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Interview with Charles O. Stones

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Recommended Citation

"Interview with Charles O. Stones" (1997). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 283.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/283>

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CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES O. STONES

Many awards and honors were bestowed on Stones during his career of forty-four years in the education. Those awards resulted from Stones' implementation of innovative teaching and administrative techniques due to a caring and nurturing attitude toward children.

Stones' approach to education resulted from his own experiences in school as a student in a one-room school in Smith County, Kansas. There were approximately 20-25 students in the school with 32 families living in the area around the school. Stones commented that there were no families living in that area today. The oldest student in the one-room school was 15 years old while the youngest was a little girl who was only four year old when school started but turned five during the school year.

Stones related that his only teacher through eight years of elementary school was Ward. Ward played an important and influential role in Stones' future as an educator. He remembered Ward as an ideal teacher, very strict but providing a good learning environment for the students. Ward impressed Stones with his ability to spell and cipher, especially during the Friday spelling bees and ciphering matches held as a reward for the week's hard work. Stones recalled that their library had approximately 25 books, and recounted that he read "Black Beauty" many times in those eight years with Ward. Even though Ward was a strict disciplinarian, Stones felt he always had the students' best interest at heart. He was a man that set standards students lived up to because of their respect for him as their teacher. Stones indicated that he saw Ward in a different light than students see their teachers today because of going eight years through school with the same teacher.

When asked about his own abilities in school, Stones related he was an average student, who was bothered by asthma at times. Since he was schooled during the "Dust Bowl" days, breathing was sometimes his goal for the day, but Stones stated he managed to get through the dry and dusty times and school in good fashion. In fact, when pressed for more information, Stones admitted he was probably a better-than-average student because of the expectations of Ward and how he and the other students strove to please him. This same perception was indicated when Stones was asked about role models who influenced his educational career choice. Stones cited the strongest memories of Ward was that his teacher made school enjoyable for the students and especially him. After spending eight of his first years of schooling with Ward and remembering him as being a teacher involved with his students, Stones considered him the epitome of the ideal teacher.

When comparing discipline situations of the early 1930's versus the situations facing teachers of today, Stones recalled the incidents when the teacher drew a circle on the board and a student stood and faced the board with his/her nose in the circle. Stones didn't have to experience this, but feared the embarrassment of it happening to him. This discipline method diminished in practice before Stones left elementary school, but the "spanking machine" existed all eight years. Stones explained the "spanking machine" as a form of punishment whereby all the boys and girls made a line about three feet away from the wall. The student who had earned the privilege of going through the "spanking machine" was expected, if a girl, to walk through, or crawl on hands and knees, if a boy, while the rest of the boys and girls lined up and swatted the boy or girl with their hands. The "privilege" of going through the "spanking machine" was earned by making too many errors on the weekly spelling test or poor test grades. Stones reminisced that poor Fred earned the privilege every Friday. Even though Stones didn't have to go through that

experience, he feared having to do so. Stones stated that discipline problems were practically unheard of during his schooling and teaching tenure as circumstances were considerably different at that time than they are today. In small communities, if a child was in trouble at school, the parents many times already were aware of it before the child arrived home. Teachers were very strict in those days as it was expected and allowed by law. Parents, grandparents, and even neighbors took care of discipline within the home or community. The extension of families living within close proximity to one another allowed for children to be disciplined by many different people. Stones made a comparison that discipline was allowed to be treated differently by both the community and laws back when he went to school and first started teaching than today. He indicated a big change occurred when laws and community standards made teachers, relatives, and neighbors hesitant to discipline someone else's child.

Extra-curricular activities consisted of track meets with all the area rural schools. During nice weather they scheduled about three softball games during the year followed always with spelling bees and ciphering matches. Schools were quite proud when they bested the other students and schools with their skills in spelling and ciphering.

As well as extra activities, chores and after-school duties were responsibilities students completed after their school day. Stones related at this point that school always started at 8:00 a.m. and always ended at 4:00 p.m. He emphasized there was never an exception, even to the degree that lunch was always from noon until 1:00 p.m. when everyone came inside from recess for studying. At the end of each day upon arriving home, farm responsibilities awaited him. They raised pigs, milked eight to ten cows, picked corn by hand, split firewood, and had certain responsibilities they were expected to fulfill. Separating the milk led to them taking a 10-gallon can of cream into town every

other Saturday to trade for groceries and items needed at home. Stones' mother raised vegetables and produced many of their meal items right on the farm. Stones' responsibilities connected those of school and farm as he related getting to and from school was a matter of walking unless bad weather dictated that his dad leave his farm duties and take them to school on horseback.

While attending high school, Stones participated in the last state program for "normal training" in the state of Kansas. This program allowed that after graduation from a high school emphasizing teaching areas, if a person passed a qualifying test, he/she qualified for teaching in Kansas. Therefore, Stones became a qualified teacher at 17 years of age after his "normal training" in high school.

Stones' first teaching assignment in 1943-1944 revolved around teaching in a one-room school in Smith County, Kansas with 14-15 students. They ranged from a first grader to a 15-year old seventh grader. During this school year, Stones rode three and one-half miles to Oriole Number 26 everyday on his bicycle unless weather was unfit. Then he rode the horse. However, in February of that school term, Stones' father suffered a heart attack and was bedridden until July. Therefore, Stones did the farm chores at home early in the morning in order to get to school where he emptied the ashes from the day before, got cobs and coal, started the fire, drew a bucket of water from the well for filling the drinking fountain, and made sure the building was warmed for school to start at 8:00 a.m. The end of the day meant floors were swept, more cobs and coal were brought in for the next day, and all the papers were gathered and placed in the bicycle basket or saddle bags of the horse, depending upon the weather. All of this was quite difficult to manage with both the farm responsibilities and school duties, so Stones finished his first term of teaching in 1944 and quit to manage the farm for the next three years.

After three years of managing the farm, Stones' brother, Harold, was old enough to manage things on the farm. That allowed Stones to continue his teaching from 1947 through 1949 at Mt. Hope School Number 78 in Smith County. He also planned on attending summer sessions at Fort Hays State University to complete his baccalaureate degree. Stones related that his father decided if he wanted to go to summer school, he probably was smart enough to get there himself. Stones arranged for a ride with his neighbor, and when left at the northeast corner of the campus, struck out on his own with suitcase in hand to find a place to live. As Stones attended the summer session at Fort Hays State University, he met his future wife, Ardith.

In discussing his early career and salaries of teachers, Stones related his first teaching job paid \$85 month for an eight-month contract. He noted the highest wages paid an elementary teacher in the county was \$90 per month. Three years later when Stones went back to teaching at his one-room school, wages had risen to \$150 per month, and the next year rose to \$165 per month. After getting married, Stones decided to move to town to teach, interviewed, and signed a contract for \$2,000 for the 1949-1950 school year at Bird City, Kansas. However, when the contract came back to him, it was incorrectly made out for \$2,100 for the school year. He went back to Bird City to inform the board members, and after a few minutes of leading him on, they advised him they had decided to pay him \$100 extra on his contract! He said that was a fortune in those days.

Stones' transition to a larger school found him teaching fifth grade the first three years at Bird City, and then seventh and eighth grade math and science with another teacher who taught the other subjects up until 1957. After teaching in a one-room school, Stones found the focus on fifth grade to be a great chance to work with a wonderful group of students. He found fifth grade to be a most rewarding experience.

Stones emphasized the role of the teacher differed when he taught as compared to the role of today's teacher due to expectations of the public. When he taught, teachers did recess duty every day, not because they had to, but because they wanted to be outside with the children. In fact, Stones related to us an experience that led to greater understanding between teacher and student as well as student to teacher. He had a student who was about 10-12 years old and always a loner in school. He didn't volunteer and was pretty much on his own most of the time. One day Stones, while grading papers after school, spied the young man setting off across a field with a rifle or shotgun in hand on a hunting expedition. However, watching him through the window, Stones knew he had no hope of really having any luck as the young man was hunting in a plowed field. Stones went on to say he felt it was the boy's way of entertaining himself without anyone to play with or talk to outside of school. Stones went home and asked his wife to pack a lunch for him and the boy for the next Saturday. Stones took the boy fishing down at the creek, and really didn't remember whether they had any luck or not. The important thing was that the boy, who never said a word in school, talked about many different things with Stones that day. Afterwards, anytime someone was disruptive or undisciplined in class, the boy would make sure the other student knew, "We don't do that in Mr. Stones' class." In many different ways, teachers became a vital part of their students' lives. Men coached track and all other sports, and their responsibilities at school differed from those of women teachers. Men teachers were paid more on their yearly contract because they were considered "head of the household." Stones indicated he felt this was unfair to single mothers and all women who worked as teachers and supported that change when it came about in making everyone equal.

