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THE WAY WE LEARNED: RURAL SCHOOLING
IN NEBRASKA (1915-1925)

by

Aldonna Searles Simmons

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1995

Approved by

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. Michael V. ...", is written over a horizontal line.

Dissertation Adviser

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The purpose of this study was to gain understanding about children's schooling experiences within rural or one-room schools through the narratives of persons who attended them.

This research project was conducted within the qualitative paradigm using narrative methodology. The context of narrative methodology, the place of memory within that context, and the feminization of the teaching profession are also discussed. The narratives of five persons who were schooled in one-room schools during the second decade of this century (1915-1925) were collected and analyzed.

The "little red schoolhouse" has established a unique place in the history of the United States and in the history of American education. As the country was settled, rural schools dotted the landscape and became critical to a community's sense of permanence, with the number of rural schools reaching a numerical peak in the last two decades of the 19th century and steadily declining in the 20th century. The country school has been portrayed as an extension of the family, a place where children were expected to learn, to mind, and to become good citizens. While questions continue to be asked about the quality of the country school experience, the narratives analyzed in this research present that experience as very positive and motivating.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dissertation Advisor *Michael Umri*

Committee Members *Jeanne Atkins Bowling*
Kathleen Casey
David Strahan

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No one has the privilege of choosing parents. If I could have, however, I would have chosen mine, William and Edna Painter Searles. By giving me life, they gave me roots and I became part of their fascinating lives and histories. By encouraging and supporting my dreams, they gave me wings to chart my own course and make my own place in history. No child could ever need more.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Much has been written about the history of education and schooling in America from the earliest Colonial schools to current models and practices. This information has traditionally been gathered from archival and historical sources. Narratives about education and schooling experiences have augmented the other sources and, through these voices, we have been able to acquire a deeper understanding of the experiences of many people who have been involved in education, including those who established schools, those who taught in schools and those who have observed and described the process of schooling in America.

One voice that is rarely heard within this historical context is the voice of the student. This silence should not be surprising, considering the lack of value that was actually placed on children and childhood prior to this century. Downey (1986:260) states that children and youth are the last major group in our history to have been deprived of their historical identity and voice.

I am very interested in the place of rural schools in the history of American education. Moreover, I believe that the narratives of persons who were schooled in those environs can provide a unique perspective on the educational process as it occurred within specific historic, geographic, and economic contexts. In this

chapter I introduce the narrators, consider the meaning of my research in light of current reform, and place my collected narratives within their geographical and historical contexts. The purpose of this study is to gain understanding about children's schooling experiences within rural or one-room schools through the narratives of persons who attended those schools.

The narratives of five persons who were schooled in one-room schools during the second decade of this century (1915-1925), four in Nebraska and one in Florida, have been collected and analyzed. The four Searles children are siblings, three of whom attended the same school together for several years. The fourth sibling is eleven years younger than his nearest brother and attended a one-room school in Florida. The fifth person, Duane Tatro, lived on the adjoining farm in Nebraska and was a classmate of the oldest three Searles children. All five were born in Nebraska, the four classmates between 1907 and 1910, and the fifth in 1921. Both families farmed, with the Searles family settling in the area in the 1880s and the Tatro family in 1900.

These five children were educated in a system which once was a fixture in rural areas throughout the country. As urban areas developed, the small rural schools which served children from neighboring farms were abandoned for consolidated schools. According to Beckner, (1983:56) the language of reform was beginning to be spoken and was saying that small, rural schools equate to inferior education and bigger schools could provide better educational opportunities.

Educational Reform Efforts

During the last two decades when educational reform efforts have attempted to identify areas in need of change, much attention has been given to the characteristics of schools that are considered "good schools" and the pedagogical practices considered "best classroom practices." Many reports, beginning with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 issuance of A Nation at Risk, have focused attention on the weaknesses within our educational system. Goodlad did an excellent job of synthesizing many of the reform reports and presents them in his 1984 publication, A Place Called School. He characterized what happens in "good" schools and listed the following common attributes:

1. strong positive leadership
2. high expectations of student and teacher achievement
3. respectful relationship
4. an emphasis on academic basics
5. a healthy balance of activities
6. individualized instruction and attention
7. parental and community involvement in the school
8. tolerance for individual initiatives

Several of these characteristics, such as high expectations of students, a respectful pupil/teacher relationship, emphasis on academic basics, individualized instruction and attention, and parental involvement in the school, have been identified as positive characteristics of and practices within the rural school. (Bowen:1944,19)

Moving beyond the context of what the reform literature indicates as characteristics of a good school, Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (1993:4,5) have identified what many professionals consider "best practices" within classrooms.

These include

- more experiential, inductive, hands-on learning
- more active learning in the classroom, with all the attendant noise and movements of students doing, talking and collaborating
- more emphasis on high-order thinking
- more deep study of a smaller number of topics
- more time devoted to reading whole, original, real books and nonfiction material
- more responsibility transferred to students for their work
- more choice for students; e.g., picking their own books, writing topics, team partners, research projects
- more enacting and modeling of the principles of democracy in school
- more attention to affective needs and the varying cognitive styles of individual students
- more cooperative, collaborative activity
- more heterogeneously grouped classroom where individual needs are met through inherently individualized activities, not segregation of bodies
- more delivery of special help to students in regular classrooms
- more varied and cooperative roles for teachers, parents, and administrators
- more reliance upon teachers' descriptive evaluation of student growth, including qualitative/anecdotal observations

As with Goodlad's school characteristics, many of these classroom practices were present in the rural schools of the past century. (Bowen:1944,31)

As educators and researchers reflect today about what is considered a "good school" and what is considered "best practice," I think it important to listen to the voices of those who were once students in the rural schools, hear what they say about the daily happenings in the classrooms, and discern any connections which might be applicable to current educational practices. Before

I can do that, however, I must set the geographical and historical stage for the narratives that follow.

Geographical and Historical Context of Persons Interviewed

The state of Nebraska is located south of South Dakota, the current geographical center of the United States. (Creigh:1977,5) Its greater part lies in what is known as the Great Plains. The Missouri River separates it from Missouri and Iowa on the east and from part of South Dakota on the northeast. South Dakota bounds the state on the north, Wyoming and Colorado on the west, and Colorado and Kansas on the south, thus effectively merging the west with the midwest.

The area of land that was to become the state of Nebraska was part of the Louisiana Purchase and has been known at various times as the "Indiana Territory" and the "Missouri Territory." After Missouri became a state, the land became known simply as "Indian Country" or the "Desert Country." (Nicholl and Keller:1961,65) In 1842, John C. Fremont traveled through the territory and suggested the name Nebraska to then U.S. Secretary of War William Wilkins. The word is Native American, either a Sioux word meaning "shallow water" or an Oto word meaning "flat river." As either word was applicable to the Platte River, which flowed through the territory, the name was accepted. (Nicholl:1967,9)

The Platte River, which Washington Irving considered a most magnificent and useless river and which Mark Twain suggested would be respectable if it

were laid end on end, (Creigh:1977,4) is one of three rivers which have been significant to the settlement of the land. The Niobrara is in the north, the Republican is in the south, and the Platte is the central ribbon which ties the parts of the state together.

James Olson (1985:3) wrote, "When Major Stephen H. Long of the Army Engineers returned from his epochal expedition of the Rocky Mountains in 1820, he confirmed what many Americans had suspected all along - that most of the area between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains was a vast desert wasteland. "In regard to this extensive section of country," he wrote, "I do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence." Dr. Edwin James, chronicler of the expedition, stated that he had "no fear of giving too unfavorable an account" of the region. It was "an unfit residence for any but a nomad population." He hoped it would remain forever, "the unmolested haunt of the native hunter, the bison, and the jackal."

Olson (1985:7) continues, describing the land as "...flat and uninviting, characterized by the absence of trees and the abundance of grasses...." Bison and deer were the largest creatures roaming the territory and did so in great herds. In addition, there were many smaller animals such as rabbits, coyotes, and prairie dogs that lived in and among the grasses. The only other inhabitants living on the land were several Indian tribes, the Pawnee, Oto, Omaha, Ponca, and Winnebago. (Olson and Olson:1968,16) A variety of birds flew through the open

skies and fed easily on the grains and grasses that covered the landscape. The sun parched the land during the summer months and the snows covered it with a white blanket during the winter months.

Although the territory attracted few settlers, it was a passageway through which thousands of people journeyed as they traveled west. From the earliest explorers to the fur traders seeking the riches of the northwest territories, to missionaries on their spiritual quests, many traversed the desolate, flat area in search of something better. The three major trails upon which the settlers traveled were the Mormon Trail, the Oregon Trail, and the California trail; all three crossing the Nebraska territory. Between 1841 and 1866, an estimated 350,000 immigrants were funneled through the grassland highway of the Nebraska Territory (Creigh:1977,33).

Settlement occurred from east to west; the first settlement recorded was Bellevue, settled in 1807 along the Missouri River. Fort Atkinson, the first permanent town, was established in 1820 (Federal Writers Project:1939,49). Forts were built to provide some respite for the travelers as they made their journeys west as well as to protect them from the many Indian tribes which lived in the territory. As more white people went west, the Indian "problem" became more acute and the idea was broached to use the entire territory between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains as one big, permanent Indian reservation.

In 1854 President Franklin Pierce signed a bill entitled the Kansas-Nebraska Act which divided the vast Nebraska Territory into two small areas. The Kansas

territory would stretch north to the 40th parallel and the Nebraska Territory from the 40th parallel up to the Canadian border. Ten years earlier a bill creating this new territory had been introduced but was quickly withdrawn when the issue of slavery arose. The country had become increasingly polarized over this issue and the Kansas-Nebraska Act prohibited slavery within the territory. (Olson:1985,53)

Between 1865 and 1880, people ceased moving through the countryside and began settling, quadrupling the population, which doubled again in the 1880s. Many of these settlers were immigrants from central and western Europe, providing great ethnic diversity. In 1980, only 19% of the state's population was born in Nebraska while 43% were of foreign ancestry, primarily Germans, Swedes, Irish, Bohemians (Czech), English, and Danes (Cherney:1989,32). These farmers settled in a land that had changed little over thousands of years, an uninviting land

....which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes....the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness. (Cather, O Pioneers!:1913,21)

Cather also wrote that "...the history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman" (O Pioneers!:1913,64) and so the settlers came. With little capital or worldly possessions, they came to plow and plant and hope that this year's harvest would yield enough to allow them to remain for another season of plowing, planting, and harvesting.

This rapid population growth brought change to the face of the plains. The railroads scarred the land from east to west with its track, bringing supplies and economic growth. Like blemishes, towns sprang up to provide services to the farmers of the surrounding countryside and, in turn, to provide a place for the farmers to market their products. Cherney (1989:35) describes the typical small Nebraska town

The center of town consisted largely of one- and two-story commercial buildings, several of red brick, stretching for a few blocks along both sides of a main street that ran north and south. On all sides of the commercial district lay residences with large yards, sizable gardens, and chicken pens. The county courthouse sat near the north end of town and the Burlington railway station was at the south end. The railroad tracks ran east and west....A town of fewer than 2,000 residents would contain about 400 households with about 1,000 adults.

When this new territory was opened for settlement, the Federal government directed that in every 36 square miles of land, two square miles should be set aside to support a public school. (Nicholl and Keller:1961,263). As the settlers arrived, they brought with them the belief and tradition that education was one of the characteristics of civilization and that it was necessary for both citizenship building and to provide the skills necessary for participation in the construction of the new country. However strong their belief in education, the primary concern of these settlers continued to be subjugating their environment and survival.

Brief History of Fairmont, Nebraska

Wilbur Gaffney, (1968:126) in his centennial history of Fillmore County, Nebraska, states that the site for the town of Fairmont was selected by officials of the Baltimore and Missouri Railroad in 1867 and the town was officially chartered in 1873. The railroad was laying track west from Lincoln and built stations in towns that were already established or selected new sites as stops along the rail line, fitting new sites between existing sites in alphabetical order.

The town site chosen was west of Exeter, thus the name Fairmont, meaning "fine surroundings and elevated position," was selected. (Gaffney:1968,126) Once the name was chosen and a post office established in the store, the town grew rapidly. The town of Fairmont was comprised of 188 acres and in the summer of 1871 the South Platte Land Company began surveying and dividing the acreage. At that time not a tree or bush could be seen in any direction without a telescope and the horizon of the prairie was broken only by tall grass, buffalo, and sod houses.

By the time the town was officially chartered in 1873, it was the most western town of what was known as the "Great American Desert." (Gaffney:1968,127) The next town west of Fairmont was Denver, Colorado. Families moved in; stores were opened; hotels, residences and businesses were built; churches were organized; a grain elevator was built; a brick yard was established to provide materials; and wells were dug a water system was built.

By 1888 the population was approaching 1,800 and Fairmont was considered the "Metropolis of the area." (Gaffney:1968,127)

During the decade between 1915 and 1925, Fairmont was a small community of approximately 2,000 people and supported the variety of businesses, hotels, schools, and entertainments necessary in order to maintain a relatively stable population. Cherney's previously cited (1989:35) description of the typical plains town almost perfectly described Fairmont then (and now). I visited Fairmont, toured the town museum, walked all the streets, visited the nursing home and the senior citizen center, and talked with several persons both in some of the stores and in the local diner. The railroad runs east and west and it and the grain elevator are located at the north end of town, with the two blocks of commercial buildings stretching south into the residential area. Fairmont is not the county seat, so a park, rather than the county offices, is located in the center of town. Although the doctor, dentist, and lawyer are located in Geneva, eight miles south, within the town are stores, churches, civic and social organizations that enable the 700 residents to retain a sense of community. Schools and a library meet the education needs of the surrounding area.

This is the geographical context within which four of the five persons interviewed were born and educated. The two families, Tatro and Searles, were farmers and had lived south of Fairmont, Nebraska for many years. Mr. and Mrs. Searles, parents of Phebe, Lawrence, William, and Delbert, married in 1898, and farmed 320 acres of land which had originally belonged to Mrs. Searles's maternal

grandfather. (Narrative of William Searles) Mr. and Mrs. Tatro, parents of Duane, purchased their first acreage and moved to the Fairmont area in 1900. (Narrative of Duane Tatro) William McKinley was President of the United States and Silas A. Holcomb was governor of Nebraska. Duane Tatro, Phebe Searles, Lawrence Searles, and Bill Searles attended school together at District 17 school for several years. Their narratives focus on the years 1915 through 1925, a time, according to Fish's History of America, (1925) during which the country joined the Allied Forces on the bloody battlefields of the First World War, enacted the 18th and 19th Amendments to the Constitution which prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages and permitted women to vote, organized the League of Nations, enacted the draft in order to provide a peacetime army, and witnessed both the growth of the air industry and the decline of farm prices. Nebraska and its citizens paralleled what was happening nationally by joining the services and fighting overseas, enacting prohibition, granting women the right to vote, dying and surviving a devastating influenza epidemic, watching the prices of their products drop and the collapse of banks which had backed them. In addition, as Nebraska had provided a route for early pioneers heading west, it also acted in the same manner as the fledgling transcontinental air service grew, becoming a stop on both passenger and mail routes as airplanes traversed the breadth of the country. (Fish:1925,334)

Perrett (1982:9) characterizes the decade of the twenties as "...both the most divided decade in American history and the most glamorous." In 1920, farming

was the country's biggest business, with 400 million acres under cultivation and one-third of the nation's population directly dependent upon agriculture for its livelihood (Perrett:100). During the decade, however, there was a rapid shift from a rural, agricultural emphasis to an urban, manufacturing emphasis. The urban areas were also undergoing rapid changes, spurred by new cultural influences of the silent movies, jazz bands, flappers, dance "fads" like the Charleston, tremendous growth of the automobile industry, joblessness among returning veterans, and the rise of unions.

Despite what was happening between and among the many nations of the world and within the large eastern cities of the United States during those years, news was slow to reach the midsection of the country. Because the primary concern for the farmers continued to be planting and harvesting crops sufficient to keep their land and families together, news which did not directly affect those concerns had little impact on the daily lives of the farm families.

Dorothy Creigh, (1977:8-13) in her bicentennial history of Nebraska, characterized the people as follows:

- contradictory - the land was originally acquired through government homestead programs and farmers receive crop subsidies, yet there is, in general, a great distrust of "Big Brother" and government intervention

- political ultraconservatives - the voting record of the State verifies that the sentiment of the people is the less government intervention, the better

- frugal - it has been said that a Nebraskan will "squeeze the buffalo on a nickel until it bellows"

- slow to make changes - if things are working, why change; if change is needed, convince them

- practical and not given to artistic pursuits

- emotional about their land - As Alexandra said to Carl in O Pioneers!, "We come and go but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it - for a little while!" (Cather:1913,272)

- highly literate and placing high value on education

- ethnic melting pot of Eastern Europe - many settlements were begun by and continue to have high numbers of Scandinavians, Russians, Bohemians, English, Irish, and Germans

- long-lived - particularly across the southern half of the state

Of such are the five persons whose schooling narratives are reflected in this study.

In this chapter I establish some of the characteristics of good schools and effective teachers and place the five persons interviewed within their historical and geographical contexts. Chapter two examines the literature on rural schools and, particularly, the feminization of teaching. In chapter three I discuss my own perspective on research and describe both the methodology and limitations which guided and grounded me throughout the project. Chapter four presents the narratives of the five persons I interviewed and my analysis of them. In chapter

five I present an example of a teacher currently teaching in a one-room school and tie my conclusions of the early schooling narratives to this current context.

CHAPTER II

SELECTED REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The American system for schooling children is based on the European design of education. The colonists may have left Europe because of discontent with much that was happening in their homelands, but there is little evidence of their discontent with European educational beliefs and practices. Thus these practices became the models used as settlements grew across the new country. (Kalman:1991,7)

The earliest teachers were usually clergy because they could read and write. (Kalman:1991, 15) These early teachers reinforced the commonly held belief that the purpose for learning, particularly to read, was to read the Bible and develop the skills necessary to gain salvation. Dame schools, the original one-room schoolhouses, existed in colonial times and after the children had learned all the dame could teach, education then was divided specifically by gender and class. (Kalman:1991,18)

In the 19th century the common school movement was led by Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education and considered to be the Father of the American Public School System. Mann's vision was of a school system which would be supported by all citizens for all citizens. Common schooling would thus become the great equalizer, offering all children the opportunity to discover the qualities which unite rather than divide people and,

hopefully, prevent hostility while promoting community. (Kalman:1991,57) Schools would shift from a religious to an ideological focus and would become the primary vehicle for preparing children from various backgrounds for full participation in a democratic society. While not without its opponents, this movement grew because it espoused the seminal beliefs of many of the early settlers of this country, beliefs that inherited wealth, that which a person reaps from the labor of preceding generations, should not be the factor which divides people but, rather, that education and hard work were the factors that equipped a man for success.

According to Spring, (1990:74) two uniquely American school characteristics arose as the result of the common school movement. The first was that schools became instrumental in carrying out government ideologies and agendas and, as they became arms of government, it became necessary to also create State agencies to oversee that the policies were being carried out. The second was the rapid feminization of the teaching profession. It is this second characteristic and its association with rural schools with which I will deal.

