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Interview with Viola Depperschmidt

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Viola Depperschmidt

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Recommended Citation

Legleiter, David and Depperschmidt, Viola, "Interview with Viola Depperschmidt" (1983). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 19.
<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/19>

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VIOLA DEPPERSCHMIDT INTERVIEW

Stone Schoolhouse Project

Prepared for

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by

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Fall semester 1983

The following interview was conducted with Viola Depperschmidt. Mrs. Depperschmidt was raised in Liebenthal and has lived in the area her entire life. She is in her mid fifties and is a very caring and concerned person. This former one room school house teacher was somewhat tense and reserved when the recorder was on but did have several interesting points, her closing comment being an example. Viola opened up more after the recorder was off and we talked for several hours. That is when I really began to get a feel of what her teaching days were like. I really enjoyed this assignment and plan to visit with her again.

DAVID: Viola, where did you teach and what years did you teach?

VIOLA: It was a school six miles north of Otis Kansas. I taught there just one year, the 1948 and 49 school year.

DAVID: It was a one room school house then?

VIOLA: Yes.

DAVID: How many grades?

VIOLA: It was all eight but I only had students in five.

DAVID: So it was first through eighth grade?

VIOLA: Uhuh.

DAVID: Who did the hiring of the teachers, who hired you?

VIOLA: The school board.

DAVID: How did you get your pay checks and how much were you paid back in 1948?

VIOLA: I was boarding with one of the members of the school board and every month he gave me the check.

DAVID: I see, so you lived with him.

VIOLA: Uhuh, with the family of one of the members of the school board, and I was paid \$190 a month.

DAVID: How much schooling did you have to have before you were able to teach?

VIOLA: Twelve hours of college.

DAVID: Twelve hours of college and they let you teach.

VIOLA: Uhuh

DAVID: I'll be darn. What type of classes did you take in college?

VIOLA: Elementary Literature, and I got my credit for taking English without taking it. We took a test and I got that without taking it.

DAVID: Oh, you quizzed out?

VIOLA: Uhuh. Can you imagine that, after growing up here and not knowing a word of English when I started school.

DAVID: Oh, you couldn't speak english when you first started? You just knew German huh?

VIOLA: That's all I knew and I went to high school in Schoenshen and that was considered a poor school but I quizzed out of English.

DAVID: Where did you go to college at?

- VIOLA: Fort Hays. And elementary Literature, I can't remember what the other thing was. Oh, it was something with education, we had six hours of that.
- DAVID: O.K. Probably an orientation to education, probably something like that?
- VIOLA: I could probably remember if I thought on it all day but right now I can't. To teach the next year I would have had to have another twelve hours and so on until I had my four years. But that is when they had the turnover. A year or two before then you could teach I think with just high school. It was just in the transition period.
- DAVID: Describe the types of teachers, and what were their teaching ways and habits or describe the type of teacher that you were? You taught all subjects obviously.
- VIOLA: I would say that teachers were very dedicated.
- DAVID: They were dedicated?
- VIOLA: Yes. They were there to teach and you learned or else.
- DAVID: Who would be applying pressure if you, I mean if you weren't a good teacher? The school board would come and monitor you?
- VIOLA: No, I don't think so. I think anybody that went into teaching, they just went.
- DAVID: They just backed in, they just really cared about what they were doing?
- VIOLA: Yes, yes they cared.
- DAVID: And they gave it their best effort?
- VIOLA: Uhuh.
- DAVID: What types of books did you use when you were teaching?
- VIOLA: Well, everything that was standard at the time. The state had a certain set of guidelines and we had the books that were expected to be taught and that is what we used.
- DAVID: O.K. so every school used about the same books and it was state standardized.
- VIOLA: Uhuh
- DAVID: How did you get your school supplies, did the board furnish you any money to.... or did you have to buy your own supplies?
- VIOLA: No. Well, some I did but most of the stuff was there, I don't know how it got there but it was there in the school building. And before school started I had to go to the county superintendent's and he had a box of stuff like grade books and the stuff that you would need. And some of it was there from the year before. We had county

superintendents way back then.

DAVID: How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community, was there a difference for men or women? Like you had to stay with a school board member, did they allow you to go out in the evenings or was that unacceptable activity for a teacher?

