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Interview with Fae Hickman Brockett

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Fae Hickman Brockett

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CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH FAE (HICKMAN) BROCKETT

At an early age Fae started helping with the children at family gatherings. She always enjoyed reading to them. This led Fae into the teaching field. After graduating from Lucas High School in 1922, she attended summer school at Fort Hays Kansas Normal School and received a one year teaching certificate. Fae was ready to begin her first teaching assignment.

Her first teaching position turned out to be a lonely one. It was at Sunrise School, located four miles west and three-fourths of a mile south of Lucas. She lived with the family of one of the board members. The woman spoke German and very little English, but she was so kind and good that it made up for being away from home. The children in the family had many chores to do in the evenings. Therefore, Fae found herself back at the schoolhouse grading papers in the evenings. This job lasted for one year.

Her next position took her closer to home. She was able to stay in Lucas with her sister and walked a mile and a half to Superior School. The people in this school were of German descent and very likable. People in the community knew Fae

was the school teacher at Superior, so they offered her rides to and from school whenever they saw her walking. In the 1920's, people were not afraid to give or receive rides.

After three years at Superior, Fae taught at Bluestem School. Fae and her brothers and sisters had attended Bluestem after moving to the Lucas area. For the next two years Fae was able to live with her parents and teach one half mile from her parents' home. This school consisted of Bohemians and Germans. Although Fae taught in three different schools in the 1920's, her teaching experiences were basically the same.

A typical day began with the building of a fire, if needed. The coal and wood was brought in the night before. Water also needed to be brought in for drinking and washing the students' faces, hands, and feet. The children came to school by walking, riding horses, or in carts pulled by horses, so they were often dirty when they arrived. The children would play until 9:00 when it was time for school to begin. School started with the morning exercise that consisted of a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Country schools usually had a flag and pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln hanging at the front of the room. The different subjects were taught until 10:30, followed by morning recess. The recess lasted for 15 minutes.

School resumed and subjects were taught until lunch time. The children brought their lunches in syrup pails that were left in the front hall on benches. If the weather was cold the syrup pails were placed around the stove. After lunch the children would play until 1:00, then the subjects were taught again. Another recess was at 2:45, followed by studying, until school was dismissed at 4:00. The children would then return home. Sometimes the parents would meet the younger children. The length of the school term was from seven to eight months.

Pump Pump Pull Away, Hide and Seek, Annie-Over, and baseball were some of the games the children played before school and during recesses. The older boys and some of the girls liked to play baseball. The baseball was made of rags and anything long and skinny was used for a bat. Fae was lucky that her students did not have any major injuries. There were a lot of scratches, so plenty of bandages and salve were handy. The bandages were made of clean cloth. During bad weather, spelling bees and math contests were held. Fae was sure these activities made her students better at their school work.

Extra curricular activities included a Christmas program and a big dinner with a program at the end of the year. There were books that the teacher could follow to help plan the

programs. Programs were very popular with the parents. It was not only a time to see their children perform but a time to visit with their neighbors. A box supper was a popular event at many country schools, but Fae never organized one in her schools.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic, the three R's, were the main subjects taught. Language, geography, and history were also taught. A subject many students enjoyed was geography. They studied maps of the continents and could locate many countries. Since traveling to visit relatives in other parts of the country was not commonly practiced, the students enjoyed locating on the map where their relatives lived. With practice the students became quite good at map skills.

Teaching grades one through eight was not a problem. It was the way it had been done when Fae went to school and she didn't know any different way of teaching. Fae taught all subjects with no other adult help. The older students would do their assignments while the younger students were being taught. Grading of the older students was done by having them do board work which Fae would grade. Special activities included "Specimens of School Work." These projects were done on Friday afternoons. The younger students would draw and do

art projects, while the older ones would have a spell down.

The ages of the students varied from five to fifteen. Some of the boys would help their fathers on the farm and not be able to attend all of the time. Therefore, some students might take two years to finish a grade. The eighth grade ended with an exam that was given in the county seat or the closest town. Fae remembered taking some of her students to the exam in Lucas. The exam was a comprehensive test over what they had been taught. The students were not required to take the test, but most did. Those who passed the exam had the option of going to the high school in Lucas.

The one-room school was the headquarters for the community. The parents of the students were very supportive and the rule was, a lickin' at school meant a lickin' at home. Because of strong parental support Fae had very few discipline problems. She was, and still is, a small person and her father worried about her having trouble with the older and larger boys. She never had to give a spanking, but she felt that perhaps the previous teacher had administered some spankings.

Russell County had a school superintendent with an office in the courthouse. Teachers could stop by the courthouse, visit with the superintendent, and discuss supply needs and concerns.