Prior to the Civil War, teachers were predominately male, primarily because men had the advantage of and access to education. At that time, also, there were few acceptable economic opportunities for women outside the home and those positions that were permitted for women were extensions of home responsibilities, such as seamstress, cook, and domestic. There were, however, "experiments" in some Massachusetts schools in which "winter" classrooms were

staffed by women. Fitts (1979:141) describes the Massachusetts system of a dual school term, winter and summer, which followed the agricultural year. The winter term was the term which the older students attended and was staffed by a schoolmaster or by a local farmer who supplemented his income during the winter months. During this term a broader curriculum was presented to the scholars than was presented during the summer terms. Summer terms were usually for the younger children and were staffed by women because of the widely held belief that women were more "naturally" nurturant than men and related particularly well to young children. These summer term school experiences would probably more closely parallel today's day care center, with greater emphasis on child care and lesser emphasis on academic endeavors. According to Fitts, (1979:148) Horace Mann devoted sections of his 1842, 1843, and 1845 Annual Reports to the success of these experiments and he became an advocate for providing women more opportunity to teach in the winter terms. Additionally, as communities increased the number of days included in the school year, farmers who may have taught in the winter term found themselves unable to continue. When the school year overlapped the growing year, teaching became less of an option for men.

During the Civil War, men enlisted and left the communities and women were called upon to assume the teaching responsibilities. After the Civil War, men who returned from the horrors of battle often did not choose to return to teaching, an occupation which had already begun to be viewed as feminine. This

change in the public perception of teaching provided expanded employment opportunities for women and the number of women who became teachers steadily increased. By 1920, 86% of American school teachers were women. (Link:1986:36)

The expanding discourse on the increasing use of women as teachers was not a discourse motivated by altruism or overwhelming support for women's intellectual capabilities. Rather, it was based on the immediate need to fill classrooms when men were not available, as well as in the belief that women were more "naturally" nurturant, particularly with younger children, and teaching was an acceptable manner to extend that nature beyond a woman's immediate family. Nelson (1983:17) indicated that another reason women were becoming more acceptable as teachers was because women were perceived to possess a greater orientation to service and teaching could be viewed as missionary work and approached with the same zeal and involvement. Altenbaugh (1992:35) confirmed that many women shared the discourse of service and self-sacrifice and affirmed teaching as fulfilling a woman's mission.

Women usually had less education than their male counterparts so school boards, particularly in rural areas, felt justified in offering smaller salaries. Even as late as 1920, Cuban (1993:122) says that annual salaries in rural areas ranged between \$300 and \$800, depending on the state, and were \$500-\$700 more in town schools. In addition, the salary paid a teacher was not viewed as payment for services rendered but, rather, as a supplement to her husband's income.

According to Hoffman (1981:8), industrialization, urbanization, and immigration were also factors which contributed to the feminization of teaching, both in rural and urban areas. As the country became more industrialized, women became part of the market force and gained economic value. Industrialization also offered increasing job opportunities to men, thus leaving teaching open for women. As urban areas became more crowded and competition for jobs increased, people emigrated to the west to find or create new opportunities. Tyack and Strober (1981:131) indicate that gender is one of the fundamental organizing principles in society. This became very evident with the settlement of the West because, as families claimed and began farming the plains and prairies, job responsibilities became very gender-specific. Men were responsible for business and agriculture and women were responsible for homemaking, child rearing, and teaching.

Biklen (1995:60) equates the feminization of teaching with the development of the concept of romantic love. Teaching provided an increasingly acceptable vehicle through which women could gain both economic and personal independence. Journal entries of 19th century teachers like Sarah Jane Price (Cordier:1992,175) and even 20th century teachers like Ethyl Scott (Manning:1990,132) indicate a growing reluctance to marry for any reason other than romantic love, particularly if marriage meant leaving teaching and becoming less independent.

The feminization of teaching was a contributing factor to its lower status and lack of recognition as a profession. According to Hoffman (1981:15), because women were considered subordinate to men, any profession which was considered feminine (teaching, nursing) could not be equal in status to professions considered masculine (medicine, law). Thus, by doing what was deemed "natural" woman's work - nurturing children and transmitting culture - the teaching profession remained second-class.

Women who entered the teaching field did so for a variety of reasons. Some were interested in the financial possibilities, some saw teaching as an opportunity for service, some saw it as a path toward independence, and some saw it as an opportunity for a lifetime of scholarship and intellectual challenge. (Hoffman:1981,16) Some teachers accepted teaching positions close to their homes while others went far away, becoming part of the great emigration which occurred in this country during the 19th century.

Like immigrants from other countries, the emigrant teachers often found themselves living with families in the community, with little privacy, and even less opportunity to interact with other teachers. In sharp contrast to the often crowded living conditions, these young women were often more frustrated by their professional isolation and their lack of opportunity for intellectual stimulation from discourse and interaction with other teachers.. They would attend summer institutes, sponsored by their districts or by normal schools, to connect with other teachers.

Immigrants usually arrived in this country with only what they could wear and carry. Teachers frequently were hired to teach because they had more education than their students. In some high schools, a basic course in teaching was included in the curriculum and for many young women this served as their only professional preparation. This course certainly did not adequately prepare them for the situations and conditions in which they would find themselves teaching.

According to Fuller, (1982:46) the schools in which they taught ranged from "soddies," built into or scooped from the land to buildings which were built as schools or transformed from other purposes (such as churches) into schools. Supplies and equipment ranged from what the scholars brought from home to what the teacher could purchase from the budget supplied by the local school board. These budgets were frequently minimal and extended to the necessities such as chalk and books. The scholars furnished the supplies they needed such as paper and pencils.

Schools were hot in the summer, cold in the winter, dark, not well ventilated, and crowded. Because some teachers were paid by the number of students they could attract and keep, some classes were extremely large and conditions were far from optimal for either the scholars or the teachers. (Biklen:1995,64) Despite often primitive conditions, the emigrant teachers came and most stayed, often marrying and establishing a permanent relationship to the community.

Arriving in a new place, the emigrant teacher had to begin the task for which she was hired. Knowing that she was responsible for teaching a variety of curriculum areas to students of varying ages and abilities, the rural teacher relied upon the methodology with which she was most familiar, subject work by age group with memorization, recitation, and individual seatwork the staple pedagogical techniques. According to Finkelstein (1970:86), children needed only the capacity to memorize and to speak to participate in rural school activities. Journals of teachers in country schools often expressed frustration because they lacked time to prepare adequate lessons across all curriculum and grade levels, nor did they have time to allow for helping individual students. So the teachers relied on other pupils for peer coaching - older students helping younger students or students more proficient in certain areas helping less proficient students.

Cuban (1993:21) questions if place made a difference in pedagogy. Did teachers in rural settings teach differently than teachers in more urban settings? He cites a study by Barbara Finkelstein which examined pedagogical practices of almost 1,000 elementary classrooms between 1820 and 1880. The study found that

Teachers talked a great deal. Students recited passages from textbooks, worked at their desks on assignments, or listened to the teacher and classmates during the time set aside for instruction. Teachers assigned work and expected uniformity from students both in behavior and in classwork. Teachers told students "when they should sit, when they should stand, when they should hang their coats, when they should turn their heads...." Students often entered and exited the room, rose and sat, wrote and spoke as one. "North and south, east and west, in rural schools as well as urban schools" Finkelstein writes, "teachers assigned lessons, asked questions and created standards of achievement designed to compel students to assimilate knowledge and practice skills in a particular fashion.

It was a fashion dictated by the textbooks usually - and often with dogmatic determination." (Cuban, 1993:25)

In addition, Finklestein (1989:84) identified three patterns of teaching in those elementary classrooms. She identified them as

- the intellectual overseer - this teacher assigned work, punished errors, and made the scholars do a great deal of memorizing
- the drillmaster - this teacher led students in unison through lessons, requiring them to repeat content aloud
- the interpreters of culture - this teacher focused on clarifying ideas and explaining content for the understanding of the scholars, not just the memorization of facts; this pattern was used in only 3% of the classrooms she studied.

Obviously, the person critical to the success of the community school was the teacher. Ideally, she would be a member of the community, be single, of high moral character, possess good health, and have the proper scholastic and professional preparation to assume the leadership of a school. Woofter (1917:62) wrote of the "teaching personality" that he felt must characterize women hired as teachers. This "personality" was defined as innate rather than acquired, and some of its characteristics included energy, a sense of humor, a pleasing appearance, the ability to maintain discipline, a sense of sympathy, adaptability, interest in extracurricular activities, and skill in instruction.

Year after year rural school boards across the country found such persons, hired them, and they became responsible for the education of a community's children. If the ideal teacher could not be found, the classroom was filled with a willing worker and the school board was responsible for providing the guidance

and support necessary for this person to do an acceptable job. Within a district the opportunity for a difference of opinion among members of the community could arise and the teacher could then be put in the middle of a struggle between opposing community factions. Sometimes the problem could be resolved and the teacher remain, but other times the difference of opinion could only be resolved by the teacher leaving. (Carney:1912,41)

Country schools were usually located in rural areas far from the statutory governing agency. While the local boards were responsible for the governance of their schools and had the responsibility for making the operational and personnel decisions, according to Carney, (1912:37) once a teacher was hired, she was given the responsibility for making the day-to-day decisions which ran the school. This shared governance design had the potential to become a struggle for authority, particularly in instances where a difference of opinion existed between the teacher and the local board.

According to Nelson (1992:78), although the teacher stood at the center of the community in a figurative sense, in terms of the importance of the function that she fulfilled within the community, she also stood at a community's periphery, excluded from full membership within it. The community's expectations of the teacher were so high and her position so elevated, that she was often not included in any activities which would put her in a position to be perceived as less than the perfect model and example which she was expected to be. Expectations and, in some cases, restrictions were written into a teacher's

contract and the community felt a responsibility to assist her in living up to those expectations.

In the 20th century the rural school became a target for extinction, in favor of larger, consolidated facilities. Consolidated schools would be able to provide better facilities, better qualified and prepared teachers, a broader curriculum, and an opportunity for students to be part of a larger, more diverse community. (Cuban:1993,125) In addition, he indicates that specific teaching practices such as formal recitation, rote memorization, and whole-group instruction which were closely identified with country schools were targeted for reform.

Nelson (1983:15) collected narratives of teachers in Vermont who had taught in both rural and consolidated settings. These teachers indicated that, while they agreed that the concept of a consolidated school may be educationally sound, most of those who had taught in both situations preferred the rural setting. There was a stronger, clearer sense of mission in rural schools and teachers were more clearly able to actualize the mission throughout their classroom lessons and activities. Community support was stronger because families had a sense of ownership in the school and were very interested in and participated in both the school activities and the community activities held at the school.

Teachers in rural communities were accorded a status which diminished in larger towns where consolidated schools were located. (Spencer:1986,169) In rural areas teachers were often viewed as the intellectual leaders of the

community and frequently were called upon to be problem-solvers or leaders in other aspects of community life. Another loss which was felt by rural teachers who moved into larger consolidated schools was autonomy. While a rural school teacher was accountable to the local school board, the curriculum planning and pedagogy were her responsibility. Her students had to pass district or county examinations at the end of the 8th grade and perform well in the various plays, pageants, programs, and "bees" to which the community was invited. These outcome or performance measures were used as indicators that the teacher was planning for and instructing her scholars appropriately and there was little attempt to impose external regulations. Other than an annual visit, most county superintendents appeared to give rural teachers their autonomy.

In consolidated schools, while teachers gained the collegial relationship of a professional community, they became subject both to closer scrutiny by a wider variety of people as well as were bound by increasing regulation over curriculum and classroom practices. According to Spencer (1986:178), consolidating schools led to the deskilling of teachers as persons able to make and do curriculum and the reskilling of teachers as managers of classroom procedures.

Not all of the teachers interviewed by Nelson (1983) preferred the rural to the consolidated school. Some perceived this transition as contributing to the professionalizing of teaching. Because they were able to provide better working conditions and offer higher salaries than rural schools, consolidated schools were able to attract teachers who were better prepared and schools became

professional communities. Assessments of teachers were conducted by supervisors and, therefore, less dependent on the performance of their students in artificial or contrived circumstances. In addition, teachers who taught in consolidated schools often did not live in the communities in which the schools were located and, thus were able to establish personal and professional communities and move from under intimate and often judgmental eyes.

Despite working conditions which may have been less than ideal and expectations which may have exceeded the ideal, women for many years filled the rural classrooms and continue to do so today. Barker (1986:149) cites a 1985 study conducted by the National Center for Education which gathered data on persons who were currently teaching in rural schools. The data showed that the majority of the teachers were still female, but most were now married; they possessed a Baccalaureate degree and 59% were working on Master's Degrees; most were located in the west or midwest; the mean years of teaching was 12, with 5 the mean for remaining at their current school; most worked approximately 9 hour instructional days and were their own custodians, bus drivers, counselors, and secretaries; and the mean number of students in their schools was 11 from grades 1 through 8. They characterized their professional situations as demanding but also very rewarding and reinforced the fact that they were teaching in those situations because they chose to.

According to Nachtigal (1992:69), the terrain of this country will continue to necessitate rural schools. The teachers who choose to teach in them, however,

must be provided additional preparation in both their pre-service and in-service educational experiences. Persons planning to teach in rural settings must also have additional opportunities to study life-span growth and development, mainstreaming and inclusion, alternative instructional and management strategies, and a variety of content in the disciplines.

From the end of the Civil War until the mid-1880s, teaching changed from a male-dominated occupation to a female-dominated one. As I have indicated in this chapter, women entered the profession for a variety of reasons and taught in a variety of sites. Many taught for only a short time, until they married and became responsible for maintaining their own homes and families. Many, however, remained to make a long-lasting contribution to the professionalizing of teaching.

In this chapter I consider teaching conditions in rural schools. In chapter four, I present narratives of five children who attended such schools.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Study Paradigm and Design

This research was conducted within the qualitative research paradigm using narrative methodology. Yarger and Smith (1990:30) say that narrative studies at their best provide much richness and descriptive information and at their worst become very unstructured and personalized. Narrative research focuses on humanity and history, perspective and context, emphasizing involvement with people and de-emphasizing attempts to quantify them or their actions, and is based on an ethic of valuing personal experiences. I chose this methodology as the most appropriate way in which to explore the richness of the experiences of students who attended one-room schools.

I chose to use narrative methodology for two reasons. The first is that I belong within a family of storytellers. At this point in my life I consider myself very fortunate to have such a family, but that was not always the case. As a child, I usually listened to the stories of my family, becoming somewhat frustrated when my maternal grandfather used to launch into his narratives about the early days of printing (or, as my brother and I used to subtitle it, "How Guttenberg and I invented the press"), when my paternal grandfather used to talk about going West on a wagon train ("How I settled the West"), when my dad and his brothers

talked about the farm ("Tom, Huck, and company"), and even when my dad started telling his military stories ("How I won WWII"). Unfortunately, my grandfather narratives are gone; fortunately, narratives by my father and his siblings are still flowing and I am now listening very carefully.

The second reason for my choice of methodology is my love of history and my fascination with the contexts in which people lived and in which children grew. My father's historical, geographical, economic, and social contexts made his childhood very different from mine. When he began a sentence with "when I was a child," although I usually rolled my eyes, I did listen to his comparisons and attempt to incorporate my understanding of his experiences into my memory. One phenomenon of which I have become very aware is the difference in my interest in his stories when he was the single narrator as opposed to when he and his siblings were sharing their collective memories.

This process which occurred as I was listening to family stories is the process Thelen (1989:1119) describes as the construction of memory, which he says is not done in isolation but in conversation with others who shared the context of the memory. He further states that we allow our pasts to be reshaped in order to both please those with whom it is shared and to gain confidence in the accuracy of our own memories. I have been present on many occasions when my father and his siblings have discussed an event which, although they may not have remembered it the same way, after discussion, they came to consensus on their shared memory. At that point, I could almost see each person filing the

redesigned memory away to be discussed again and probably altered at a later date.

According to Gagnon (1981:56), memory is not made up of knowledge, but rather of sensory recollections. Although several people witness or share the same event, each accommodates it individually into his or her existing schema. One person may code the memory as a pleasant one while another may code it as painful, thus having different sensory "triggers" which bring the memory back into consciousness. As the event is discussed the memory may be deconstructed and socially reconstructed as less pleasant or less painful, depending on how each person changes the memory's coding.

Nunan (1993:27) provides a theory on memory which he suggests directs us as we construct our personal histories. He describes it as a frame theory and bases it on repetitive stereotypical life situations. The primary example he used was a visit to the doctor. From our first visit to the doctor we begin to acquire a set of experiences which builds a frame which enables us to make meaning of our experiences and also to predict what kind of experiences may await us during future visits to the doctor. This frame encompasses a set of experiences that become our memory of visiting the doctor. What we experience during subsequent visits to the doctor may fit within the current frame or cause us to modify the frame to accommodate any new or different components.

Chafe (1994:44) voiced a concern that we are making memory a place rather than a process. He emphasizes that memory should be conceptualized as

a verb rather than as a noun. If we perceive memory as a place, then remembering or recalling becomes simply a process of retrieving information, much as we currently retrieve information from computer databases. Psychologists use the terminology "long-term" and "short-term" in describing memory and Chafe says that we can use similar terms in describing the information which we possess. Long-term memory would be the storehouse for inactive information, while our short-term memories would store currently active information. Chafe posits, however, that no information is inactive, that everything we have processed within our own schema or frames is active, working in combination with other information which is constantly being processed through our senses. He does introduce the term "shallow memory" (1994:71) to indicate information which may not be in our consciousness, but which continues to work in combination and in context with other information we are processing.

Nelson (1989:32) emphasizes the importance of remembering past events and telling stories of them. Telling personal stories is the first form of discourse people learn and through this type of storytelling we form connections to our family and its history and find our own voice. The use of the term voice is linked to narrative methodology, as people feel both comfortable and empowered to participate in discourse. Grumet (1990:281) uses the metaphor of three voices singing as she defines the following three voices which contribute to the narrative song:

1. situation - this voice sets the context of the narrative - the historical, social, economic, physical, geographical, cultural, political factors within which the narrative is grounded

2. narrative - this voice is the voice of the experience, the story to be told

3. interpretation - this voice reflects on the narrative and places it within the greater discourse

Each of us is located within a specific context or contexts, which give us identity and whose discourse becomes ours. Combining our contextual stories with interpretations and their relevance to current circumstances creates a mighty chorus whose music will be heard throughout history.

Nunan (1993:16) defines discourse as, "...a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative." While that particular definition includes both written oral communication, emphasis is placed on the opportunity for people to interact through the spoken word. Discourse analysis, then, is the study of language as it is used, rather than simply the study of language properties. As the primary function of language is communication, discourse analysis places emphasis on the function of language within a particular context.

Within the definition of discourse is the example of personal narrative. Riessman (1993:3) defines personal narratives as "...talk organized around consequential events." Just as discourse analysis is the decoding of language as it is used, so narrative analysis is the attempt to make meaning of the stories

other people tell of their own experiences. These experiences are not necessarily linear or sequential and because they rely on personal memory, are triggered by different cues and can be associated with different experiences, depending on the recall cues.

