

Fort Hays State University

FHSU Scholars Repository

College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse
Oral Histories

Archives Online

July 2021

Interview with Bonnie Nelson

Glen Davis

Fort Hays State University

Bonnie Dee Gustafson Nelson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors>

Content Disclaimer

The primary source materials contained in the Fort Hays State University Special Collections and Archives have been placed there for research purposes, preservation of the historical record, and as reflections of a past belonging to all members of society. Because this material reflects the expressions of an ongoing culture, some items in the collections may be sensitive in nature and may not represent the attitudes, beliefs, or ideas of their creators, persons named in the collections, or the position of Fort Hays State University.

Recommended Citation

Davis, Glen and Nelson, Bonnie Dee Gustafson, "Interview with Bonnie Nelson" (2021). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 1.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/1>

This Audio Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives Online at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

AN ORAL HISTORY OF

BONNIE DEE (GUSTAFSON) NELSON

AS RECORDED BY GLEN DAVIS

for

HISTORY OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

Glen What years did you teach in a one room school?

Bonnie 1936 and 37

Glen Two years, and do you remember what your pay was?

Bonnie Seventy dollars a month.

Glen Seventy dollars a month.

Bonnie That was considered a pretty good salary at the time.

Glen What school was this?

Bonnie It was Eagle College and it was located , the building is still there, its a grain bin now. It is seven miles east of Geneseo. The technical name was Eagle College, but it was always given the name, the foul name of Buzzards Roost.

Glen I remember talking to Roxie about that. Okay, when you taught there how did you start the day.

Bonnie Oh the flag salute every day, Lords Prayer, and then I was the music teacher also and they sang songs, and so forth.

Glen In cases of dicipline problems, what type of punishment

did you administer.

Bonnie . Mostly staying in after school. They couldn't stay in during recess because I had to be outside to supervise the playground. After school worked best because most of the children walked together and they hated to miss out on walking home with their friends. I didn't ever spank a child.

Glen How did you get your paycheck?

Bonnie This is something that bothered me. I had to go to one of the board members homes and pick up my check since they lived on my way home. I thought they could of brought it to me.

Glen Did you ever meet with the school board?

Bonnie I saw the board at social functions occasionally but never met with them collectively.

Glen What about your teaching supplies?

Bonnie I never had any trouble at all. Anything I wanted the board would let me get. I would go to Salina and pick out what I wanted and they never rejected anything. Anything I wanted for Art, I taught Art, I wasn't the best Art teacher in the world, thats for sure, but anyway anything I wanted, music or whatever.

Glen How much education did you have prior to teaching in this school?

Bonnie I had two years from Emporia State. I had a life certificate at that time.

Glen Where did you stay while you were teaching?

Bonnie At home. The school was only about seven or eight miles from my parents home so I stayed at home with them. I drove my dad's car back and forth.

Glen Describe the average school day.

Bonnie We always started at nine in the morning and we had opening exercises like I already explained, flag salute, Lord's Prayer, and usually sang. I then started going successively from grade to grade and we had a little recitation bench at the front of the school house and the teachers desk was up there. I would call a class like the first graders up there and we would have reading. Then I would go up to the next grade. I didn't have every grade that year, as I remember I had first and second graders, and seventh and eighth graders. I do remember I had seventeen students all together. It was some of the middle grades that I didn't have. After reading it was time for recess of fifteen minutes and the teacher always went onto the playground because the board asked us to. We went out to play ball, blackman.....

Glen What is Blackman?

Bonnie Oh it is a game where by you have a base on each end of the playground. Some one was it and they ran one base to the other trying to pat them on the back. Once touched on the back they were caught. Whoever was caught last then they were it.

Glen Did you have a piano in the school?

Bonnie Oh yes. In the afternoon we just followed along with our studies. Friday afternoons were always a special time. A time for fun. We would have little programs, read some poems, we would have arithmetic matches, spelling matches, and sometimes music. We liked to sing. We had quite a bit of music and they liked that because they hadn't had music much in the past. They liked music and I loved it so we got along fine.

Glen What type of textbooks did you use?

Bonnie The old Stone Arithmetic for sure. I wasn't exactly comfortable with arithmetic. I really worked on that. I would see that every night before I went to school the next day that I could work every problem of the seventh and eighth grade. I could usually get it, but I was so scared those seventh and eighth graders were going to catch me. I really kept up on those math problems.

Glen Was the school house used for community and social activities as well as education.