Usually once a year the superintendent would make an unannounced visit to the schoolhouse. This was one form of evaluation, but the primary evaluation came from the school board. The board was made up of three farmers in the school community. They were in charge of the hiring and firing of the teacher. They also made unannounced visits, and recommended any corrections they felt were needed. Fae's salary was one of the highest paid for that area. She received a salary of \$70.00 a month that was hand delivered by one of the school board members. There was not a written code of moral ethics, but it was expected that the teachers had high morals. Fae was sure that some teachers morality was checked by the school board members.

Each summer Fae returned to Fort Hays Kansas Normal School to renew her certificate. There were certain requirements mainly dealing with the three R's. The college classes explained what to teach and how to teach. By attending summer sessions she soon had a life-time certificate. Life-time certificates encouraged many teachers to stay in the field of teaching. Graduates of eighth grade could take an exam that would enable them to teach school, but most finished high school and went on to summer school at a college.

While teaching at Bluestem School, Fae was to have twin boys in her first grade group. They were identical twins, so naturally Fae was concerned about telling them apart. The mother informed Fae that one of the boys had a scar on his temple, so there would be no trouble telling them apart. Just before the school term started, the mother informed Fae that the other boy had fallen against the stove and now had a scar on his temple. Since Fae was unable to tell the boys apart, she would call one of their names and look down when asking the boys to recite. The boys had strict orders from their mother not to answer each others questions. They never tried to confuse Fae, but later in life they did let Fae know that they were aware she couldn't tell them apart. Both boys understood English, but German was spoken in the home because of their grandmother. The boys were fast learners and quickly picked up the English language.

Fae married in 1928, and she felt her teaching career was over. Twenty years later, when her daughters were in college she was asked to return to teaching. Her teaching assignment was at Surprise School, a one-room schoolhouse located south of Lincoln, Kansas. She drove to school everyday, but a lady who lived across from the school offered her a place to stay

whenever she needed it. Fae felt her teaching methods in the 1950's were no different than the methods she had used in the 1920's.

Surprise School was not close to a town and the people in the area were of many different cultures. Although the parents still supported the teacher, they were not a close community. They did not get together for social events. The school district eventually built a new school building in the community. This building had a basement which allowed space and opportunity for the people to sponsor programs and social events. Fae held several programs with the help of one of the ladies in the community. Carry-in suppers and funeral dinners were held in the basement.

Fae shared several incidents that occurred while she was teaching. One day a boy came up to Fae and informed her that a snake was under his desk. The class and Fae were not alarmed. They were use to animals wandering into the classroom. Chickens and baby calves were a common sight. Fae dismissed the class and when they returned the snake was gone.

The incident that caused Fae to leave Surprise School for another position involved a farmer and the court. The farmer's wife died and left him with three children. He remarried and his

new wife also had three children. Instead of letting some of the children go to school, he made them work. One of the girls ran away to attend school, but the farmer brought her home. People in the community were concerned about what the farmer was doing, and it wasn't long before the authorities removed the children from the home. Fae had to appear in court concerning the case. From that time on she feared the farmer and decided to leave for another teaching position.

Denmark School was her next position. This school had two teachers. One teacher taught grades one through four and the other taught grades five through eight. This made the experience different from the one-room schools. There were sliding doors between the two classrooms that could be opened for programs. There was also a basement with inside toilets. The families in this community were of Danish descent and worked well together.

4-H was very important in this Danish community. The 4-H club had a square dancing group that usually did well at the Sylvan Grove Fair. They would practice at school during the noon hour or after school. Her students also learned to play recorders and formed a band. They played music that Fae had copied for them. This band became part of a 4-H project.

Fae taught at the Denmark School for three years. She attended Marymount during this time and earned her teaching degree in 1959. Receiving her teaching degree made her very proud.

Teaching in the 1950's compared to the 1920's was not much different. The subjects taught were the same and there was still no adult help with the subjects. Once in awhile, Fae did have student teachers from Kansas State. Fae was paid to have these student teachers. She would let them choose what subject area or grade they wanted to teach. The school board was still made up of three members. They would come once a year to check on Fae's teaching. Some years they didn't visit at all. The county superintendent's office was located at the courthouse in Lincoln, Kansas. The superintendent gave Fae an outline of what goals she was supposed to accomplish. The outline included what to do in case of a tornado or a fire. Fire drills were to be held monthly. At the Surprise School they were told to go to the grader ditch in case of a tornado.

Fae ended her teaching career at Franklin Elementary School in Junction City, Kansas. She was one of three second grade teachers. She drove from Lincoln to Junction City every week and stayed in Junction City during the week. The principal,

Mr. Sloan, had met her when she was teaching in Minneapolis, Kansas. He later asked her to come to Junction City and teach in his building.

