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Interview with Loretta McGinty Schafer

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Loretta McGinty Schafer

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ORAL HISTORY

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH LORETTA MCGINTY SCHAFER

Holiday Home, Larned, Kansas, July 20, 1984

Dianne Richards
EDUC 700
July 23, 1984

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH LORETTA MCGINTY SCHAFER
Holiday Home, Larned, Kansas, July 20, 1984

QUESTION: During what years were you teaching?

ANSWER: 1926-'27, that was my first year.

Q. Where was the school you taught at?

A. It was about, oh, about four or five miles from Belpre.

Q. Was it a one room school?

A. It was a one room school with two small rooms that were off the entrance hall.

Q. And about how many students did you have?

A. I had 14.

Q. You had 14 students. And were you the only teacher?

A. Yes, the only teacher.

Q. How did you group the students?

A. Well, I had one in the first grade, and there were three third graders and two fifth graders, three seventh graders and five eighth graders. And we would, and after everybody got, and in cold weather, they all got warm and we gave the flag salute, and then started in. And you couldn't spend more than ten or fifteen minutes at the most with a class. And some of the older students were, some smart older students, and they would help some of the younger ones. And I especially worked hard with those eighth graders because they had to take a county examination and I remember the last month and a half, why, we went to school just alone with those eighth graders and to prepare for this examination. And I got old copies from the county superintendent of what the exam had been before, and we drilled on them and everyone of them passed that year which made me feel real good. We really did work hard and we worried about one boy but everybody tried to help him and he made it. And then we'd start out with the flag salute and then

somethimes we'd sing because this girl was in the seventh grade and she was quite good on the organ. And we'd sing songs and then on bad days when we couldn't get outside, why, we'd play games in the school. We had very few library books and we put on a Christmas program and had a big--everybody came. And I took bedsheets and put them up for a curtain and we put a wire across. We had a stage and did I say I had to build my own fire?

Q. No, you didn't tell us that, the kind of heating you had.

A. Well, it was a big old potbellied stove, I guess you'd call it. A huge stove and it had a big metal fence around it. And except, you know, oh, where you would put the coal and the cobs in it. Well, you had to shake this down in the morning and get all--and then empty the ashes and then build your fire, put the cobs in and get those to burning and then put your coal in. And you couldn't keep anything in there. It would freeze over night. So you couldn't keep any water in there in the building. And the boys brought, there were three or four boys and they were real good about carrying in the coal and the cobs and carrying in the water.

Q. How did they drink the water? Did they bring cups?

A. Well, we had a bucket with a dipper and if they didn't have a cup, they just used that dipper. But some of them, most of them had their own tin cups and then I had hooks around where they would hang them. And they did and their feet would be cold when they would get there and their hands. And you had to warm them up because they would carry their dinner pails and some of them would lose a glove or something like that. And, but, baseball was all, oh, we used to play blackman

and, of course, they'd choose up sides and they always wanted me to be on their side but with baseball, I usually was the umpire. But once in a while I'd play and I could really bat that old ball and, but most of the time I was the umpire.

And the county superintendent would visit once a year and it was always a relief. You didn't know when she was coming or anything and I was always relieved after she made her visit. I could relax a little more because she would grade you, you know, and ask to talk to the kids.

Q. So it was a woman superintendent, then?

A. Yes, well, county superintendent, and that's why I got the, she gave me, you know, the examinations and you see, we drilled on those questions and were just real happy when that whole time worried them. That's kind of the way they judged you if those eighth graders could pass that examination, why, then you were a good teacher.

Q. That's how you were judged as a teacher.

A. That's right.

Q. How about the lunch for the children?

A. Well, they brought their lunches and I had to bring mine. And then I was the one that got this idea that they could bring something, and if they wanted to, in a little jar from home, like soup, a little bowl of soup, some of them brought navy beans and we'd heat that up in that boiler that was on top of the stove. You know, put the lid on and we'd put that on in the middle of the morning and by noon, you see, they'd have a hot liquid or they could bring cocoa or whatever they wanted to and they thought that was pretty nice.

And we did have a library bookcase but there was very few books we had but the school board let me get

some more books. Sometimes, I'd read to them or, well, we, when we had a little bit of time, we'd start a book. And one of them I remember, we read the Bobsey Twins and a whole series of that. And then we'd read a chapter or so or maybe one of the eighth graders would, this one girl could read very well, and they'd want you to go on but you had to stop. And then we had, we used to have spelling matches, maybe on a Friday afternoon and then sometimes the kids, they liked to cipher, you know, and choose up sides and cipher. And, oh, and then this school bell, when, if I was out I had to have the bell with me, but they always liked, somebody like to ring that bell. It was a big old bell and just made quite a bit of noise. And most of the time, if there was anybody close around they wanted to ring the bell for me.

