

Reminiscence

by Marilyn Roberts, Grand Prairie, Texas

Living at the "Old Hotel"
1953-1954

My husband and I lived in the right side of this house [Old Stagecoach Stop] from July 1953 to March 1954 for a period of about eight months. He was stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, in the Army. When we lived there, there was one big room with a big antique bed that went all the way to the ceiling and one small room with a half or 3/4 bed in it. It was fully furnished with antique furniture. The beds were made of hay or straw mattresses.



John Roberts on the porch of the Old Stagecoach Stop. Courtesy of Marilyn Roberts.

The kitchen was very small with no sink and no running water. We used apple crates for cabinets that had been converted into cabinets. They were fixed where the door let down and had a stick under it and that is what we used as a door for the cabinet and also for a table. We used folding chairs, also furnished. We had a small ice box. It only held a twelve pound block of ice. The top of the ice box was used as a wash basin.

We had a two burner kerosene stove for cooking, no oven, and no air conditioning. We heated with a kerosene stove. Utilities were furnished.

There was a pump outside to pump water and one shower outside in a building. Everyone used the same shower. The toilet was flushable about like a campsite toilet. Everyone went outside to the toilet. There were several toilets in little buildings. There was a drain outside the kitchen door to pour dishwater down. Much to my surprise when I found out it was once a stage coach stop.

When we lived there, there were three couples downstairs and three

upstairs, all in the army. I think the middle apartments were smaller than ours. Only one bedroom.

The building did not have a name at that time. It was just an apartment house with all army couples living there. We paid approximately \$40.00 per month rent for the three rooms furnished.

My husband and I shared the apartment with Weldon and Helen Bailey because we could not afford the rent unless we shared. Both couples were from Malvern, Arkansas and our husbands were drafted into the army.

Helen and I took turns sleeping in the bedrooms. Our husbands were only allowed to come home from the base on weekends. So, every other weekend, we would switch bedrooms. The reason being, the front bedroom had a full size big bed in it with a big antique bed and the middle bedroom had a very small half bed.

We had no running water and we went out to an outdoor toilet. We would wash our husbands uniforms in a tub on a rub board in the backyard and hang them on the line to dry. We rode the bus to the army base at Fort Leonard Wood for 25 cents to take them the uniforms when we finished ironing them.



Marilyn Roberts, pregnant with son Steve, in the backyard of OSS. Courtesy of Marilyn Roberts.

There used to be a USO on the other side of the square. We went there almost every night. They always had food there and they would show movies once or twice a week and you could play board games. Since we were living on a very meager wage, it helped us out.

Helen and I used to sleep late so we wouldn't be hungry, then we would go to the drugstore on the other side of the square, directly across from the apartment, and order an order of toast and split it. I think



City Drug Store on the west side of Waynesville square, 1950s. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

the toast cost 15 cents. Sometimes we would get together with the other wives at the apartment and each cook a dish and put it together for a pot luck dinner. I will never forget, I cooked black-eyed peas because they were the cheapest thing I could fix. There was a girl upstairs from Pennsylvania and she made fun of me for it and said they feed them to the hogs in Pennsylvania. She also made fun of me for being from Arkansas. I was 18 years old at the time.

I got pregnant while we lived there. So my son, Steve, was conceived there. I worked at the Army store at the edge of town until I was seven months pregnant, then my husband got transferred to West Point, N.Y. and my son was born there at the Academy hospital in August of 1954.

I passed out one day walking across to the drugstore and when I came to, I was in the feed store next to the drugstore [Dodd's General Store] laying on a sack of feed. They had poured cold water on my face to bring me to.

Another memory I have is my salary at the Army Store. I worked eight hours a day, six days a week, and cleared \$27.56 a week. Back then that was a lot of money, at least to us it was.

Before I went to work at the Army Store, I baby sat at the [Methodist] Church, just off the square, with about 25 kids at a time. It was mostly the Captains' and upper classmen's wives who wanted to have time to do other stuff. It was quite a challenge to try to keep up with that many kids. I kept them on the playground of the church. I got 25 cents for the first kid in a family and 15 cents for each additional kid in one family. That was for all day of baby sitting.

One day I locked my keys in my car in front of the apartment. I had already put my purse in the car and all my identification was in it. I

couldn't get the car opened so I borrowed a hammer from one of the girls who lived in the apartment and broke the window to get in. Just as I started to break the window, the police came and tried to arrest me. I was just a kid and forgot about the police department being in the building in the middle of the square. All the girls who lived in the apartment came out and told the police that was my car and my purse was in the car. They didn't listen to a word we had to say. They were going to arrest me for breaking and entering. They took me to the court house in the middle of the square and there I found a clerk who had watched Helen and I cross the courthouse lawn every day from that apartment, going to the drugstore and she told them I lived there and that was my car so they didn't charge me. I was so scared because I had never been in any trouble before.



Waynesville 1950s USO next door to Tut's Cafe. Picture courtesy of the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation.