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Interview with Anne Kenyon

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Fort Hays State University

Anne L. Kenyon

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Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Douglas D. and Kenyon, Anne L., "Interview with Anne Kenyon" (1984). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 25.
<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/25>

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**An Oral History Report:
Miss Anne L. Kenyon**

**by
Douglas D. Ferguson**

**Fort Hays State University
July, 1984**

Miss Anne Kenyon

INTRODUCTION

This oral history interview is being done as a partial requirement for Education 700, History of Education at Fort Hays State University. Dr. Allan Miller is the instructor.

The interview is being done by Douglas Ferguson, a graduate student in school administration. The interview is with Miss Anne Kenyon, a veteran of 41 years.

BIOGRAPHY

Anne Kenyon was born in Trego county, southwest of WaKeeney on June 1, 1921, as a tornado passed through the area. (This could explain her high-spirited and strong-willed attitude about life.)

She was the eldest child of seven born into a Scotch-Irish farming background. Tracing the maternal family tree, Miss Kenyon is a distant relative to former President Pierce.

Miss Kenyon attended a one-room rural school from 1927 to 1935. This particular school was located on a section of land provided to the school district by her father. She went on and completed high school at the Trego County High School. She then attended Fort Hays Kansas State College and completed 30 hours of education to receive her teaching certificate. Returning to Trego county, she taught in the rural schools of the area from 1942 to 1947. During the summers of 1942 through 1945, she returned to FHKSC and completed an additional 30 hours to receive her life time certificate.

In 1947, she moved to Weskan, where she taught in the 8th grade. She remained at Weskan for two years, before returning to FHKSC to complete her Bachelor's Degree (1949-1950).

From 1950 to 1953, Miss Kenyon taught in Ingalls, Kansas. In 1953, she moved to Tribune where she has just completed her 31st year in Tribune.

During her teaching career she has served as 8th grade sponsor,

cheerleader sponsor, and has coached volleyball, basketball, and track. She has also served in various positions, helping out whenever and wherever she has been needed.

She has dedicated her life to the children of Western Kansas, and I feel it is an honor and a privilege to be associated with this woman, not only as a co-worker, but as a friend.

It gives me great pleasure to present this interview to the collection of one-room history reports. Miss Kenyon is truly an asset to the educational system and deserves to be recognized for her accomplishments.

Douglas D. Ferguson
Tribune, Kansas

INTERVIEW

As a student, when did you go to school?

"I attended a rural school from 1927 to 1935."

What time did school start and end?

"It started at 9:00 o'clock in the morning and we were dismissed at 4:00 o'clock in the evening."

What did you do during recess and noon hour?

"Recess, we usually played on the playground equipment, teeter-totter, merry-go-round, and then at noon, we played organized games, softball, dare-base, and prisoners-base."

And what did you bring for lunch?

"Sandwiches, peanut butter and jelly, meat, cookies or cake, and an apple or fruit."

How did you find out if you weren't having school?

"We had a telephone and my dad was on the school board, so we always knew we weren't going to have school."

What rewards for grades and attendance did you get from the teacher and parents?

"At the end of the year, if we had perfect attendance, we usually got an achievement awards. Once in a while if our grades were high. From our parents, it was usually praise and 'see I knew you could do it' type of things."

What punishments were you given?

"Isolation, sit in the corner, extra work to do."

I know you didn't do any of these, but what tricks did you pull on the teacher?

"Well, the one I remember best was finding a nest of mice and putting it in my teacher's desk drawer."

What were the first subjects and the daily routine?

"If you were a first grader, it was learning to read. Generally speaking, for the other youngsters, it was math and then we went through the routine of spelling, reading, English, history, geography, similiar to the modern day social studies. Some health."

Did you have any special duties?

"Oh, it was a priviledge to dust erasers, clean the blackboard, empty the trash."

What special things do you remember about the teachers?

"Oh, I think teachers were very much like they are today. Maybe their mode of dress and the way they taught were slightly different, not a great deal different from the teachers today."

What fun things did you do?

"Oh, the games we played. We made puppets, sometimes. Sometimes, we used the phonograph to sing and that type of thing."

Going on to being a teacher, as a teacher what years did you teach?

"I taught rural school from 1942 through 1947."

And what was your pay?