Q. So you took turns with them?

A. Took turns, yes.

Q. How about the books the students used?

A. Well, you see, at the, this teacher's institute that we had, why we would learn, it was sort of a workshop, and we would learn the different, if there was any change in the textbooks and then the new, if there was any new procedures that you were to carry out. Why, you see, we went, we got all that. That was all the teachers in the county and the grade schools were supposed to go there, were required to go there. And then the kids would get their own school books, well, there was mostly, it was the drugstores that carried the books.

Q. The drugstores had the books?

A. Had the books and they bought their own books. The district didn't furnish them. And then they had their own pencils and crayons and we used to make posters

and put around the, there was a place to put posters, and we just, we'd just have that, that was special. And some days, there were a few days that you just didn't get through every, all our schedule.

Q. What subjects did you usually teach?

A. Well, we had a, in the first grade, it was just was, was a primer that was what it was called. And then they, of course, I didn't have second grade that year, and the third grade had a reader, and arithmetic book and I believe that's all. And then in the fourth grade, they started geography and then in the seventh grade, they had, well, of course, they had geography and history. History started in the seventh grade and it seems like we had a physiology book. And I know, I forget how many, how many different subjects that they had to pass in the examination. And there was no music, I mean, we just did that on our own.

Q. That was your own activity?

A. Un huh.

Q. What kind of materials did you have to teach with and how did you teach the kids what they were supposed to learn?

Q. Well, the little first graders, I had flash cards to start out to teach reading and the same way with arithmetic. I made these myself and then in the other grades...

Q. When they learned the geography, what did they do?

A. Oh, well, we had a globe, then we had maps and then we had a map that I could pull down--it was like a curtain--of the different countries. And we, they were taught how many continents there were and, but they were required, I mean, they knew the states and the capitals. And some of the older ones would help the younger ones, now like with the flash cards. And we really didn't have much. And we did have penmanship,

and this was a book and they would learn to write. I think it was called Palmer.

Q. Palmer method?

A. Yes, and we'd have that and try the one line space. You know some of the ^ssmall letters were one space, that was the beginners, and then two, and then, but we didn't teach any printing. It was all longhand.

Q. As soon as they began to learn to write, they learned longhand writing. How did you usually test the students?

A. Well, with, uh, we didn't have any workbooks, you just had to make up your own. And a course of study, we'd make out a course of study a month ahead or at least we tried to and keep up with that and that'd be your requirements if you, that you could sort of go by. And this was a nine months' school which was, most of them, most of the country schools were just eight months' and this was a nine months' school.

Q. About what was the length of the school day?

A. Well, it started at nine and we went home at four. And then we took, well, an hour at noon, you know. They'd play, go out and play sometimes, and sometimes I'd go with them. They'd have their lunch first, eat their lunch, and some of the, you know, they'd have a lunch, and lots of times it'd be a gallon bucket with a lid and that would be on there tight and then they would open that and sometimes they'd have boiled eggs.

Q. And so, at lunch then, you played games. What kind of games did they like to play?

A. Well, if it was any decent weather, they always wanted outside. Like I said, the liked to play in those trees and this pond was there and the boys, some of the older boys, made them fishing poles and would pretend. They would sit up in that tree and pretend they were cat fishing and have a string, you know.

I don't know, they just liked to do that, get up in the tree and then this pond was there.

Q. Were there really any fish in it?

A. No, there wasn't any fish in it and then in the winter, why, they always wanted to go out there and skate on that ice. Lot of them tumbled but it didn't seem to hurt them.

Q. Did you go skate, too?

A. Oh, yes, yeah, it was fun when I fell down, they thought it was funny.

Q. How about discipline? Did you have any--what kinds of punishments did you give?

A. Well, I really didn't have any discipline problems. One little boy, one day he was going along dragging his feet and I said, "Harold, pick up you feet," and he turned around and he said, "Oh, where did I leave them." And, of course, everybody thought that was, well, we just laughed about that. And some of them, there was whispering. But with just fourteen, there wasn't any disciplinary problem at all. I mean I never had to, I never kept them after school because they all had to go home. And they didn't, some of them did do homework, but I didn't require it because I don't think they did so much homework then. But there were some that would take their books home and study.

