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### Interview with Florence Wilson

Tamara Riggs  
*Fort Hays State University*

Florence Wilson

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Oral Report and Interview for  
Education 700  
Tamara Riggs  
Dr. Allan Miller

My interview was with Mrs. Florence Wilson a resident of Garden City, Kansas. She has been retired for about seven years, and she taught school for a total of thirty years.

Tammy: My name is Tammy Riggs, and I am talking to Mrs. Florence Wilson. The first question I'd like to ask you is how long were you teaching for? How many years did you teach altogether?

F.Wilson: I taught thirty years.

T: Where did you first teach school?

F.W: My first year was at Sed College at Gray County. It is about twenty-five miles straight east of Garden City.

T: How long did you teach there?

F.W: I just taught there one year.

T: What age group did you teach?

F.W: I had only three pupils. I had a little girl in second, one in third, and a little boy in fifth.

T: How much schooling did you need in order to teach school back then?

F.W: I was very well educated back then. I had two years of junior college. High school and two years of junior college was all that was really required. I had my sixty hour continuing certificate, and there weren't too many. It was the end of the Depression time and to have two years of junior college at that time was pretty good.

T: How much were you paid?

F.W: Alright, I received sixty dollars a month, and my contract was for eight months. My total contract was for four hundred and eighty dollars, and I paid twenty dollars of that sixty out for board and room.

T: How did you get your paychecks?

F.W: The board members would meet once a month, and they would discuss any problems or any good things that had happened. At that meeting they would write out my paycheck and give it to me.

T: When you were teaching where did you live?

F.W: I boarded and roomed with a farm family, and I walked a mile each way to school.

T: How long was the school year?

F.W: Eight months.

T: How long was the school day?

F.W: We started at nine, and we were out at four.

T: Was there more than just one teacher in the school or were you the only teacher?

F.W: I was the only teacher, yes.

T: Did they ever have any other teachers come in while you were teaching or were you basically the only one?

F.W: No, I was by myself. Once a month and sometimes once every six weeks depending, the county superintendent would come and pay me a surprise visit. I never did know so my lesson plans always had to be up-to-date. She was very nice, and she came from

T: Was there a principle for the school?

F.W: No, I was the total one.

T: Who employed the teachers?

F.W: The school board. I applied for that school. Then I was sent a contract by the school board when they voted on me.

T: How many members were there on the school board?

F.W: I believe four back in those days.

T: How often did you meet with the school board?

F.W: I never did have a meeting that first year or even in the next three years. They never did ask the teacher to meet with them. I would have I'm sure. I could have if I'd wanted to and if they had invited me. They didn't seem to think that it was necessary.

T: How did you get the supplies for your school?

F.W: I bought these myself whatever I needed. I would give the school board my receipt, and they would pay whatever. I never was questioned, but between you and me some of the supplies I bought myself. I didn't mention it, because I felt that some might think that I was trying to spend too much district money. I spent my own money on some of it.

T: Was there a certain way that you started out each day like with a song?

F.W: Yes, when the weather was nice, I'd ring the school bell, and we'd meet out in front. Like I said, when the weather was nice, the flag would be at the flagpole outside, and we'd give the flag salute. Then if the weather was not that nice; why we'd say the Pledge of Allegiance inside. Then I'd always go to the piano, and I would play some march tune. The children would march in and hang up their coats, take off their overshoes or whatever, put their lunch pails away, and take their seats quietly. I don't ever remember having to say be quiet, because they just liked to behave. I can't remember having any discipline problems.

T: What subjects did you teach?

F.W: All, my favorite three R's, all of those, plus in these days we didn't have formal science books. We did lots of visiting about science. I know now that they probably got as much science then as today with all the workbooks. We didn't do lab experiments or that sort of thing. We'd take nature hikes many times if the weather was nice. We'd walk a distance with our lunches and sit and talk about what we'd seen. We would study the clouds, talk about the different insects, and the different rock formations. I'd had a little of that in my training. I have real good feelings about science. Of course every child had to learn Kansas history. Starting with first grade, we had some study of the Kansas history and the United States history. I had the whole curriculum to myself.

T: Was there any particular order that you liked to teach the subjects?