"This is going to sound terrible. I got \$70.00 a month for teaching and \$2.50 for taking five gallons of water to school every day."

A little hard to survive at that point.

"Eight months a year that went."

How did you start your day?

"With the flag salute, that usually one of the children in the classroom led and then we had singing or some little relaxing thing, a game."

What subjects and in what order did you teach the subjects?

"Well, generally speaking, it depended upon the child's age, but each day we taught reading, writing, spelling, math, English, history, geography, and health. Depending upon the age of the child what order that was. We had to dove tail them together to get them in before the class period was over."

What punishments did you dole out?

"Here again, isolation, sitting in the corner. Some schools had a dunce cap, I never used one of those. As a last resort, I was told I could use the 'board of education.'" I didn't think I ever did, but I was told I could, if all other things failed you called the parents and/or your board of education to settle bad problems."

How did you get your paychecks?

"My paycheck was brought to me at the end of each four weeks by one of the board members."

How often did you meet with your school board?

"Well, it depended if they met at my building, I frequently saw them as they come to meet once a month. Otherwise, only when they wanted to see me about something."

How did you get your school supplies?

"I bought them and the board paid me for them."

How much schooling did you have in order to begin teaching?

"When I first started teaching, the law said I had to have 30 hours, so I taught three years on a beginner's certificate. Then I had 60 hours and a life certificate."

Where did you stay while teaching?

"Well, I stayed at the home of a retired farmer in the community as a rule. A lot of teachers stayed with families who had children in the schools."

Describe the school day, including curriculum, also, how did the regular day for the student fit into the school day.

"Well, generally speaking, the school started at 9 o'clock in the morning, which meant the child was up sooner than that because all children, including myself, when we started to school had jobs to do. And when I turned 6 and I was ready to start school, my parents told me that the first thing I had to do was milk my cow every morning before I went to school. So all children had a job to do. Those had to be finished, then breakfast eaten, lunch packed, then they could go to school. After school, and I've already said something about school days, so after school they had chores to do and then it was time to do homework. In between chores and homework was usually supper."

Describe the types of teachers and their teaching ways or habits.

"Life of the teachers, except for the fact that they did not have a degree in education were very much as I see in the classroom today. Now, as the types of teaching habits, their subjects will be slightly different than we are used to. As far as our habits, we had to learn to continue to go back to school to keep ahead of the things coming through. Some of them were extremely strict disciplinarians, some were a little more relaxed. Me, I enjoyed the more relaxed area of my teaching, than something I had to do than being on top of it all the time."

Describe the textbooks you used.

"The state of Kansas set up a group of texts that we people teaching in the rural area had to teach from. We taught from a certain type of reader, a certain type of math book, a certain type of English and spelling books and the parents bought those books. So they were always the same, traditional."

How did you study and how did you use your leisure time.

"Generally speaking, studying was done very much as it is today. Parents, I think, saw to it, at least my parents did, that we has a special place to study. The Dining room table was our place to study. And that was either done just as soon as you got home from school or right after supper. And our leisure time, if it was early enough, we went outside and played. If it weren't, well it was parental supervised orientation games, reading, reading the Bible, reading stories, visiting with your parents. Quite frequently, in the winter evenings, popcorn, apples were added to the evening festivities."

Was the schoolhouse used for community social activities as well as for education of the young?

"Oh yes, some communities had church services on Wednesday evenings and Sundays. Some of them had dances. All of us had social meetings, community card parties, that type of thing, quite frequently held socials."

What were the boundries of the school's jurisdiction and how were they set in the beginning?

"The school district was laid out by a board, that usually was about 6 miles by 6 miles. It was set by the location of the people on the particular acreage and it was usually put so that it would ne almost the same distance for all the people at the farthest distance for them to come. Now our school district enlarged in size when we no longer had the same number of children and wasn't fesiabile to have...to have, one teacher for such small groups and the coming of the automobile made it easier to get a school larger in the area."

Was the school for all children or only for the landowners or tax-payers children?

"The school was for everybody. Anybody living in the area wanted to go."

How were the children of the transit workers treated?

"Oh, about like everyone else. They always knew who they were and really in this rural society, there weren't many transit workers. These people were either renters or owners of their own land and they stayed put the year around."

They don't have the migrant workers like we have today?

"No, not generally speaking."

How was the school financed?

"By land taxes."

Basically the same way we do today?

"Practically the same way, yes."

How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community?

"They were to set the model for the behavior of the people in the area, children as well. Kind of a set on a pedastal type of thing."

What were some of the teachers extra curricular activities?

"Socials, go to church. A little later on we went to movies, community cards parties, community dances. As long as most of the community was there you were all right."

Was there a problem of teacher turnover?

"Not really. Women teachers stayed in the profession until they married and quite frequently dropped out to rear their families and then came back into the profession. So marriage would be the reason they dropped out. Men moved to better themselves more than women did."

Who governed the school?

"In the school day, the teacher was the governing body. She was supervised by the county superintendent and by her board."

Who hired and fired the teachers?

"This was done by the district's board of education three person board and you were responsible to them technically."

What were some of the physical problems of the building?

"Poor lighting, poor heating, some buildings had no water supply close by."

Who was in charge for the upkeep of the building?

"Generally, the board was. The teacher made the recommendations. This, this, and this needs to be replaced or did you know about this."

Did the teacher do the daily cleaning?

"She was the janitor."

What special events happened at the school?

"Church meetings, teacher-children presented programs, oh, two or three times a year. Quite frequently doing that, we had for instance, ice cream socials to raise money for something special or a box supper. Something like that. In most schools, boards of education were also held."

When was the schoolhouse built?

"I would say, the late 1890's, because that was about the time the county was settled."

By whom?

"It was...first of all the tax money was raised and the lumber was furnished by a lumber company. Usually the people in the area did the building."

What materials were used to build with?

"Well, the ones I taught in were lumber. Some of them had post rock foundations. Now my dad also went to a rural school and he talked about going to school in what was known as a 'soddy' school and my mother went to the same school I did. And when she went, hers was a stone school, but then they had to move the setter and the stone school didn't move very well, so it became somebody's home."

Who has owned the schoolhouse?

"Well, first of all it was a community building owned by the board. Then after that school was closed, the one that I went to became a dwelling for someone else."

Did more than one teacher work at the school?

"No, it was a one teacher school. We didn't have a principal to supervise our work."

We have already discussed if the building was used just for teaching or not.

What teaching methods were used?

"I used board work, and if anybody came into the community and who was quote an old timer and had something interesting to share, we asked them to come in. Posters, we used dramatization, particularly reading stories, things like that. Phonograph records, therefore music and puppets, sometimes. Anything that would seem to work and that children enjoyed doing we used."

What are the typical activities for a school day?

"Besides the work schedule, recesses were about 15 minutes long. There wasn't time for organized games. Generally speaking, that was time to go out and play on the teeter-totter or merry-go-round. The rest of the time there were such things as dare-base, prison base, softball. We didn't have water for ice skating or anything like that. When there was snow on the ground, we sometimes had snowball fights, things like that."

How long was the school year?

"School year was eight months long starting usually after Labor Day, and ending about the third Friday in April."

What was the greatest distance traveled by any student and what was the mode of transportation?

"Generally speaking, three to five miles and if you didn't walk, your parents brought you. When I was first going to school, some of the kids came to school in a buggy pulled by a horse."

What teaching aids were available and, also, what were the effects on the students?

"First of all, there were no teaching aids, only the ones that the teacher made. I felt like the flashcards, the picture cards, the word association cards, things like that helped my children to learn, especially the non-English speaking children."

What system of evaluation was used?

"Well, if you're talking about the teacher, the county superintendent usually made a visit to our school once a year, if you needed some help it was more often than that. I had one visit a year only. The board of education listened closely to what the parents and the children brought home and we were evaluated by them. But as far as a real evaluation sheet, there wasn't one."

What types of heating, lighting, and other facilities did you have?

"The heater was usually a coal burning stove. One place I had quote a pot belly stove that didn't have a steel protection around it. That one got pretty hot for the child setting next to it. The ones that had

the steel protectors were much better. A little cumbersome, but they were much better because it wouldn't get so hot. Now, as far as lighting, we had the natural light and that was it. When we put on programs, parents brought in, oh, it was the time of gasoline lanterns and so they brought those in. And as far as toilet facilities, we used the outdoor bathrooms."

How did the school get its water?