St. John, Kansas was the site of Stones' first administrative position from 1957-1962. He was hired as an elementary principal after 10 years of classroom teaching. In 1960 Stones completed his master's degree in administration at Fort Hays State University after many summers of classes. Not only did Stones attend classes for his master's degree, but he went to other colleges for areas of study he felt would help in future areas of education. For example, he attended a summer session at Kansas University to take personnel training courses and attended a summer session at the University of New Mexico. During his classwork in New Mexico, Stones experienced the multicultural influence which was to become a valuable tool later in educational areas. He left his administrative position in St. John in 1962 when he was hired as an elementary principal in Hugoton, Kansas where he spent the next 11 years.

Again, Stones did not stop attending school. He continued to take courses throughout the summers, taking his family with him each time. His experiences included teaching summer classes for Fort Hays State University in the Education Department for the teaching block classes of language arts, as well as supervising student teachers over the summer months during the 1963-1964 and 1964-1965 summer sessions. He also took his family to Waterloo, Iowa to attend classes at the University of Northern Iowa in 1966-1967, as well as spending a summer in Honolulu, Hawaii with a teaching program involving John Goodlad. The serenity of open spaces drew Mr. Stones to attend summer classes at the University of Montana in Missoula in 1968. During his tenure at Hugoton from 1962-1973, Mr. Stones served on the North Central Accreditation team from 1971-1973 and developed programs for elementary school certification. This was a valuable experience as he met several times per year in Chicago with other educators and developed changes in national standards and certification programs.

Because of his motivation and devotion to see that students received every opportunity to achieve, Stones was awarded the President's National Advisory Council Innovative Project Award in 1970. This program instituted by Stones in the Hugoton elementary school placed a male teacher as a role model in all of the first four grades. This program operated on a rotating basis so that the teacher moved with the students as they progressed through the grades. It required the hiring of three men teachers as it was implemented so that the first male teacher rotated back to a first-grade position after completing his fourth year with that group of students. Stones designed the program to provide exposure to students to a male role model as many children came from homes without the father-figure present in their lives.

In 1971 the Kansas Bar Association awarded Stones the Liberty Bell Award for his innovative law enforcement program whereby policemen, sheriff's officers, highway patrolmen, judges, and the county attorney came into the school to address law enforcement issues which created an awareness with the children emphasizing obeying the law and becoming responsible citizens in Hugoton, Kansas. This program somewhat resembled the D.A.R.E. incorporated in schools today. Also Stones was named Kansas Elementary Principal of the Year for 1972 while serving as principal of the elementary school in Hugoton.

Stones' experiences from the one-room schoolhouse to the islands of Hawaii to diversified summer programs to meeting rooms in Chicago prepared him for the position in 1973 of Director of Instruction for U.S.D. 457, Garden City, Kansas. In that position, he worked with teachers and administrators in developing curriculum programs for grades K-12. Much progress in educational curriculum design and delivery occurred under his direction. Stones moved to the position of Assistant Superintendent in 1978 and later

served as Interim Superintendent during the spring of 1985 and the entire school year of 1985-1986 while a search was conducted for a new superintendent. Stones was awarded the Kansas Curriculum Leader of the Year Award in 1985 due to the success of an innovative program which utilized computerized math programs in the elementary, middle schools, and secondary schools designed by one of his teachers in the science department. Stones described the program as using federal funding for purchasing the computers. This program was one of the first of its kind in the state of Kansas.

Stones recollected that many changes took place in Garden City between his hiring in 1973 and his retirement in 1991. Probably foremost was the population growth of Garden City due to two large beef-processing plants built in the late 1970's. Stones witnessed the growth of the population of school-aged children increase rapidly through the 1980's as well as the minority student percentage. In 1973 when Stones was hired as Director of Instruction, the minority student percentage was 17%. In 1991 when Stones retired, the minority-student population had grown to approximately 40%.