Q. They probably had a lot of chores to do, too.

A. Well, too, they had chores to do. And they walked as far as, oh, a mile and three quarters. Of course, in bad weather their parents drove them to school.

Q. Were most of the children children of farming families?

A. They were all children of farming families.

Q. Did they have any particular national background or religious backgrounds?

- A. Well, no, not really, they didn't. Then that seemed to be a time that they stressed patriotism and, you know, we had, we put the flag up, had a flagpole. Lots of schools didn't have flagpoles but we had a good flag and that had to be put up every morning and taken down and folded up before we went home. And one night I forgot to take it down and one of the boys came to school, it was never locked, and because he thought it would be awful if the flag would have had to of been left up over night. It was consider^{ed} wrong then to leave the flag up over night and he, of course, he thought he had something on me because I'd forgotten to take it down.
- Q. But it was a good thing he remembered.
- A. Yeah, well, he could see it. You see he lived, oh, closer, probably half a mile. Anyway he knew it was up.
- Q. Now you told us some of the special activities you had. You mentioned the Christmas program...
- A. Well, we had, this was really quite a deal and we had, we practiced, we had a little play and we had Santy Claus. And we had, like I said, we took bedsheets and made a curtain and we fixed up sort of a little stage. And I remember I fixed it to make it look like a window because in this little play, there was something about the window and I took a curtain and fixed it. And, of course, there was no window there but it just looked like a window. And we brought a few chairs and things from home. I think it was to be a livingroom scene. And that really went over big. And then, the last day of school, it was a big day because they would have a big dinner and everybody came to that. And there wasn't much, there wasn't any studying done. They come, you know at noon, or just before noon.

And we had all kinds of...

- Q. Was that just the students or...
- A. No, that was the whole district if they wanted to come. Some of them came that didn't even have children in school but they had this, the last day of school.
- Q. Did they use the schoolhouse for other things besides school purposes.
- A. No, not really.
- Q. How about spelling bees? Did you have spelling bees?
- A. Well, we had, we called them spelling matches, and they would come up and I would pronounce words and the last one, that was the winner. And they liked to cipher. I'd give them problems, and the one that could go to the blackboard and could solve that problem, why, then they were the winner.
- Q. Did you ever compete with other schools?
- A. No, well, there wasn't any schools too close. And we had very few visitors.
- Q. Parents didn't usually visit. Did you have any group like the PTA.
- A. No, nothing like that.
- Q. Who hired the teachers?
- A. Well, the school board.
- Q. It was a county school board or just the district?
- A. No, just the district school board.
- Q. And about how much did the teachers make?
- A. Well, I got a hundred and five dollars a month and that was pretty good wages then.
- Q. How about any special rules that you had to follow as a teacher?
- A. Not in the country schools.
- Q. How about your special responsibilities? You told us about putting up the flag and about getting the stove ready, were there any other things you had to do

besides teaching?

- A. Well, did I tell you it was my job to sweep the floor and I would do that after school was out and instead of waiting 'til morning. I always managed to do that before I went home and I'd stay there sometimes and work and then come back to that old, cold schoolroom early in the morning and build the fires and... But they were all, in the bad weather, they were always, it took the building a while to warm up.
- Q. Where did you stay while you were teaching?
- A. Well, I stayed at home.
- Q. You stayed with your family. And how much school did you have? What training did you have?
- A. Well, I had, this was just right at the time they had discontinued normal training and so I went to Hays to school, and took a, and we had to take an examination. And, I don't know, I think it was 17 subjects and the county superintendent at Hays gave this. Well, that's where we went to for our exam and theⁿ we got a certificate that was good, I think, for three years. And then I went every summer for awhile.
- Q. When you needed special supplies and materials for teaching, how did you get them?
- A. Well, I asked the chairman of the school board and he was very generous compared to what some of the other teachers would get. And most anything I asked for he would get it.
- Q. Let's see, I think we talked about the heating. What kind of lighting did you use?
- A. Well, it was just the, there was no lighting only just the windows and shades. There was no curtains.
- Q. How about the toilet facilities the school had?
- A. Well, they had the outside toilets. There were, no, there wasn't toilet tissue at that time and we would empty the waste baskets which had crumpled writing

paper and that was taken out. One of the girls would take it to the girls' toilet and the boys would, and that's what they used.

Q. That's what they used for their toilet paper. Did the students have to pay anything to go to school or did they have any fees of any type?

