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1984

### Interview with Earl Gibson

Harry P. Disbrow III  
*Fort Hays State University*

Earl Gibson

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Earl Gibson

1928. His first teaching assignment was at Martin Center. Earl taught at Martin Center for two years. In 1930, Earl moved to Beaver Valley School District to further extend his teaching career. He taught at Beaver Valley for three years before moving once again to another teaching assignment at Smith Center, Kansas.

At the end of the school term in 1945, Earl took employment with the United States Postal Service. He retired from the postal service in 1976. While in retirement, Earl enjoys playing golf with many of his friends.

Figures one and three on the following page are pictures of the former building site of Beaver Valley. Figure one shows that a hitching post is all that remains on the Beaver Valley grounds. Figure two is a picture taken in 1906 of the one-time Beaver Valley schoolhouse.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Chapter III  
Oral Interviews

This interview is being taken with Earl Gibson on July 5, 1984. Earl presently resides in Smith Center, Kansas, and at one time taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Smith County, Kansas.

Disbrow: Earl, what is your present age?

Mr. Gibson: Seventy-four.

Disbrow: Have you lived in Kansas all your life?

Mr. Gibson: All my life, I was born here.

Disbrow: Where did you live most of your life in Kansas?

Mr. Gibson: Most of my life was around Athol.

Disbrow: How old were you when you first started teaching?

Mr. Gibson: I was eighteen.

Disbrow: Eighteen? Was that right out of high school?

Mr. Gibson: Right out of high school.

Disbrow: What high school did you go to?

Mr. Gibson: I went to Athol Rural High School.

Disbrow: How many years did you teach in a one-room schoolhouse?

Mr. Gibson: I taught five years in the rural schools. I taught two schools during that time.

Disbrow: What two schools were they?

Mr. Gibson: Well, the first one was Barns, known also as Martin Center. I taught there two years, then I came closer to town and taught at Beaver Valley about three miles out of Smith Center, three and one-half.

Disbrow: What kind of educational background did you have to have in order to teach in a one-room schoolhouse?

Mr. Gibson: Well, you had to have a certificate . . . or you had to graduate from high school and then a certificate to teach which was gained by going to a Normal Training Course for one month. You had to pass a pretty stiff examination at that time. Really had to work in there because I hadn't worked too hard in high school probably.

Disbrow: While you were teaching, was there any other classes you had to take to refresh or renew your contract?

Mr. Gibson: Well, we had correspondence courses we took, they weren't required. If you had a valid certificate to teach, you didn't. I don't think they were required but if you wanted to advance a little you would take those courses.

Disbrow: What was the name of the first county, Smith County, school district that you taught in?

Mr. Gibson: Martin Center.

Disbrow: How many students did you have there in Martin Center?

Mr. Gibson: I believe it ran that first year about fourteen. It varied during the school year because they



move in and out. In March you usually had a few new students that fought.

Disbrow: How was one to get a teaching position, do you just hear about it? How did you ever get into that position?

Mr. Gibson: Well, in my class in high school there was several of us decided to teach and we wrote letters of application to the school boards and then we usually went to interview them. Pretty much on our own.

Disbrow: How many members did they have on school boards then?

Mr. Gibson: Three.

Disbrow: Three members?

Mr. Gibson: Three members.

Disbrow: What kind of salary did you receive when you started teaching?

Mr. Gibson: This is 1928 and times were fair at that time and I taught the first year for \$85.00 a month.

Disbrow: Was there any other benefits that came along with that \$85.00 a month?

Mr. Gibson: Not that I know of. You were just teachering. No health benefits or no sick leave or anything. You were to do it and that was about all.

Disbrow: Where did you live while you were teaching then?

Mr. Gibson: I lived at my folks, half mile south of Athol, and I drove seventeen miles to teach and back home that time.

Disbrow: That must have been a long day.

Mr. Gibson: I did have a place to stay up there in the country. I stayed with some folks if it was bad weather and I think I stayed three or four days during the first year, bad storms you know.

Disbrow: Did you have to pay any rent or anything for those days at all?