F.W: Yes, you see I had all eight grades. I would try to have the little children, first grade,-- course kindergarten is not in the rural schools at all. I was speaking of my first four years of teaching. First graders are so young and wiggly, so I always try to have first, second, and third grade class over with by noontime. Also as many of the other classes as as I could, because fourth graders are still quite young. The afternoon would be spent with my upper grades, with the fifth through eighth grades. While they were having their recitation classes, the younger children had sit work. Whether it was sandbox play, play play, reading, or whatever they had for art study, that was their sit work. As the older children would finish with their recitation, they would blend in with the younger ones and kind of have an all school crafttime. They had crafttime whether or not they were handed in. I think everybody was happy.

T: You said you didn't have any disciplinary problems but if you did was there a certain way that you handled them?

F.W: I don't remember. You know with farm children, and my first four years of teaching were with farm children. I think farm children, and I can say this because I am the mother of city children, carry responsibility real well. In those days, now this would be back in the 1940's for the next four years, children were so happy to be at school. They wouldn't have television at all to watch, and school was their learning center and entertainment center. They didn't have close friends excepting at school, and why do something to cause your best friend not to like you. It seemed that everybody wanted to behave, and I guess I'm lucky. I feel that my children loved me, and I loved them. We had a real healthy relationship, and I honestly don't remember of ever having to discipline children at the rural school. Now at town if I would have a child who was a little-- you know-- out of the ordinary, I always thought I learned to gain their confidence more through a smile. If you have a child who is having a lot of trouble and is causing disturbances, you just stop everything you are doing, your teaching, and put your eyes on that child and get their attention. Then don't frown, smile, a smile will gain you more than all the frowns. I never did use a paddle. I had candy in the desk draw. I always had a rocking chair in my room. After school if I had a child who would have been not so well disciplined through the daytime.... I am speaking of my last twenty-six years.... I would keep them to help me with picking up the chalk erasers, whatever, and we would end up in the rocking chair, rocking and visiting. If you can gain their confidence they're probably not going to be naughty tomorrow. If you can end that up with a piece of candy why not. I think love can gain more through good discipline

in the classroom, then I'd ever had in sending them to the principle and all things like that. I just never did buy that.

T: Did you have any extra-curricular activities that you had to do outside of school?

F.W: Many. In these days, way back in the 1940's, the teacher was in charge of all the community programs, We would have Thanksgiving programs, Christmas programs, box suppers, house suppers, and literaries. The teacher was always the key person to see that everything recitations, the songs, and the dialogs were all ready. The schoolhouse was the community center. The community revolved around the teacher.

T: Was the schoolhouse also where you had different town meetings if you had to have a meeting?

F.W: Yes, the school board members would meet at the schoolhouse and all of those literaries etc met at the schoolhouse. Sunday it became the Sunday school and the church building. This includes my first four years, it was all that, I mean the school, the church, and the community center. I drove for my first year, and I walked two miles a day. My second year I walked four miles a day, because I did two miles from the boardingroom. The next two years in Liberal schools; I drove up from Garden City a total of ten miles a day. I did all my own janitor work.

T: When you were a teacher did you have any particular code of ethics that you had had to obey in your private life?

F.W: Oh just in my own feeling...I have a feeling that had I-well I had a boyfriend my first year; my present husband and I were dating. I never did tell my school buddies that we went to movies on the weekend. I don't know that they would have cared, yet they might have thought well does she go to movies. I'm not sure that I told them that because some movies were not the highest class. We certainly most went to the highest class. The second year I was married, but my husband had gone away to war. Many of the young women were taking up with the soldiers we encountered. We had ten thousand soldiers here in Garden City at the air base. I didn't want any part in that. I worked at the hospital as a nurses aid in my spare time. I never did go to the USO because inwardly I felt that maybe my community would think that I was looking with a soldier. My soldier was at the war front...my husband, and so I think yes, I had a feeling that I certainly had to stay on a straight line. I wanted to anyway, but I think some teachers didn't and they were fired. Inwardly I did what I wanted to do, which I guess was the right thing.

T: When you were teaching did you notice any problems with teacher turnover? With other teachers leaving the teaching profession for other jobs?

F.W: Not so much in these days back in the 1940's. Teachers were somewhat pretty hard to go by. I mean, they, teachers were not leaving the profession like they are now. Because a teaching salary was about as good as any other if not better. Believe it or not-sixty dollars a month!