One of the most exciting components of narratives is the uniqueness and contextual relevance of each. Riessman (1993:1-7) values this uniqueness and indicates four qualities common to all narratives. The first is the construction of each. As we recall experiences we construct them within the context of a particular setting. As the setting changes, the narrative construction can also be altered. Although a narrative may change somewhat, the reality of the narrative remains. She also indicates that narratives are creatively authored. Each of us authors our individual stories to reflect the meaning we have made of our experiences and we do it in unique and creative ways. Personal narratives are also rhetorical. They are not conversations and do not require responses from or dialog with the researcher. Riessman also says that personal narratives are interpretive. Not only do we construct our narratives to place us within a particular context and community, that construction occurs within each of our interpretive frames of reference.

I believe that terminology is a very important issue within the qualitative research paradigm. While discourse, discourse analysis, and narrative are the most consistent terms used, Linde (1993:6) uses the term life story. Within her definition of the term she affirms the characteristics which are becoming part of

the canon of understanding related to this methodology. Linde says that each person has a life story; that, in fact, we need life stories and an awareness of what they are in order to function well within a social group. Our life stories express our sense of self - who we are and what our place is within the society or societies in which we are members. She places great emphasis on the context of our life stories and indicates that they are never fully developed or static, but rather constantly being revised to ensure that they are currently acceptable. In addition, she emphasizes that life stories are oral, told in different ways in different contexts. Once we begin to write them down, moving from the spoken to the written language, the stories become less fluid and less likely to be revised. However, she does affirm the importance of capturing life stories in writing because they do represent a portion of a life within the contexts of a particular time, place, and group.

Riessman (1993:9-15) also developed a five-step schema which she posits as a possible frame for the researcher in working with narratives or life stories.. Her five steps include attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing and reading. Briefly, she describes the five steps as follows:

- 1) attending - Within an experience there are many sights, sounds, and impressions which contribute to the meaning of the experience. However, at different times there are certain items to which a person pays closer attention than others and those items can be in sharper focus or be recalled more dimly, depending on the memory cues. Within the context of my family narratives, my

father and his siblings often remember the "same" story differently, with different emphases or attending to different details.

2) telling - This is our recounting of the experience - our own personal narrative. Because our experiences are not linear or sequential they become our own creation and may be constructed differently for different audiences. (Within my own narrative collection I found my uncles and aunt frequently referencing particular things they did with my father or commenting that maybe my father would remember something somewhat differently.) Riessman also emphasizes the importance of time - no matter how quickly after an experience we tell of it, there is always a time gap and we must rely on recalling the experience from our memory.

3) transcribing - As a narrative is transcribed, the gap widens between the experience and the representation of that experience. In addition to the widening time gap, the transcriber working with the narrative words adds an additional person to the process and an additional person's choices of language representation. Transcription can definitely change the meaning of a passage - with the written word one-dimensional and dependent on the integrity of and direction in which the transcriber takes the narrative. I found transcribing very difficult and extremely frustrating because there was no way that the words as they were represented on paper could convey the full meaning of the narratives I heard - in fact, even a video camera could not have caught all the visual images

that accompanied the stories and all the wonderful, subtle inflections of the voices as the persons talked.

4) analyzing - Narrative analysis is the attempt to make meaning from the flow of words and sentences. In order to do this, similarities and disparities, silences and slippages, and the form and presentation of the language all must be considered as the experience gains its own identity. Analysis is interpretation and is always done from outside the interpretive community and from the perspective of an observer.

5) reading - Once a narrative takes on written form, it becomes a part of the life continuum of a particular person, capturing the richness of a particular experience within its time and context.

As one who sees herself within the narrative paradigm, I found Riessman's schema a wonderful place from which to begin my journey through the narrative research process. The first task before me was to develop a plan, a strategy for accomplishing my task. As I did that, and throughout the rest of the research experience, Riessman's reminders that I have a great deal of flexibility and the freedom to change course as the unplanned occurs were ever before me. The surprise twists and turns narratives can take support the richness of the narrator's experiences and the researcher's skill in discerning and decoding.

My research project is centered around the narratives of persons who were schooled in one-room schools. Four of the persons (all currently in their 80s) were classmates at the same school in Nebraska during the 1915-1925 decade and

one (in his 70s) attended a rural school in Florida during two years, 1926-1927. The question I asked of each person was very broad: "Tell me about your experiences going to a country school." Within the context of that question I was listening for information about each person's memories and perceptions of the following topics:

1. building and grounds - what did each person remember about the physical plant of the school, the inside of the building as well as the surrounding grounds;
2. community involvement - did other community events ever occur there, did parents or visitors come to school, how was the school supplied and maintained;
3. curriculum - what was taught by the teacher(s), what was learned from the other students, what were the subjects emphasized or de-emphasized, what was studied inside the school and what was learned outside the school;
4. materials and supplies - what textbooks were available, what other teaching aids were used, what materials were provided and what did the students have to furnish, how and where were the materials used;
5. pedagogy and management - how did the teachers structure their day, how did they conduct lessons, how did they manage the behavior of the children in the classroom, what kind of relationship did the teachers have with the students, what kind of relationship did the teachers encourage the students

to have with one another, did the students have homework, how did the teachers grade or evaluate the students' work;

6. teachers - who were these people who came to be teachers, where did they come from, how long did they stay, how were they trained and prepared, what were the students' opinions of the teachers.

Because I had determined the topics about which I was most curious, I was aware of the need to listen very carefully during the interviews in order to ensure that the conversation included those topics. I developed a series of prompt questions and was very pleased to note that on very few occasions did I need to intercede and use them to establish direction. I tried not to lead the narratives with my questions but, rather, let them flow as the narrators wanted them to; although when there were silences in which it seemed as though they were waiting for a question, I did ask one. I did not place a time limit on the interview and made a conscious decision not to rush their narratives; between the first interview and the last interview I became more comfortable allowing longer silences.

I first visited Indiana and Nebraska and made separate time with each of my two uncles and my aunt. During each interview the person I was interviewing and I both sat in comfortable chairs with the tape recorder on a table between us. I was at an angle or across from each narrator and was able to watch as well as listen attentively. (Had I not felt that a video-recorder would have been too intrusive, I would have set one up with my Uncle Larry because his

facial expressions and hand gestures were absolutely wonderful!) I began each interview by providing paper, pencils, and pens and asked each person to draw a picture of the school he or she attended. This strategy worked extremely well because each of the five gave a verbal description as he or she was drawing and segued naturally from how the physical plant looked to the activities that occurred there.

I did not set a specific amount of time within which the interview would happen. Rather, I found myself concentrating very closely both on what the narrators were saying and how they were communicating. Generally, their words flowed more abundantly and topic melded into topic at the beginning of the interview; as the time went on, it appeared that they were either waiting for my question or prompt to go on to the next topic, or trying to remember something else to tell me.

There was an evident difference in the interviews with the Searles siblings and the interview with Mr. Tatro. The Searles interviews were with family, people whom I had known and who knew me; therefore, there was little need to establish a relationship with them. They were very loquacious and connected me and my schooling experiences to them and theirs by pointing out similarities and differences. When I met Mr. Tatro I spent the first hour visiting with him and his wife (although I invited her to stay with us, she subsequently left the room when her husband and I began talking about District 17), sharing with him current pictures of my family, talking about my relationships with his former classmates,

talking about Fairmont and my connection with the town, and answering his questions about why I was there and my interest in him and his story. His speaking style was very different from the other four - he was a man of short sentences and direct answers that attended to the subject but initially did not volunteer additional information. As the interview progressed he appeared to visibly become more comfortable. As this happened, his sentences became longer and he went beyond simply providing an answer to a question - he was telling his story.

Lather (1986:257) remained a conscience for me during this project because she stated that all who participate in narrative research must realize that it is not value-free because the researcher's interest in the topic will impact or affect the research in some manner. Agreeing with her, I worked very diligently to accept my own investment in both the topic and the persons interviewed, and to be involved with the process, yet not try to manipulate it, as I listened from a different perspective to these voices.

Limitations of the Study

While I do not accept the positivist view that the nature of qualitative research is in itself a limitation, I do accept the fact that, in choosing to do a narrative study, I establish my own perspective and must guard against that perspective becoming a limitation. According to Peshkin (1988:17), an emotional relationship exists between a researcher and any research project, regardless of the

paradigm in which the research is housed. He encourages the researcher to acknowledge and identify that emotional relationship and use it to gain as broad a perspective as possible of the project and the researcher's relationship to it.

A second limitation is one of distance and time. Narrative research relies on fieldwork. A one-room school in Fairmont, Nebraska, was the setting for these narratives. I went to Nebraska twice to visit the setting and to conduct interviews with two persons who still live in the state. I also interviewed two persons who currently live in Indiana and one who lives in North Carolina, all of whom attended the school in Fairmont. Because I was going to be able to visit each person only once, their narratives had to be taped in one interview session. I had to develop a plan for each interview session, paying careful attention to the fact that I had several pre-determined topics about which I was seeking information. I, therefore, had to be prepared to both follow and lead the interview, if such were necessary.

The third limitation to this study is the fact that I belong to the community whose narratives I collected for the project. This study grew out of family narratives, and I found myself in the relationship Kleinman and Copp describe as "immersed." (1993:18). Four of the five persons interviewed are siblings and I am the daughter of one and niece of three others. During my childhood I had heard slightly different versions of the same basic stories from the siblings and when they were together there was always a bit of "I don't remember that" or "That's not the way it happened." My interest increased in their divergent

memories of similar experiences, as well as in the richness of their stories about a collective experience in American history which has almost ceased to exist. The siblings I interviewed were Phebe Searles Keenan (age 87), Lawrence Searles (age 85), William Searles (age 84), and Delbert Searles (age 73).

The primary motivating factor for this study was to capture the richness of these narrators' early schooling experiences. I would be less than truthful, however, if I did not acknowledge that another motivation was that of strengthening my connection both to these relatives with whom I had few interactions during my childhood and to the place of my family's roots.

The fifth person I interviewed, Duane Tatro (age 84), was someone whom I had not met prior to the interview but had heard about for many years within the stories told by my relatives. He grew up in the same community, thus establishing a common context and shared history, and was the only one of the five to remain in the community. Interviewing him provided a unique opportunity for me to both reflect on his life and the life courses that my family, who had left the community in 1926, had taken and how different those courses would have been had they not moved.

The fourth limitation is my lack of understanding of the context of these narratives. Every person I interviewed grew up in a time I had only read and studied as historical. They were farm children, from a rural area in a state "somewhere out west" and my childhood was spent on military bases and in small southern towns. While the purpose of the study was to focus on the

narratives of their rural schooling experiences, I was very cognizant of my need to understand more of the historical and geographical contexts of the persons interviewed. This led to an interesting excursion into Nebraska history, in addition to reading novels by two Nebraska authors, Willa Cather (O Pioneers! and My Antonia) and Bess Streeter Aldrich (Short Stories).

The use of narratives in research places value on a person's experiences within his or her contexts. The way to access those narratives is through the literary device called autobiography, which is defined as the story of a person told by him/herself. Szczepanski (1981:220) expands that definition to beyond simply the parts of a person's life which he or she remembers to include the state of a person's "social consciousness," which is defined as "the collectively accepted and recognized pattern of thinking, reasoning and feeling - which is changing in time." So rather than autobiography being a singular undertaking, it is, rather, a collective venture which puts the author or narrator within the collective and encourages relationship rather than isolation.

Research that is conducted using autobiography, narrative, and memory must be approached with reverence and respect. Such research is capturing the essence of the human experience within particular social and historical contexts as well as through the complexity of the human consciousness. (Casey:1993,7) The interrelationship of the human organism in a particular time and place provides the richness that gives definition to the human experience.

Chapter four contains the narratives of the persons I interviewed and, to use Grumet's metaphor again, my analysis of the beauty and complexity of their song.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Context of Rural Schools

During the years when Nebraska was a territory, "schooling" was primarily done by the families, often with the Bible as the only printed word and source of instruction. Assistance was provided to the families by the itinerant literate preacher or missionary as he traveled through the territory and he would teach children their letters and numbers by using the abundant, accessible school supplies of sticks and dirt. (Olson:1985,94)

The first territorial legislature provided legal authority for the establishment of public schools. It passed the Free Public School Act in March, 1855, and created the office of an appointed territorial superintendent. (Olson:1985,103) The Act also provided for the selection of county superintendents by popular vote of the residents within the county, gave counties the right to levy taxes to support their schools, and directed that money paid in fines for violations of state laws be given to the local school fund where the fines were collected. (Nicholl and Keller:1961,265) The original state constitution of 1866 recognized the state's financial obligation to the public schools but in 1875 direct state taxation to support public schools was transferred to the local school

districts. This lack of major state support for school financing continued until 1967. (Jensen:1968,3)

Once county superintendents were elected, they were responsible for dividing their counties into school districts and notifying the citizens within each district to organize their own schools. A district was identified as an area whose boundaries may or may not coincide with other boundaries. For example, a district might have the same boundaries as a county, but usually there were several districts within the county boundaries. In addition, districts could not cross county lines. Each district elected its own three-member school board, which was responsible for governing and maintaining the school building(s) and hiring the teacher(s). (Nicholl and Keller:1961,273)

The county superintendent was also responsible for overseeing the property tax levy, which was the chief funding source for the school districts. This levy was against "real property," which was defined as buildings, and the county superintendent had to ensure that each district received its share of the revenue, based on "real property" and the number of white children between the ages of five and twenty-one within the district. According to Nicholl and Keller (1961,278) with the local districts responsible for raising 95% of the levy to maintain their schools, the structure was in place for some schools to benefit financially and some to stagnate, based on the "real property" within the district. Towns were able to generate more revenue support for their schools than were rural areas so the growth and development of public schools varied greatly

among districts. Today control of the schools, whether county or city, remains within the local school districts.

The public school system grew slowly. By 1859, statistics indicate that 1,310 children attended school out of an eligible pool of 4,767. (Olson:1985,104) Although the people supported public schooling, their primary concern remained daily survival and there was little money available with which to establish and maintain schools. The construction of a school building on the flat prairie was difficult, and early schools were cut into hillsides or built out of the sod. In addition, teachers were very scarce, there was no established curriculum, and no compulsory attendance requirement. In 1869 two hundred schools existed within the 800 established school districts. The state population was 123,000, with almost half of the persons between ages five and twenty-one attending school. (Olson:1985,106)

In 1867 Nebraska was admitted into the Union and became the 37th state. (Fish:1925,430) While it was still a territory, most of the land was public land and controlled by the United States Congress. Upon being granted statehood, Congress ceded some of the land to the state government for aid to public education. Within each township two sections were to be set aside to support the development of the common schools, a total of 3 million sections across the state. (Olson and Olson:165) In addition, the appointed Territorial Superintendent position was changed to an elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction. That position remained unchanged until 1955 when the position of Commissioner

of Education was established as an appointed position by an elected eight-member State Board of Education. (Greene:1985,12)

A new constitution was adopted in 1875 and it provided for a complete system of public schools, from the elementary level to the university, with the implementation of that provision left quite largely to the local districts. (Nicholl and Keller, 1961,393) During the 1880s there was tremendous growth. The number of school districts increased to almost 6,200 and the number of schoolhouses to almost 3,000. In 1889, approximately 75 percent of all children between the ages of eight and fourteen attend school for at least a portion of the school term. Compulsory education was resoundingly rejected by the voters in 1871, but the Populist legislature of 1891 enacted a compulsory school law which "...guaranteed the opportunity for a common school education to all young Nebraskans." (Olson:1985,351) There was also an increase in the number of women teachers, with increasingly better preparation, some having attended one of the state's two normal schools.

By the end of World War I, there were approximately 200,000 one-room schools throughout the nation and 5,3000 consolidated schools. The number of school districts throughout the country has also continued to rise, peaking at almost 8,000 in the 1920s and 1930s. (Perrett:1982,436) The 1940s marked the zenith of the rural school and currently there are approximately 840 continuing to exist across the country, with approximately one-half of those located in Nebraska. (Rose:1995,36)

During this century the enrollment figures on children attending all public schools continued to rise, peaked in the 1960s, went through a decline and now are slowly rising again. Costs have increased, including better facilities and more equipment to support a broader curriculum. Teachers are better prepared and salaries have increased. While there has been an expansion of the capital outlay and support, the dollar has declined in value and the responsibilities associated with providing each student a free education have remained the same whether the school has four students or four hundred students. (Nicholl and Keller:1961,267)

In 1949 the Nebraska Legislature, with visions of great opportunities for immediate school reorganization, passed the "Reorganization of School Districts Act." (Pool:1994,2) However, for the next twenty years opportunity was frequently interpreted as mandate. Because of the strength of local control, the districts were often in turmoil and efforts for reorganization were difficult and sporadic. In 1968, the "Great Plains Study," a Federally funded project intended to promote improvement of state and local school systems, recommended additional reorganization in "comprehensive high school districts." (Pool:1994,6) These recommendations again met with considerable resistance and culminated in the dismissal of the Commissioner of Education. In 1985 a significant piece of legislation was proposed which would increase the equity of district funding by increasing the state's funding level to 45%, thereby decreasing the district's contribution to 55%. This increase in state funding was tied to mandatory

consolidation of the state's school and was soundly defeated by the voters. (Pool:1994,12)

The third wave of reorganization legislation is now occurring and includes three significant bills. In 1989 an act was passed by the Legislature which provided pupils the option to enroll in schools other than their resident district; in 1990 a bill was passed which included a new school finance mechanism to provide for more equalized state funding; and a law was passed requiring elementary-only districts (Class I) to affiliate or join with Kindergarten through Grade 12 school district for tax purposes. (Greene:1985,14)

Pool (1994,20) characterizes the history of reorganization of Nebraska public schools as bordering on "...bloody." Control today remains within the local districts, which continues to be greatly influenced by contextual factors such as population distribution, economy, agriculture, mode of transportation, and community social-ethnic composition.

The curriculum of a state's schools is established by the state and is usually very extensive. Missouri, for example, listed the following subjects to be taught in all of its schools in the early decades of this century: reading and literature, English language, spelling, penmanship, history and civics, geography, arithmetic, science and agriculture, physiology, hygiene and sanitation, and arts and crafts. (Culter and Stone:1913,86) An examination of report cards William Searles received while attending District 17 indicated the Nebraska curriculum included all of the above, with the addition of orthography and astronomy.

Teachers in rural schools were expected to address the breadth of curriculum, as were teachers in urban schools. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the rural school student body, the teacher was addressing spelling for grades 1 through 8, geography for grades 1 through 8, etc., rather than planning lessons for a more homogeneous group. Weber (1946:73) stated in her journal that rural students may not have "moved" as quickly through the breadth of curriculum as students in urban schools, but because of the emphasis on peer teaching and constant reinforcement, their depth of understanding was probably as great or greater than students in urban schools.

Cutler and Stone (1913:132) mentioned an exit examination given to students from rural schools, often at the end of the 8th grade. While there was no comparable examination given to urban students at the end of the 8th grade, the rural students were usually successful on the examination and many went on to high school. In addition to their academic competence, Bowen (1944:34) characterizes students in rural schools as more independent, more self-confident, and more resourceful than students in urban educational settings.

