



## REDISCOVERING SOD-HOUSE DAYS

# OSBORNE COUNTY HISTORICAL MARKER

### SITE OF LITTLE STONY, or HILLSVIEW SCHOOL, DISTRICT #33



*Little Stony School.*

#### The Story of Little Stony. An Old Rural Schoolhouse—Written by Howard H. Ruede

"School District 33, Kill Creek Township, is one of the oldest in the county, having been organized July 23, 1873, when John T. Saxton was county superintendent, but did not have a permanent schoolhouse until several years later. The first school was taught in a dugout on the Bailey Taylor place, across the road east of the present schoolhouse. Miss Sarepta Barnes was the teacher, and she had a summer term in the year 1874. That winter school was kept in a half log dugout on the Cavitt place, about three-quarters of a mile as straight south of the Taylor place, on the west side of the road. Maria Hughes was the teacher. Mrs. Emily Hall, [later] Mrs. Henry Rook of Kearney County, had the summer term in 1875, in the same dugout. In the winter of that year Miss LeNette Hart [later Mrs. Frank Stafford] instructed the rising generation.

[LeNette later told that] the dugout was in the bank of the draw, and faced south. It had four courses of logs above the surface and was furnished with a log chimney that, during the last week of school, took fire inside, and the water she had to throw up the chimney didn't put it out. The fire ate its way slowly in the chimney till it reached the hay with which the rafters were covered (under the sod roof) and the whole thing was destroyed, including the homemade furniture and the books. The fire occurred one night when the pupils from the Wineland District, taught by Wilmer Eckman, had a spelling match with [School District] 33 at Joseph Hall's because Hall's house was bigger than the schoolhouse, but there was no sign of fire when the Wineland School went home, some time about midnight. That

night old Charlie Cook spelled down the school. Imagine if you can what it meant to try to teach school in a room 10 feet square, with 20 pupils and a varied assortment of text books, and you can get a faint idea of what the teachers in those days had to contend with.

The folks got tired of having school here, there and anywhere, and in the spring of 1878 they held a meeting in George Lough's dugout . . . to devise ways and means for putting up a permanent schoolhouse. The dugout was about 14x16 feet inside, all underground except two feet, and into it came some 20 of the male voters of the district - August Hackerott, Bailey Taylor, Fred V. Heberlein, Henry A. Hoot, Herman Ruede, Sam Hoot, Richard Benwell, and others whose names escape me just now. The place was pretty well filled, you may believe, when you know George and his family lived there, and the furniture was all there, too, so the crowd hadn't much place to spread out. Those who could find them took chairs; the others sat on the beds or stood up. It might have been considered an informal meeting, seeing that the remarks were not confined to the discussion of the matter for which the meeting had been called, but too strict adherence to Parliamentary rules in those days tended to "muzzle" men and prevent them from expressing themselves freely, so the chairman gave them all possible latitude. Seeing that it was impossible to get enough money by issuing bonds to build a frame house, it was decided to build of stone, which might be had for the quarrying and hauling, involving only an outlay of time, and time was not considered very precious just then. Volunteer work was pledged to the amount of 81 days, which or all thought would be ample to get out the rock and deliver it or on the building site. Probably it would if the work had gone through "with a whoop and a hurrah," but as things turned out the volunteer work had all been done by the time the walls were up to the window seats and the rest had to be hired.

A site for the house was offered by Bailey Taylor . . . but he wanted to give the land [located] a short distance east of the section corner, in a deep draw. Sam Hoot objected to the proposition, alleging that *'the muskeeters is so bad in them draws,'* and though the others did not endorse his sentiments in similar language it was deemed best to accept Dick Benwell's offer to give the use of the land so long as it remained the schoolhouse site, and there the location was made. August Hackerott, Fred Heberlein and Herman Ruede, the three oldest and therefore supposed to be wisest men in the district, were appointed a building committee and had charge through all the time the house was in the course of construction - nearly two years. In 1878-1879 the school building was built of rock and was called Little Stony. It was found later that bonds would have to be issued to the get money for lumber for floor, window frames, etc., and election was held which resulted in a unanimous vote for the big bonds. So to Osborne the school board went to sign the pro bonds, thinking everything was lovely, only to be confronted with the information that the election was illegal and another would have to be held. The amount of bonds voted was \$206, which was twice as much as the law permitted, seeing there were only 240 acres of taxable land in the district and the amount of bonds was proportioned to the taxable real estate. The second election was for bonds to the amount of \$103 and for there was not a dissenting vote. This time the money was forthcoming and was invested as proposed, but as the lumber was hauled from Russell in the fall when the people hauled their wheat to market, it had to be piled up on the lot alongside of the building, which it was hoped to finish shortly. Some person who feared not the law and took his chances on being caught removed the whole pile of flooring one night, and was though suspicion pointed strongly in a certain direction there was no proof. The district had to buy another floor, with which was not hauled out till the house was ready for it, and being so crippled by the theft of the lumber that it could not buy joists to put under the floor a levy was made on residents who owned timber along the creek for oak and elm trees eight inches in diameter. A day was set and the tree trunks brought to the house, where Caleb Weiney, Wils Garman and George Lough with broadaxes faced them and a gang of helpers put them in place and nailed down the floor.

John Rupert taught the first term in the new house from New Year to the end of March, 1880, before the house had been plastered. He labored under great difficulties, getting \$20 a month and boarding himself; his home was only a hundred rods or so from the school. He had 26 pupils and 27 classes. Each pupil had a different textbook. Uniformity of the textbooks was a scheme that had not yet been evolved. That winter the teacher occupied a chair at one end of the room and the pupils sat on boxes and homemade benches ranged along the sides. Each family sending children had to furnish seats for their own youngsters. In the middle of the floor stood the wood burning heating stove loaned by the teacher to the district during the term, and by the door was a soap box on which the water pail sat. Seats for the house were bought on time and put in in the fall of 1880.

When the new frame school building was built in December 1917, it was renamed Hillsview School.

On March 1, 1947, School District 33, Hillsview School, was disorganized and the territory was made part of Reorganized School Districts R-7, Fairwest School, and R-2, Mayview School. These orders of Disorganization and Reorganization were made by the Osborne County School Reorganization Committee.

Cap Nauman bought the frame schoolhouse and moved it approximately four miles south of the old school site to his farm for a storage building.



*Hillsview School*

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IN MEMORY OF THE PEOPLE AND PLACES DEPICTED  
IN THE CLASSIC AMERICAN BOOK

*SOD-HOUSE DAYS: LETTERS OF A KANSAS HOMESTEADER 1877-1878*  
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