T: Were there a lot of people who wanted to become teachers? When other people go to school did they want to become teachers like a lot of people are becoming teachers now?

F.W: Oh I don't know. I feel like alot of people, alot of my classmates, went in other directions. It seemed like secretarial work was great in those days. There weren't as many teachers turning toward the teaching profession in the 1940's as in secretarial positions. I know many of my classmates became secretaries. I was one of the few who chose to be a teacher.

T: I would like to ask you a few questions about the school that you taught at. I'd like to know when the schoolhouse was first built?

F.W: This first school I taught in was called Sod College. I don't know where the word college came from, but sod meant just what it indicates. It was made—the first one was sort of a cave building; more like our solar buildings today. It was diked with sod. I've seen a painting of that first building called Sod College, and I have a feeling that some farmer probably gave the land for that Sod College, the cave building. Then as that building deteriorated the Sod College building was built and that was the one I taught in. I have visited that building in the last six months, and it's shambles now. It's just ready to—a good strong wind could blow it over. It was a beautiful building at one time as was this sod college; the painting I have seen of this sod building. It dates back—if you need to know this in your study; I expect you could learn this in Gray county register of deeds office. I don't know the history of who gave the land or who built the sod building. I do know that the two buildings called Sod College were on the same landsite.

T: Was there anybody who ran the school? Was it the school board?

F.W: Yes, the school board with the county superintendent overseeing me to see that I was doing what I should.

T: Do you have any idea why they decided on that location to build the school?

F.W: Well in those days the state was giving so much money for every school that could be started on sections of land. There was schoolhouses everywhere, and I have a feeling that there would just happen to be enough children in that area to merit building a building there. I don't know that, I'm just guessing but there were many, many rural schools. Today children are bused fifty miles or more a day but in those days children either had to walk, ride a horse, or be brought in the family lumber wagon. There had to be many schools for transportation.

T: Who was in charge of the upkeep of the school?

F.W: I was. If it needed to be shingled or painted the school board members would do that. I took care of all the janitor work, and I would build the fire myself. Many mornings when I walked that mile or two miles, whatever it was, to school; I would be so cold. I would try to bank the coals into the stove the night before, so that all I would have to do is to put in more kindling the next morning. Sometimes the cinders had gone out in the night, and I had to build the fire from scratch, you might say. It was cold to do that. New early in the fall, I would go out in the evenings to get my bucket of coal for the next morning before the snakes had hibernated. I'd always take a hoe along, because sometimes I'd have to kill a rattler or two before I could get my bucket of coal. That was kind of creepy! Then in the early spring the same thing; the snakes would come back to the coalhouse first it seemed like. I never would let the children go after coal, because a rattlesnake could have been there. I always had the hoe right along with my broom in my broom closet. There was my hoe and the coal shovel.

T: Do you have any idea who decided that the school needed to be built there? Was there one particular person or a group of people who decided that?

F.W: I don't know that. I just imagine though that it would be a concentration of people living in that particular area, that's all.

T: Do you know where the finances come from to build the school?

F.W: Probably the state would reimburse the county. I'm just guessing that. I doubt that parents had anything to do with that; I mean with giving the money. I think that would be county reimbursed by the state. I don't know if the federal government had anything to do with that in these days.

T: Do you have any idea how much the school cost to be built?

F.W: I really wouldn't, it wouldn't be into the tens of thousands. For instance, the school on the hill cost two and a half million. It wouldn't be anything like that now. I imagine that it would be thousands of dollars but not tens of thousands. Maybe a few thousand, I don't know but nothing like today.

T: You were just talking about how the school was heated. I was wondering if you might talk a little bit about how it was heated and how it was lit?

F.W: We didn't have any... in any school I've ever taught in it's always been a coal stove or coal furnace. This is until coming to the city schools, but I always had to make my own fire. The last two years I taught in a rural school so this would be my third and fourth years of teaching. We did have a big ferrous furnace that was stoked by coal. All my first four years it was coal stoves. The farmers would bring in scrap lumber and corn cobs, and I had some kerosine. I would soak the corn cobs in kerosine and light them. That would turn into wood, into the coal and so forth. I was to cook the meals the first four years I taught, I would always have a pot of beans, a stew, or something like that on top of the stove cooking all the time. At neontime we had our bowls and our spoons, and we would eat along with maybe a sandwich or whatever the parents would send from home. But I always had the main course cooking on the stove. So we had hot meals!

