



## BROWN RETIRING AT BAXTER

By Sherry Billingsley Jones: Herald-Citizen Staff  
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When Arnold Lester Brown became principal of Upperman High in Baxter, he had one request.

That request was that they put another exit in the principal's office. "I didn't want to get hemmed up in there," he laughed.

He leaned back in his office chair that someone else will soon sit in – in his office with the two exits – and talked about the beginning of his teaching career.

Brown had always thought he would want to teach, and after returning from the service in 1943, he accepted a teaching position at Martin's Creek in a one-room school house with 32 students ranging in ages from five to 17.

He had never taught and wasn't even certified to teach.

But that first year launched a 37-year career that has just ended for Arnold Brown, principle at Upperman High.

Tuesday he sat in his office clearing away tons of memories.

"I remember that first day, I was only 22. They (students) were afraid and so was I," he laughed.

"I made \$87 a month and did everything from teaching to sweeping the floors, if I couldn't get the girls to."

The year went smoothly and Brown no longer thought he wanted to teach – he "knew" he did. So he enrolled at Tennessee Tech and received a B. S. in history with a teaching certification.

"At that time I decided I wanted to teach at Baxter Seminary, so I set my sights."

Brown was the son of a sharecropper and grew up "working the land" in the Gentry community. He and his four brothers worked the fields while his mother and three sisters kept the household running.

"Dad worked for a dollar a day cutting wheat or working hay. Mother would sell eggs to buy what food we couldn't grow. Times were hard.

"We ordered a radio from Sears and Roebuck in 1938. We'd listen to the fights or Amos and Andy and the Lone Ranger.

"We had a radio before that, come to think of it, that operated on the car battery. We found you could pour water on the ground wire and it would play a little longer," he laughed.

He remembers the days when a dozen eggs cost five cents and a 24 pound bag of flour costs 50 cents.

He also remembers wash day.

"We'd carry water from the spring, heat it and then wash on an old rub board or take the clothes to the spring and carry them back wet. I didn't mind," he added.

"Mother would have to wash every day because we'd have to wear the same clothes to school the next day."

In 1943 after graduation from Baxter Seminary, he got drafted into WWII and for the next 27 months stayed homesick for Tennessee while he was stationed in California.

“I was just homesick – for home.”

When the war ended, Brown returned to his beloved Tennessee and back to his parent’s farm. He soon accepted the teaching position at Martin’s Creek.

Brown recalled that he always liked school and remembers two teachers who influenced him strongly to teach.

“Mrs. Lean Plunkett and Miss Ethel Hill were good teachers. They were kind, concerned and made you want to learn. That’s what makes a teacher good,” he smiled. He styled his own teaching after Miss Hill’s.

After graduating from Tennessee Tech, he landed a full-time teaching position at Baxter Seminary in history and math.

In the next ten years at the Seminary, Brown would marry the school secretary and have three daughters.

“I remember when I first saw my wife, I thought she was pretty and that I didn’t have a chance – but I did,” he laughed.

“We lived in the boys’ dormitory where we had all three of our daughters. The boys just loved those babies, and they were the best baby sitters,” he smiled.

In 1959 Baxter Seminary ceased to be a boarding school and Browns stayed on in the dormitory until 1963.

Brown remembers his early teaching years and what his students labeled as his teaching style.

“They call it bird walking now,” he smiled. “They claimed they could get me off the subject and talk about something else, and I guess I’m guilty.

“But I always tried to work it into the lesson somehow, and since everyone participated in getting me off the subject, I tried to keep the participation once we got back on the subject.”

Brown recalled one of the funniest answers a student ever gave him in a history class.

“We were studying mugwamps, and I asked a student for a definition, and he told me it was a bird sitting on a fence with his mug on one side and his wamp on the other.

“To this day I don’t know if he actually thought that is what it was,” he smiled.

In 1962 Brown accepted the position of principal and worked in that capacity until he retired this year.

“I miss the classroom and the close association with the students, but after I became principle, the students could always come in and be recognized.

“Sometimes it would be rather embarrassing. The students would just come on in without knocking. My secretary would try to catch them.”

As Brown leaned back in his chair, he observed some of the changes the past 37 years had brought.

“They say it (teaching) is worse now. The kids’ attention span is not as long. They have so many things to keep them from studying. We used to because we had nothing else to do.

“And it is harder to discipline the kids. Now when you discipline the children, you have to answer to someone. Even the parents side with the children. The kids just don’t seem to accept authority anymore.