Documentation indicates Stones worked with a student-population increase from 4,800 students in 1973 to just under 7,000 students in 1991 with diversity of cultures and language of major importance. During those years of rapid growth, Stones recognized the pressing need for English as a Second Language programs which soon became a reality. Diversity of population in Garden City was a reality and Stones accepted the challenge to provide an educational system to reach all children irregardless of language abilities. As a matter of fact, Stones saw a Garden City student population by 1991 that represented 17 foreign countries, and the Garden City school system touted as a premier training ground and educational opportunity for non-English speaking and limited-English speaking

students and parents. This was accomplished through many of the innovative curriculum structures Stones encouraged within the district.

Gertrude Walker Elementary School, Garfield Elementary, Kenneth Henderson Junior High School, Florence Wilson Elementary School, Edith Scheuerman Elementary, and Victor Ornelas Elementary School were all constructed with numerous additions and renovations to other buildings during Stones tenure as Director of Instruction, Assistant Superintendent, and Interim Superintendent for Garden City Schools from 1973 through 1991.

Prior to Stones' work in Garden City, no academic curriculum guides existed in U.S.D. 457 until the "Links to Language Arts" was developed by language arts teachers. The success of this was followed by a developed curriculum guide in each academic area under the guidance of Stones.

Stones announced his retirement plans to finalize the 1991 school year after serving 44 years in the educational field. Four years later, he received one of the greatest honors an educator can receive. U.S.D. 457 passed a bond issue for two new fifth and sixth grade intermediate centers and asked the people of the community to submit names for both new buildings to be opened in the 1996-1997 school year. Shortly thereafter, the selection committee announced the Charles O. Stones Intermediate Center as one of the choices in agreement with overwhelming public sentiment toward a gentleman who epitomized the ideal teacher to many Garden City students, parents, teachers, administrators, and business people of the community.

Donna Roush, Garden City School Board Member, stated that she nominated Stones' name for the honor of being placed on one of the new intermediate centers because she valued his importance to education and children in Garden City, Kansas. She

verified that her impression of Stones' caring and sincere attitude toward bettering children's educational processes began when she worked for him as his secretary. Roush stated she witnessed his hard work in bringing about educational reforms and programs which benefited all Garden City school children. She felt this was a fitting tribute to a man who weathered many changes and used the diversity brought to Garden City through such rapid population growth as a positive selling point for educational programs.

Local speech and broadcasting instructor at Garden City High School, Shelby McNutt, related an incident which made his first impression of Stones a lasting one and partial reason for nominating Stones for the honor of having the intermediate center named in his honor. McNutt related that his interview for his current position in Garden City involved a guided tour by Stones of the high school and its facilities. The most impressive characteristic he remembered of Stones was the knowledge and sincerity Stones displayed in walking the hallways of the high school. Stones talked to students and teachers alike with the familiarity known only by someone who had been in the building often enough to keep in touch with students and faculty. McNutt emphasized the size and scope of that phenomenon was overwhelming since Stones had an office across town with many more issues at hand other than walking the halls and seeing students and faculty at work. However, Stones made a personal effort to stay in contact with the needs of the educational system in Garden City through a grassroots basis of being out and among staff and students almost daily as he witnessed the workings of a district under his direction.

Hired as the first principal of the Charles O. Stones Intermediate Center, Marcy Aycock reiterated many of the same qualities mentioned before. She indicated Stones continued to display the caring and kindness revealed in his recollections of his schooling, teaching, and administrative careers. Aycock related that Stones has continued the

involvement in education he was known for during his career by making regular appearances at the intermediate center and staying abreast of activities. He requested the monthly calendar of events be sent to him as this allowed him to become a part of the school named for him. Aycock named several school activities Stones participated in during the year whereby he talked with students, parents, staff, and community members present, and that he stays in touch with new educational trends. She remarked that Stones has brought in cookies and vegetables from his garden to share with teachers as well as invited teachers who might be alone over holidays to spend the time with his family. When asked to relate the characteristics she sees in Stones in her building, Aycock stated she is impressed that Stones still displayed so much enthusiasm for teaching after 44 years in the field of education, and it is obvious that the "teacher" in him still exists when he works with students. Stones emits that enthusiasm to students along with the kindness and caring attitude by which he truly lives.

Whoever would have thought a \$680 per year one-room schoolhouse teaching position would lead to so many years filled with the richness of these kinds of educational experiences? Stones certainly epitomizes the characteristics dedicated to making education the foundation of building a better community for tomorrow.