T: Was there a particular way the school was lit?

F.W: In the first four years--wait a minute-- in the first two years we had kerosine lamps. At the times of literaries some of the farmers I suppose would bring in these Aladdin lamps that they would have to pump. It burns some type of gas; I don't know quite. They were lantern like lamps. Then in my last two years at the rural school; we had electricity, which was very modern, very!

T: Was there a certain place where you had to go to get water, like did you have a well outside the school?

F.W: The first year I taught, the parents brought a cream can of water each day. Then that would be poured into a fountain that had a little faucet, a little press faucet. Then the next three years of my rural school teaching, we had pumps. The children would have to pump the water, or I would depending... sometimes the pump would be frozen. If I knew that ahead of time, I would call one of the board members and he would bring water.

T: Could you describe the interior of a school a little?

F.W: The old traditional pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were always on either side of the flag, right in the center of the building of the school. My first two years, we had a pump organ to play. The last two years, in the rural school I had a piano. Our desks were wooden desks; very sturdy. I don't know when the children could get by with it, but when I wasn't looking I would find names carved. That was done back in those days. I've been on the committee to preserve this little school in the park and now we treasure those names and initials that are carved in the desk. It really wasn't the best thing to do. We had inkwells in the desks, because we wrote in ink. We didn't have ballpoint pens then. The potbellied stove was always the center of the room, with its long pipe extending to the chimney entrance. I don't know why these pipes had to be so long, but they always were almost the length of the room. We always had cloak closets for the boys, and a cloak closet for the girls. They each kept their overshoes and their lunch pails in their own closets. We had a common wash basin with a bucket and a dipper. Everybody drank from the same dipper and nobody grew to be any less healthy for it. We had one bar of soap that we used. We didn't have liquid soap dispensers, I had a common old straw broom and I would sprinkle sweeping compound around to keep the dust down. When I would sweep, it wouldn't make so much dust. We always had a big Webster dictionary. I think in every school I've ever taught in we had big, thick Websters dictionary. A big globe... just a nice memory really.

T: Did you have a library in your school?

F.W: Very scant. The books we had, if I remember, were very old. I would come to town every week or so, and I would go to the county superintendent's office, not the city library, but the county superintendent's office. There I could check out big boxes of books and take them back to my school. The children would enjoy these books. We didn't get to keep them but sometimes a neighboring teacher and I would trade books. We would have those books checked out for maybe as long as six weeks, from the county superintendent's office. This is because different teachers would be trading them around. We always had good books, because we could draw on the county superintendent's supply.

T: Did this school differ in any way from any of the other schools in that area?

F.W: Schools were all pretty much the same, the interior, the teachers. Well maybe a different teacher would live five miles away from me. In those types of good relationships, we would visit all the time in the evenings sometimes. In my first year of teaching my parents lived about fifteen miles from my school. Sometimes some of the neighboring teachers would come home with me, like for the weekend. They were from the cities, and we had fun, lots of fun. I have good memories of that.

T: Was there any outstanding feature for the school that you taught at?

F.W: Well the first year, of course, it was the Sod College building. The farmers in that area were very well-to-do, and I feel this was the way it was. The second year I taught, I felt that the farmers were, well a little more desperate. I don't know but what they paid a little more attention about what was going on at the school. They had more time, and they didn't have as much money to count I guess. Then my third and fourth years of teaching were close to Garden City; I don't know everywhere I've been I've had wonderful patrons. I've felt like their daughter in some cases. They would let me come home with them for weekends when my husband was away at the war. Sometimes I wouldn't come to

Garden City for several weeks, because I would be drifting around with my patrons in their homes. They were very nice to me.

T: Was there any physical changes made to the schoolhouse while you were teaching there?

F.W: Not while I was teaching there, but it's real funny these very schools, the first three schools I taught in... The first school was closed at the end of the term that I taught. It became just the community house then because there weren't enough children to merit having school. There were only three the year I had it and then two of those three moved away. The other little boy's parents took him on into Cimarron to school. That has closed down, and it has never been a school since I left there. Then the second year I taught almost the same thing happened; parents moved away. It was the beginning of when farmers would move to town. They would come back out to their farming interests, but the farmer would live in town. The attendance dropped and that's what became of Grainery. I closed it down. The third school I taught in, which was ten miles from Garden City was the old Valentine out east of town here. That school went under some years after I taught there, but it wasn't maybe three or four years later they built a brand new building over on south fifty. That has become the special ed building now. The school I taught in is now a farmhouse. They made it into a home. History goes on.