Bonnie It hadn't been because there wasn't a PTA so to speak. But there was another neighboring school about three miles away in Rice county. This Eagle College was in Ellsworth County. I went over after school to the neighboring school and talked to the teacher from over there, and asked her what she thought of the idea of organizing a community meeting or PTA and have meetings during the year. We did that, and one month her school was in charge of the program, not the students but the young people of her community. There were a lot of young men and women and high school kids in the area. They would do a one act play, sing songs, dancing etc. This is how I met my husband. He lived in that other community. One month Lois Crabb, the other teacher, had a one act play. I was a negro nanny and my husband to be was a negro parson. This is how we met and I was supposed to wash clothes, and he was always running around with other women, and to keep him home I washed clothes and we had real water in the play. It went over pretty good. The young people after play practice would go to Little River, or Geneseo of someplace for a hamburger. At Christmas time we would always have a Christmas program. Every month my poor mother would bake a cake and all the ones who had birthdays that month would be honored, and my poor mother baked all the cakes for all the kids all year long and the kids loved it.

Glen Was the County line the boundary ?

Bonnie Yes, at that time we had a county superintendent and Mr. Shannon was my county superintendent and of all the schools in Ellsworth County were under his jurisdiction. Every so often he would come out and visit each rural school and the same was true for other counties.

Glen What was the usual age a child began school?

Bonnie About six.

Glen What was the length of the school year?

Bonnie Eight months. We began in September and were out in April. And we always had those tests to look forward to at the end of the year. Usually on a Saturday the eighth graders had to go to Ellsworth, the county seat and take tests, and they had to be able to pass them in order to get into high school. So we worked hard on reading, writing and arithmetic so they could pass the test. I never had anyone not pass it but believe me I worried about that.

Glen Do you know how the school was financed?

Bonnie Taxes on the township, I think.

Glen Were you given any moral standards that you had to abide by as a teacher?

Bonnie The board never discussed that with me.

Glen Was there a high teacher turnover?

Bonnie Oh it varried. If they were from the area they stayed longer than if they were furs away from the area. I stayed one year and the Langley a neighboring two room school asked me to come teach there. The board asked me to teach the lower elementary room and music in both rooms.

Glen Where do you suppose it got the name Eagle College?

Bonnie I don't know. I got a buzz out of sending letters to college friends on stationery I had printed that said Eagle College, Bonnie Dee Gustafson, teacher.

Glen Who hired the teachers?

Bonnie The board of education. The county superintendent was aware , but the board did the hiring.

Glen What were some of the physical problems of the building?

Bonnie The building was heated by a coal stove and there was a coal shed outside. I gave the kids points for getting the coal, cleaning the stove, washing the boards, and dusting the chalk out of the erasers. I had no trouble getting jobs done.

Glen Do you have any idea when the school was built.

Bonnie I really don't. It was an old building when I was there.

Glen Was it a frame or stone building?

Bonnie Frame.

Glen Did it have a bell on top?

Bonnie No, but my two room school, Langley did have a bell.

Glen Who owned the school?

Bonnie I think there was a law that certain land was going to the boards for the school.

Glen What was the oldest child in your classroom?

Bonnie Thirteen or Fourteen.

Glen How far did students live from school?

Bonnie They usually walked around three miles.

Glen What kind of grading system did you use?

Bonnie They got grade cards once a month and they were letter grades.

Glen What were the bathroom facilities?

Bonnie There were two outside toilets, one boys and one girls.

Glen Was there a well on the property?

Bonnie There was a pump and the children and I carried it in.
 We had a bucket and a dipper.

Glen Was there any type of library?

Bonnie Oh yes. We had books and every year the state put out
 new books. Oh yes we had a nice little library.

Glen Can you think of any incidents particular to this school?

Bonnie I had trouble with one mama about my monitor chores.
 She asked if I had ever heard of child labor laws. I
 told her that they didn't have to do it but they wouldn't
 get a gold star. If she wanted to deny her children
 that opportunity that was her problem. Her children
 continued to do their jobs and she never bothered me
 again.

Glen Was this school serving a particular religious group?

Bonnie No, it was mixed. They were not very religious.

Glen What type of graduation exercise did you have?

Bonnie Well, it was at the county seat. All country schools got together for graduation.

Glen When was the Eagle College closed?

Bonnie Oh, I think it was in the early forties.

Glen Was it used for anything after it was closed?

Bonnie A farmer bought the land and now it is used for a grain bin.

Glen When the students enrolled did they have to pay any fees?

Bonnie Not a cent, but they were responsible for their own books and supplies

Glen What did the students dress like?

Bonnie They dressed like little farm boys and girls. The boys wore overalls, and high topped shoes. The kids were real clean always real clean.

Glen What kind of lunches did the kids bring?

Bonnie Some of the kids brought fried rabbit, and I would always trade my fried chicken for their fried rabbit because I love fried rabbit.

Glen Bonnie Dee, did you attend a one room school as a student?

Bonnie Oh, yes!

Glen Did you have good teachers

Bonnie Oh yes, I do remember one teacher got fired because all we did was play and dance all the time and the county superintendent came out and talked to her and she was replaced with a tough teacher, but a good one.

Glen What school was that?

Bonnie That was Range School, it was also in Ellsworth County. It is still standing, but it too is a grainery. It also had a bell on top.

Glen Thank you Bonnie Dee, I appreciate your time.