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Trish Wichman

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AN ORAL HISTORY REPORT

MRS. BEA BOOS

BY

TRISH WICHMAN

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 11, 1984

AN ORAL HISTORY REPORT

Mrs. Bea Boos

I taught in Russell County, Barton County and Ellis County. My name is Bea Boos. I live at 506 West 21st. And my telephone number is 625-2704. I am going to use one school that I taught in the year of 42 and 43. I was given \$90 a month.

One of the stipulations that I had was that I must take drinking water to the school. I had an old cream can that was about fifty pounds or one hundred pounds. The regular cream can that people used to have for their cream and I had to take the cream can out of my car without any assistance to have the children drink out of.

When it got cold we would go out and find sunflower weeds for fuel to start the fire and then when it really got cold then we would have coal and I had to use the ax to break the big chunks of coal so we could have a pot belly stove warm.

There were oil wells that were south of the schoolhouse and people drove very nice cars at that period of time. There were no dictionaries in the room. There were no pencil sharpeners. And there were no encyclopedias. There were no books of enrichment of any type except what the children brought for their own use. But the American University Women had a program that the teachers in the district could go to the county superintendent and we could borrow books for two weeks and then bring them back and exchange them again, so they knew our situation and it was through them that we were able to have enrichment and a little culture. These

people were culturally deprived people.

And one of my big surprises was when the war was in the background and it was coming and we could tell it, and one of the school board members came up to me and said that his son was going to the Army and he had a big jug of whiskey and he said to me "Drink up gal". He said "My son is leaving for the Army" and, of course, I don't drink. We never had it in our home and he had the big jug and he was one of the school board members and I said "its early in the morning and I better not". And that's how I was able to get out of that one okay.

At recess they talked their German or Russian language and I didn't know what they were talking about. The children with their language. When we had classes they had to be in English because that's the only thing I knew and I did not understand what they were talking about.

Question: Did they do that on purpose?

I don't think so. I think that they were very dear and sweet little children. Really. I think that they came to school to learn. I am not sure because they could have easily been talking about me because I was a strange individual.

Question: An outsider?

An outsider -- very much so. They came to school with their lard pail -- lard dinner pails for food and they usually had an apple in it. They also had many times syrup on bread -- homemade bread.

They gave me a wooden box that had chalk with sawdust in it. A box

that had alot of chalk in it. I have no idea how many it would have in the box but they were wooden boxes. And the sawdust kept them from breaking. They told me that I had to keep that and use it because they were not going to give me any more and it should last me two years.

Question: Did you have chalkboards?

We had slate boards. I rode with another lady that taught at Schoenchen and sometimes she could not always go to school so I had to sometimes get out there some way and sometimes I had to walk home and I would have to walk. The little children would say to me "Well, my Daddy and Mother wouldn't pick you up" because they thought I was a gypsy. When I was stuck out there, there was no way that I could get a ride.

Question: How far would you have to walk?

Well, usually about six to seven miles into Hays, Kansas. And I remember that there was a wreck and nobody stopped for the person that needed help and I think they were deathly afraid of foreign people in Ellis County. They were scared to death of them.

We had a County Superintendent of the schools and he could come to visit. He wouldn't stay very long and I usually would ask him to give comments of the day of what he was interested in and that used the time up and he would look around and say I was doing okay or the floor needed sweeping or something.

I have a little book here that I found at the Thrift Shop the other

day. It is one of the books that I taught. I taught all grades. And it's called Mac and Muff.

Question: It's kind of like Spot and Jane?

Yes. I was so amused when I saw that and I paid 25¢ for it down at the Thrift Shop last week since I knew that you were to come.

Question: And you used that one?

Yes. I used that one. Is there something else you would like to ask?

Question: Okay. What subjects did you teach?

I taught reading and writing and arithmetic. They did not like me to teach anything like geography because it wasn't very interesting to them. And we had no piano, no graphophone, anything of that nature to use. We tried to sing little songs without any help. They did not have any background for nursery rhymes, folklore. It was strictly what was all in the book.

Question: Did you use alot of recitation? They would memorize?

We didn't do alot of memorizing but I would have them come up. I had never taught in a country school. All my education was in a big town school. Not a big town school, but a town school. I never was inside a country school til I started to teach one, so I just sort of patterned my thinking on what I had to do from past experiences such as having a child come up and sit in a little chair and I would bend over and be with

him and we would visit together and I would be with him so it was on a one-to-one basis many times. I had all grades and the discipline was.....

Question: Kindergarden?

No, first grade. I think that this particular school had four little precious boys and one little girl. I remember so well the little girl. Her clothes were clean but the buttons on each one was a different button because they didn't match and I remember that so well. They wanted to look respectable and they tried very hard. There was no discipline problem.

Question: What would you do for discipline? Do you remember?

I don't remember that I had any. They just got their lessons and they really did try very hard.

Question: How much schooling did you have in order to teach? What did they require here?