T: At the school that you taught at were there any special events that happened there?

F.W: We'd have track meets in the spring and this would bring in maybe four or five districts. They would all center at one school, and we'd have all the feats of high jump, broad jump, and all the races. At noon there would be a big basket dinner, and everybody would bring food. In the afternoon, when all the running events, jumping, and all this would be over, we would have a big spelling bee. Children would compete to see who the best speller would be. In some cases the spelling bee would be held separately. I've known when that's happened too. Ladies would bring quilts and put them up in some of the rooms in the school. They would have a quilting bee, while we were having a spelling bee. We would have a potluck at noon, and I remember one time some of the farmers brought in a hog, it's a great big pig. They had a butchering at the same time, and children got to watch this going on. Many times butchering would go on while the child would be at school so they had a butchering that one time. I thought that was really great. So there was excitement.

T: Did this school make any lasting contributions to the community?

F.W: Well I suppose through the children. I mean some of the children I have taught in those rural communities have gone on to be quite famous. In fact one of these girls, the first year I taught, has gone on in music. She is head professor of music in the Indiana University. She was my little second grader in the Sod College building. The boy has become an outstanding minister. He is living in Louisville, Kentucky. His voice was so quiet and so soft, that I would hold him on my lap for reading sometimes, because I couldn't hear him. He was so shy and bashful. Today he doesn't need a mike when he speaks, and the auditorium is full of his beautiful voice when he sings. He's got a beautiful singing voice. I've visited him in Louisville, Kentucky in the last three years.

T: Were there any rules that the students had to obey in the school?

F.W: I think so. I never did let children just run back and forth to the pencil sharpener or to the drinking fountain. They needed to ask permission. I never did let one child go to the outdoor toilet alone. I always wanted them to go in pairs because of snakes, and because I did not want someone to be kidnapped. There were precautions, yes. If they wanted to speak they raised their hands. I don't think I was stern, but you have to have some kind of regulation. I don't remember ever having troubles that way.

T: This may sound funny, but you said the students might be kidnapped. What do you mean by that?

*Excellent follow-up*

F.W: Alright, this was kind of ingrained in me from my early childhood. My stepmother, my own mother died when I was a tiny baby, she always cautioned me to be careful when I go to the restroom because somebody might kidnap you. Well the reason for this was, she had a sister who had gone to the toilet. This was when she was a little girl in a rural school, and her family has never found her. That's long ago, but they never did find her. Whether she was kidnapped they don't know. There were lots of gypsies in those days, and they don't know if the gypsies kidnapped her or not. I always had that fear that that could happen. First to me when I was a little girl, and then I never did allow one child to go alone when I was teaching. I didn't want them to be kidnapped. I guess that's a personal thing that came from my home, but it can happen. It can certainly happen in today's society. It could of back then to because it did.

T: Now I'd like to ask you about some of the students you taught and about the curriculum that you used. Did you have any certain teaching methods or habits that you used?

F.W: Well now in these days, like I said the county superintendent would come to visit. She would check my plans and, for instance, we wouldn't have a social studies book, but I had a teacher's guide. I had to do the research. I had to look up all the references, because the children's library couldn't afford that. When I would come to town on weekends, I would go to the county superintendent's office and do my research. Then I would take the materials back to the children. I would build my own curriculum study. I didn't have it as fine as the teachers have it today, because they have workbooks and resource people who come in to tell things. I didn't have it that way. We didn't have workbooks the teacher had to make up the extra work.

T: I was wondering if you might be able to describe some of the text/books that that you used?

F.W: I remember the readers were the Bobs Merrill, and I still have some of those. In fact, I have the one I learned to read from when I was a little girl. Boba Merrills readers. We had a Stones arithmetic book, and it's a red book; I'll never forget it. It was very, I thought, difficult. I never did enjoy arithmetic, when I was having to learn arithmetic. When I started to teach it, I learned to like arithmetic. The children seemed like they always had a bad time with it. I think I know why. We didn't have all the interesting, manipulating things that children have today in the classroom. When we needed to regroup, we did it with rocks or something we'd go out and find on our own, toothpicks. I think the arithmetic books today are inductive to more study than our books were then. These books, of course, are out-of-date and are collector's items.