"I taught in three rural schools and attended one. And three of those four had dug wells with a hand pump. The other one, I carried water to school."

And you mentioned that earlier in the pay.

Did the community raise money for equipment?

"First by tax, then by these box suppers and socials we had. The teacher usually got to do most of that."

What was the size of the school's library?

"The school library had a set of encyclopedias, several dictionaries, and then it depended on how long the school was in existence, some where in the neighborhood of 150 to 300 story books for children, and I usually added anywhere from 10 to 20 new books a year."

Did any activities take place between schools?

"Sometimes in the spring, especially, we had spelling bees, and softball games."

How were discipline problems handled?

"By the teacher. In case of real need why then the board of education was called in. Parental conferences were common."

Are there any traditions that are peculiar to the particular school-house?

"One school that I taught in we had to have a bi-monthly program. And at those bi-monthly programs we had to have a pot luck supper. The other schools it was traditional to have a Christmas program. And the end of the school program."

I believe we have already discussed the curriculum.

How did the female teachers handle discipline problems as compared to the male teachers?

"About the same except, I felt that the male teachers were prone to use the 'board of education' and the belt more than women teachers were."

I think that is true today.

How did the people decide on this location. Was it a part of the public system of schools?

"Generally, by deciding that this was the center of the district's population and this would be more convenient for the most people. Oh, yes, very definitely."

Earlier we had mentioned that some of the schoolhouses were built out of lumber and some had stone bases. Where did the stone come from that was used in the building come from?

"I lived in the post rock area of limestone, and therefore it was usually some farmer's pasture."

How was it hauled into the building sites?

"In my area it was hauled in by wagon. My father talked about moving it by sled, but where we were we used wagons."

How did this school differ from others in the area?

"Well, the school I went to school in we were different that the teacher did not have to out to an outside building to get coal...fuel. Now the ones that I taught in, I had to carry the fuel from the supply house outside."

What was the outstanding feature of the school?

"Well here again, I have three or four to choose from. One school I taught in had almost all the north side glasses in with double sets of glass windows which gave us a wonderful set of lights. One of them had an enclosed pump house. One of them had fuel stored in a building between the two bathhouses. One of them had separate cloak rooms for boys and girls to store their coats, hats, and lunches in. The rest of them had open cloak rooms."

Did the school have any particular problems?

"Well, I would say only in the dirt storm era. And, probably the nearest one I can tell about when the kids were studying and all of a sudden we would have parents knocking at the door coming to get their children because the dirt storm was beginning to roll in and with luck, they would be home before the dirt storm hit, cause you couldn't see. Then, of course, the next day, probably as much as three or four hours of cleaning before you could have class."

What was the significance of the schools' names?

"One school I was in was called Hillside, because it was built on the side of a hill. One of them was called Republic and it was built on a branch of the Republican River. And one was called Bannish and that was the leading family in that particular rural area."

Were there any physical changes to the schoolhouse during the years of use?

"Oh, not really. One school built a stage to put programs on."

What type of records were kept?

"Each teacher had to keep a register listing the children, their birth-dates, who their parents were. The grades went in there and it was the beginning of health records. And we had certain kinds of a ... what diseases they had and had they been vaccinated for certain kinds of things. Now, they also had to send a report card home and the register had to go into the county superintendent with the kid's grades on it."

What types of remains can be found?

"Well, here the schools have been used for housing, for grain supplies, and used for garages. I have in possession a hand bell which was used to call the kids in from playing."

A cherished item, no doubt.

"Very definitely."

How many students went to the school?

"Fifteen, I think was the least I taught. Thirty was the most."

We already mentioned that school started in September and ended in May. "April." Excuse me, April, you're right.

What county was the school district in?

"I taught in Trego County."

Why was the school built?

"To accommodate the youngsters and to be sure they had an education that, so they could go on to something better."

Was the land purchased by the school district or given to the school?

"Neither one. The land was left for the use of the school district and when the school district was no longer in existence it returned to the land owner. This was on the ...the school district, the school I

attended in our school district happened to be on a corner section that we owned, and when the school was moved they...Everything was taken off and the land reverted to our family."

What were the special observances?

"Oh, there was the Christmas program always, spelling bees, there were no contests for music and things like that. One of the big highlights of the year would be an annual ball game with one of the nearby rural districts."