John Dewey (1938:25) wrote that "In order for education to be effective, it must take into account the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupations, etc....." The school in a rural community reflected that community's history and values and that reflection was very important to the people within the community. Communities wanted their school buildings to be safe, positive learning environments for the children, they wanted qualified,

caring instructors for the children, they wanted current materials which reflected the community values, and they wanted to be sure that their particular school was receiving its fair share of financial support from sources external to the community.

The major inequity among rural schools was the funding and this was a concern expressed throughout much of the literature. Schatzmann (1942:103), in her comparison of rural schooling in Europe and in America, indicated that equity of funding was the primary concern in America and the issue which seemed to cause both the least change and the most change in rural schools. The property tax has been the primary means of supporting public schools and this tax varies greatly from state to state and even from district to district within a state. Finding a strategy to equalize the allocation of funds from the overworked property tax, finding alternative funding sources, and also ensuring that the federal monies which support educational opportunities within the states are providing the support that was intended all continue to be challenges to state and local boards.

This lack of equity in funding has, over the years, been one of the major thrusts behind the consolidation of many rural schools, with this effort peaking in the 50s and 60s. (Guilliford:1985,212) One larger building was more cost efficient to operate than several smaller buildings. A wider curriculum could be offered, teachers with more specialized training could be employed, and a broader array of activities could be offered to the students. In addition, students who

may have spent most of their school years in insulated communities could now become part of a larger, more diverse community with a broader discourse. Although the consolidated schools might be a greater distance from the student's home, the quality of the educational opportunities would be of greater benefit to the student than the proximity to home.

Guilliford (1991:10), in researching the current status of rural schooling, notes that Wyoming, in both an attempt to increase school attendance in rural areas and to preserve its rural system has developed a means to financially support families' choices to attend rural schools. Several counties have a mileage allowance which assists parents with the transportation costs for their children, which may sometimes be up to 60 miles one way.

History of District 17 School

This district school, located approximately 3 miles south of Fairmont, was organized January 3, 1872, and the first teacher on record was Miss C. C. Morgan, who taught from 1872 to 1873 for \$20.00 a month. (Gaffney:1968,325) The schoolhouse was at first very small. As more room was needed, about 1907 or 1908, a church building was moved from the town of Sawyer and Sunday School classes were also held in the building. A well was dug at that time also, so it was no longer necessary for students to carry water from the homes of nearby neighbors. In 1942, the Fairmont Air Base took over the land on which the school sat and the district was dissolved June 10, 1943. The school building, which was

originally thought to have been moved to the nearby town of Strang, had actually fallen into such disrepair that it was burned. (Narrative of Dr. A. A. Ashby, Geneva, Nebraska)

Narratives of Rural Schooling Experiences

Building and Grounds

The District 17 school building was rectangular and Phebe recalled it facing the west. Duane indicated that it was an old church building that had been moved in and settled on that particular location, on a piece of ground about a "half acre." The half acre was flat, with patches of grass and patches of dirt as the landscaping. The school property included the main building and some additional structures. The outhouses, one for the girls and one for the boys, were in back of the school building. There was also a "cob house" located in the back which contained the fuel for the stove - coal, wood, or cobs. It was the responsibility of the school board to ensure that there was adequate fuel for the stove and this task was usually rotated among the school families.

On the east side of the school building Larry described a barn in which there were

...four stalls, for your horses you rode, see, and that was the hitching post. See, these three round posts had a log on top of them, about this big around. It was a tree, you know, that laid on the posts and you tied your horse up there, see, and you unsaddled him and stuff. The door was around here, see. You had to lead him around back to put him in the stalls. There was a row of trees here, see, and these were planted by the men themselves years ago, even before I was there. The row of trees was

along this side (the north). Now this is in a field and on either side of this was crops - corn - and it kind of came around like this, you know. The road went along right here - a dirt road, see, in front and there's a drive in here, see, but everybody just rode their horses in anywhere. I always came in this corner, see, there wasn't no ditch or nothing, just a dirt road. And I tied my horse here, see, and took my saddle off and everything and put it in the stall.

There was very little in the way of outdoor or playground equipment on the school property. Larry remembered

Now right out here there was two trees that were stuck in the ground. The men had cut down from somewheres, I don't know where they got them, I was just a kid, but there were two logs....No, I'll tell you the truth I don't know how they were fastened up there. But they were laid like this, two logs like that, see. Now, they were fastened at the top of these trees, I can't tell you how, and a swing hung, you see. The swing hung in between with ropes, and the swings hung down. They were quite tall - they were big ones. And then we'd swing, see.....There was one other piece of playground equipment and it sat right back here and it was for the girls and us guys poo-pooed on the girls, see. But it was a teeter-totter and it was made out of logs. There was four logs in the ground like this....And it had a log down here about six inches in between these, see, and this was all made of trees. Except for the plank. The plank was fastened with heavy nails to another log that set in here. This round log set in here, going across this way, see. And the plank set out here, see, to teeter on. And that rolled in that little W or little U there, see, and that was for the girls. Why would we guys have anything to do with a silly teeter-totter when we could fight and poke each other!

Bill also remembered very vividly the tree with the swings attached to it.

Well, of course, the reason I remember this tree so much is because it had one of these swings attached to one of the larger limbs that came out. And the swing must have been 20 feet high. And it was a great thing to get up there and, you know, pump. It was just a rope and the rope ran through a seat....well, we'd get up there and pump. Now down at the base of this tree was a bunch of sprouts and they were usually cut off and left little spines up, you know. And one day I was pumping...and, of course, the

higher you go, the better....you always wanted to go around, see. And I was pumping and pumping and pumping and for some reason I fell out of that damned swing. And I fell down among those sprouts. Well, I didn't pay any attention to it - I got up and shook myself off and went on with it, you know, and it seems about....It was near the time that Gilbert died and, of course, we had a lot of neighbors come in to visit us and we kids, not taking it too seriously, we were out playing one evening about a month later. And we were playing....where you jump over....leapfrog! We were playing leapfrog. And somehow I got my feet tangled up and fell down and suddenly I felt this wetness here on the side. And I went in and showed it to mom and it was pus mixed with blood. And so they took me to the doctor, or the doctor came out, I don't know which, but he looked at it and he said "you've got some foreign object in there." So he lanced it and, sure enough, I had a piece of one of those pieces of wood about so big in my.....in there. And he took it out and I don't know why I never got sick or anything else from it. But, anyway, it healed up and....I've got a big scar there now but that's the reason I remember the swing.

Although there was no other outdoor equipment available, the lot was large enough to provide the students ample room to run and chase one another. There was also enough space for a ball diamond and all four District 17 students remember playing baseball. Proper equipment was at a premium, but somebody would usually be able to round up a ball and something to use as a bat. Because there were not enough children in the school for equal baseball teams, Larry described a similar game called Cross-Out.

So we formed a little baseball diamond and played Cross-Out in the summertime, and, of course, it was made just like the diamond only a lot smaller, you know. But there wasn't too many kids so we wouldn't have too many on a side. Some of the girls would play with us. Not many, but there'd be, maybe, two tomboys, you know, and they'd play with us. We'd choose up sides. Say there's four a side. That'd be eight kids. The most we had was those pictures I showed you and that was, what, thirteen kids. That was the most I remember being in the school at one time. So half of that is six and a half, so, let's say, we had five on each side. It was a cross

out. You had a baseball and you sometimes got hurt when you got hit but nobody complained. You'd hit the ball and the fielder's out here, see, which would be just the three basemen, actually, because we didn't have enough kids to be out here in the field, see. You'd run from home to first. Now the person who caught the ball or tried to stop the ball before it got too far away, all he had to do was throw the ball in front of the runner. The runner'd be heading from first base and if you could get the ball and throw it or roll it in front of him before he got to base, he was out. They didn't care if you caught the ball, he was not out, see. You just had to throw it in front of the guy. You see, the runner'd be kitin' for first base but if you could throw it in front of him, you know, before he got there, he was out. Well now, of course, there'd be one on first. Then the next one up to bat. And if you could get that ball and throw it in front of any of the two, see, there'd be one running for first and one running for second. All you got to do is throw the ball in front of any of them, see, and he's out. So it was a fast game, you know, and the kids really liked to do it. And it was, kind of, well, you just got a lot of exercise that way, see.

The school building itself became part of the outdoor equipment used by the children when they played games like "Annie, Annie Over the School." Both Phebe and Larry recalled playing that game and Larry characterized it as "...the main game whenever we were out for recess." Recess lasted for fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon, while lunch was an hour at mid-day. The longer time period at lunch was more conducive to more organized and complex games, those with more rules that took longer to complete, than the brief morning and afternoon recess time, which was more conducive to running and chasing or to games which could be organized and played quickly, and which did not require resolution or closure. Larry described "Annie, Annie Over the School" as

Let's say there were six or eight boys....we'd get four on a side or something, you know, and you'd throw the ball over the top of the building and it would roll down on this side. Now, whoever caught it there, those three or four guys would quietly run around the corner of the building and we wouldn't know whether they caught it or not over here. They'd quietly sneak around the building and throw the ball and if they hit you then you'd go on their side, see. Now, you say they hit one here and there's four here and three here and they hit one of these guys and there'd be two here and now there'd be five over here, see. They'd throw the ball over to us, see, now, where there's two guys and we'd have to try to go around and hit one of them and get them back over here, see. We got hurt sometimes with that damn ball because they'd throw it, I mean, they'd throw the damn thing, see. But then it was just a game we played.

There were three steps up to the front door of the school building and there was an entryway/hallway where Duane remembered a little table which held a crock jar with water that the bigger boys brought from neighbors' homes. The historical information of District 17 indicated that a well was dug when this particular building was moved to this location in 1907 or 1908. As Duane was the only person to mention carrying water from the neighbors, although he does not remember doing it himself, the pump may have ben inoperable at this time.

There was a belfry over the front door and a rope attached to a large bell hung from the belfry down into the entryway. Pulling the rope to ring the bell was a treat for the children. Phebe said "They always wanted to ring the bell...when school started, at the end of recess, at noon, at recess...and the teacher would let them. They'd ring the bell and everybody'd run." Bill remembered the bell..."this was a privilege the teacher would give you - to ring the bell."

Although the school was rectangular, Duane indicated that the door was not in the center. "Most of it (the school) was on the north side. This (the

entryway) was kind of even with the south side." Off of the entryway, to the north, was a cloak room. It apparently did not have a door on it but the sides contained both shelves and hooks. Duane said the cloak room "...had books and stuff on one side of it." Larry said the cloak room "...was where we walked in and hung our coats and put our lunch pails on the shelf there." Phebe also described the cloak room as having a shelf for "lunch buckets" and hooks on the walls for hanging coats, the boys on one side and the girls on the other. It also had a partial floor overhead and Duane said that the guys would sometimes hide up there as a joke. The cloak room was also apparently the only storage space in the school and held any extra books not in use during the school year, as well as all books and supplies when school was not in session during the summer.

After climbing the steps, coming into the entryway, hanging up coats and putting lunch containers on shelves, the students entered the large single room that was used for instruction. By its location in the front of the room, the teacher's desk appeared to be that object on which anyone entering the room would focus. Although there was some difference among the four students in recalling whether the desk was flat on the floor or on a raised platform and whether it was located in the center front or a little to the left of center, there was complete agreement among all four that the teacher's desk was in the front.

Each school building had a stove for heating. Phebe remembered the big black stove in the middle of the room ("Most of the times the stoves were in the middle"). But the boys all recalled the stove in the rear of the classroom on the

north side. While the 1872 rules for teachers indicated that the teacher was responsible for tending to the stove, during the time these students were in school that task may have been delegated to others because Bill remembers that, during the winter "Lawrence and I used to go down there periodically and get the fire going. Now, when we did it I don't know, but I know we'd have to go down early and build a fire periodically." Phebe also remembered that the children were responsible for cleaning out the stove from the previous fire and making sure that the fire did not go out during the day.

The large room also contained student desks, separated into two groups by a wide aisle which Duane remembered as "kind of even with" the teacher's desk. Because of the construction of the building, with the entry closer to the south side than in the center, Duane also remembered that more kids ("the older kids") sat on the north side of the aisle. Each child had his or her own desk with a lid that tipped up. Duane said that there were "...little desks down in front for the little kids, you know, and bigger desks for the big kids. And we all had our initials carved in there!" Phebe remembered sitting by grades rather than being divided by gender. Larry and Bill did not recall sitting specifically by grades. Larry said, "...we big guys sat in the back, as far away from the teacher as we could get. Bill and I and Claude Lefler and Ralph Lefler, we always sat in the back." Bill agreed that the seating was "...wherever we wanted to..." and indicated later that the teacher may have had a purpose in allowing this heterogeneous mixing of the students. Larry also described about four rows, with individual

desks fastened together at the base "...so that when you moved one you moved the row." Because the building was small, the rows of desks were close together, with very little space in the room for students to move around.

A recitation bench was located on the south side of the teacher's desk. The children in each grade would move from their desks to that bench when it was their specific turn for lessons or recitation. Larry remembered one additional bench, a small one located near the front of the north side of the building and held the victrola.

Windows were located along both the north and south walls of the building and there was one window on the west side which provided light in the cloak room. Behind the teacher's desk, all along the west wall were blackboards. Phebe remembered that "...there was always a flag in the center of the front, over the blackboard, with a picture of Lincoln on one side and a picture of Washington on the other side."

The country school in Florida which Del attended shared many of the same characteristics as the school in Nebraska. He recalled his school as

....a white frame building with steps leading up to the door at the front and it had a bell on the top of it....There were windows, of course, on both sides. And, as I recall, inside we went into a kind of a cloak room - there was a room first before we went into the main school part of it. And it was just really barely large enough for six rows of seats. There were six rows of seats and so that would be the approximate width of it.

The teacher's desk was up in the front of the room, in the center, and he recalled it being somewhat elevated. His school encompassed first through sixth grades

so there were six rows of student desks, one for each grade. In the cloak room he recalled pegs on which to hang jackets or sweaters, He explained

....naturally we didn't wear heavy clothes but usually in the fall and winter it was cool enough in the morning and late that we had our sweater so we each had our own peg to put our sweater on. And we had to carry our own lunch but I don't recall, it seems to me like there was probably a shelf...there must have been some way we could have put our lunches there.

He did not recall a stove in the schoolroom and said, "I don't think we ever had to worry too much about that....this was central Florida....it can be quite chilly in the morning but when the sun comes up it gets quite warm before the day is over, even in the wintertime." He did not recall the space being colorful at all, very neutral. There was a blackboard on the wall behind the teacher's desk and he did recall a picture, "....most likely George Washington or Abraham Lincoln," above the blackboard.

Del's school was located on flat land ("....most of central Florida is flat") "....pretty well surrounded by sugar cane fields." The only other structures on his school grounds were two outhouses, one for the boys and one for the girls. There was lots of cleared, flat space for the children to play and he did not remember any outside playground equipment. He did remember a small hill or rise which the children played on, but primarily there was just lots of running and chasing one another around the flat schoolyard.

Community

The country school was frequently the center of community activities. Within a specified geographical area, families farmed their own acreage, with their houses often miles from one another. In small communities there were often several churches and families whose farms may have shared boundaries would worship at different churches. But all children in the district attended the same school, thereby making that facility the one shared by most of the families. Larry said of District 17

That was the only gathering place, really, that they had. They had those quite frequently. And then, always, every holiday that was in the school year there had to be a stage play about this holiday. I don't care if it was Joe Smoltz died of small pox in 1877, we had to have a program about him. And we'd have the minstrel shows, see. And the families would all come and sit, you know, we'd be up on the front there. Now, the floor was just level - we didn't have a stage up front. They later put one in but there wasn't at that time. Then we'd get up there and make nuts out of ourselves, you know. I know the families would have so much fun, you know, I can see that now. It got the neighborhood together. People lived kind of far apart, you know. They'd come by horseback and buggy, you know, and tie them in the yard. They'd gossip, you know, and have a good time.

Bill also remembered the programs in which all the children would have a part.

And whenever we would have, say a Christmas program, all the families would come there and we would all put on our little programs on the platform. And I can recall having to recite, and I had an awful time memorizing. And I'd have to recite something and get up there and make a fool of myself, you know. And, of course, everybody would clap and the parents would be so proud, no matter how you did.

The major community event at the schoolhouse seemed to be the basket suppers which, although they did provide social opportunities for the families, were actually adolescent courting rituals. Bill said

And, then, there'd be these basket suppers and they'd have those at the school and that was always a big interesting affair, you know, because, as Lawrence said, he was always trying to get Vera Baugh's basket. But I remember you'd always try to find out what kind of a basket your current girlfriend had and then you'd try to buy that, you know. You probably had 50 cents, but the families were always very considerate, you know, and they knew who was sweet on who.

Larry also remembered the basket suppers as important community events.

And, then, of course, in the pleasure part of school was the basket suppers they had. Now you fell in love with a little girl, see. Oh, my, you followed her around and you tried to do a big strong thing in front of her so she'd look at you (ha,ha,ha) that kind of stuff, you know. We're going to have a basket supper. Mothers and fathers and all, bring your baskets and be at the school. Now in this basket was a dinner. I mean, there'd be fried chicken and, well, I don't know, I don't remember, but then there'd be a cake and, you know, like something nice. Two or three little things, wrapped up. And it'd be in the basket and some in a tin pail they used to carry lunch in. Used to go to the bar and get beer in it, you know, those tin pails about this big around and about this high. Had a lid that fit down on it with a ring in the top. Used to carry beer in them things, out of saloons. Well, they were lunch buckets, see. You brought your lunch bucket and you had your name on it. Now, boys didn't do it. The girls did it. They brought a basket - they called it a basket supper. Now, of course, the boys didn't know who brought what, see. You're not supposed to know who brought what. So all of the families would get together and they'd come to the schoolhouse - it wouldn't be very many, you know that, if the whole 8 grades only had 13 kids. And they'd kind of move the benches around and then the teacher would get up, or one of the men. And he'd hold a basket and it'd be all frilly with stuff, you know, hanging on it, bows and stuff. And, the guys....of course, you had no money. The guys didn't have any money. So you had your ma and dad, see, and if you thought that was Vera Baugh's basket that you wanted, then you had to bid it, see. And the highest bid would be 50 cents, see, that was

somehin' big. And they'd bid and bid, about a nickel a time. And whoever had the highest big got that basket and had to eat the lunch in the basket with the girl, see. So it created a little excitement for us naive dudes (ha,ha,ha). They had those quite frequently, see. I don't think I ever did get Vera Baugh's basket. I was always outbid or failed at everything. She could always do everything better and run faster than I. No, I don't think I ever did get Vera's basket.

Phebe summarized the community involvement by saying, "The parents really took pride in their schools, I mean, they really did."

