

Fort Hays State University

FHSU Scholars Repository

College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse
Oral Histories

Archives Online

1987

Interview with Nadine Ellis

Bonnie Emlen

Fort Hays State University

Nadine Ellis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors>

Content Disclaimer

The primary source materials contained in the Fort Hays State University Special Collections and Archives have been placed there for research purposes, preservation of the historical record, and as reflections of a past belonging to all members of society. Because this material reflects the expressions of an ongoing culture, some items in the collections may be sensitive in nature and may not represent the attitudes, beliefs, or ideas of their creators, persons named in the collections, or the position of Fort Hays State University.

Recommended Citation

Emlen, Bonnie and Ellis, Nadine, "Interview with Nadine Ellis" (1987). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 77.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/77>

This Audio Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives Online at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

CHAPTER TWO

ORAL INTERVIEW WITH NADINE ELLIS

Bonnie: I am talking today with Nadine Ellis, who has been a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse and also Superintendent of Schools in Trego County. I want to thank you for being willing to do this interview, Nadine. Shall we start with the first question concerning curriculum? Can you tell me what subjects were studied in the schools when you taught?

Nadine: Yes, in the rural school, arithmetic, which we call math today, English, spelling, penmanship, geography, U.S. history, civics, Kansas history, agriculture, reading, physiology, art, music, phonics and numbers.

Bonnie: All right. What was the length of the school day and the school year? Do you remember that?

Nadine: Oh, approximately seven and a half hours and one hundred eighty days a year.

Bonnie: What time did you start in the morning?

Nadine: Nine.

Bonnie: And went until four? That's what I remember.

Nadine: Uh-huh.

Bonnie: Did this change any while you were teaching?

Nadine: No, it didn't.

Bonnie: What was the name of the school?

Nadine: I really didn't specify any school, having taught 17 years in rural schools.

Bonnie: All in Trego County?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: What about the teaching methods used?

Nadine: We followed the course of study.

Bonnie: Where did the course of study come from?

Nadine: It came from the State Department.

Bonnie: And what teaching aids were used or made available?

Nadine: Very little; maps, library books and encyclopedias.

Bonnie: Did you have to make your materials then?

Nadine: Oh, yes.

Bonnie: Were any special classes or unique educational services offered?

Nadine: No.

Bonnie: Describe the typical school day curriculum.

Nadine: Well, this is guess work, I don't exactly remember, it's been too long ago. But we always had opening exercises. We either had music or I read to the children and numbers for the first graders, then math, all grades. By that time it was recess time. Then we had phonics, English classes, two-eight and penmanship for all. Then it was noon. We had geography, grades three-eight, U.S. history, word recognition and number work and agriculture. In the afternoon, that is afternoon, this is after recess, we had civics for the eighth grade, reading one-eight, spelling, two-eight and art when time permitted. Then, the last half of the year, we taught Kansas history and physiology.

Bonnie: O.K. Were competency tests taken for promotion purposes?

Nadine: Eighth grade was all.

Bonnie: Did the schools have libraries?

Nadine: Yes, but they weren't very adequate.

Bonnie: How many books would you say there were? Approximately.

Nadine: Oh, probably 75 and some of them were so old and obsolete you couldn't use them.

Bonnie: What would you say was the atmosphere of the educational program? Was it strict, loose, cold, or warm in the classroom?

Nadine: Warm.

Bonnie: What were some rules of the school that may have been different from today?

Nadine: Well, all of the children were interested in getting an education and I wonder sometimes -- if they are today. And I think our schools had better discipline than we have today.

Bonnie: So the children were more motivated you would say?

Nadine: Right!

Bonnie: What were some special observances of your schools? Christmas programs, spelling bees or music contests?

Nadine: We had all of those.

Bonnie: What was the usual age a child began school?

Nadine: Six.

Bonnie: Did this vary?

Nadine: Sometimes, there really wasn't any set law. Sometimes parents waited until they were seven if the children were a little slow.

Bonnie: Did they ever start before six if they were fast?

Nadine: No.

Bonnie: Did many children move in and out of school during the year?

Nadine: Very little.

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

Nadine: Probably the farthest was three miles. Usually most of them walked or their parents brought them in the car.

Bonnie: How many students went to the school, usually?

Nadine: Well, it would vary from twelve to thirty-six.

Bonnie: And what grade levels did you teach?

Nadine: All grades.

Bonnie: What type of occupations did the students usually take up?

Nadine: Usually farming for the boys and teaching for the girls.