I know this isn't one of the questions, but what type of music did you have?

"Traditional music. Since I'm no musician, I had a phonograph, hand wound, that recordings of music...so that the students could sing to that."

We talked a little bit about the interior of the schools. Was there anything you would like to add?

"Well, I don't know what more you want. Teacher's desk was always at the front of the room with the flag behind it. Generally speaking, to the back of the room was the drinking water and each child had a cup. On one side was cloak rooms, generally speaking."

Did the room have pictures of Presidents Washington and Lincoln?

"Some of them did and some of them didn't."

What types of occupations did the students eventually take up?

"Generally speaking, they were farmers or went into farm related jobs. However, I have taught people who have become doctors, nurses, lawyers."

Were the majority of the original students of a particular religion or nationality?

"Generally speaking, a mixed bag. We had quite a number of the area of Russian people who migrated, and first and second generations. Some of those, who could not speak English. We also had first and second generation people from Bohemia, now Czechoslovakia. The rest of the people were third, fourth, fifth generation Americans. And the fathers on these first and second generations from Russia and Czechoslovakia, father was the big boss. When the father could no longer take care of it, the older child did, whether a girl or boy."

What type of graduation exercises were performed?

"Around about way, as a 7th grade they had to take a geography test, health test, and a Kansas history test. Passing those three, they were

ready to go to the 8th grade. In the 8th grade they took tests in the rest of the subjects and passing those, they were eligible to graduate from the 8th grade. All of the children in Trego county, then who had graduated were called in early June and they were given their diploma in a very special ceremony in our courthouse."

Were any controversies surrounding the school for any reason?

"Oh, generally speaking, the biggest controversies we had were when and where and what kind of fund raisers we were going to have. Once in a while, a parent would object because they thought their child was being badly treated, but not very often."

Did this school make any lasting contributions to the community it served?

"I would say so, in the idea that they have outstanding group of farmers. I would say well educated and making a good living for themselves."

How many levels or grades were incorporated into the educational program?

"Grades one through grades eight."

We mentioned earlier that...

"Ages five to fourteen as a rule."

We already discussed the heritage and background. We've discussed the function of the schoolhouse already.

What do you know of the atmosphere of the educational programs. Was it strict, loose, cold, warm?

"In some cases, it depended on the person who was the teacher. Some teachers were extremely strict and run a very tight ship. Usually teachers tried to have a warm respectful association with themselves and their students."

What was the average number of years a student spent in school?

"About eight."

Did many go on to high school?

"In the class I graduated with, there were five of us and two of us graduated from high school."

Why did the school building close down?

"The main reason that the school building closed down was because there were no longer enough children to pay or hire a teacher."

Who served on the school board?

"One of the...or...three of the people in the area. My father, for instance, served about 14 to 16 years."

Are any of them still living?

"I think maybe one is. I kind of lost track."

We've already discussed the occupations of the students and if they have become outstanding people.

What was the average class size?

"Oh, one, two, three in a class. Sometimes, we only had one, you'd double, particularly if they were the people who owned land and would be there next year. Maybe you'd give 3rd and 4th graders the same assignment then the next year they would repeat the assignment and then go on to the next class."

Name some of the rules of the school.

"Well, such things as no talking, no gum. If you wanted to speak, you raised your hand. Some teachers insisted that if you wanted to talk, you had to stand. Of course, no hats."

That's one of your favorites.

"Yes."

What was the dress and overall appearance of the students?

"Girls all wore dresses or skirts and blouses, long hose, all wore lace shoes. The boys all wore, in the fall and spring, denim shirts and in the winter time heavier shirts and all wore blue jean overalls, lace boots."

What did the student have to pay to go to school or did they have any costs?

"There was no tuition, but each child had to buy their own books and supplies."

Finally, was there any organizations similar to the PTA or were the teachers and parents involved much together?

"Well, not as you call a PTA, because generally speaking, it was too small a group of people. Parents had a great deal of contact with the teacher and their children. Always, parents visited. It would be unusual if I had a week that I didn't have at least one parent or grandparent pop in. And then you must also remember, a number of teachers who lived in a home where children also attended school from that home

and so they had a geat deal of contact with the parents and people."

I think that is all of the questions. Do you have any closing comments that you'd like to make?

"I don't know what."

Very good.