Curriculum

What did students study in the rural school? Everyone with whom I spoke used the term "the basics," although their definitions of what encompassed "the basics" differed somewhat. Phebe said it included "...reading, writing, and arithmetic, and geography and history." Bill said it was "...spelling, writing, arithmetic, and an awful lot of reading." Larry said

When we did arithmetic, see, we started out with two plus two, you know, one plus one - just started from scratch and kept advancing. Now it was noting advanced like it is now. There was no algebra, none of that stuff, you see, it was just balancing books. She'd make a little problem up like Mr. Smaltsy had 6 bags of wheat and he....you know, so much a bag of wheat, on the board, you know, and we had to put it on our paper and get the answer to the problem. It just graduated to a little bit worser, a little bit longer problems, you know, and we learned. Mostly you sat at the desk and practiced writing. The old Palmer method. I don't know whether you know it or not but we all had to pass tests on the Palmer method of writing, see. And just all the time you was going like this, see, circles, you know, the old Palmer method...she stressed writing....I did more damn circles and up and downers - we all did. and we've got beautiful writing, I don't care if I do say so myself. Even today I have a beautiful hand. And there was a lot of poetry read. Uh, it's been so long ago...John Greenleaf Whittier was one of them and I loved his poems, his work. I love poems anyway. I think I derived that from going to school. Otherwise, poems, who would want to read a poem, see. But the teacher

would read poems to us and they were good poetry. I mean, they were rhymed poetry. They had some sense in them, see. And, uh, there was quite a big of that read. And the teacher would read it to us. And then she would come to one that, I suppose, interested her a hundred percent, I don't know, but she would say "now you got to memorize this poem." Gad, my memory's about as long as a string is thick, see, and I used to work like a durn dog trying to memorize a blinkin' poem that I would never use, I know that, and I didn't like to memorize 'em. But I loved to hear the musical rhyme of it when she'd read 'em. Today I just love poetry. That was a lot of that done. Now we learned a lot from poetry, we did, 'cause the poetrys carry a story, you know, that sometimes is sad and sometime, you know....The words just flow like music, see. And I liked that - we all kinda' liked that. The teacher would read to us, see, and we liked that.

Bill particularly remembered the reading and spelling. He said

I enjoyed reading. I wasn't too sharp at arithmetic, although I got by. And, spelling....I was pretty good at spelling, too. I like to spell. We had spelling bees that caused a lot of internal competition in the school.

The arts did not appear to be a major component within the curriculum.

Bill said, "Drawing was about it in art and the teacher would display those around the wall when we had a gathering, you know." He added

I never did win any prizes with my art but Lawrence was wonderful! It's a shame that he couldn't have followed up on that because he was a natural, a natural artist. He could draw anything and he still can.

Larry, the artist, agreed that there was no art instruction in the curriculum. He remembered that

...mostly, the art lessons were cutouts. You know how you take paper and fold it and fold it and make little cuts and you open it up and it's a snowflake or whatever, see. Well, there was a lot of that - hung in the

windows, see, and put on the top of the blackboard. There was a lot of cutout stuff. But, otherwise, as a lesson for a group there was no art. You did little things yourself, see, that you liked to do or you wanted to do. You weren't discouraged in it. But that was really all.

Phebe also did not remember art instruction in the curriculum but added a dimension of application when she said, "We did a lot of drawing for geography, making maps and stuff like that. But there was no fancy art stuff or anything like that." Duane remembers that every child had a box of crayons and "...I suppose they colored pictures, you know."

Phebe does remember having music books, "....and we sang out of the music books. And she (the teacher) had a little harmonica and we'd sing, because for our programs we always sang." Music was also provided by a victrola. Larry described the bench at the front of the room which held the victrola and he remembered that the school had

...one record, on both sides, see, that's all there was. And the one we guys played all the time was "Whistler and his Dog. It's about a guy and his dog, you know, and it's about a guy and his dog and he whistles for his dog all the time. We'd have music times in the class which was nothin' but just getting that bunch of kids together and us guys just about vomited because we didn't like it, see, while the girls were just la, da, da, la, da, da. And us guys would sit back there, you know, and we'd have to sing. We'd sing a little. A piece I remember was "Tenting Tonight on the Old Campground." I loved that piece.

The victrola was apparently a prized piece of school equipment because Duane remembered that "...different families took it home during the summer so nothin' would happen to it."

The curriculum of Del's country school in Florida was very similar to the curriculum in Nebraska. He remembered

...we had arithmetic and grammar and penmanship of a kind. I guess, I don't know, some writing of some sort. Geography I remember, and spelling was very big. That was very big, spelling. We had to do a lot of memorizing and I remember being caught one time not having prepared and I think I scraped through by her not calling on me but I can remember anxiety. Anxiety because I wasn't ready for those big words. I lucked out that time! I really liked geography. I really ate that up - I just thought that was great stuff. The rest of it - well, I wasn't really very good at memorizing, although I had no trouble with arithmetic, for example. I mean, I was taught well, whoever taught me taught me well. And I learned properly because I can do it - the multiplication tables, for example. And I understand, you know, adding subtracting, long division, all that stuff. But the memorizing, I guess I was always afraid I wouldn't do it right. And you know, for example, in spelling, you don't get a second chance - it's one time. You either spell it right or it's wrong, you know. You can't fudge any. So I guess that kinda'....not that I didn't like spelling. I always liked to read and that kind of stuff and I spell pretty well, so again, I must have learned properly. But I don't know how much my mother had to do with that either. She might....there might have been some family influences there that I don't remember. But that's all I can remember. But I liked the reading. We always had a reading assignment and I remember we had to read out loud. I remember that. Even the young ones had to read out loud but, of course, we had the easy books. And, again, I was always....well, I never really liked the limelight that much. I'd just as soon have the others do all the reading and shouting and I'd just sit back and observe. Of course, I'd take an A any time I could get it! So, I'd say reading and geography'd probably be the two subjects that I remember as being ones that attracted my attention.

Everyone with whom I talked indicated how important recess was during the day. Bill said

Then there were recesses and they were great things. As I recall, we had 15 minutes for recess morning and afternoon and this was a time when the kids went berserk. Of course, there were only 15, 17 people in the school but it was a lot of fun. Boy, recess was something. And of course, we had

lunch break. We'd carry our lunch - none of us went home. But recesses were very important. And, of course, it broke up the day very well and it was a lot of fun.

Phebe agreed and added

We had so much fun, you know, playing at recess and noon, we really did. The older ones would make teams and play something, anything. And I guess the little ones took care of themselves. I don't remember paying any attention to them.

Del also remembered recess very fondly

Recess, of course, was very big. Of course, everybody went out whooping and hollering - the boys all went on one side of the area and the girls all went on the other side of the area and there was a lot of chasing the girls and, you know, running and running and running. And, uh, being in the first grade I just kind of stood around and watched because I was never invited to play or anything because the games were for the big kids.

Occasionally the teacher would try to orchestrate a game during this time and it was frequently met with resistance. One particular game Larry described was

...Drop the Handkerchief and that kind of junk and we guys would just die. We'd go out to the barn and try to sit, you know, out with the horses. Oh, I don't know, we'd all try to get out of it, you know. And the teacher would have us in a circle, you know. We'd all stand in a circle and the teacher would get a bandanna and you'd run around and you'd drop the handkerchief back of some person or some girl or somebody you wanted to chase you. And then she's to pick up the handkerchief and chase you and if she caught you then she got to go back in her hold but if she didn't catch you, if you got around here, you got in that hold and she had to run around and drop the handkerchief. A real good tough game! Another game was called Fox and Geese but nobody every does it today. Now this is done all winter long, see. It'd snow, you know, deep snow, so the first thing the guys did when they got snow, was, of course, to get out in that yard and made a circle, see, like this, by tramping their feet, shuffling their

feet, and it would be about this wide, see. Then we'd shuffle across this way and shuffle across that way and shuffle a round circle in the middle, see, all out. The geese were in here. There'd be maybe six of us or eight of us to play. There'd be one fox and he'd be out here - he' couldn't get out of these runs or nobody could, see, that we'd made in the snow, the little paths, see. The fox was always out in here. Now you'd want to get him to run. So one goose would go at a time. One goose would strike off this way, see, around here. Now this fox, now, he's got to come around here or wherever and you try to go opposite him. The fox can go anywheres, and the geese can go anywheres too, as far as that goes, but you've got to get back in that circle before the fox gets him, see. So he tries to corner you, you know, and you run just to beat the dickens across here and across here trying to get this guy before he gets back in the circle, see. If you tag him then you get to go as a geese and the guy you tagged has got to go as the fox. This was the only thing we played in the wintertime. We had no hills to slide on or nothin' like that, see, and you just made your own. Most general we stayed in.

Duane mentioned another game, "...pump, pump, pullaway." It was "...kind of a running game and someone'd be out there in the middle and try to catch you before you got to the other base. It'd be called soccer ball now, I suppose." Whether it was recess or an attempt at an organized game, the students appeared to get a lot of playing and physical activity during the 15-minute recess time.

Written tests were not mentioned by anyone and all seemed to feel that a student's oral recitation was the main way which a teacher used to evaluate progress. Bill said, "All we ever had in the way of tests were verbal and she would rate us on that. I don't recall taking any written tests or anything of that nature."

The report card was used during that time much as it is still today - as a means of communicating a child's achievements to the parents. Parent-teacher

conferences were rarely held, so the report card was the primary bearer of information about a student's progress. Lawrence described the report card as

...arranged like today's report card - they haven't changed much. I mean, those long narrow things, the columns, about this long, haven't changed a bit. Your subjects were over here, Xs over here, A, B, C, D, or 60% or 50% or whatever. And there was deportment - that was the one that always got you. You'd take it, the report card, home and show it to your parents and the first thing they'd look at was deportment, see.

Bill added

And, of course, report cards were very important to your parents. They really were - they became a very important part of your life...And one of the important things was deportment. The parents usually looked at deportment the first thing.

If that very important deportment grade fell, there was usually an immediate reaction from the parents. As Bill explained

Your parents usually took care of that. It wasn't a problem. The teacher would....again, there was a great amount of dependency on the parents. And, the parents came through. Just like I said before, my dad's position was if you get a licking in school you get one at home 'cause the teacher's always right. And, uh, there's no talking back to the teacher and no going home saying the teacher's unfair or she doesn't understand me - you didn't do that.

If there was need for additional discipline, Bill added

She'd (the teacher) probably send you home. Now, of course, in those times we didn't have school busses. And she'd send you home with a note and that was usually it. Or, she could, if necessary, sit you in the cloakroom. I remember she did that - she put a chair or something in the cloakroom and you'd sit there in the cloakroom. That wasn't the

disciplinary problem - the problem was the kids givin' you hell after you got out! They never let you forget it if you were being disciplined! But your parents always knew if you were being disciplined for anything....your parents knew about it.

Larry had a vivid memory of discipline methods that teachers used.

Well, boy, if you did somethin' wrong all she did was walk back there with a stick about that long and about that wide and, boy, she laid it on you! I mean, there was no holdin' back! You really got it! Sometimes she'd take your hand and open it up, see, and what that son of a gun - oh, it'd raise hackles on the back of your neck! I've had it done...

Phebe, conversely, had a different memory of discipline. She said

I don't remember being threatened, or anyone else being threatened. You just knew that you should behave yourself. It was just part of the feeling - you should behave yourself.

Good student behavior was also achieved through the use of positive reinforcement. Bill remembered

One of the favorite jobs that you could get if you were a good student was cleaning the erasers after school. This was a privilege! You'd go outside and you'd beat the erasers together, you know, and knock all the chalk off of them and then you'd wash the blackboards.

Although correct deportment at school was very important to the parents, there were several instances mentioned in which pranks were played both on other students and on the teacher. Del described an incident in Florida when he was in the first grade

I remember one time some of the boys, again, not me, but some of the boys caught a snake and, uh, killed it and hung it on the inside of the girls' outhouse, on the inside of the door in the morning, see, before, so that when recess came and the girls all went running out to go to the outhouse and then there was a lot of squealing and yelling "teacher, teacher" so she came out and there was a kind of big fuss about that but I don't recall anybody being punished for it so maybe it just went the way, the way of other things.

Larry had several vivid memories of the "boys games"

In the school itself was stressed but, just as I say, just the 4 Rs - readin', writin', rithmetic, and the rod, see. You had to mind. I don't care what you did - you had to mind. You had your seat, you kept it good, and you stuck the little girls' pigtails in the inkwells when they weren't frozen and got ink all over. I had a little girl sit in front of me, Ethel Cook, had red hair. She always wore pigtails, see, and I beg I blacked her red hair a thousand times! Teacher'd come around and pour ink in the little holes in the wells, see, and they had a glass in it, see. She'd come along and pour that ink in - they wouldn't be full, see, and I'd reach over and get that pigtail and dip the ends in the ink, see. They'd be blacker'n the dickens!

And you ought to have seen the ceiling! Everybody smoked Bull Durham, Cowboy hands kept them in their pockets, you know, the little sacks, and everybody was makin' 'em a cigarette, you know. Puttin' it together and smokin' it, see. There wasn't any made cigarettes, you made 'em yourself, see. So us guys would just sneak 'em, you know, and smoke 'em. We'd always beg cigarette papers from the hands because they got 'em when they bought the tobacco, the Bull Durham, see. They'd give it to us. Well, we got so we carried a lot of pins, just sewing pins. Mommy sewed everything, see. We's get a bunch of pins and you'd take a cigarette paper....he,he,this was fun....and a pin and you'd roll the cigarette paper on the head of the pin, see, and it makes a little tail out here, see. You'd put it between your fingers like this, and whoosh, that thing'd go for half a mile! Now that ceiling was, I bet you it was 12 foot above the floor, see, it was jus a peaked ceiling. And we guys would get these pins and put 'em in there and go whoosh and that darn ceiling, I bet you had three thousand pins stuck in it with little cigarette papers off of them, see. And you couldn't get up there to get 'em off, they just hung there for days and days and days and days, see. And, of course, the teacher'd see one once in a while. She'd catch you. And she could do was reprimand you. There was no way you could get it down. And they she'd try to confiscate our

cigarette papers and we, of course, would hide 'em, you know, and stick 'em in our shirts and everywhere so she couldn't find 'em, ha,ha. But she'd take our pins, though. You know, pins used to come in little papers about this long and they were rolled. Of course, mother sewed all the time and that's when we'd snitch all our pins. All the pins we'd get, we'd stick around us, Bill and I, so we could send the darn things to the ceiling of the school. That ceiling looked like a porcupine!

Now, I've got to tell you this one story. This is the funniest thing! It used to just turn the schoolroom upside down! Ralph Lefler, one of the 3 Lefler boys, was a devil, I tell you. He was good, I mean we never fought or nothin' like that, but Ralph was forever farting, ha, ha, ha! Oh, it'd drive the school nuts. He'd stick his butt over the crack of that seat and let a great big fart go. The guy'd just go crazy! And the girls'd be....oh, I tell you it was the funniest thing! The teacher'd try to find out but we never....nobody every knew who done it, see. What, teacher, what happened? It wouldn't be 2 minutes later, see, she'd go back up to her desk and here'd come another blast from Ralph. Us guys died every time from laughin' and she couldn't quiet us down. There was nothin' she could do because nobody knew anything about it, see. She knew it was the boys but she couldn't find any boy that would say who done it, see. That was one thing that really sent the school into an uproar. You get a bunch of boys, see, 6 or 7 all hollerin' and laughin' and stompin' their feet and, see, first thing you know there'd be another shot and it would start all over again. And Ralph did it so much - the rest of us guys didn't have the guts to do it.

Duane also added his memory of a prank

I remember an awful dirty prank. When they got ready for the school play there was a carpet upstairs that we'd put on the floor. And, uh, this one teacher we didn't like, she went up there to get it and they waited until she was underneath and threw it on her head. That was the Lefler boys - they was....ha, ha. And they'd make them stay after school for pranks, you know. Well, this one Lefler boy'd take our dinner pails and start down the road and when the teacher wasn't looking, he'd take off. That was when they was on the other side....Oh, I never got involved in any of the fights or anything like that. We had a place where we rolled up sod and made little sod houses. And we'd get in there at recess and the teacher couldn't find us. Just little boyish pranks.

Schoolwork was done at school, during school hours. Larry stated very emphatically that

...there was very little homework, very little. Sometimes there might be some math, but very little. It was all taught right in the school, you know, and they hammered it into you and you memorized it - that's what you did. When you got home you had chores, you had other work to do, see. I herded cattle when I was 9 years old!

Duane also said there was "...not too much..." homework because "...we always had chores when we got home. Farm boys, they had their chores, you know, like milking cows." Phebe did remember having homework and smiled as she recalled

The dining room table was round and, uh, there was a lamp in the middle of it. I remember well, every so often, they'd pop popcorn. She'd put newspapers on the table first and we'd have popcorn in front of us when we did our homework. I don't remember if it was every night, but we had homework and it was important that we do it. I don't remember every rebelling or saying that I didn't want to do it. I don't remember about my brothers, they might have, but I don't remember that.

A very important part of the school day, and one which everyone mentioned was lunch. Del remembered

Well, I think we kind of treated it as a recess. We just went outside and I don't remember what mother put in there because probably, just maybe, a sandwich and maybe a cookie because, as I said, we had oranges and there were sweets all around us, what with the sugar cane and the oranges. So I doubt very seriously if she'd go to the trouble to put in a piece of fruit. It was just enough. I don't remember lunch being anything distinctive except just another recess. We probably had a recess in the morning, considered lunch recess, and had a recess in the afternoon.

Duane said that his lunch would be

...a sandwich and an apple and cookies, or something like that. We carried it in our pails. Some of 'em had fancy pails. Our family had half-gallon syrup pails. And we had water that they'd carried from the well.

Lunch from the Searles household, as reflected by Bill

I don't recall what we took, sandwiches probably. Mother, of course, baked her own bread and then we had plenty of butchered meat. I don't recall, really, what we had for lunch but it was always very simple. And, of course, we had a well. It was right our here and we would have to pump our water. But I don't think we took any drink to school - we used water. At that time we weren't drinking coffee and we didn't have soft drinks, at least in any manner that we could take to school with us.

...and Phebe

Well, we didn't have foil and we didn't have wax paper, and no baggies, no nothing. I don't remember what they were wrapped in but they were usually meat sandwiches and peanut butter and jelly. And we had oranges and bananas. it was enough. And everybody had their lunch - they'd just wolf it down to get outside to play. We'd sit at the desks and we had to clean everything up - we couldn't leave anything to be a mess. And, of course, there was lots of trading, too, cookies or sandwiches or stuff kids wanted.

...and Larry

Well, mommy baked, you know, all the time. And the lunch was just like a sandwich and a....we ate a lot of raw potatoes. It would be a sandwich with a potato and we'd take our jackknives and split the potato, see, and eat a raw potato. I like raw potatoes. So, of course in the wintertime it was mostly like brown sugar sandwiches, just a sandwich with butter and brown sugar on it, 'cause we couldn't get white sugar, see. It's real good! There wasn't any white sugar at that certain time. There was later. During the war you couldn't get white sugar because Cuba supplied the

white sugar and, uh, at that time, of course, you see, Cuba was quite a distance away. Things were different then. You didn't have airplanes that could go over there in 15 minutes, see. You had to go by boat, which took a long time, you know, and all the boats were transporting troops and supplies to the war, the first world war. There was no sugar come out of Cuba because they didn't want to lose their ships to the submarines - the German submarines. But we had brown sugar. It was not refined, see. So mommy used brown sugar on our sandwiches.

