, get my mail and be back home by noon. At first the hiking was a little hard, but now it doesn't bother me at all. I hike at least 30 miles each week.

We wish to take this opportunity to extend thanks and appreciation to our county superintendent, Mr. Jack Messer, for his interest and wonderful co-operation in every thing. He has been a great enthusiast and a loyal supporter of all our plans from the very beginning. If it had not been for him we could never have accomplished many things which we have. We give thanks to the Rotary Club, Community Club, and to the various churches and their organizations. We also extend our thanks to the people of Canton and Clyde and to each individual who has helped us. We wish to thank Mr. Henry for his wonderful support and for his part in making it possible for us to have a school.

We cannot forget Mr. R. H. Gibson, better known to us as Bob Gibson, because it was through his efforts that we got the school, and it is to him we owe everything. Everyone here loves him and will give him their loyal support in all things. Up to date he has hiked approximately 380 miles in the interest of the school. He has gone through rain and snow

The Friend of Big Bend People



This is Robert H. Gibson who worked untiringly to establish a school in the Big Bend community, and it was through Mr. Gibson's efforts that Miss Odum was sent in to teach where no one had ever taught before. He is shown sitting on the push car that was used until recently to haul supplies into the Bend. The rails are now up, and via foot over crude trails remains the only method of getting into the community.

and made many sacrifices in order that these children might have a school and a few opportunities that other children have. The people realize what he has done for them and even the smallest child loves him. Very often you hear some one make the remark, "If it hadn't been for Bob we wouldn't have a school, no one else ever cared enough about us. We wanted a school, but had no one to help us." They learned that he is a Christian man with their interest at heart, and no one else can get the co-operation from them that he has. It is worth every effort that we have put forth just to see the change which has taken place in the lives of these children. We owe them every

advantage of school, because the children of today will be the citizens of tomorrow.

LILLIAN MAY ODUM,
Teacher in Big Bend.

MARRIAGE LICENSES

(As recorded to Monday of this week)

Mack V. Miller, of Waynesville, to Annette Chambers, of Clyde.

W. H. Watson to Elizabeth Sexton, both of Canton.

Two Mississippi Negroes Lynched

COLUMBUS, Miss., July 15.—Two negro farmers, Bob M. and Ray M. Mottson, were lynched early this morning by a mob of whites who wrested the bodies from Sheriff Park's hands in this county, and hung them to a tree.

The negroes were arrested after the attack on a white man who resided about a mile from a negro church, the lynching.

The mob was estimated about 35 men, some with automobiles, seized the two negroes and carried them away to a place of keeping.

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