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Interview with Dorothy Wampler

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Dorothy Wampler

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CHAPTER II: NARRATIVE OF A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL TEACHER

Dorothy Wampler began her teaching career in a one-room country school in western Kansas in 1937. She continued her teaching in this one-room school for two years. Dorothy, now 77, can easily recall many memories of her students, the school, and her teaching experience.

The one-room school in which Dorothy first taught was District 40 otherwise known as "The Fighting Forty." The school house was located three miles south of Cimarron, Kansas and four miles east. The school was built where the two section lines crossed. It is rumored that two families used to move the school house back and forth from one side of the property line to another. As the families fought over possession of the school, it became known as "The Fighting Forty." Children within a one mile radius attended District 40.

Dorothy lived with two of her students and their family one mile from the school. They would walk to and from school every day unless it was cold. On cold days, the girls' father would drive them to and from school in the family car. On occasion they would take other students home as well.

"Fighting Forty's" 1937 class consisted of three boys and seven girls, one first grader, two second graders, one third grader, one fifth grader, four seventh

graders, and one eighth grader. Dorothy had the same students the second year, minus the eighth grader who graduated.

This small one-room school house was administrated by a three member school board. This board was responsible for the schools' upkeep. They brought in the coal when it was needed and made sure that the school house was well maintained. The school board also supplied towels, paper and pencils. When more supplies were needed Dorothy went to the drug store and charged them to the board.

The District 40 school grounds consisted of the school house, a coal shed, boys' and girls' outhouses, and a horse barn. The school house itself was constructed of wood. The school used coal for heat and was wired for electricity. The electricity was seldom used as the sunlight through the windows gave ample lighting.

The students of District 40 were all caucasian and came to school well dressed. The young ladies wore dresses and the young men wore nice jeans and shirts. Dorothy always wore a dress for teaching, never pants.

Dorothy taught all of the basics, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English, and Spelling to all eight grades. The children bought their books from the book store or

borrowed books from older brothers and sisters. The school day began at 9:00 am, ended at 4:00 pm, and lasted for eight months. All children were required to attend first through eighth grade.

Dorothy began every school day by stoking the fire. The children would all help bringing in the coal and the water. Everyone helped with the chores. Once the fire was going class began with the flag salute and prayer. She feels that the biggest problem with our country and the greatest mistake education has ever made is taking prayer out of the schools. Following prayer studies began. Mid-morning would call for a short recess and then back to the books. Every day at noon, the students would take turns fetching a pail of water to heat on the old potbellied stove. As the water was heating, they all ate their lunches brought from home. After lunch they all took turns washing the dishes and cleaning up. When cleaning was complete classes resumed. Mid-afternoon would call for another short recess and they would finish the remainder of the day with the last of the lessons.

Dorothy's teaching method consisted of lecturing, black board work, and one on one tutoring. Her class worked in rotation. As she would work with the first grade the rest of the students would work on their

lessons. When the first grade received their lessons they went back to their desks and the second graders came up to the front. She rotated the students and their lessons all day.

Dorothy did not have a principal who was "over" her as a boss. There was a county superintendent who would send materials and guidelines for her to follow. Dorothy would turn in a questionnaire every six weeks. The materials sent to Dorothy would include exam requirements for passing the eighth grade county exam.

All eighth graders were required to pass a county exam before they could graduate from eighth grade. All four of Dorothy's one-room school eighth graders passed the county exam and went on to High school.

In the one-room school Dorothy held a few special programs like math contests, spelling bees, and a Christmas program. The programs would all be held during the last hour of school and the parents would come to watch.

Dorothy doesn't remember having any problems with discipline. She only had to spank one child in her entire teaching career. She believes that when you set high standards and expectations, your students will live up to those expectations and standards when you follow through. Dorothy's students always met her expectations

and gave her their respect.

Funds for building maintenance and Dorothy's salary came from taxes gathered in Cimarron. Dorothy was paid \$65.00 a month for an eight month contract. Dorothy's checks were all signed by Mr. Strawn, the board member who hired her. He seemed to be the one who always took care of things. Mr. Strawn would bring Dorothy her checks each month. Once in a while she would go in after one.

At this point in time teachers had to have 60 hours to get a three-year state teaching certificate. First year teachers were usually sent to rural schools to develop their teaching skills and gain teaching experience. Once a teacher developed those skills they could move up to teach in the larger towns if so desired. She credits her successful teaching career to her one-room school teaching experience.

Dorothy has recently located most of her District Forty students. One of her third graders is the Librarian in Cimarron, Kansas. The schoolhouse remained open for two more years after she left in the spring of 1939. The students attended school in Cimarron following District Forty's Closing. The old school house was then sold and moved to Cimarron where it was converted into a house.

Dorothy firmly believes that all teachers should be placed in a smaller school for their first year or two of teaching. This would allow them to perfect their teaching methods and further enhance their teaching skills. She also feels that prayer was a stronghold for education in the early days and that a grave mistake was made when it was banished from the public schools.