Instructional Strategies

What instructional strategies did teachers in rural schools use to assist their students' learning? Phebe indicated that one of the first goals of the teacher was to instill "...a work ethic, a scholastic ethic...." in the students, to make them always want to do the best they could.

I don't know if it's just the way I'm looking at it, but it seemed to me like it more of a challenge, as a game. You wanted to do the best you could, better than this kid here. There was a lot of rivalry. See, there were 5,6,7, kids in a grade and you wanted to be the best in your grade. We worked, you know, you didn't sit around a fiddle-de-de. We worked, you know, from morning until....from 9 to 4.

Phebe also described instruction and learning in the language of fun and games. She said

...and, of course, there was arithmetic. The way I remember it, it was taught more or less as a game. You tried to be the best in division, long, division, or multiplication. And geography,,,of course that was wonderful, that was exciting, that was like a puzzle. And she'd pull down the maps and we'd put the pieces together.

One of the first things the teacher did was to establish a schedule of daily study and recitation. There were periods when specific classes would be with

the teacher at the recitation bench. During those times, the other students were at their desks working on their specific lessons, preparing for their opportunity at the recitation bench. A 15 minute recess in the morning, a 15 minute recess in the afternoon, and the hour lunch break provided students the opportunity to move outside of the confines of their rows of desks. Duane summarized the typical school day by saying

Well, we had certain time for certain classes. And we'd recite, you know, and then go back and study and have 15 minute recess in the middle of the morning and 15 minutes recess in the afternoon.

Phebe remembered

We always had reading in the morning. I suppose you're sharper in the morning. And, of course, sometimes she'd put two classes together, like 5th and 6th. And she'd call them up to the benches. We took our books up. Now, arithmetic, we'd be called to the board and raise our hands, see, if we thought we knew it and we'd be called up to the board. And, reading, everybody took their turn reading. We read a lot.

Larry also recalled the grade-by-grade recitations

Now, she call for the 2nd grade. Maybe there was 2 in the 2nd grade, see. Well, those, two, maybe one sat here and one sat there, see. They'd just get up and go up to the front and have their lesson, see. And that's the way it was conducted.

Bill added

As I recall, she would rotate the classes. In other words, she might call on the 3rd grade today for the first time, see. A teacher in those days really had to plan each day ahead in order to keep up with your curriculum.

And she would alter, as I recall, the classes as they would....in other words, she might call the 5th grade for the first period. And then she would alternate them. And you can see just what would be necessary in the way of preparation for something like this because you would go from the first grade up to the 8th grade during the day. Now I don't recall whether she got all 8 grades in every day or not - she might not have. That would have been a big push to do, but anyway she had to really plan ahead.

Although the teacher established a schedule and followed it most of the time, the students recognized that she could deviate from it when she chose. Del recalled

One class recited or did board work at a time. And I don't recall the sequence. I don't really recall whether she started...she might have rotated...I have a feeling she rotated instead of starting with the 6th grade first she might rotate and start with the first grade first so that there was a little rotation, a little variety, something was differed. I just have a feeling that's the way she did it. My memory is of moving from subject to subject in the same day and the same with the other row. I think she covered a pretty large area in one day - by that I mean the 6th grade might have geography and the 5th grade might have math and the 4th grade might have spelling. In other words....now I suppose....common sense tells me that she probably structured it the way she wanted it. I don't recall there ever being the situation that it was Tuesday and therefore it was geography. It seemed to be quite diversified and we always were given, apparently, or we knew what we were going to do the next day so we must have had assignments of some sort. Although, as I mentioned before, there were times when the whole school, all six rows, did one thing on that particular day. But that was kind of a big day and, I mean, it was more things like spelling, for example. She would build us up to it, see, and say things like "next Tuesday all we're going to do it just have spelling, all day long." And she kind of made it fun - we kind of looked forward to it. Still, a little scared about it but looking forward to the fact that we wouldn't have to worry about all that other stuff, but I don't remember it being that way all the time.

The "bee" appeared to be a very important part of the teaching-learning process. Del said, "We used to have spelling bees but they were in-the classroom situation and very competitive, very competitive. Big competition!"

Phebe spoke in more detail about the "bees" but called them be a different term. She recalled

Spelling, that was such fun! We had spell-downs. Every week we had a spell-down at the end of the week. They's divide into two groups, everybody, and the leaders would....first one leader would choose one and the next leader would choose, and oh, man, you were excited about which group you were going to be in. And, of course, she varied the difficulty of the words with the child. And that was always fun because there was just so much rivalry - which one would win that week.

Larry remembered not only spelling "bees" but also mathematics "bees."

And the she always had contests - bees, you know. Now we all had access to these words, no matter who you were in school, because they were on the blackboard, see, and you were supposed to memorize them. And that went for the most of the kids, you know, but not for the little ones. They played, see, but there were very few of those, for they didn't even go to school. Then we mathematics bees. We'd get up there and, of course, if you missed one you sat down and see who'd won the bee, see. And mathematics bees - she'd get 2 or 3 guys to the board, see, and she'd give you the problem and each of you had to do it on the board, see. And the first one to get done, won, see. Just those little things, see. I enjoyed it very much.

Because the building was small, with the rows of desks close together, the children remained at their desks and there was little movement around the room. Duane recalled that the teacher had a specific direction which orchestrated the changing of classes movement. He said "She would say, uh, the class turn, rise. See, turn out of your seat, rise, and then pass." The class which had just completed its lessons would file from the bench in one direction (i.e., to the right), while the class beginning its lessons would file from the opposite direction (i.e.,

from the left). The students at their desks were able to use one another as resources for assistance with their work while the teacher was engaged with a class. Bill said

This was one of the things that...as I recall, why she did not sit us in sections in classes. Because if one of the kids had a question we would help them, or they would help us. Now, this is my recollection. There was interaction. I mean, we didn't feel because we were in the 7th grade that the 5th graders were no good or anything like that.

Phebe added, "And, of course, there was perfect decorum too, you know. We could work together if we had permission from the teacher, but it was very quiet."

Larry agreed that working with one another

...was allowed a lot in school. The teacher, of course, kinda' depended on the older kids - maybe there was only two or three. They would help the little ones read or help the little ones spell, you know. The teacher would make up problems, real easy little problems, for the little ones and she wouldn't have the time to go to each person, you know, 'cause she had so many lessons to make up for all the grades, so the elder pupils did help. I helped a lot 'cause I liked to do that. I liked the little ones, see, and I always loved to help 'em.

Students learned from one another, whether it was through the strategy of older student helping younger student or simply by listening to what the other students were studying when they were with the teacher and possibly anticipating the time when they would study that same subject.. Bill began school one year after Larry, but he

...skipped a grade in the elementary school. Because of the small number (of students) and the fact that I had....I guess I was a little advanced because I had followed Lawrence around, you know, and listened. So I skipped a grade and moved into Lawrence's grade, see, so he and I were together.

As one of the younger ones in his school, Del recognized the benefit to listening.

I remember it being very interesting to listen to the others, you know. Of course some of it I was more interested in than others. Geography I remember was particularly interesting to listen to because they were talking about countries that I had never even heard of. I almost can picture now listening to them talking about African countries and things like this. I knew nothing about that stuff yet. Well, I can't say that because we always had books and things around the house - National Geographic and things like this but still, at the same time, it was interesting and I have a feeling that I probably learned quite a bit just from that, just from listening to the others and, of course, when we knew she was approaching our line, our row, kids began to kind of shuffle and get a little nervous, you know. It's coming and it's going to be us and all these others are listening, all the other kids are listening. And even though she'd tell them "now while we're doing 6th grade geography I want the rest of you to study this and this and this." Sure, you've got your book open but you're listening just the same. And you know that they're listening to you. Now, there is an advantage to that because we who were, say, in a lower class, would hear what was going on here and it helped us, really I think it did. Because I know periodically I can remember getting intrigued with something that was being discussed up here and instead of sitting back there studying I would listen to them. And, of course, that prepared me for next year.

Memorizing was the tool students used to learn. If the students were able to memorize and correctly recite a lesson at the appropriate time, then the teacher accepted that learning had occurred. As Larry said, "There was a lot of memory work - you memorized a lot of things." Del also remembered

We had to do a lot of memorizing. I remember being caught one time not having prepared and I think I scraped through by her not calling on me but I can remember anxiety. Anxiety because I wasn't ready for those big words. I lucked out that time!

Materials and Supplies

Materials and supplies were frequently at a premium in country schools. In Nebraska, the districts were responsible for providing textbooks but this was often a responsibility difficult to carry out. In the latter nineteenth century, textbooks were brought to school by the students. Most families had Bibles and these became the primary instructional materials. If a family had additional texts, they were used also, and once school districts organized, the books that were brought to school by the children became the texts which were used, regardless of their subject matter or currency.

Although the districts were responsible for providing textbooks, Bill remembered that

....they weren't up-to-date. See, each school district had to maintain their own district. I don't know whether they had any outside financial help or not. They probably did from the county or the township but, as I recall, during the summer months the textbooks and everything were stored in the cloakroom, see. And then the next fall, why, you'd break 'em out, blow the dust off of 'em, and go to work. I don't recall ever having any modern, up-to-date books.

Not only were the textbooks out of date, their numbers were few and students often had to share books in order to complete their assignments. Larry recalled

The books that you had were furnished by the school. But there were so few of 'em. One day a pupil would take, say, the history book home, and she would always bring it back, see. Well, the next day, somebody else got it, see, if they wanted to take it home. Otherwise, this book stayed in the school and you read it in the school. You read it to each other, see. But if you wanted to take it home you were welcome to, see. Reading books were....there was nothin' in the reading but just a small Jane....you know, Jack and Jill went up the hill and Jane, uh, pulled the wagon across the road or something, see to get your words, you know, out of it. Those were just left at school, see. No boy ever took a reading book home. My God, that was a waste of time! But you had to get up and read in school. You had to stand up in front of the class, you know, and read out of that book. So you had to learn it, you had to learn it, that's all.

Bill also remembered being able to take books home, if a student wished to or had homework, but

....there wasn't an awful lot of homework being done, I'll tell you, because as soon as we'd get home, why then our chores would start and we'd have to do those. You couldn't delay those, regardless of the weather.

Students were responsible for bringing their own supplies to school. The usual supplies consisted of pencils, tablets and crayons. Bill and Phebe mentioned also taking slates, which were more cost-effective than tablets because they could be cleaned and re-used. Phebe described the excitement of buying new school supplies at the beginning of every school year. "It was wonderful! You'd go to town before school started and get your pencils. And your tablets, you took your own tablets too." Duane also recalled the fun of buying and carrying his brand new pencil box. Larry added

We had to bring our own paper and that was hard to do. Paper was rather scarce, you know, there wasn't a lot of paper. And, uh, at that

time,,,Nebraska today furnishes everything, I understand, everything. I mean, you don't have to buy a thing when you go to Nebraska schools now. That was how it ended up. But, then, they didn't have anything. You got your paper. There was only one type and that was bought at the local little creamery or ice cream shop. It was a red tablet, like that, about twice as big as this secretary's table. It was bright red, had a big Indian chief's head on the front of it. That was the only kind you could buy for school. Course, I don't know the cost of it but it was minimal, hardly anything, you know, probably a nickel. But we had to buy our paper. We had to furnish our pencils - the folks did that for us. But that's all you needed - you didn't need nothin' else but a pencil and a little tablet.

In addition to purchasing pencils and tablets, Bill recalled two other purchases which were equally as important

This was one of the great events of the fall, buying our lunchpails and our pair of shoes. These were the two things that we looked forward to - buying our school lunchpails and buying a pair of shoes. Now, in the spring it was buying your summer straw hat and your overalls. We didn't wear shoes so we didn't need to worry about shoes.

Del also remembered textbooks being furnished by the school in Florida. He said, "...it seems like to me that they were all hand-me-downs and that the first graders would have gotten the books that the second grade had last year." He remembered very few additional teaching materials in his room, "...perhaps a world map..." but not much else. He did add that

the world, of course, was fairly stable then because World War I was over. We were between world wars so there wasn't a lot going on in the world as far as countries disappearing and new countries being added - new names being added to the map, you know. So she probably could take a 1918 or 1919 map and use it in 1927 and it would probably still be good. Can't do that these days." Del also discussed the fact that textbooks and teaching materials cost money and in the late 1920s Florida was in the midst of a depression so there was little money available for school boards to supply current textbooks and materials. He said, "I imagine they were

hard put probably to pay her some salary. Even then, in 1927, she was lucky to have a job." From the salary paid to her, a teacher certainly did not have extra money to spend supplementing her classroom supplies, so she used what was provided to her.

Teachers

In 1912 Mabel Carney described the country school as "...the only all-inclusive community institution." Therefore, the teacher was a person who not only transcended all segments of society, she was in a position to be a creative force in unifying and providing leadership within the community. Who were the persons who filled these positions - the teachers who had the opportunities to be such change agents within a community?

During the early years of settlement in this country, teaching was male dominated. Because of their educational opportunities and abilities to read and write, clergy frequently became tutors to small groups of boys, sometimes establishing schools in communities. Historically, male teachers are pictured as being rather lax in their pedagogical skills and quite harsh in their methods of management and discipline. In the nineteenth century a feminization of teaching occurred. Women were characterized as the kinder and more nurturant of the genders, much more capable of accomplishing the educational principles and practices of persons such as Freiderich Froebel, Johann Pestalozzi, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. These early educational philosophers espoused education as a process of unfolding the inner abilities of a child and of encouraging their natural, logical growth and development. The feminine nature was believed to

be better suited for accomplishing this task than the masculine nature. Therefore, females were recruited for teaching positions both within larger, urban communities and smaller, rural communities. All of the teachers at District 17, with the exception of John C. KetrIDGE, who taught for one year, 1903-04, were female. None of the persons interviewed could remember a male teacher, even in high school. Bill stated quite assuredly that "...we had no males...no men teachers even in high school."

To be a teacher in a country school required a multitude of skills. A young woman had to possess a high school or normal school diploma. In Fairmont, Nebraska, many teachers were recruited from Doane College, located in Crete, approximately 30 miles east. In Lakeland, Florida, Southern College provided a normal school curriculum for young women interested in teaching. Although District 17 in Fairmont and the country school Del attended in Lakeland were in rural locations, they were not located in isolated areas or areas distant from a supply of personnel qualified for the task.

Teaching in a country school meant being willing to relocate and possibly move to an area often quite distanced and different from the one in which the teacher grew up. Phebe grew up in a community with very little diversity and began teaching in a community which was half German and half Bohemian. Because of the frequent housing arrangement of boarding with a local family, a country teacher had to possess a willingness to accept cultural diversity and become part of the community in which she was located.

Teachers were transient; they usually came from outside the community, established no permanent ties, and moved on within a year or two. Although they did not usually grow up in the school district in which they were recruited to teach, their position enabled them to quickly become important members of the community. Because they did not have family within the district, they would frequently board with local families. Larry remembered

Mother and dad always had a bedroom upstairs for the teacher. And, she would be hired for a pittance of a salary, I know now. But she lived with the family. And our big house happened to be only about three quarters of a mile from the school - it was the closest building to the school....So it was convenient for mother and dad to put the teacher up. I don't think they charged her anything, see, but I don't know, 'cause she just drew just a few dollars, you know, a month. she just lived with the bunch, with the family. "Course we kids had that advantage, see, because she was teaching us at home too, see. We couldn't get away from her!

Teachers were professionally isolated. A young woman was the only teacher within the only school in a district. The next district may have been only a few miles away, yet the lack of transportation, the lack of time, and the community expectations that a young woman be at home or at church in the evening left little time for teachers establishing a professional community. The county superintendent was supposed to visit at least once a year and the visitor's log from District 17 shows those visits usually occurring. The purpose of that visit, however, was not staff development or the sharing of professional knowledge, but rather an evaluative exercise in which the superintendent was to

ensure that the appropriate curriculum was being taught through activities within the classroom.

Teachers worked for very little salary and no benefits. Copies of a few of the contracts of teachers at District 17 are contained in the Appendix. The salary ranged from \$28.00 per month in 1882 to \$35.00 a month in 1905. However, in 1905 Miss Effie Bower would be paid an additional \$8.00 for "janitorial work." No contracts or documents of Fillmore County, Nebraska, outline any additional benefits for teachers in District 17.

Teachers were minimally prepared. In Nebraska a simplified normal school curriculum was within the choices incorporated into the high school curriculum and many young women frequently accepted teaching positions upon completing high school.

Teachers were usually young, often right out of high school or normal school. Larry describes them as "...real precious people, you know, actually just little girls coming out of high school." Older women whose children were grown and had left home were also candidates for teaching positions, as were widows. Bill also remembered most of his teachers being

...young and they were probably getting their feet on the ground and then they'd go someplace else. Most of them....well, they had to be single, they couldn't be married. And, uh, most of them were boarding individuals. They'd board with one of the families. As I said, we boarded several teachers at our place. But they were just ordinary kids trying to get their feet on the ground. Almost every year you'd get a new teacher - they didn't stick around long.

Teachers were responsible for much more than educating the students. In addition to the pedagogical responsibility, the country school teacher had to be a maintenance worker, nurse, social worker, curriculum developer, counselor, recreation director, librarian, administrator, carpenter, purchasing agent, and community leader. Foght (1918) called rural school teachers "educators in overalls" because of the number and variety of functions they were called upon to perform.

Each district school in Nebraska had a board of directors which had two primary responsibilities - hiring a teacher and overseeing the maintenance of the school property. Larry said

Since dad being on the school board, why, of course, they had to find a teacher. Very seldom would you get a teacher to stay over one year, see. They'd stay one year and then they'd leave. The school superintendent from there was named Margaret Haughwout and she always helped dad find a little teacher.

The teachers changed on almost an annual basis. As Bill said "...they didn't stick around long." Three possible reasons for this high turnover rate emerged from the narratives and included marriage, better positions, and being "run off."

The societal expectation for young women in the early years of this century was marriage and children. If she were to complete high school without a marriage proposal and if she were so inclined and able to acquire additional education, she studied teaching or nursing. If she were working as a teacher or nurse when a marriage proposal was made to her, she was expected to cease

those activities and begin her "true" profession as wife and mother. Lucy Sawyer, who completed high school in 1893 in Fairmont, Nebraska, taught in a country school until her marriage to Claire Searles in 1898. Although Phebe, her first child, was not born until 1907, upon her marriage, Lucy left the role of teacher and assumed the role of farm wife.

The most frequent reason for leaving a school appears to have been accepting teaching opportunities in other school districts. Bill and Larry both viewed District 17 as a beginning, a teacher's first experience. Bill said

...they didn't stick around long. And, of course, I will admit that Fairmont and District 17 was, more or less, the bottom of the barrel, you know. You had a small student enrollment, you had farmers who put demands on their children, particularly the boys, and kept them out of school during certain periods and the teacher had to do an awful lot of juggling. You had to take into consideration the fact that these kids were busy helping their fathers, helping their parents, and yet, by so doing, they couldn't keep up, see. And so you had to take that into consideration. I really sympathize with the teachers of those days because even when you're teaching with a set schedule and a set curriculum it's hard. But when you have a rotating classroom it's worse.....school actually took a hind seat to your everyday living. It wasn't the first priority for many families in those days.