A. No, no there was no kind of fees.

Q. Just buying their books.

A. Buying their own books.

Q. When the students finished school, what did they usually do? Were they mostly farmers? What kind of work did they enter?

A. Well, they had chores and things of that kind. But I don't think there were any of them that did real farm work. They were, see, they'd be about 14 years old, 13, about 13 most of them were. And, but I don't think that any of them actually worked with farm machinery. They had their chores and some of them had to milk cows, I remember them talking about that.

Q. When they finished eighth grade, what kinds of things did they do? Did many of them go on to other schools?

A. Well, most of them went to high school. Now, that eighth grade class, all but one boy went to high school.

Q. Where was the high school?

A. Well, one of them was in Belpre and then there was some others that went to Macksville.

Q. And where did you go to school when you were in elementary school?

A. Belpre, and I graduated.

Q. And I think you mentioned to me that your principal (in Belpre)...

A. Was my primary teacher.

Q. And then you began to teach...

A. And she taught quite awhile. She had them older than

than I was. She taught there forty some years.

Q. Do you remember her name?

A. Un huh, Ora Rankin.

Q. Is your school still standing?

A. You know, I don't know because I haven't been back there. This was about, oh, about three and a half miles from where I lived and I haven't been back there, oh, right where that school was, oh, for thirty years or more. But it seemed like that there was, the homes were pretty close to this school because I think the longest that anyone walked was about a mile and a half.

Q. Was the school, do you remember if it was built out of wood or stone?

A. Wood, painted white. But I can't remember, it had a number but I can't remember the number.

Q. I think you told me earlier, the school had a special piece of equipment.

A. An organ.

Q. An also a telephone. Do you want to tell us about the telephone?

A. It was a country line telephone and it was in this room where we had our drinking water. And we could hear the, the telephone would ring but everybody had a, like one long, two shorts, or a long, and I can't remember what ours was, but as I remember, I never had to call anyplace or no one ever had to, and that was unusual. Most of the schools didn't have a telephone. But I guess this school board, in an emergency, they wanted a telephone. But we paid no attention, you know, and there wasn't a lot, it didn't do a lot of ringing but the telephone was there.

Q. If you had to name one thing that maybe the one room schools did better than what we do today, what would

you probably name?

- A. Well, I believe that they were all just interested in each other. And wanted to help just like the, when I had those eighth graders and we were all so anxious that they pass their examination so they could go into high school. And they were so willing and would help one another and this one boy, everybody worked on him and he made it. And they felt, and I felt that at that time, it wasn't fair that they had to take this while in schools like Belpre and other elementary schools, you see, they didn't have to pass this county examination. And it was quite an ordeal for them. And I have been told that those students that came from that school, those country schools made better freshmen than a lot of them from the city schools or the small city schools.
- Q. So, in other words, they all had, everyone had to work hard together and help one another.
- A. Seemed like they did.
- Q. And more so than in the city schools.
- A. And I did quite a bit of studying myself to keep ahead of the eighth grade. I think I learned an awful lot that winter that I missed out on all through school.
- Q. Because you had the responsibility to teach.
- A. To teach and I had to keep ahead of them.
- Q. Did any of the students go on to do anything particularly outstanding?
- A. Not that I can, I think most of them married and had families and some of them went, moved away. I heard about it, and farmed.
- Q. A large portion farmed...
- A. Yeah, and married and had families.
- Q. Do you remember any particular controversies or problems that arose while you were teaching?
- A. Well, about the only thing, there was Jehovah's Witnesses,

were the new religion that had come and that was sort of understood then that we had to give the flag salute and that wasn't required but it was suggested that that was a good way to start the day.

Q. To keep everybody kind of united and...

A. And as far as I know, there weren't any Jehovah Witnesses in the district but there were some around in some of the others. And you know they would refuse even to give the flag salute. And, but, I was happy that I didn't have to put up with that.

Q. You didn't have any problems.

A. No.

Q. What about your district and the kind of support and the board of education and the kind of support they gave you?

A. Well, the school board was just very supportive of anything that I wanted to do and especially this, he was the chairman, and he was just a real kind, and he wanted for his children and the rest of them to have what they needed. And they even bought library books, a few of them. I built that up a little bit. There was a small library but he was willing to, and it seemed like, he could just go get that. I don't think they had to have a meeting or anything about it.

Q. He had the power to do it.

A. Power to do it, un huh, and the others, I don't know of course, they elected their school board but I never knew anything about that and he was the chairman of the board.