Mr. Gibson: I paid them for staying. They gave me the meals, place to sleep. It was comparable to the wages, you know. I don't remember what it was but fair enough.

Disbrow: It was sure nice to have a warm place to go.

Mr. Gibson: Sure was.

Disbrow: At school, with a storm coming in. Who was primarily your boss or the people you were responsible to when you did teach?

Mr. Gibson: It was directly to the school board.

Disbrow: Did you have any superintendent or principal or anything?

Mr. Gibson: We had a County Superintendent that was advisor over the county and visited these rural schools periodically. Once a year, I think, was required that he visited your school but they lots of times came more often than that, maybe two times a year. But they were more of a place you could go for maybe advice or help or something and they kept the records of all of these rural schools.

Disbrow: You said you only saw them maybe once or possibly twice a year?

Mr. Gibson: Well, yes, but then you had teachers' meetings once in a while at the county seat and you had an institute that ran for a week before you started teaching.

Disbrow: Now, did you get paid extra to go to these teachers' meetings or this extra week of preparation?

Mr. Gibson: No, I don't think there was any pay for it.

Disbrow: You were just expected to go?

Mr. Gibson: Yes, expected to be there and you got your record books and supplied from the County Superintendent that you would need during that time. Anything that came up on school law or anything they wanted to do to specialize on or emphasize, they would tell you usually at that institution.

Disbrow: Where was the meeting usually held in Smith County?

Mr. Gibson: Well, it was usually held in the high school building up here and the County Superintendent had an office in the courthouse.

Disbrow: What guidelines were you given by the district both as a teacher and a member of the community that you were pretty well expected to follow?

Mr. Gibson: I don't remember ever getting any guidelines. They just expected you to teach and I don't remember any of them ever saying anything to me what they would expect,



and I am amazed at that because starting at eighteen you would expect them to give you a little advice.

Disbrow: How many grades did you have in your building?

Mr. Gibson: Well, I think I had seven grades the first year, they ran straight through. Whoever showed up, whatever grade they were in, you had to teach it.

Disbrow: So, like first grade on through seventh grade?

Mr. Gibson: First grade through the eighth.

Disbrow: Oh, through the eighth.

Mr. Gibson: You were lucky if you had two or three grades missing because there is a lot of subjects you didn't have to teach, you see. And you usually had to call up to the bench when they had their class and it just saved a lot of teaching time. You could give that to the other grades, that time.

Disbrow: Right, I can see that. If you have a lower level there that needs a little more attention, then you can give it to them. Sure, it makes a lot of sense there. For enrollment there, was there any age requirements to begin school?

Mr. Gibson: No, I think you had to be . . . accepted time was pretty much six years old, but I know some of them started younger. Some of them held til they were seven, but there could have been a requirement that you go when you are six by state law. But I'm not positive about that.

Disbrow: Okay. How old was your oldest students?

Mr. Gibson: Usually not more than thirteen or fourteen.

Disbrow: Did you have any older than that in the eighth grade--like seventeen, eighteen, trying to finish up?

Mr. Gibson: No, I think when I started teaching in '28 that thing had practically passed. I know of kids that went to school fifteen, sixteen when I was going to the first grade when I was in school myself. But they taught some ninth-grade subjects, but I think it was pretty well settled down to fourteen. There might have been some fifteen's in the eighth grade, but very few.

Disbrow: When the students left the eighth grade from your school, were they finished with education then or did they try to get to Smith Center to go to high school?

Mr. Gibson: Well, of course, there was high schools in all these towns in the county at that time and the greater per cent did, but there were alot of kids that never went beyond the eighth grade.

Disbrow: Just probably went into the farming with their folks.

Mr. Gibson: Yes, alot of them did, lot of them didn't want to go farther.

Disbrow: How long was the school day and also the school year?

Mr. Gibson: Well, the school day would be about from starting time until quitting time, was six hours in school. You had an hour at noon and started at just about the same

as they do no as far as that goes. I believe it started at 9:00 and let out at 4:00. I might be wrong on that, it seems to me like it started at 8:00--8:00 to 4:00.

Disbrow: 8:00 to 4:00? How long was you school year? Can you remember when it started?