Although the district school board had the responsibility for hiring the teacher, support of the families was critical to the teacher's success. When a teacher was hired, that was no indication that she was the choice of the majority of people in the district or even that she would have the support of the district. Duane said "There was two sides to the school district. Whoever hired the teacher, the other side didn't like 'um. And they wouldn't make their kids

behave." That created a problem in 1922 for Miss Alice Varvra who left at the end of the first semester because, according to Duane, "...she couldn't handle the boys." At that point "...Chapin, Chapman, something like that, she, uh, took over at the end of the first semester. And, of course, the other side liked her so they made their boys behave."

Del, who attended a rural school in Florida couldn't remember his teacher's name. But he did remember that

she wasn't stern - she was approachable I seemed to sense. She seemed to be a kind person....You know, we thought of her as being old but I imagine she was 30 at the most. And, uh, I remember with pleasure the time because I remember her as being kind and seemingly working with the individual kids.

Bill recalls his teachers as

Disciplinarians....my impressions were simply that a teacher in a rural school such as that accepted the fact that you had a diverse group of children and that they readily accepted the fact that if you were absent, for instance, there was no disciplinary measure because the teacher usually knew that it was harvest time or corn shucking time and so....the children by the way, were very disciplined by their parents. I know my parents' creed was that if you got a spanking in school you got one at home, see. The teacher was always right and so you accepted that. And I don't recall ever challenging a teacher - you just didn't do it because your parents wouldn't have accepted it. I think this is the key to the whole thing - the fact that the family was the basis for a child's attitude in school. And, of course, mother, having been a teacher....I know, when I first started to school, being left-handed, the teachers tried to make me write right-handed. This was a common thing - a left-hander wasn't accepted. and mother went to the school and told the teachers, "now you just leave him alone. He is naturally left-handed and I want him to be that way." And so teachers never bothered from then on. And I'm sure that the same thing happened to Del, I don't know. But I know the problem I ran into, being left-handed, was the Palmer method, making circles and ups and downs.

And I think that's the reason I write the way I do now, instead of being left-handed over-hand writing, which Del does.

Both Duane and Phebe mentioned one particular teacher by name - Emma Renken. Duane said

Well, my first teacher was Emma Renken. And she wound up being the county superintendent here for years. Boy, she was a good teacher. She could get it across to the kids and she had control over them, even the big boys.

Phebe remembered that

...she came from Geneva. She was a German, Renken, Emma, and she has a sister Anna who never married either and they lived together in Geneva. And, uh, I don't remember how long she taught after I went to Fairmont to school but she ran for county superintendent and she was superintendent for a long time. And everybody just respected her so much! Emma Renken, she was a wonderful teacher!

I did ask each of the persons interviewed if there were any students who, using today's terminology, would be considered handicapped. Duane, ever succinct with words said, "I don't believe so. No, I believe everyone was halfway smart." Del was more reflective about the issue when he said

Well, I don't remember. The chances were that there probably were. You know, common sense says that out of 30 or 35 kids there was bound to be somebody that was slow in some way. I can remember her giving us, seemingly, individual attention that we needed, which indicates to me that probably there were some kids in the class that very seldom needed her special attention. So perhaps, if there was anybody in the class, she took up the slack there and gave them more attention. But I don't remember any real problem like that. Seemed like to me if we had had anybody....we were so open to observation by everybody and you know how children

are. They can be very cruel, making fun of others, you know, that it would have been noticeable, but I don't remember. She must have been able to handle it all right.

Bill and Larry personalized their responses to this question. Bill said

No, not in this group. Now, I remember one, our cousin, by the way, Wesley Brown. He lived right across the street from the high school there in Fairmont with his mother Mary Brown. Mary Brown was mother's sister. And, uh, I don't think I ever met the father - I think he left the family right after....I think she had two boys. Wesley was a retarded individual. He's the one that used to swing in the barn and we'd say "Look out, Wesley, you're going to fall!" Wesley was about our age, and uh, he'd have been in special ed. Now, I don't know, but I don't think Aunt Mary ever sent him to school. I don't even think he had any formal training because I don't think they made any provisions for them in those days. Now he was eventually put in a home for the retarded and he lived out his life there. That was a tragic case because....what the hell did we call him - he had a nickname....anyway, he would come out to the farm now and then. And, of course, Lawrence and I'd pick on him - oh, we really picked on him - it's a shame the way we picked on that poor soul! But he's the only one I remember as having been retarded in any way. They weren't accepted in society - they were set aside and simply forgotten. But he'd come out to the farm and we had a sack swing in the barn, there, you know, and hay underneath. And we would swing out and swing back and then we'd drop into the hay after it'd quit swinging. Old Wesley'd get on that and Lawrence'd start yelling, "Hey, Wesley, the rope is gonna' break, look out, the rope is gonna break!" and old Wesley'd then jump off, you know. One day the rope actually broke and we were trying to tell him to jump and he wouldn't do it....

Larry said

No, there was no such a thing as that (special education). We had pupils that were in a way incapacitated but they were not expected to do anything. They were just there, but only when their folks brought them. To get the atmosphere of school they would bring 'em to the parties, to the programs, to the box suppers, to the little things that happened at school to get a taste of what school was like. And they taught 'em at home and the way I understand there was never any thought of taking 'em to school.

They were just taught at home and always conducted themselves good and there was never any thought of 'em. Phebe had a little trouble with one of 'em. He had grown. Now Phebe was up, see, she was one of the elder ones. And, uh, he got a crush on her. I was always scared of him. He was too big, see. Now he would come over to the house and work for dad, pickin' cherries, pickin mulberries, pickin' apples, you know. I never will forget one time he brought Phebe a necklace, a beautiful necklace. I don't know where he got it or nothin'. I wasn't in on this, I just observed. He brought it over, I believe, it was just before Christmas and gave it to Phebe. She was just a kid, so she took it. She brought it in, I remember, and I remember the discussion at the table between mom and dad as what to do with this necklace. They discussed what to do and they thought the best thing was to give it back to him. So dad took it back. I don't know what happened, if there were any unusual happenings because of it. So it must have come out o.k. He's the only one I remember - there was nobody at school that I remember was a little slow. They were always kept at home, worked near home, taught at home. We all liked 'em, never was mean of nothin' but we just weren't together.

Phebe made the transition to the present time with her response to that question.

She said

I don't know, I just don't know. But I never remember anybody having a child that they kept at home because he was dumb or anything....I hadn't ever thought if that before. I wonder why it would be that nowadays it seems like it's just one of those accepted things that every so often there will be a child come along....Judy (her daughter who teaches school) has one - he's picked up and brought to school and he has an attendant all day long and he's taken home. Now we're paying for that and he'll never be anything! And we're spending ten times as much on him as we're spending on the smart kids in the class! I'm just adamant about that! We're losing our brightest children and for what - a kid who will never be able to have a job! The high school had about a hundred students when I went to it. I never remember one that was slow or anything, never....seemed like they were all alert. I know some weren't as bright as others, of course, but there was a feeling of participation - I mean, nothing held them back. If there were slower ones that needed help, the others would help and were just delighted to do it! They just take that kid off to the corner and just work with them. And the kid, if he or she were a little slower, I don't remember there was any resentment, any not trying....It was so different!

The silence among the four siblings on this particular topic is very interesting. Only Bill related his answer to their own family - their cousin. Even Larry, who participated in the teasing, did not include a reference to Wesley in his narrative. Phebe had an additional experience with a person whom the children understood was "slow" but she made no reference to the incident with the necklace. Possibly, as Larry suggested, she was young and the incident meant little at the time and has long since been forgotten. Larry, however, remembered the discussion between his parents and their resolution of what was perceived to be a problem, although he was not involved in it. Del was the youngest child, 11 years younger than Bill, and the family moved to Florida when he was 5 so he may never have had any contact with Wesley. However, in his narrative he surmised that, among his school population, "common sense" would indicate that there were probably children with handicapping conditions, although he was unaware of any specific children or instances which called attention to this difference.

Analysis

During the years that four of these persons were attending country school, the United States entered and was on the side of the victor in World War I. Only two of the persons interviewed referenced any context beyond their community. When Larry, the oldest, was talking about the brown sugar sandwiches that his mother packed for lunch, he explained why white sugar was so difficult to secure

because of the blockade of Cuba. As Del, the youngest, was speaking about the materials his teacher had to work with, he referenced the time of peace that the world was in and indicated that the map was not changing rapidly and could probably be used for several years before a new one had to be purchased.

The physical descriptions given of the school, both outside and inside brought a reference to sensory memories in four of the five narratives. Del went to school in Florida. He walked through an orange grove and remembered how the orange blossoms would smell when they were in bloom, "...there's no other flower quite as sweet." In addition to his sense of smell, there was the taste sensation that accompanied eating a fresh orange or tangerine just picked from the tree. His school was set in a sugar cane field and the kids would break the cane, smell the sweet syrup and chew the sugar from the stalks. He said

I can remember, uh, walking to school. There usually were two or three of us boys. They must have lived close to me. As I understand, we lived in a kind of suburb of town - out a ways and I remember walking to school and I remember, uh, so distinctly the orange groves, the smell, and grapefruit and, you know, picking up oranges on the way to eat. My recollection is never hurrying to school - always kinds of just dawdled along and ate an orange and then we would go through the groves to get to school and then we went through the sugar cane fields. There was a path through the sugar cane - it was well over our head and we had to go through the sugar cane as a kind of a final place or final area before we got to the clearing where the school was...I can remember the sugar cane and as we went along the path going to school we'd break off a piece of sugar cane and suck the sugar out of it...I can remember the smell of those trees and the dirt and the warm sugar..."

Del describes these activities on his way to school but does not mention them as part of his walk home. He remembers never being in a hurry to get to

school because of the fun of the grove and cane field; yet, these same things apparently did not charm him or slow him down in the afternoon. Something may have made the walk home less memorable; possibly he was in a hurry to get home to his mother as he was now the only child at home.

Phebe introduced the sense of smell as she described the school cloakroom and how crowded it would be in the wintertime with coats, boot, hats, and other cold weather apparel. She said, "Everyone had only one coat, a winter coat, that we wore all winter. They were usually woolen and didn't get washed so they got quite ripe." She did not mention anyone in school ever complaining about the odor because "...everyone's coat smelled the same."

Larry's olfactory memory was the horse stall. There was a four-stall horse shelter on the school property and the horses which the children rode to school were put in the stalls during the day. Larry said he always loved the smell of horses and the horse barn on the farm - that was his place to "escape" when he needed to be by himself.

I had a terrible temper, real bad, and when I got mad I'd just blow up, see, so I'd take myself to the little stall and blow up to myself or to the horses, see, and it was o.k. Babe'd roll her eyes at me and just keep on 'a chompin'.

Bill mentioned the sight and smell of chalkdust several times in his narrative.. There was only one board in the school - a long one across the wall behind the teacher's desk. It was her only visual aid and she filled it up with problems and exercises. It was erased and washed at the end of the day and the

students looked forward to being chosen to "clap" the erasers, covering themselves with chalkdust and sneezing.

We'd take the erasers to the big tree and just whomp those things against it until we were all covered with chalkdust. It went up our noses and made it hard to breathe and made us cough. It always amazed me how much dust got in them every day - maybe part of it was sawdust! That old tree is long gone and I wonder if we just beat it to death....

In addition to the sense of smell, all five narratives contained references to the classroom sounds. All mentioned the bell that the teacher rang to signal many different things and the classroom sounds of children reading and reciting - teacher helping children and children helping children. Phebe said the sound "...wasn't loud, not really, especially when the boys weren't cutting up, but it was a nice sound, like bees buzzing."

All five persons remembered their early school experiences as very "positive," "happy," "fun," and "great." Larry said

What we got was so much more than just learning' from books and the Palmer Method, see. What we got was a "family" start on life. School was part of the family, see, and we all knew each other there and at church and in town and everywhere. Now kids are foreigners, strangers, when they go to these big schools and they aren't family.

The language and metaphor used throughout the narratives was that of the school as family. The school was an extension of home, where the children had chores and were expected to behave, but where they could also relax, play, be creative and fellowship with their friends. The school was also a place where

families could come and enjoy one another. The schoolteacher acted "en loco parentis" and she was to be respected and obeyed. However, none of the narratives indicated a fear of any teacher. She would surely use discipline if it were needed, but the reflections did not indicate that she was harsh or meted out discipline regularly. School provided the students an opportunity to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and engage in mental labor rather than physical labor for a few hours a day.

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974:54) indicated a gender difference in the way children responded to authority. They found that girls tended to be more responsive to directives from parents and teachers and their behavior was more conforming. Boys, while they may conform to directives, did so for shorter periods of time and appeared to show more curiosity and exploratory behaviors.

Belenky and her colleagues (1986:7) affirm a gender difference in experiences, even experiences shared by siblings. Their research indicated that, not only are the "same" experiences gender-different, the value placed on those experiences differs depending on the gender. In general, we know that males tend to be more physically active, are usually more vocal, and are perceived to get things done. Females are frequently less physically active, process information more quietly, and they are often not affirmed because they are perceived as less competent. In addition, women process information differently, attempting to gain access to others' knowledge and making connections.

Four of the persons interviewed were farm children and there were specific expectations of each of them. The daughter was responsible for helping with the "inside" tasks which included cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing, sewing, and everything else associated with the smooth functioning of the house and family. The sons were responsible for the "outside" tasks and were up early tending to the morning chores which centered primarily around the needs of the livestock. After school everyone had additional chores specific to their gender context. The children's days, as did their parents', began before sunrise and ended after dusk. Therefore, school for these farm children may have been a respite from the work routine and provided an opportunity to socialize and relax with their peers.

The gender difference and difference in their foci were very interesting for me to recognize and reflect upon. I believe that the details of their memories of school parallel their memories of their home and their areas of responsibility. The girl was inside and the boys were outside. Among the Searles siblings, Phebe was quite detailed in her description of the inside of the school and spent more time talking about the learning activities that went on inside the building. She showed great animation when describing her love of studying, of being the best, and the intellectual atmosphere the teacher attempted to establish in the school. Larry and Bill both showed greater animation in describing the "pranks" or the outside activities than in the academic studies in which they were engaged.

An additional interesting point is that Phebe's style of narrative was very different from that of Larry and Bill. As the only girl in the family and the oldest child, her responsibilities were inside the house and she had no one with whom to make memories; she worked with her mother but had no playmate near her age at home. Most of her narrative is "I" oriented ("...I always wanted to sit as close to the teacher as I could; I loved reading," etc.) Larry and Bill had one another to work and play with so there are shared memories ("Bill and I sat in the back; we had to bring our own paper, etc.") To this day, "the boys" can tell a story with tremendous similarities and Phebe is puzzled because "I was there and don't remember any of that." In fact, she wasn't there - she was elsewhere.

In their narratives of the activities both outside and inside of the school, "the boys" mentioned one another frequently and mentioned their sister rarely, and Phebe rarely mentioned them. When she did, it was as a comparison ("I loved studying, but I'm not sure about my brothers"). This did surprise me because I had anticipated intertextuality among the siblings' stories.

As I reflected on this silence, I thought about my own brother and our shared school memories and realized that they are, in fact, not shared. I was three years ahead of him in school and, although we did have some of the same teachers, we did not share classes or friends. The major difference between us and our father and his siblings is that my brother and I were not in the same classroom for several years. The fact that Phebe, Larry, and Bill were in the same

classroom together for at least six years but rarely mentioned one another in their narratives is, to me, a very "loud" silence.

An interesting social and gender issue in their family was the question of who would be continuing school after the 8th grade, the highest grade at District 17. Bill remembered discussions between his parents about the future education of "the boys." He said

The concern was when the two boys would finish school. When the eighth grade came, that was it, there was nothing else for us. We were to go to work on the farm full time, turning the sod over, planting, and that was it. Dad saw no need for any more education. But mother won out and we guys went to high school.

Larry recalled that there was not that concern with Phebe

Whether she went to high school or not, it didn't make any difference. She really didn't need an education because she was going to get married and have children and education was just a kind of thing on the side until she found a husband. Nobody ever thought much about it.

Apparently, however, Phebe thought a lot about it because she determined early that she was not only going to graduate from high school but she was going on to college. She said

I knew that if I was ever going to get away from the farm I had to go to college and I would, whatever it took. What it ended up taking was turning my back on my mother and Delbert and going to live with my grandparents and working and working and working until I did it.

She acknowledged that in leaving home, she also had to leave her mother and youngest brother. Yet leaving her father and the two older brothers did not appear to bother her. This statement was very telling to me, knowing the relationships among the persons in this narrative. Phebe's narrative was filled with references to her mother and Del but her references to her father were all in relation to bad decisions he had made ("...whatever made him think he could run a restaurant...") and her references to Bill and Larry were usually discussing the mischief they were into ("They were always getting into trouble - but mom kept asking me to go and check on what the boys were doing.")

I did ask each of the five if they remembered any unpleasant experiences or negative things that happened, particularly with respect to punishment. Only Larry remembered any physical punishment, and the only embarrassment anyone described was not related to punishment but, rather, to having to stand up in front of the room and recite poems, participate in school plays, or miss a word in a spelling bee.

The passage of time alters our perspective and, therefore, our narrative. The youngest person interviewed was 73; the oldest was 87. Therefore, not only could details and descriptions have been remembered differently than they actually were, but throughout these narrative "songs," for each of these persons school was obviously "the good old days."

Remembering and Reminiscing

The early schooling experiences of each of these persons were pleasant, happy, and apparently without negative aspects. I asked each one if s/he could remember any unpleasant experiences and none could. As a researcher, I could certainly not assume that there were none, but, instead, needed to think about not only the role that memory played in reconstructing these early experiences, but how memory, time, and context may have influenced that reconstruction.

As previously cited, Chafe (1944:44) indicates that we should approach memory as a process rather than as a place. Teski and Climo (1995:2) add that memory is a continuous process used by both individuals and groups as they make meaning of both the distant and recent past. Kotre (1995:16) also supports the idea that memory does not simply reside in our heads. In addition to it being a process, he states that it is also actual external places, "autobiographical sites," which are significant in a person's life experiences. These places support the idea that a person's memory is dependent on life contexts.

In 1947, D. Ewen Cameron described three concepts of remembering. The first he called "Hedonic Concepts," the second, "Gestalt Concepts," and the third, "Psychobiological Concepts." (1947:13) If we approach remembering through the hedonic perspective, Cameron says that we will repress or forget those experiences which were unpleasant or which brought us pain. We never lose them, even with the passage of time, but continue to work to keep them repressed. (1947:13) Within the gestalt perspective, the experiences within our

memory undergo continuous change. Some of those experiences are sharpened and some are leveled, depending on their characteristics, and all are fitted into the larger fixed system. (1947:17) The psychobiological perspective places remembering on an entirely biological level, as part of the total functioning that all organisms can do, rather than just confining it to the symbolic level. (1947:22)

Ian Hunter (1964:17) outlines three universal phases in the making of memories. The first phase is our involvement with an experience. Life is a continuous series of experiences and we are constantly involved with what we do; therefore, we are continually provided with the opportunities to remember. The second phase is our retaining of the experience and the third phase is our remembering, or recalling, the experience. Because we are constantly involved in experiences, how do we determine what will be retained and, in particular, what we will remember? According to Hunter (1964:153), we abstract from all of our experiences those characteristics which are important to us at the time. The criteria which we use to determine what is important vary from person to person, as between siblings who shared the same event and remember it differently, and from experience to experience, as a person may retain the memory of an experience one time and not retain the identical experience at another time. What is important to us at the time is the determining factor in retention of memory.