T: Was the school that you taught at open to all children?

F.W: Yes as long as they were of age. A child had to be five years old before they could enter first grade. Now they have to be six, which is a good rule today, but they were too young back then. In my particular case, my birthday is on October the 8<sup>th</sup>. This would mean that I was four years old for the first six weeks of my first grade. The school board let me go, because I was to turn five the next month. That followed me, and I was always the youngest one in the class, I'm still the baby of the senior class of 1938 in Garden City.

T: Were a majority of the students a certain religion or nationality were you taught?

F.W: Well as far as religion, they would come to the school for Sunday school and church. I can't remember any church denominations at all. I'm sure some of the parents may have been Catholic or Protestant, but I didn't know those words when I was young. When I began to teach, I don't know, I think the people were more of a congregational thing. I mean they were all one, but there weren't any religion lines.

T: Did any of the students or their families have customs that appeared in the school?

F.W: Yes, one year I taught, and I had some Mennonite children. I'm certainly not talking Mennonites down at all. I admire them very very much, but I was teaching the children to do square dancing because it was fun. I had all eight grades, at that time, and lots of children. I think I had twenty-seven, and I was teaching them square dancing. They just having a ball. Several of the Mennonite families realized that it was dancing, and so I was visited with by several of them. They wished I wouldn't do that. I decided to call them folk games, and I said would it be alright if we played folk games. Sure that will fine and so we continued, but it wasn't square dancing anymore it was folk games. We went right on with folk games, which are actually square dancing. So yes some of the them didn't want dancing, because dancing was not the right word. Folk games was fine though.

TT: How many students went to the school?

F.W: I've had all the way from three children, in my first year of teaching. One year here in Garden City, I had thirty-two in the first grade, and one was totally blind. I've had all sorts of different members in my class too in thirty years.

T: What was the different ages of the students in the school?

F.W: Well in the rural schools, I would have it from six years up through fourteen/ fifteen years. When I came to Garden City, I was strictly a first grade teacher for six-year olds.

T: Was there a certain way that the students had to dress when they came to school?

F.W: I don't remember that, seasonal was all. Warm in the wintertime. I can't remember anything that was different about that. We didn't have anything like a military dress code like some schools have. We didn't have that.

T: What was the greatest distance that any of the students had to travel to get to the school?

F.W: Well the rural schools, I suppose some children would come as far as five miles. That was by horseback, by horse and buggy, and then cars. Some of the farmers, some of the more well-to-do farmers had cars. That was everything the children used during my years of teaching.

T: In talking about the ways the students dressed did they dress differently than kids dress now going to school?

F.W: Well the little boys, as I remember. I don't remember much about jeans mostly the boys wore overalls in those days. Little girls would wear cotten dresses and sometimes aprons to school. This was to keep their dresses clean. Maybe they would wear the same dress all week, and they wore aprons Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Then they took the aprons off Thursday and Friday. Well I don't know, their shoes were farm style shoes sometimes high top shoes. Actually today boys and girls are wearing high topped shoes. The blue jeans today, there was a period of time where I think children dressed better then they do now. Seems like today if the jeans are a little more worn-out the more popular they are, whereas back there the new overalls were really the thing. When they get to be a little bit wash-worn, well then that was taken as farm wear, and they wear their new overalls to school.

T: What types of occupations did some of the students end up doing?

F.W: Well like this one girl. I had my first year, she is the head professor of music at Indiana University. Our doctor, my family doctor today, is one of my first graders, Dr. Tom Kekxal. One of the bankers is one of my first graders. A Dr. Atting, he's a dentist here in town, is one of my first graders. Many, many of my pupils have become teachers, and I've had the joy of recommending them for their jobs. Many of them! There is certainly nothing wrong with the boy or girl who grew up to be a fine parent. I'm proud of all of my children. I have taught hundreds of them and as far as I know only one has ended up in a penitentiary. So I'm real proud and if I could have kept my loving arm around him, and the rocking chair close by he might not be in the pen today. Real proud of my people.