VIOLA: Well they did, I don't know if all of them did but I got to go out in the evenings.

DAVID: You got to go out in the evenings and so uh....

VIOLA: We didn't do a whole lot of it, just when there was something special going on, it was more weekend stuff. We got married in May that same year. One thing though, if a teacher was pregnant she did not teach. When a teacher got to where anyone could tell she was pregnant, you got out of that school room. Nowadays they don't do that.

DAVID: Yea, they just take a couple of weeks off a lot of times just long enough to have their baby, uhuh. Was there a problem with teacher turnover? What were the causes of it? Why did the teacher leave when you took the job? Did she uh....

VIOLA: She went to a different school, closer to home. When one became available closer to home she went to it.

DAVID: Was there a discipline problem in your school and how did you handle the discipline?

VIOLA: Well I don't think we had a problem because way back then the teacher was boss.

DAVID: And the students respected the teacher?

VIOLA: Yes.

DAVID: And I suppose in a rural community like north of Otis there....

VIOLA: It might have been even more so....

DAVID:then if you were in a city school somewhere. So you really didn't have any discipline problems.

VIOLA: No.

DAVID: O.K. they respected you and listened to what you said. Good. Who was in charge for the upkeep of the building, was that your job to make sure that the building was clean?

VIOLA: Yes, I swept evenings after school. And other than that the building was in good shape. And I had to fill the kerosene.

DAVID: You had kerosene lamps?

VIOLA: No, kerosene heater.

DAVID: Oh, I see.

VIOLA: I don't know what kind of lights there were. Whether we ever needed lighting. Yea, we had lights because we had a school program. We must have had kerosene lamps, I don't remember. Because it was way out in the country where there was no electricity. It had to be kerosene lamps. But we had a kerosene heater. And I'd have to bring my five or ten gallons in every night and fill that thing and turn it way down, you know, you had to keep a little bit of fire there at night.

DAVID: O.K. Viola, could you describe a typical day in your one room school house. How would you start out your day?

VIOLA: Well I would get up to the school early and turn up the fire. And then when it was time for school to start, and I don't remember for sure what time it was, I think it was nine o'clock. I think we went from nine to four. We'd start by having the lord's prayer, and the pledge to the flag. And we'd end the day with a prayer.

DAVID: Oh yea, were most of the students over there Catholic?

VIOLA: No. They were all Lutheran.

DAVID: Oh Lutheran, Lutheran in that area.

VIOLA: I was Catholic but they were all Lutheran.

DAVID: O.K. And you would have....the kids would bring their lunch to school?

VIOLA: Yes, everybody brought, I brought my lunch to school, all the kids brought their lunch. Now one family that lived only about a half mile away, their mother would sometimes bring her kids hot soup or something like that.

DAVID: I see.

VIOLA: She even sometimes brought stuff that she told me to set on the top of that stove to heat up for lunch time. Whatever it was, when it gets such and such a time, set it up there so it gets hot.

DAVID: Did the kids all walk to school then, and did you walk to school?

VIOLA: No, mostly they were driven. Now, the one family, they came on bicycles. They had a long ways to go, but they were from a broken home, but they came on bicycles, alot of the time.

DAVID: They rode their bicycles clear to school?

VIOLA: When it got real cold somebody brought them. But when it was half ways decent they came on bicycles and they had about two and a half miles to go.

DAVID: Have you got any other comments that you would like to make?

VIOLA: Yes, where I went to school we had two grades in a room. And I myself feel that's the perfect type of situation for learning. Because when I got into this school, having all these grades, I just didn't have enough hours in the day. And where I went to school, when you were in first grade, the teacher taught the first grade and then you were expected to do your work and she taught the second grade. It went back and forth all day. And I think that way we got alot of reviewing. And the smarter students didn't get bored like they do in a one grade school. Because if they got bored they could always listen to something a bit more advanced and it would keep them out of a lot of trouble.

DAVID: It was that way... I went through my first year at Liebenthal grade school and we had first, second and third all in one grade. And I really liked that too. Because, you know, you could listen to the muns teaching the upper classes and see how much you could understand of that.

VIOLA: And then it worked the other way too. If you were in the forth grade and she was teaching third grade anything that you might have missed in the third grade, you had a chance to review it. I think that's an ideal school. Two or three grades in one room. Rather than just one grade per room.