At that time I had a life certificate. And I had more than most people. I went up to the County Courtroom where they keep records of the land and everything. They do have my record. We looked it up. It's on file who was the school board and the year and the salary and I had a life certificate. Many of them just got right out of high school and taught.

Question: Where did you stay while teaching?

Well, I was married and I had two children at that time. When Christmas came we couldn't get anybody to be Santa Claus but the Chamber of Commerce

gave me a lovely suit to use that night of the school programs. I don't remember who dressed up as Santa Claus but my two kids went down and they were small children, and my husband, and we had a nice little Christmas program.

Question: These were how many students -- five?

No. There must have been about fifteen children. I remember two children in the 8th grade and they were bigger than I was.

Question: Physically, you mean?

Yes.

Question: Can you describe the school day? Just basically what you did.

I'm a great believer that you should say the Flag Salute. I know that they don't practice that in Ellis County because I have done some substitute teaching after I stopped teaching. I did teach at Lincoln School here for many years. Then I did substitute teaching. I started the day with the Flag Salute and then I would take the roll afterwards and discuss who was absent. I have this great belief that reading was terribly important so I hit that real hard. We would have arithmetic and arithmetic was very easy for these children because they understood that arithmetic meant money and they were very careful with it. They were good at it. In reading, no. They were very poor in reading. They saw no correlation there.

Question: It wasn't practical enough?

No, it wasn't practical. But they understood that if you wanted things you had to have money. You better salt it away or get it some way. And then writing, of course. I always tried to read to my children which I guess was unheard of. I always tried to read some fairy tales to them. I think that at that time I may have read Laura Ingall Wilder books to them. So I'd read 30 minutes to them right after dinner so that they could enjoy these stories.

Question: What were the hours?

I think we started at 9:00 and got out at 4:00. We had, I think, a break of 15 minutes recess in the morning and 15 minute recess in the afternoon and we were supposed to have a whole hour for dinner which was very long and we had alot of games and competition.

Question: They brought their lunches?

Yes, that's right.

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

I suppose six years old or maybe five because when I stop to think about it I think maybe they could go clear to December if they were five years old. Some were very young and immature. Very young and precious.

Question: Age made a difference. It wasn't anything to do with if the child wasn't developed enough? They just went when it was time agewise?

Yes.

Question: What was the length of the school year?

I believe it was eight months.

Question: Was the school for all children or only for the land-owners or taxpayers children?

I would say that most of the people owned their own land there. Or they rented the land.

Question: I'm not sure if this applies. If all children came to school, how were the children of transit workers treated?

It does not apply.

Question: Was the school house used for community social activities as well?

Maybe the election year possibly. The rest of it, no.

Question: Do you know how the school was financed?

Well, sure. It was taxes. People were taxed.

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

Well, very properly. In my case there was.....

Question: They didn't like being married?

Yes, right. I don't think they were against drinking and they had their wedding dances in the community. I think they were very liberal. I don't think they particularly liked anyone smoking but I didn't smoke or

drink so I had no problem there.

Question: Basically you could do anything you wanted to do? You could go to the show. Did they have shows here?

Well, yes, come to think of it. You could go see Tom Mix or some of the cowboys.

Question: Was there a problem with teacher turnovers?

No, not at that time because jobs were very hard to find and wages were low and people were wanting desperately a job. But as the war clouds started to come into the horizon it meant that there was going to be jobs and people were not so concerned about finding a job. Especially teaching school because they could do better other places later on. But before that salaries were very poor. Some men taught for \$45 a month during the depression days but this is not during the depression.

Question: Who hired and fired the teachers?

Well, they had three men that were all related. I think they were all three brothers and if one of the brothers wasn't completely satisfied then, of course, the teacher got fired.

Question: Was that the school board?

Yes, that was the school board.

Question: What were some of the physical problems of the building?

Heating. We would go out and get our sunflowers and stalks and we would stuff them underneath something to keep them dry and we would need

them on cold, wet days. And the kids and I would go out in the ditches for the sunflowers and stalks. And the other physical thing was there was no water so I had to have a cream can full of water for the children and it was heavy and I had no assistance to get it in and out of the car that I rode in.

Question: You brought this water from Hays?

Yes. We didn't have any ration on water. The kids could have a drink of water any time. I was told that other teachers in the area would only allow one cup a day. There was no problem with the outside toilets. They were separate, I remember that. They kept the school clean. That was one thing that was very important.

Question: Was that basically up to you to do the cleaning?

Oh yes. I had to do the sweeping and the dusting and keep things in place and take care of the ashes.

Question: Did you have desks?

Yes, we did. And they were nailed to the floor.

Question: What special events happened at the school?

Well, mainly there was Christmas. A child was given a little piece to say and we tried to include everyone to have a little piece and we tried to see whether or not anyone would come forward to play the banjo or the violin or something to help us. So it was all strictly up to me whether it was good or bad.