Although having a principal was one of the biggest differences in teaching in a town school, Fae liked working for Mr. Sloan. Other differences were having a music teacher and a health teacher. Children of soldiers at Fort Riley attended Franklin Elementary. When it was time for Christmas break many of these students would leave and a new group would enroll after Christmas. Dealing with the paper work for these students was very different from the one-room school. There was some competition between teachers. The school building had a gym, a secretary, and a method of making carbon copies of papers. After teaching for ten years in Junction City, Fae retired in 1970, at the age of 67.

CHAPTER III: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fae (Hickman) Brockett was born March 13, 1903, to Joseph and Ella Hickman. They lived near the Saline River in Lincoln County. Her father managed the Lambert Ranch and her family lived in a big house on the property. She attended Gorge School in Lincoln County with her two brothers and four sisters. Fae had saved some of the "Specimens of School Work" her classmates and family completed at Gorge School.

In 1913, her family moved to the Lucas area where her father bought some farm land and raised wheat. The children in her family attended Bluestem School that was only a half mile from the farmhouse. After completing eighth grade, she attended Lucas High School and graduated in 1922.

After high school graduation, Fae attended summer school at Fort Hays Kansas Normal School to obtain a teaching certificate. One summer was all that was required to be able to teach for one year. She started her teaching career at Sunrise School three miles west and three fourths of a mile south of Lucas. After a year of teaching, she moved closer to Lucas and taught three years at Superior School located only one and a half

miles from Lucas. Her last teaching job in the 1920's was at Bluestem School, the school she had attended as a student. Teaching at Bluestem enabled her to live with her family whose farmhouse was only a half mile from the school. She taught there for two years.

Each summer Fae and other teachers from the area would return to Fort Hays Kansas Normal School to renew their certificates. They would drive to Wilson and board the train to Hays. In Hays she lived with a friend and attended classes. Both men and women attended classes to renew their certificates. Fae remembers a group of men and women getting together to study and help each other with their schoolwork. They would meet by a lamp post near the old junior high and discuss their classes. Fae enjoyed the classes but they were hard work. She also enjoyed the camaraderie between the men and women teachers. Many of them would attend dances together, but not as dates.

In 1928, Fae married Lewis Brockett. Her teaching career was over, because at that time married women could not teach. They made their home in Lincoln, Kansas where Lewis worked in the Lincoln State Bank. Their two daughters were Patricia, born on January 25, 1933, and Joleen, born on September 29, 1934.

Even though Fae wasn't teaching she was not idle. During the war Fae worked at the print shop. She also worked at the Lincoln State Bank. Fae collected and compiled the census for Lincoln County. Both girls thought they must have had their foot in every house in the county. When the girls were older they took on some of the responsibility of collecting information for the census.

When Fae's girls were in grade school, Fae became a girl scout leader. She held the meetings after school. Fae made sure the girls went to camp in Beloit and arranged for them to have swimming lessons while they were there.

In 1954, when the girls were in college, Fae went back to teaching. She taught in Surprise School a one-room schoolhouse south of Lincoln for three years. She also taught in Denmark School for three years. While teaching at Denmark School she worked on completing her teaching degree. She held a life-time certificate but she wanted to improve herself. She graduated from Marymount in 1959 at the age of 56. She felt very proud but sometimes embarrassed about being so old and in college.

After leaving Denmark School, she taught one year in Lincoln, Kansas and one year in Minneapolis, Kansas. Mr. Sloan was her principal in Minneapolis. After he left Minneapolis for

Junction City, Kansas, he asked Fae to come and teach second grade. The wages were better so this was where Fae finished her teaching career. During this time she drove to Junction City on Sundays and return to Lincoln on Fridays. She and her husband, Lewis, would talk on the phone every Wednesday night. Sometimes on Fridays, Lewis would met her in Salina and they would see a show and go out to dinner. She remembered that was where she first saw "Gone With the Wind". Once in a while they drove to Kansas City for the weekend.

Both of Fae's daughters went into the teaching field. When Patricia was teaching in Natoma and Joleen was teaching at Abilene, the three of them attended a teaching meeting together. At the meeting Fae was honored for being a mother with two daughters present.

Fae retired in 1970. At the age of 93 she still has a love for teaching. Lewis and Fae's home was destroyed by fire in 1987. After the loss of their home, they chose to move into the highrise apartments in Lincoln, Kansas. Lewis died in June of 1992. Fae still enjoys playing bridge and talking about teaching with anyone who is willing to listen.

Fae has five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. She feels that television has ruined the education of children.

Fae also feels the children of today do not read or do math facts as well as they did in the one-room school setting. Fae's great-granddaughter who lives with her parents in Hastings, Nebraska, will be trying something that is new to her but not new to Fae. Her great-granddaughter will be a student in a school that will be trying a one-room school concept. Fae feels that her great-granddaughters's education will be more diverse.