Mr. Gibson: Well, it was eight months. All the time that I taught it was eight months in the rural school.

Disbrow: Did you start in September then rather than in August?

Mr. Gibson: Yes, always in September that I remember.

Disbrow: Then, did you go all the way through May?

Mr. Gibson? No, I don't think it was May. No, it was early May I think.

Disbrow: Or the last part of April?

Mr. Gibson: Or the last part of April that we let out.

Disbrow: What types of subjects were taught at the grade levels that you had in your schools?

Mr. Gibson: Well, do you want me to tell you the names of the subjects of the higher grade?

Disbrow: Why don't we go with the higher grades first, then maybe you could explain a little bit about the lower grades after that.

Mr. Gibson: Well, usually it ran about eight subjects-- of course you had your reading, writing, arithmetic. Then you had classics at that time, and you had your English, geography, history. I don't think there are others . . . I believe that's it. That's seven, isn't it?

Disbrow: I believe you're right. Did you have music then?

Mr. Gibson: It makes a difference whether the teacher was qualified to teach music or not. They wanted music, if you could do it, but a lot of the teachers didn't have . . . you didn't have to have music. You had to pass the test though to get your teacher's certificate. We had music, but I couldn't teach it. That was about it. See your classics, I think, started in the seventh grade.

Disbrow: What is classics?

Mr. Gibson: It was kind of a literature course. It was kind of like a literature class in high school but it was on a lower level.

Disbrow: Did you group your grade levels then?

Mr. Gibson: Oh, no. There was . . . not when I taught in the rural schools, you kept each class separate. Each grade was kept separate and you usually called them from their seats up to the recitation bench and you had your class discussion up there on the subject, then you dismissed them and called another class. If you had a fairly large school with all those grades, why you was having class about every ten minutes.

Disbrow: Really kept you on your toes, didn't it?

Mr. Gibson: Yes.

Disbrow: How about your lower levels like first, second, and third grades? What kind of subjects did you have down there?



Mr. Gibson: Well, you see, your first grade, you had reading, and your writing and your arithmetic and then you usually had busy work or art work or something you could get them interested in--extra work that they could do while you were teaching these other classes. That sometimes was a problem. Keep everyone busy, first and second grades especially. Myself, I liked the upper grades. Lots of teachers like, would rather have the lower grades so when I came into town, why I took the seventh grade because that was my . . . about where I liked to teach.

Disbrow: How did you handle discipline problems with some of your students? Was there any special methods you used?

Mr. Gibson: Well, there was . . . I don't say I had any special . . . there was common practice to make them stay in at recesses or take some little privilege away from them when they done something kind of out of line, but punishment was usually the last resort, that is physical punishment.

Disbrow: Paddling or something else?

Mr. Gibson: Yea, I paddled some, but I never attempted to be severe with them. I tried not to do it when I was a little too erked.

Disbrow: I'll bet you they knew that was one option.

What kind of features or conditions was your building in?



Mr. Gibson: Well, in the first school I taught the building was not in very good shape. But it was certainly a well-warmed rural school, very good inside stoves, ventilation.

Disbrow: How about your lighting? Was it very good at all?

Mr. Gibson: Well, there was kerosene lights up by the window and on the wall. We never used them unless we had a night meeting and very seldom we had night meeting of any kind in that school building.

Disbrow: Did they light it up very well at all?

Mr. Gibson: No, pretty dull.

Disbrow: Was it?

Mr. Gibson: Yea, you kept running into things but they didn't light very adequately.

Disbrow: What did you use for heating?

Mr. Gibson: Well, it was a coal-burning stove, usually had a jacket around it. Some of them had vents that would be to draw the cold air into the stove from outside. You could control that with the damper. That was a very good system of heating by the way.

Disbrow: Who had to bring all your coal in for your burner?

Mr. Gibson: The school board had it put in. You usually had a coalhouse and they usually had a cobhouse and you usually got your fuel in at night so you would have it

ready in the morning. It was always the first chore you did--cold weather, you'd go to school and build your fire.

Disbrow: Was that your job then to put that coal in the fire?

Mr. Gibson: That's right, yea.

Disbrow: Did you ever use your students to bring the coal in from the sheds at all?