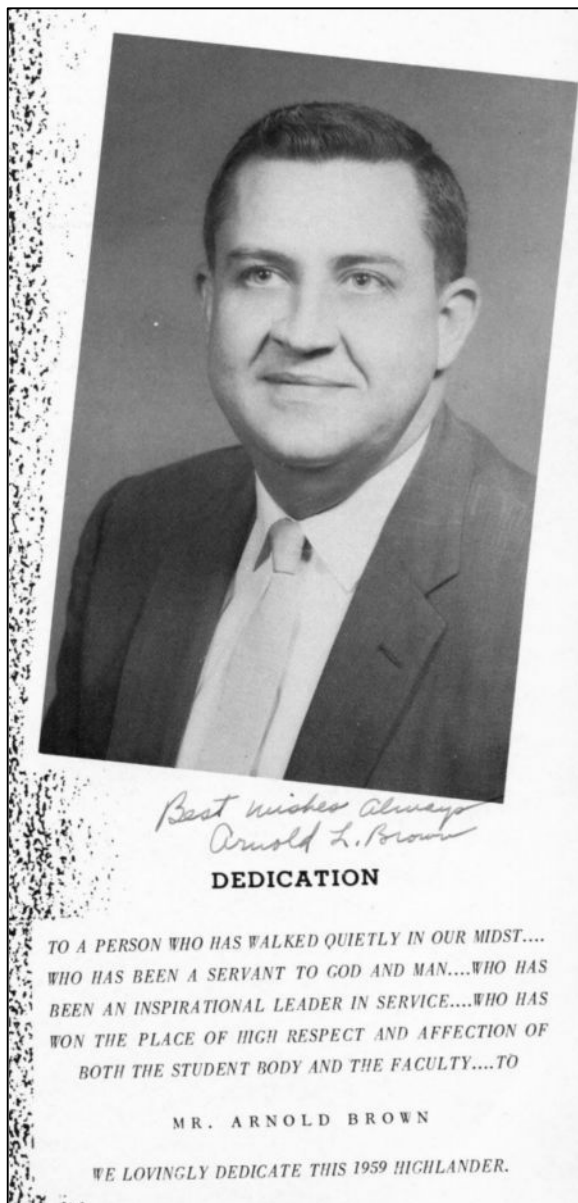
“The parents want them to have more than they had and I guess I’m guilty of it to. But I don’t think it is necessarily good.”

At 62, Arnold Brown is looking forward to the change of retirement.

“I’ve always said I’d retire when I was old enough, yet young enough to do some things I’ve always wanted to do.”

Brown’s list of things to do include going back to California, spending time with his family, especially his five grandchildren, traveling and church work.

“I’ll miss school, but I don’t want to hold one, and I hope I don’t come back sticking my two cents in. But I’ll always be glad to help.”



The Highlander Yearbook, Baxter Seminary, Putnam Co., TN, 1959.



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Arnold Lester Brown Obit.



Funeral services for Arnold Lester Brown, 66, of Baxter, were conducted from the Baxter Church of Christ, Tuesday, March 26, with Bro. Johnny Hester, Bro. Thomas D. Compton and Bro. Glendon W. Cantrell Sr. officiating. Burial was in Crest Lawn Memorial Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN.

*Arnold Lester Brown's senior picture from the Baxter Seminary yearbook, 1943.*

Mr. Brown died Sunday, March 24, at Cookeville General Hospital. A native of Putnam County, he was born April 12, 1924, to the late Ethel and Avo Boyd Brown. He was a retired school teacher with the Putnam County Board of Education and served as principal of Upperman High School in Baxter from 1962 to 1986. He was a member of the Baxter Church of Christ where he served as an elder for many years. An U.S. Army veteran of World War II, he was a past mayor of Baxter, member of the Baxter Board of Alderman and a member of the Putnam County Retired Teacher Association.

Survivors include his wife, Gertrude Mitchell Brown of Baxter; three daughters, Sharon Sliger and Janell Dyer, both of Cookeville, and Janet Dyer of Baxter; three sisters, Eva McReynolds of Cookeville, Faye Boles of Kansas and Patricia Clark of Florida; three brothers, Freeman and Earl Brown, both of Baxter, and Lehman Brown of Columbus, GA; and six grandchildren.

Active pallbearers were L. B. Johnson, Frank Medley, Troy Phillips, Raymond Nash, Ray Presley, Danny Armistead and Robert A. Shanks. Honorary pallbearers were Lawrence Richardson, Junior Maxwell, Arthur Thompson, Robert Thompson, James Stafford and Kenneth Massa.

Baxter Funeral Home was in charge.

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