Bonnie: Did many students go on to college?

Nadine: Not until later years. After the depression there were more that attended college.

Bonnie: Did the students come from a particular cultural or heritage background?

Nadine: Yes, German.

Bonnie: Mostly German?

Nadine: Yes.

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

Nadine: Twelve.

Bonnie: How many years was a student required to go to school?

Nadine: Eight. Going back to their cultural background, some of the children who came to school in the first grade couldn't speak English at all. And that presented quite a problem. I couldn't speak German at all.

Bonnie: Are there any outstanding students from those early schools?

Nadine: Oh yes! Lawyers ...

Bonnie: What was the dress and overall appearance of the students?

Nadine: Simple but neat and clean.

Bonnie: What was the cost of education to the student and his family?

Nadine: Just their books.

Bonnie: They had to buy their own books?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: We'll take all of the schools you taught in, in general, why were the schools built in the country?

Nadine: I suppose the parents felt the need of an education for their children. And the mode of transportation was so slow at that time, they couldn't bring them into city schools. And I think they wanted their own schools.

Bonnie: What were the boundaries of the school's jurisdiction?

Nadine: I don't know exactly what that means. How large were the districts?

Bonnie: How large were they? Why were they made in a certain area, certain size? Do you have an idea about that?

Nadine: I don't know.

Bonnie: How was it decided who went to school in those districts?

Nadine: The people that lived in that particular district.

Bonnie: Was the schoolhouse used for community social activities as well as for education?

Nadine: Yes, some.

Bonnie: What were some traditions peculiar to those schools?

Nadine: I can't answer that either.

Bonnie: Were there any German type traditions? They didn't hold Oktoberfest in those days, did they?

Nadine: No.

Bonnie: Was there a school board for the schools?

Nadine: Oh yes.

Bonnie: Do you remember any school board members names?

Nadine: I think I remember them all.

Bonnie: Have any passed away?

Nadine: Yes, many.

Bonnie: Did the schools have an organization similiar to a P.T.A.?

Nadine: No.

Bonnie: Who hired and fired the teachers?

Nadine: The school board.

Bonnie: Did anyone else have input?

Nadine: The County Superintendent and I'm sure the patrons did too.

Bonnie: Parents could talk to the school board members?

Nadine: That's right.

Bonnie: Did any activities take place between schools?

Nadine: Play days, ball games, spelling matches.

Bonnie: Did the school make any lasting contributions to the community?

Nadine: In what respect?

Bonnie: Educating the young people.

Nadine: I would think so.

Bonnie: Why did those schools close?

Nadine: Because of reorganization and lack of pupil attendance.

Bonnie: Was land purchased or given to the school?

Nadine: It was usually given by someone in the district, sometimes it was purchased.

Bonnie: Where did the funds for the construction of the school come from?

Nadine: Taxes from the district.

Bonnie: What was your salary when you first started teaching?

Nadine: Eighty-five dollars a month. And it later dropped to fifty dollars.

Bonnie: Because of the depression?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: What was your salary your last year of teaching?

Nadine: Six hundred and fifty dollars a month, I think.

Bonnie: How was your salary determined?

Nadine: Based on your age, years taught, personality, neatness, recommendations from other schools, amount of education you had.

Bonnie: And that was determined by the board members?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: Did a teacher have a voice in salary decisions?

Nadine: Not at that time. In later years, yes. They were allowed to voice their opinion.

Bonnie: How did you get your pay check?

Nadine: Board members brought it to the school.

Bonnie: All right, can we talk about teacher expectation and discipline? Would you describe a typical day before and after school?

Nadine: Well ...

Bonnie: Did the children get there early?

Nadine: Oh yes, with their tin lunch pails. I drove everyday. I only boarded two years out of the seventeen that I taught. I drove everyday from eight to fifteen miles.

Bonnie: You lived here in WaKeeney?

Nadine: Yes. Arriving at school, went over your lesson plans. All your extra work you placed on the blackboard if you had time. If it was a cold winter day, you had to build your fire and get it started. When you first arrived you'd have to bring in fresh water. And after school

you'd have to bring in fuel for the next morning and your fire was banked, the floor swept, blackboard and erasers cleaned. Papers to be graded, I usually took those home because you didn't have time. If the weather was bad, I went home immediately after school because you had to plow all those muddy roads. It seemed like it rained or snowed nearly every day.

Bonnie: Did you ever get stuck?

Nadine: Many times.

Bonnie: I would think so, I've traveled those roads myself. How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community?