Mr. Gibson: Oh, yes. A lot of them wanted to carry it to you. If you get along with the students, kids like to do it for you.

Disbrow: How about water, was that a problem at all?

Mr. Gibson: Usually a cistern. Caught by water running off the roof into a cistern and then you'd pump it up with a regular cistern pump.

Disbrow: Now, is a cistern a kind of filter system, is it?

Mr. Gibson: Well, they were suppose to have them but then, like anything else, a lot of times they'd let it run down and they were suppose to keep them filled with charcoal that filtered the dirt and impurities out. Thank heavens most of the things settled to the bottom in the cistern and you pumped off the top.

Disbrow: Was that outside the building or was that inside?

Mr. Gibson: It was outside. You know what a cistern is? A hole in the ground that is cemented up and is like a

bottle, a big bottle in the ground and that's filled from the eaves from the eave pipes. But if there wasn't that much rain why then they hauled a tank of water in and dumped it in the cistern.

Disbrow: Would the school board do that or--

Mr. Gibson: Yes, the school board would do, it was their responsibility.

Disbrow: Did those school boards work very well with the teacher then? Did they also evaluate the teachers on their performance?

Mr. Gibson: Well, they did. They decided if they'd hire you another year or let you go. I think for the most part they worked very well together. There was three of them and they were elected for that purpose, and I thought all school boards I ever met were great.

Disbrow: Now, was it your responsibility also to keep the school building good and clean?

Mr. Gibson: Yes, you were supervisor of maintaining health and all that.

Disbrow: How long was your school day for yourself then?

Mr. Gibson: Well, you know it wasn't too long. You were ready to go home lots of times a half an hour to an hour after school.

Disbrow: Did you have a few dependable students that would sweep up a little bit for you?

Mr. Gibson: Sure, a lot of kids were contesting each other to see who would sweep. You would be surprised how many times they would sweep for you. The school board furnished the sweeping compound if you used it sparingly.

Disbrow: Did you have any type of storm shelters at all by the school?

Mr. Gibson: No, I didn't in any of the schools I taught.

Disbrow: Well, what would you do then if a tornado was coming your way? Or what did you do if one would have gotten close to you?

Mr. Gibson: We had an actual experience. There was no place to go except where there used to be an old building, a kind of dugout place with no top over it. But when I taught out here by Henry Williams,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles west, we had a tornado that came right down practically on the schoolhouse and a seventh grade boy asked to leave the room and he couldn't get the door open. My desk was close and I just stepped over there and turned the knob and it jerked it out of my hand. I knew something funny was going on. So, I stepped out immediately and looked to the north side of the schoolhouse. And there was a hedgerow out there and it was just tearing the leaves right off the hedge. I recognized it was a tornado immediately and hollered at the kids to get out of the schoolhouse. They came running out and we went to this low place, kind of like a basement would be. It was low,



lower than the rest of the ground. By the time we got out there we could see it was moving on north and it moved just to that area, just a little northwest. Usually it's northeast and I know it went up to William's and it put a chickenhouse up into a tree and that's about all the damage it did at that place. But, it went about a mile further north and just tore the Post place all to pieces.

Disbrow: Is that right?

Mr. Gibson: Close enough. I had some parents really running that afternoon to see if the schoolhouse was still there.

Disbrow: Are there any other special memories that you could share with me?

Mr. Gibson: Well, that was probably the most exciting that I had in the rural area. I had some times where . . . I was quite a hand to make it to school. I think I was only late one time the first year getting to school and we had some pretty good storms that year. I remember driving my car through snow and it threw it in the ditch. I borrowed the neighbor's car. Four miles north of Athol we traded cars, he was going to take mine out of the ditch and I was to take his car and go on to school. Before I got to school I had his car stuck but we scooped it out and made it to school, but about an hour late. But, that night why we met in town and traded our cars back. No charge or anything, it was just good will.



Disbrow: That's super, that's really nice. What kind of car was that?