T: When you were teaching in school how did you evaluate or grade the students?

F.W: Well we had the A, B, C, D, F system in those thirty years of teaching. I never did like to put a grade on a paper. A child who really should have a F or failure on a paper might have tried harder than the child who would get an A and hadn't tried. I never did like grades so I generally would end up writing a note or a word on a paper. I had to put down a grade for the county superintendent's grade. I've tried to manage a grade on a grade card, but I never did like to put down grades. I never did like to do that. As the years went by, we had the list of E for excellent, U for unsatisfactory, and S for satisfactory. That was the ending grades that I had in my last years of teaching. That was a little less painful because that included more understanding. It seemed an A on a paper means almost perfect. An F was a complete failure, yet that child which received an F was crushed thinking that was his best. So I never did like grades.

T: While you were teaching did the curriculum ever change at the school?

F.W: Well through the years yes, those first years. I was the curriculum director and instigator of the whole thing. In the last years of teaching, it was more specialized. We had the reading group on the committee, and they would decide

even the texts that were to be used. Then there would be follow-up. Mark, it's wonderful what they're doing today, but it wasn't that bad back then. I have a good feeling about the change, from a teacher doing most of it, to committees directing teachers. It's all been fine.

T: What were some of the different educational materials you used at the school?

F.W: I had carbon paper instead of duplicating machines, is this what you mean? Okay I never did have a grading pencil until I started teaching in the city schools. I used crayons to mark our papers, I remember having an indelible pencil that I could write with. When I would come to the county superintendent's office, she would have kind of a gel-like mat that I could put it on. Then I could make some paper copies of that. That had to be done in the superintendent's office. I always lived in her office every Saturday. So did many, many teachers, because we didn't have all those things at our fingertips at our school. Like I said the potbellied stove helped with cooking the meals. I had a board liner, and it was a music liner. That was what it really was that I used. I still have that among my treasures. That would make the lines on the chalkboards, because the boards were not lined. I had a school bell. After six districts consolidated, they made me a gift of their bell. I have it in my antique room. I had a school bell. I had the brooms, the shovel, and the hoe that I used and that's everything.

T: Were there any particular traditions at the school that you worked at?

F.W: Well what do you mean? Something that I should carry on that other teachers had done? I don't remember that. I don't remember anything like that. It seems that I did my own thing. I never was told what I had to do. I just... I don't have any memories of traditions. I suppose the tradition of literaries; I carried on with that. You know what that means? That means a committee of us getting together and talent numbers given. I guess that would be a tradition. The box and the pie suppers those were traditions. I wish they would do more of that today, it's fun!

T: Were there any particular traditions that you started at the school? That you just kept doing over and over again?

F.W: Well I do know that I instigated a rhythm band in the second school I taught in. In fact the money we made from one of our pie sales; we bought rhythm band instruments. When that school closed they were taken to the county superintendent's office. They were checked out to other teachers in the county, so I do believe I started that. I may have started other things but that rings a bell.

T: Were there any special observances that you had at the school, like maybe Christmas programs?

F.W: Yes they always had a Christmas program. Santa Claus would come, and he would come with sacks of candy on his back for all people not just the children. I mean really everybody got candy. We always had an orange. Could you picture that today oranges are so expensive. The children get an orange, candy, peanuts and that happened each year. I know one year when I taught; my school wasn't so far from town. I brought all my, I think I had twenty-eight children that year, to my house here in town. They all brought their Halloween costumes. They had them in sacks off in all the rooms of my house. I had them sit down in the kitchen and diningroom. I served them all soup and pies and then they

It went into all the different rooms in the house and put on their costumes. None of them had been trick or treating ever. I had gone around to I don't know how many homes in the neighborhood and had left treats so that it wouldn't be a hardship on the hostess. We went to those doors, and they got to knock on the door and trick or treat. The school bus brought them to town and that was quite a time. Some of those children now are parents of children, and they're still talking about that evening. They remember the first time they got to go trick or treating. That was fun!

T: Were there any special classes that you had in your schools? You said in one of your classes you had a girl who was blind. Did you have to do anything special for her?

