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Interview with Helen Tacha

Betty Jean Baus

Fort Hays State University

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Recommended Citation

Baus, Betty Jean, "Interview with Helen Tacha" (1988). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 96.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/96>

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Oral History of Helen Tacha
One-Room Country School Teacher

Fort Hays State University
School of Education
1988

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Oral History of Helen Tacha

Baus : Today's date is July 10, 1988 and the location of the interview is Oberlin, Kansas.

I'm Betty Jean Baus and I'm conducting an oral history interview with Helen Tacha, who in the past was a one-room schoolhouse teacher.

Helen, would you give me some background information on yourself, like the schools you attended?

Tacha: I attended grade school and then high school at Jennings. Then went to normal training, so I could teach.

Baus : Alright, what years did you teach?

Tacha: Nineteen twenty-nine, nineteen thirty and thirty-one.

Baus : Alright, at what schools did you teach?

Tacha: Just Custer.

Baus : What subjects were studied at your school?

Tacha: Reading, writing and arithmetic, history, English, spelling and government.

Baus : Alright, what was the length of the school day and school year?

Tacha: The school day, we started at nine o'clock in the morning and the year was nine months.

Baus : What teaching methods were used?

Tacha: Well, I don't know that we had any special teaching methods. We had all eight grades, so we had to get in what we could in a day's time.....They had to read and they had to do their arithmetic problems, spell and they had their penmanship.

Baus : What teaching aids were made available?

Tacha: Well, we didn't have very many teaching aids, just what you kind of could pick up yourself. We did have.....there was no library, but there were encyclopedias.

Baus : Describe a typical school day curriculum.

Tacha: Well, we started at nine o'clock in the morning. We had our fifteen minute recess and an hour for noon. Then another fifteen minute recess.....then school was out.

Baus : Do you remember what subjects you taught, say in the morning or in the afternoon?

Tacha: No, I can't really remember how we did that.

Baus : Were competency tests taken for performance purposes?

Tacha: No, I don't think so.....You just had to use your own judgement and go by their grades.

Baus : How did you decide on a textbook?

Tacha: Well, I think the county superintendent did

all that.....what, what they were supposed to take.

Baus : Where did they come from?

Tacha: Well, I imagine they come from the state.

Baus : What were some rules of the school?

Tacha: Well, we had our rules and I suppose every country school probably had their own rulesbut I don't know that they were any different than they are today.

Baus : What were some special observances of your school?

Tacha: Well, we had Christmas programs, literaries and things like that. I can't remember that we had any contests of any kind.....spelling bees. We'd spell down.

Baus : Did Custer school have a graduation exercise?

Tacha: No, they didn't.....I think they had to go to the county for that.

Baus : Would you describe a typical day before and after school?

Tacha: Oh, we went to school in the morning, had to build a fire and bring in the water. I don't know that we did anything special after school, but go home.

Baus : How were teaching ways or habits different

now than when you taught?

Tacha: Well, each grade has their own teacher now and we had.....we had all eight grades and you couldn't give them very much time.

Baus : How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community?

Tacha: Well, I don't know that we had anything special to do. There wasn't really anything to go to in the community. Of course, we were supposed to have good ethics and morals.

Baus : Were you allowed to dance?

Tacha: Oh yes, we.....I did.

Baus : Okay. Were you in charge of any extracurricular activities?

Tacha: No, there wasn't any really.

Baus : How were discipline problems with the children handled?

Tacha: I don't know that we really had any.....that I had any problems with.....but oh, they probably had to give up their recess or something like that.....that was about it.

Baus : Were parents involved in the discipline process?

Tacha: Not where I taught. I thought they were all pretty good.

- Baus : Where did you live while teaching at Custer school?
- Tacha: Well, I boarded at a neighbor's home and then the second year I was married, so I drove from home.
- Baus : How much schooling did you have in order to teach?
- Tacha: Well, I graduated from high school and normal training.
- Baus : How long was the normal training?
- Tacha: I think it was four weeks.
- Baus : Do you remember when the schoolhouse was built?
- Tacha: No, I don't.
- Baus : What materials were used to build the schoolhouse?
- Tacha: Our school, it was a wooden schoolhouse..... made of lumber.
- Baus : Was Custer school a public school?
- Tacha: Anyone could go there in the district.
- Baus : What type of heating, lighting and toilets were available?
- Tacha: Oh, we had a pot-bellied stove and we had coal oil lamps on the walls and our toilets were outdoors.
- Baus : How did the school get its water?

Tacha: We had a windmill.

Baus : What is the significance of the school name?

Tacha: Well, it was the Custer Township, so I suppose that's where the name come from.

Baus : Could you describe the interior of the school?

Tacha: Well, I think it was above average for a country school.....had the desks in. They were well kept and the walls were always painted. For a country school, it was, I think above average.

Baus : Who was in charge of the upkeep of the building?

Tacha: I think, I suppose the school board was.

Baus : Do you know what happened to the schoolhouse?

Tacha: No, but I wish I did.

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

Tacha: Oh, they had to be six years old.

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

Tacha: Not.....not very often. I didn't have many.

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

Tacha: Well, I think the furtherest one was about three miles. Of course, their folks brought

them in a buggy.....horse and buggy.

Baus : Did any students walk?

Tacha: Did what?

Baus : Did any students walk?

Tacha: Oh yes.....they rode a horse, or the folks brought them.

Baus : How many students went to this school?

Tacha: Oh, I think there was about twelve.

Baus : What grade levels did you teach?

Tacha: Eight grades.....from the first to the eighth grade.

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

Tacha: Oh, I think the girls probably went to teaching and the boys were farmers.

Baus : Did the students of Custer school come from a particular cultural or heritage background?

Tacha: No they.....just who lived in the community. They were Bohemian or, or a, just anyone could go.

Baus : Alright, what was the dress and overall appearance of the students?

Tacha: Oh, they were well dressed. They.....the girls wore dresses and the boys wore overalls.They didn't have jeans then.

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

Tacha: Well, I don't imagine it was any more than..... not too much.....that in those days.....not like it is now.

Baus : Do you know what the boundaries of the school's jurisdiction were?

Tacha: No, I don't.

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

Tacha: Not that I know of, unless they voted there.

Baus : Was there a school board for your school?

Tacha: Yes.

Baus : Do you remember any school board member names?

Tacha: Yes. Do you want me to give them?

Baus : Please.

Tacha: Okay. Lewis Vavroch, Tandy Nelson and Walt Gaumer.

Baus : Are any of these men deceased?

Tacha: All of them.

Baus : Did Custer have an organization similar to a PTA?

Tacha: No, they did not.

Baus : Who hired and fired the teachers?

Tacha: Well, the school board.

Baus : Did any activities take place between schools?

Tacha: No, I don't believe so.

Baus : Why did the school close?

Tacha: Lack of children.

Baus : Was the land purchased or given to the school?

Tacha: I don't know.

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

Tacha: I imagine from the district from.....I suppose taxes.

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

Tacha: The first year I got ninety-dollars.....a month. The second year I got a hundred dollars a month.

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

Tacha: No, we took what they give us and was glad to get it.

Baus : How did you get your pay check?

Tacha: Oh, the treasure of the school board usually..
...I think they all had to sign it, but.....
all the board members.

Baus : Alright. Well thank you very much for this very interesting oral history of Custer school and your years of teaching there.