Mr. Gibson: Mine was a Model A Roadster, 1929 Model A Roadster--great mud and snow car. And the fellow that loaned me his car had a Whippet Six Coupe. They were both good cars. There were a lot of them stuck that day, but to make it seventeen miles, that was a pretty good run on the roads at that time 'cause there wasn't any built-up draws, you know, where they have a bridge leveled off on the high level. You went clear down to the bottom of the draw and there was a little culvert down there and then you had that big hill to make on the other side.

Disbrow: Earl, you said that you also taught at Beaver Valley. What kind of school building did you have there?

Mr. Gibson: It was pretty much the ordinary run of the country schools, pretty much straight building with a protective building over the doorway and they had put in new windows. They had taken . . . most of the windows were, in the older school houses, were about three or four on each side of the school building and they had taken them off the west and the south and had put in a line of windows instead of separate windows on those two sides of the building and it sort of modernized it.

Disbrow: Was that for better lighting?

Mr. Gibson: Better lighting and the pupils faced the north and they were getting the light from behind them

and over the left shoulder and it was very good.

Disbrow: Seems like then they really had a lot of things on their minds as far as the position they put the building in and every little trinket they put inside the building. It all served a purpose, didn't it?

Mr. Gibson: It was always painted and well cleaned and kept. Of course, once it was clean and fixed up for the fall semester, the term why it was my duty then to keep it clean.

Disbrow: What kind of heating system did they have there at Beaver Valley?

Mr. Gibson: They had a coal stove, circulating-enclosed jacket on it. It was adequate because the building was in pretty good shape.

Disbrow: Did they insulate these buildings at all?

Mr. Gibson: No, I don't think so.

Disbrow: I didn't know if they had anything like that at all.

Mr. Gibson: They weren't insulated, that's for sure.

Disbrow: Did Beaver Valley also have a cistern for the water system?

Mr. Gibson: I didn't get that question.

Disbrow: Did Beaver Valley also have a cistern for the water system?

Mr. Gibson: Yes, it was just a cistern, you pump the water. They did have a bubbler for kids to drink out of inside that you could fill up.

Disbrow: Oh, that was nice.

Mr. Gibson: They could have their own cups. They had good maps, pull-down type map on rollers in the front of the schoolroom and then they had a good cabinet for library books--something we didn't have in the other school that I taught in.

Disbrow: Pretty important to have that library.

Mr. Gibson: Yes.

Disbrow: Did you find your kids using that library quite often?

Mr. Gibson: They did.

Disbrow: Were they allowed to take books home?

Mr. Gibson: Yes.

Disbrow: What kind of restroom facilities did you have?

Mr. Gibson: Well, there was the outside toilet. And we had a barn, shed, out there to keep about four horses in if they cared to drive or ride and the cob shed was also in that shed.

Disbrow: Did the outhouse cause very many problems as far as going in and out from the schoolhouse?

Mr. Gibson: None that I could see except that if you stayed ahead of the problem, there was no problem at all.

Disbrow: Did Beaver Valley have any shelter for storms?

Mr. Gibson: No. That's where I was when the tornado hit that time.

Disbrow: Beaver Valley?

Mr. Gibson: It didn't do any damage to the schoolhouse, but I say we lucked out.

Disbrow: Earl, I would take a moment here just to thank you for all your help with this project. I have thoroughly enjoyed the visit with you. I'd like to say once again, thank you very much.

Mr. Gibson: You're sure welcome.

This interview is being taken with Martha Turner on July 6, 1984. Martha presently resides in Smith Center, Kansas, and at one time taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Smith County, Kansas.

Disbrow: Martha, what is your present age right now?

Mrs. Turner: I'm 72.

Disbrow: Are you a native of Kansas?

Mrs. Turner: No, I'm a Missourian. I was born in Mexico, Missouri, and lived there for a goodly number of years. Then at the death of my mother, I was transferred or went to live at Auxvasse, Missouri, with an aunt--A-U-X-V-A-S-S-E, Missouri. Later I taught in Auxvasse, in their school.

Disbrow: How old were you when you first started teaching?

Mrs. Turner: I was seventeen.

Disbrow: Seventeen years old.

Mrs. Turner: I took the State Normal Board which you could do at that time and I got a certificate rather easily. I started teaching and I taught my first winter