According to Cameron (1947:55), other factors which contribute to our retention of experiences include our engagement in an activity, the amount of attention given to the experience, and the personality characteristics of the

individual involved. He states that we tend to remember best those activities in which we participated. The participation does not necessarily need to be physical, but we must be actively engaged in the experience. If the experience is one which connects to other recent experiences or is given a lot of attention by an individual, it will probably be retained more readily in the memory than random experiences to which minimal attention is given. An individual's personality characteristics also impact the retention and recollection of experiences. Persons who are more analytic and reflective may be more actively engaged with experiences and more likely to retain details of experiences than person who are more reactive.

Hunter uses the metaphor of a tape recorder to indicate what recall is not. (1964:157) He says that recall is not simply our ability to play back recorded life segments which we can fast-forward, rewind, or pause at any place along the continuum. In any situation in which we are recalling a previous experience, we recall only those characteristics which are specific to the situation which is evoking the recollection or remembrance. Because we retained only those experiences which were important at the time, we also retained only specific characteristics of experiences. Cameron (1947:78) says that recall is always partial and that we never remember the entirety of an event. Hunter (1964:158) adds that, because we may not have retained all of the details of an experience, it is unlikely that we will be able to remember the characteristics which we did not initially retain. Therefore, our reconstruction of an experience will be less faithful

to the original than our initial interpretation. In addition, he adds that long-term memory of a particular experience is often influenced by additional information assimilated between the initial occurrence and the memory trigger.

According to Teski and Climo, ownership of memory is an important issue. (1995:12) Memories may be owned by an individual, a small group such as a family or organization, or a large group such as a community or even a nation. Those who own a memory also own the right to review that memory, through recall, and reformulate or change it at any time or level.

When a memory is owned by more than one person, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka says that a "community of memory" has been created. (1994:49) A community of memory is created when meaning is given to an event by those who were part of the event or who are part of the community. Generations in the same family can be considered a community of memory because, in spite of the fact that multi generations did not participate in an event, there is a memory of the event which is owned by the community. Oral family histories belong to a community of memory and the community is part of their reconstruction.

John Meacham (1995:43) says that reconstructing memories is not an easy task because it requires negotiating on the part of those involved in the reconstruction. The process of reconstruction becomes more difficult as the community of memory becomes older because of the intervening factors in the members' lives. Persons are guided by their social identifications such as family, class, religion, race, gender, ethnicity, etc., and some of these may be altered as

the years pass. (1995:44) These changes influence those reconstructing the memories and are influences on the negotiations. As we negotiate our memories, Halbwachs (1992:48) says that we also attempt to validate them with the memories of others and make them more precise through this process of comparison.

There were several communities of memory present among the five people I interviewed. Four of the persons are siblings and that community was very evident. Although I collected the narratives separately, the siblings each made several references to "ask Bill if he remembers this," or "Phebe probably remembers this differently," or "Del was too young at this time." Throughout the process of reconstructing memory, each was redefining himself or herself, his or her place in the context of the memory, and his or her relationship with the others in this particular community of memory.

Cameron (1947:100) also states that memory serves us as a place of security. This is often represented through memories of childhood or memories that are most closely associated with feelings of joy and peace. In support of this, Hunter (1964:272) adds that pleasant times and events are more frequently recalled than unpleasant events. The narrators in this project evidenced this through their concluding remarks that school was a fun place, a happy place, a place of good times. As Irwin-Zarecka says, "the past is a cozy home to return to." (1994:88)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Larry's concluding statement summarized his feelings about his own early education and he offers his solution to what he views is the major problem with education today.

I think the worst thing in God's world we could have ever done was get rid of the little schoolhouses, I truly do. Like I said before, I think that instead of gathering all these pupils from miles around, strangers to everybody, putting them in a great big sterile building that don't teach you nothin'. There's no personal touch, there's no way of learning responsibility or authority, or being at ease with authority. No, there's no way. And then to go out into the hinterlands and bus poor kids into this big sterile building - they're outcasts and foreigners to begin with. The kids who are there don't want these new kids and they won't let 'em do anything. Kids are being driven out of school rather than in to school. I'm on my preachin' thing now, girl! I think they should take a 6-block area in town, 6 blocks, build a nice little 2 or 4 room school with a library. All the kids walk to this little school. Divide the kids up into the room and teach the basic. Take another 6 blocks, build a nice little building there. I don't care who lives there - black, chinese, whoever - that's their neighborhood, that's where they belong. They'll all go to that school. They'll know each other and they won't be outcasts. It'll be a pleasure for them to go to school. They'll have their library, learn the four basics, and come out of there with some common sense, be able to write, and be able to tell you who the President is. We've got to change our educational system and I think that's what needs to be done. Let's start now and change it. Let's make it a fun time again so the kids and teachers will be nice and like each other.

The little red schoolhouse has established a unique place in the history of the United States and in the history of American Education. The country school

is portrayed both in words and pictures as an extension of the family, a place where children were expected to study and learn, to mind, and to become good citizens. While usually small and often austere, the rural school buildings represented an investment of labor by a community to establish that other place which, along with the church, indicated both a respect for the past and a commitment to the present and future.

Whether the little red schoolhouse eventually becomes immortalized as the best educational experience children ever had or whether it is considered in context within the development of the United States and its educational system remains to be seen. Narratives such as the five presented in this paper reflect the rural schooling experience as very positive and motivating and all of these persons credits their early school experiences with providing the educational foundation upon which they built. Today, all five persons continue to value reading and enjoy discussing books and current information. Larry did not attend college but married and successfully raised 7 children, encouraging all of them to attend college and assisting as he could. Bill dropped out of high school, joined the service, and over the next 35 years earned his G.E.D., B.A. and M.A. degrees, taught school, and supported his two children through their higher education opportunities. Phebe worked to put herself through the University of Nebraska and taught school until she married and began raising her family, all five of her children subsequently earning college educations. Delbert also had a career in the military service and, upon retiring, earned his B.A. and M.A.

supported his children through post-secondary studies. Duane was not able to attend college but had a long, successful career as a farmer, also encouraging his children to seek as much post-secondary education as they wished.

Despite the recommendation Larry voiced at the beginning of this section, the rural school model may not be the panacea for educational reform that he envisions. Redistricting would have to be done throughout the country and smaller buildings built or renovations made to existing structures. These efforts may lead to the re-birth of the neighborhood school, itself an acceptable and often desirable concept, but accompanying that may be some less desirable societal consequences, including the re-segregation of society.

The District 17 school building was the community center - the nucleus of activities for the families that lived in that district. The school board was selected by the community and was responsible for ensuring that the school had the necessities to function smoothly. Although the school board members were duly elected and charged, the rest of the community was also invested in the school and there is evidence in the narratives that members of the community other than the those on the school board took an active role in making decisions about the school. If parents were pleased with the teacher, they would make sure that their children were positive models of deportment and fulfilled all the teacher's wishes; if they were displeased, they could make their lack of support evident through the behavior of their children.

Both the school in Nebraska and the school Del attended in Florida had very homogeneous populations. In Nebraska, the District 17 scholars were the children of farmers, not poor in terms of property but poor in terms of spendable income and "pocket money." In Florida a land boom had given many families the hope that they would become prosperous if they relocated to that area and many families, including the Searles family, made that move in 1926. The subsequent land bust shattered those hopes and equalized the financial status of families in the Lakeland area. Del described them as "...just plain poor, poor." The children in both the Nebraska and Florida schools were white and everyone interviewed was silent regarding any form of ethnic or cultural diversity.

Although none of the narratives mentioned visitors to the school, copies of the visitors' register for different years indicated that most families made an annual visit and some visited more frequently. This community interest and the school visits may have been the mechanism through which the community reassured itself that their children were learning those subjects which were of value of the community. If the community were small, as was Fairmont and Madison township, in which District 17 school was located, the tendency was to be insular and conservative. Communities were immersed in their own place and time; energy was not expended ensuring that the curriculum was expended to expose students to a diversity of cultures and perspectives.

In both Nebraska and Florida the rural school curriculum paralleled the curriculum in schools located in urban settings - there was not a separate course

of study for rural schools. Due to the single-teacher setting, however, with students in multiple grades in one room, less of the curriculum was usually covered during the year in a rural school than in an urban school, thus limiting the depth and breadth of what many students were exposed to. According to the narratives, the arts and physical education were frequently not taught as part of the curriculum but were usually simply activities, fillers, or recess. While the narrators mentioned the important place of reading during the day, none mentioned library books, science experiments, or field trips. In today's rural school the study of languages and the provision of support services such as counseling would be provided only if time or resources permitted. In addition, computers and technological support of instruction would probably not be a priority item for which today's local school board would advocate. (Beckner:1983,28)

Providing current textbooks and teaching materials was a tremendous financial drain on the rural school districts. While the school was responsible for providing textbooks for the students, for many financially burdened districts, the solution was simply to continue to use the textbooks that were available. Archival records do show that new texts were purchased at District 17, although certainly not on annual basis. Sometimes students would supplement the school texts with books which belonged to their family, but these could not be used by the teacher to plan sequential lessons for the student body.

Beyond furnishing textbooks, supplemental materials for the students were not provided by the school. Students were responsible for bringing with them the materials such as paper and pencils that they would need to do their lessons. Teaching materials were also at a premium, with the school probably not providing anything beyond a map or globe and chalk. If a teacher desired supplementary teaching materials, she could petition the school board for the funds or purchase the materials herself. A similar process continues to be used today.

Many of the instructional strategies that educators currently espouse as best practice were standard practice in rural schools. Practices such as peer tutoring, multi-aged classrooms, and mastery learning undergirded the smooth functioning of the classroom. Younger students learned from older students, older students reinforced their own understanding as they helped younger students, and everyone had to demonstrate to the teacher mastery of a concept or skill before proceeding to the next level. Although these are positive strategies and appear to have worked well with the five people I interviewed, few teachers in rural schools had the time, energy, or knowledge to move beyond the known methodology and attempt alternate or otherwise innovate strategies such as truly individualized instruction based on pre-assessments of student abilities. Although it may seem as though teachers in rural schools offered individualized instruction, their instruction was individualized more by grade level than by pupil interest and ability.

Scheduling was certainly more flexible in a rural school because the teacher was accountable only to herself and her students - she did not have to obtain permission from an administrator in order to seize upon a teachable moment. She was, therefore, able to change the usual daily routine of the students and have a play day or a day of "bees" when it fit into her plan.

Securing a teacher was the local school board's primary responsibility and finding professionally prepared teachers and keeping them at a school more than a year or two appeared to be a continuing problem. All of the persons interviewed remembered a succession of teachers. General characteristics or impressions of those teachers remained with their former students, but only two people were able to remember a specific teacher's name, and they remembered the same person. A school board's primary responsibility was securing a teacher. The roster of the teachers at District 17 indicates that this was frequently an annual task because young, single girls would usually teach only until they were married.

Most school districts were not affluent and, therefore, were unable to offer the financial incentives necessary to make teachers want to stay. District 17 school was a small school supported by six or seven families, with an average school population between 15 and 20 children, grades 1 through 8. The families could offer room and board and the local school board small salary; therefore, teaching in the smaller districts was perceived by the narrators as simply an

opportunity for a young woman to enter the profession, gain some experience, and, as soon as possible, get married or move to a different school.

Narratives of teachers often mention the importance of a professional community. Rural teachers were unable to recognize this benefit as they were professionally isolated. There was no one with whom to team teach, with whom to talk teaching, and no one to provide professional support or mentoring. As the rural teacher was also the administrator, all decisions were made by her and there was no other professional with whom to discuss options or alternatives to current issues. An annual visit from the county superintendent was frequently the extent of the administrative support and staff development a teacher would receive.

Current Context of Rural Schooling

Mike Rose spent a day in a one-room school in Polaris, Montana, and included his observations in his new book, Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America. The schoolteacher was a thirty-four-year-old single man who had lived most of his life in Montana and Oregon, had earned a bachelor of science degree in geography and biology, and had worked for six years prior to trying to find a vehicle through which his life could make a difference in other people's lives. He chose teaching and returned to college to acquire the skills and complete the requirements necessary to become licensed to teach. Intrigued by many of the characteristics inherent in a rural school, and seeking a setting in

which he could continue to enjoy outdoor activities, Andy Bayless came to Polaris, Montana.

Rose observed and described a typical day for the fifteen students in the school, ranging from second through eighth grades. Many of these descriptions could have fit District 17 school in 1920 or the school at Fort Des Moines, Iowa where Arizona Perkins taught in 1850 (Kaufman, 1984:102). The Polaris schoolroom is small, about 28 by 35 feet, and crowded with tables, chairs, bookshelves, a large heater with a stovepipe, a couch, a piano, supply shelves, a large piece of corkboard on a movable stand, and a teacher's desk. There were also pillows and small stands which created different work/study areas.

According to Andy Bayless (Rose,1995:43), the key to successful experiences for the students is still the teacher's ability to plan and organize instruction for the wide variety of student ages, abilities, and interests. He appeared to approach the task with the same diligence and concern as earlier teachers, but was less inclined to compartmentalize curriculum by grade level and did not feel pressed to cover each subject for each student each day. Instead, he placed primary emphasis on reading and mathematics and integrated many of the other curricular areas through individual and group projects.

Teachers in early rural schools, particularly young single women, usually boarded with families in the community or lived in a teacherage, a boarding house for teachers. The Polaris community had attached a small teacherage to the school, thus placing both Andy's professional and personal lives within the same

structure. Andy acknowledged that the strict moral standards set for teachers in early rural communities remain in effect today. While they may not be written into his contract, as they frequently used to be, he is very aware that inviting a date to his home would be considered most inappropriate by the community.

In addition to social loneliness, Andy also struggles with the same sense of professional loneliness that early rural teachers felt. Belonging to a professional community provides both intellectual stimulation and support, particularly for new teachers. In one-room settings teachers have to seek professional community through professional associations or meetings. Andy does have an assistant with whom he plans and works and his district is investigating a technological connection among all schools within its bounds.

Monetary support for teaching has never been based on the teacher's responsibilities. Wages paid to teachers continue to be low, particularly in rural districts. Andy's annual salary is \$15,500, excluding his living arrangements. (Rose, 1995: 47) Despite the low salaries, teachers in both rural and urban settings, have historically been willing to spend some of their earnings on purchasing supplies or "extras" for their classrooms. While the Polaris district provides supplies and equipment, Andy supplements his provisions according to his curriculum needs.

The rural teacher was usually were the only adult in the school and was responsible for knowing and meeting the intellectual needs of all the students. Teachers were ill-prepared to identify and serve children with special needs, if

these children were sent to school. At the Polaris school Andy does have full-time assistant and special services, such as speech therapy, are provided by itinerant teachers.

Rural schools were and are neighborhood schools, with the adjoining farm families providing the student population. Polaris school has 15 students from 7 families, with all but one of the students having at least one sibling at the school. These sibling and inter-family relationships frequently provide an interesting and challenging classroom dynamic which the teacher must work with and through.

Community support for the school has traditionally evidenced itself through maintenance of the building, grounds, and equipment and supplying fuel. At Polaris, those tasks continue to be done by the school board or by school families. In addition, on the day which Dr. Rose observed, parents were working with the children as they prepared for a rural school track and field match.

For Andy, the key to being a successful teacher in a rural school is planning. He focuses on the abilities and interests of the students and minimizes the need to cover every curriculum area for every grade level every day. Individualized attention has been identified as a strength of the rural school experience. Depending on the number of students in a school, this may or may not have occurred in many rural schools. At Polaris school, the two adults ensure that each of the fifteen children receives individual attention daily. Students also attend to one another by acting as peer tutors or by working collaboratively on

projects of interest. Dr. Rose observed that peer tutoring in a multi-age group setting appears to occur naturally within a rural school.

General Conclusions

The current wave of educational reform has been occurring in some manner within our nation's schools for over two decades. Zemelman, et.al., (1993:4,5) captures the essence of the reform reports by outlining what instructional practices should increase in the school and what should decrease. He includes the following among those which should decrease:

1. whole-class, teacher-directed instruction
2. student passivity: sitting, listening, receiving, and absorbing information
3. prizing and rewarding of silence in the classroom
4. classroom time devoted to fill-in-the-blank worksheets, dittos, workbooks, and other seatwork
5. student time spent reading textbooks and basal readers
6. attempt by teachers to thinly "cover" large amounts of material in every subject area
7. rote memorization of facts and details
8. stress on the competition and grades in school

These were among the standard institutional practices in the rural schools. This does not tell us, however, that rural schools, the revered little red schoolhouses, provided inferior education to the thousands of students who matriculated through them. Nor does it tell us that they provided the best possible educational experiences for their students. Rather, I believe it validates the rural school within its historical and ideological context and reinforces to us

that we must always be cognizant of the significance of time and place whenever we attempt to make meaning of people's lives.

Rural schools have a unique place in the fact and folklore of America. This project has not attempted to present the "truth" about rural schooling, because, as truth is socially constructed, so the true song, to continue using Grumet's metaphor, of what it was like to attend a one-room schoolhouse will be sung by each narrator. As the country's educational system continues its evolution, I feel it is critical that we continue to listen to the voices of those who were part of that context, valuing them for who they were and are and for what we may learn from them today.

Future Research Directions

This research project has examined rural schooling within the context of Nebraska in the second and third decades of this century. Working on it was very exciting for me and it became both an initiating and culminating experience. It initiated me into the world of qualitative research. As I have stated, my previous research study had left me unsure of myself as a researcher and with the feeling that, in simply studying quantitative data, something was being left unattended. As I became more familiar with the qualitative paradigm, and narrative study in particular, I found a context in which I not only could work, but wanted to work. Now I not only see myself as a researcher, I place great value on the understandings that come from narrative research.

Two very specific future research projects have taken form from this project. The first is to continue to study District #17 school and collect the narratives of other persons who were schooled there. The school continued to educate students until 1943 and many of those students are still in the Fairmont/Fillmore County area. Their stories would add to the richness of the stories already collected for this project and also provide a longitudinal view of rural schooling within this community during changing economic and historical contexts. My plan is to hold a "reunion" of these students and, through their narratives, tell the story of one rural school within its specific context.

The second project is closer to home and focuses on researching rural schooling in North Carolina. Country schools operated within our bounds until the 1960s and were primarily located in the mountains. I am very interested in further researching the history of rural schools, collecting narratives of persons who attended them, and possibly extending my research question to a study of the narratives of people rural schooled in the south and rural schooled in the west.

Rural schools are part of the history of the United States, in both fact and fiction. This narrative study has provided information relative to rural schooling within a particular context. Continued study of country or rural schools within their specific historical, geographical, economic, and social contexts will add depth and breadth to our knowledge about education within those contexts and, possibly, impact contemporary educational discourse.

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