F.W: I didn't know what to do for her, so I was beginning to teach her on the stylus. I would have to read to know what to teach her. So a stateworker came out to visit my class one day, and he told me that that was the wrong thing to do. She should be learning Braille instead. Well I didn't know that, because I hadn't had any training. That was when Garden City started their program for the visually handicapped. I was fouling up, so! That's what started the program here in Garden City. Today there is a teacher for the visually handicapped because of the goofs I was making way back then. So good for my goofs! I've had deaf children. I've had dumb, the ones who couldn't speak, I've had brain damaged. You name it; I've had it. This was before they started their special program. Today when they have these children come into the classroom; there's a special teacher to work with them. Back in those days, Mrs. Wilson got them. I was older on the staff and so I taught all kinds.

T: You said that you basically taught first grade, but I was curious whether you had been or helped perform any different graduation exercises?

F.W: I've taught all eight grades in the rural school. I would have eight grades except that first year when I only had three. I've taught all eight grades, but when I came to the city schools and did my last twenty-six years of teaching I taught totally first graders. Now as far as helping with graduation you mean what?

T: Was graduation different then it is today?

F.W: I don't think so; no not that much. I mean even myself I remember graduating from junior high, senior high, junior college, and even the four year college. They're pretty much the same. The speaker and handing out the diplomas. Pretty much the same.

T: When you were teaching were there any controversies surrounding the school that you taught at?

F.W: I suppose every school has that going on to some degree. When you get a group of parents together some are bound to dislike something that is going on and others are bound to like it. I know in the Florence Wilson school they have the assertive discipline program going on. At first I think that was thumbs down. A lot of people felt that their children were being too regimented but this isn't true. Now these same parents are happy their children are being disciplined in a very positive manner. It is showing up in the homes, and the children are easier to manage at home. You see when something new is tried generally there is much criticism. When people realize the good that is coming from it, then they get on the bandwagon. I think that's happened since Adam and Eve.

T: When you were teaching was there any organization like a PTA? Where the teachers and parents could get together and talk?

F.W: I have no memory of that in the rural schools but in the city schools yes always. From the time I started teaching there's been a PTA and now it's PTO. It was parent teacher association, and then part of the dues would go into a state fund. Now it's parent teacher organization so the money stays in Garden City. It stays in that school in most cases. Some of it goes into the city offices, in part. There always has been one as far as I know in Garden City.

T: You said in the rural schools they really didn't have one. Did you still meet with the parents anyway?

F.W: We didn't have any parent teacher organizations. The only contact we would have with parents would be if they would come for their children at the school. They would then come in and visit. Or at the literaries, the pie suppers, big track meets, and that sort of thing. As far as having parent teacher conferences--none. It was so open. If I would have had a problem with a child; I'm sure all I would need to have done was to tell the child to have their mother come see me. She would have come. I can't remember. In the city schools we had parent teacher conferences. That's bringing a parent into your council. The rural parents visited the school every once in a while, and they would come in and sit down. Sometimes they would bring a lunch instead. It was like a great big family. Then maybe I would go home with them for the evening that sort of thing. So there wasn't a need for a conference.

T: I was just curious. From the time that you first started teaching to now, do you think that teaching, and the way students learn. Do you think that has improved from when you first started teaching?

F.W: I think the teacher today is under more stress than I was then. Teachers today, now I'm speaking about myself in the first grade classroom. I'm in my fifth year of retirement now, but I remember I felt that I had to compete with television programs. I had to make my teaching so interesting, that that child's mind would come to me instead of back home on the television. Teachers today are having to fill out so many reports. If you teach a child in an area; you must test the child in that area. You must record the child's performance, because twenty years from now that child might come back and sue you. That is because you didn't teach him that area. That's being done today. I think teachers are underpaid, because they are having to work so hard and so many hours. The hours within the four walls in school are not the only hours that a good teacher spends in the profession. They bring work home to do for that child's good the next day. Teachers are terribly underpaid. I think that it was easier, even if I did have to work on the community programs; do my own janitor work; and drive, walk, or whatever the case might have been. That was easier than trying to be all the challenges of the teacher of today. I don't want to discourage you, because we are living in a different age. Everything is really hurry and get it done. Back in those days, we didn't have to hurry so much. We have that in our everyday lives. I'm not trying to discourage anybody. I do think that teachers are in the most honorable profession on earth and their underpaid. So you do all you can to get salary up.

T: I'd like to thank you for letting me interview you.

F.W: Thank you for wanting me to.