Nadine: They were supposed to act like ladies and gentlemen at all times.

Bonnie: I have seen lists of rules for teachers and some were not able to smoke.

Nadine: Or go to dances.

Bonnie: And some ladies were not allowed to be married, were they?

Nadine: That was before my time.

Bonnie: Were you in charge of any extra curricular activities?

Nadine: No, just outside playground and programs that were given at school.

Bonnie: Was there a problem of teacher turnover?

Nadine: Yes, there was so many teachers at that time, it was easy to get a certificate.

Bonnie: Did more than one teacher work in the school?

Nadine: No.

Bonnie: Was there a Principal for the school?

Nadine: No, not in rural schools.

Bonnie: So you were all under the Superintendent?

Nadine: Right. In order to teach you just needed a normal training certificate and that didn't require any college work at all.

Bonnie: Did you have to take a test to get that?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: Where did you take your test?

Nadine: I took mine at Hays. They conducted a summer school and we had to attend summer school and then take a test, and make a certain grade.

Bonnie: What evaluation system was used for the teachers?

Nadine: Well, the County Superintendent visited school during the school year once and she had a report that she had to make to the school board and to the State Superintendent.

Bonnie: How were discipline problems with the children handled?

Nadine: Well, the teachers took care of their own discipline problems and if she needed assistance why she usually called in the board or the parents and County Superintendent.

Bonnie: Was corporal punishment or spanking allowed in that day?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: And I suppose parents could be involved in the discipline if they needed to be?

Nadine: Yes, right.

Bonnie: Were the parents usually cooperative?

Nadine: Very much so. They believed in discipline at home so it carried over to school.

Bonnie: Did the female teachers handle discipline differently than the male teachers?

Nadine: I don't think so.

Bonnie: I remember your handwriting is so beautiful and artistic. Did you practice a great deal or how did you develop your penmanship?

Nadine: I took a special course, Spencerian.

Bonnie: Where did you take the course?

Nadine: It was correspondence.

Bonnie: So you did practice quite a bit?

Nadine: Oh, yes and I enjoyed it. I liked it.

Bonnie: Shall we go on to the building and supplies? When were the schoolhouses built?

Nadine: In the 1800's I'm sure.

Bonnie: By whom?

Nadine: The patrons. I suppose they determined the place by distance.

Bonnie: What materials were used to build the schoolhouses?

Nadine: That's a funny question. Lumber not brick.

Bonnie: I suppose limestone?

Nadine: I only know of one limestone building in the entire county.

Bonnie: One schoolhouse? The rest were wood?

Nadine: Right.

Bonnie: You did mention the heating, you had to take care of it?

Nadine: We had a coal stove, one of those huge ones with a big jacket around it. No lighting.

Bonnie: Just the windows?

Nadine: Just the windows. Outdoor toilets.

Bonnie: How did the school get its water?

Nadine: Oh, every school had a well.

Bonnie: Outdoor pump?

Nadine: Yes, the teachers and pupils carried the water into the building. Had a bucket.

Bonnie: And what was the significance of the school name?

Nadine: I really don't know that. I think of Valley School out here. I think

it was named Valley because it was in a valley. I don't really know.

Bonnie: All right. Would you describe the interior of the school. Can you talk a little bit about how the inside looked?

Nadine: It was clean and it was always nicely painted, curtains at the windows. The floors were always oiled and the interior ... there wasn't anything in it except the teachers desk and the pupils desks and the stove. The recitation bench.

Bonnie: Who was in charge of the upkeep of the buildings?

Nadine: The school board.

Bonnie: What were some of the physical problems of the buildings at that time?

Nadine: The buildings were cold because they weren't insulated, there wasn't any indoor plumbing, very little equipment to work with and what supplies you had, the teachers furnished them.

Bonnie: Sometimes did the children wear sweaters and coats?

Nadine: Sometimes, not all the time.

Bonnie: What happened to the schoolhouses?

Nadine: Well, when we had reorganization, they were sold -- some were kept for community buildings but very few.

Bonnie: So the people that bought them could do whatever they wanted?

Nadine: Yes.

Bonnie: And what happened to the equipment and supplies after the schools closed?

Nadine: The supplies that were of any value were -- the Superintendent of Schools looked them over and they took what they could use and the rest were sold at a public auction.

Bonnie: I believe that's all. Do you have anything else you want to add in closing?

Nadine: Those were wonderful days -- wonderful experience.

Bonnie: I want to thank you.

Nadine: You're welcome.