Question: Was there any different religions -- the Catholic? The Catholics were dominate?

Yes, very much so. They were very superstitious about other people that weren't Catholic.

Question: What was the schoolhouse built of?

Wood. It was wood and it was a nice design. They had several windows and whoever helped them with it was good. It was nicely done. It was a nice building.

Question: Was it owned by anybody specifically?

Before? That I don't know the history of.

Question: Did more than one teacher work at the school?

No.

Question: Was there a principal?

No. Our principal was our county superintendent. He would come, or was supposed to, at least once a year and we would talk about the ballgames.

Question: Did you have organized sports activities?

Oh, the kids would have certain games they would like to play.

Question: Did you have any competition with another school?

No, we didn't. I think that came later.

Question: The ages of the children. You said they started at six. About when did they get out?

When they got their diploma which was sixteen. Some of them went to high school. Some didn't. Some of them got married.

Question: Do you know the greatest distance travelled by any student?

Oh, I imagine Hays. About eight miles. I taught in one school where the children had never been in Hays but that's a different school.

Question: How did most of the students get there?

Well, they had nice cars because they had this oil income.

Question: What system of evaluation was used?

I think the county superintendent was eager to see what was going on and he had to put his name on a little piece of paper that he had been there. I think that was the important thing. And we didn't have any big fights or anything happen to take any position on. He wasn't a very good referee, I don't think, if we did have some difference of opinion, but we didn't.

Question: Did the community raise money for equipment?

No.

Question: What was the size of the school library? You said none?

None. Absolutely nothing.

Question: Just the books that you brought?

I brought or the child brought with him and our first textbooks.

Question: And you brought those?

No, they bought them in those days.

Question: Are there any traditions that are peculiar to your particular schoolhouse?

No. The schoolhouse is no longer there. It was sold and it's a private home. Dwelling for someone.

Question: You might not know this. How did the female teachers handle discipline problems as compared to male teachers?

Well, I did see one teacher one time later. The teacher had used the ruler on the child's hands and he had them stuck out like that and she gave him a good whack on the hands. Palms down and whacked him on the knuckles.

Question: Do you know if that was common?

Evidently it was.

Question: But you didn't do that?

I didn't do it.

Question: Good. Were there any physical changes to the schoolhouse during the years of use?

No.

Question: Was there a water well near the school?

No. There was no water well. None near.

Question: Do you know when the school opened and when it closed down? Year-wise?

That I don't really know. But the building has long disappeared.

Question: Can you tell me this? What type of occupations did some of the students eventually take up?

Well, generally working for someone. Farm people. They always farm. Most people had farms and some of them had oil income.

Question: The majority of the students were a particular religion and nationality -- I guess probably German Catholic, right?

Yes.

Question: Do you know why the school closed?

That I don't know. I think there was a law that came in that they had a choice to bus the children and change to Hays. There was a time when the schools were closing.

Question: You described the text. Did you have to study each night for your lessons the next day?

I didn't because it was very elementary and I took it very slow and didn't push.

Question: I think I've been through most of this. Teaching aids? What were teaching aids that were made available? You said there really wasn't any.

No. I can't even remember if they had a clock in the school. I doubt they did.

Question: The amount of different classes given at one time. Did you have your classes divided up and were teaching.....

You had to. Many times I couldn't teach English only maybe twice a week because I had to use my period for 4th grade and the next day it had to be for the 8th grade English. Arithmetic would be the same thing. You couldn't get to every class because that was impossible.

There was no shrubbery around the building. I remember that. It was very stark but they didn't have any shrubbery around their own homes.

Question: Yeah, there's not much out here as far as.....

Well, they didn't plant any trees or bushes or anything.

Question: Who governed the school?

That was the three brothers. They may not have been brothers but in all probability they were. They had the same last name.

Question: What teaching methods were used? That's basically answered. How big of an area did the school serve?

I don't know. I really don't know that part. The school was 7½ miles south and I don't think there was any school from there to Schoenchen. A lot of kids went to a little village by the name of Schoenchen. And there was Munjor. And then there was Loretta and Pfeifer and all these little towns. There was also a little school that was one mile west and I can't think of the name of it. It was in operation a little while too but I'm not sure whether it was a church school or a public school.

Question: Okay, one last question. Had anything unusual happened during the time that you were there? Any specific fun incident that you can think of?

Well, it was all pretty sober, actually. There was no fun and games, I'll tell you.

Question: It was just business?

It was all business and very grim and then when I would try to teach them little funny limericks they would just look beyond that. Little limericks, you know, -- a play upon words. Well, I think the teachers before were their type of people and it was hard for them to adjust.

Question: You were probably different coming in compared to.....

Yes.

Question: Did they have a whole lot of drop out?

In what way?

Question: Did alot of kids start school and never finish?

No. They were basically an agricultural group. They stayed til they finished school.

Okay, thank you.

You're welcome. It was fun. I enjoyed it.