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Interview with Lydia Groves

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CHAPTER II

ORAL INTERVIEW

Bill: This is June 30, 1986. We are visiting in the home of Lydia Dillon Groves who was a one-room school teacher in several different schools in Jewell County, Kansas, starting in the 1920's. Mrs. Groves, would you like to give us some of your background, please, your age, place of birth, schools attended, that sort of thing.

Lydia: My name is Lydia B. Dillon Groves. I am 77 years old. I'll be 78 on December 2. I was born December 2, 1908.

I attended grade school in several rural schools, and the Mankato Grade School. I attended high school at Mankato High School. And, as to college, I attended several because most of my work is from correspondence, extension work, and summer school. I have gone to Fort Hays, Manhattan, Emporia, Sterling College, Fresno, California, and Visalia, California.

Bill: So your background is varied.

Lydia: Varied, quite varied. But I eventually got my B. A. degree at Sterling College.

I have taught, a, forty-eight years in grade school, and I really have spent over 50 years teaching because when I wasn't in the grade school, I taught in government nursery schools during World War II.

I have taught at three rural schools. A, the first one was at Monitor, that is two miles west and two miles south of Mankato. I graduated from Mankato High School in the spring of 1927. I had always planned on taking a nurse's course after high school as I had worked for Dr. Dorothy D. Allen all during my high school and on Saturdays during the summer. But, this was in the 30's and times were very hard, and, a, she and I de-

cided I'd better teach a few years before I started nurse's training. So, I, the second, the last semester of my senior year, I changed to a normal training course, and but had to take a, a county exam to get a certificate. In the spring, Dr. Allen helped me apply for schools because she was known all over the county, and she picked out two schools for me to take. One was northeast of Mankato, but she wouldn't let me take that one because one of the older sons had had TB, and that was the only place I could room and board. So, we decided on a school two miles east and two-and-one-half miles south of Mankato. That was Monitor, and, a, of course, she went with me, took me out and introduced me, and I got that school. And, a, one of the school board members lived just about a block from the school house, and she talked her into letting me board there. It was just a four room house, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a front room, outside bathroom, and, a, I could help with the supper dishes, take care of my room, and I got it for five dollars a week. I, I worked, worked this part time out, and a, I paid Pearl five, this five dollars a month.

I had to, the school, Monitor was a school, a wooden school house with a platform in front and four windows on each side. It was always very clean because a, the district came and cleaned it before school started.

But a, you had, and Pearl furnished my lunch at noon. She fixed it in a great basket, covered it with a napkin, and I learned to like peanut butter sandwiches with dates on top. And, I still love them too. At least dates kept it from sticking to the roof of your mouth (laughter). We had meat, a, in the winter time whenever, they, a, butchered a hog or beef. And it was a change.

The school house was a regular country school house with a potbellied stove in the middle, and, a, in the winter time when it was cold, you drew your desks up around the stove to keep warm. And, I can remember days looking into the southeast corner of the schoolhouse, and there was a crack from the top to the bottom. Nothing was ever done about it, never even thought about it probably. We burned wood which, a, started wood; they kept me in cobs and, a coal and that was my duty to take care of the fires, bring in the wood. You did all of your own

sweeping, and like that. Of course everyone did that. You didn't think anything about it. You were your own janitor. You'd be just as clean as you wanted to be, but I always swept every night, so that the dust would be settled next morning.

Bill: These were your experiences, some of your experiences at Monitor School, then what was the next school you taught at?

Lydia: White. I can remember my first day of school. I'll always remember because I remember I was scared to death, and homesick, and I couldn't ring the bell that morning. I couldn't make a bell; one of the mothers had to show me how to ring that big old bell up in the bell tower. It, it's hard to do; there really is a knack to ringing those old bells, but I finally learned, and, a, I got through the first week, but it was pretty hard.

I can remember that I have always thought that, if a, someone had come along and asked me to go to town that first week, I might have gotten in the car and gone along, but I stayed out there. Nobody asked me, so I had to stay all week. I had ten pupils that first year. That was in six grades. I had, a, eighth grader, two, two sixth graders, one fourth grader, two third graders, three second graders, and a, one first grader. The, a, as I had attended rural schools myself, and I had an inkling of how to make out a schedule for my classes, and the first day we went through all the classes. We checked whether the children had their book, ahem; the parents had to buy their own books, but those were the teacher, the school board bought. Each pupil brought their own books, and the school district furnished the teacher's. All texts were issued from the state department.

And, a, I thought the first day never would end. At noon and at recess we played Black Man, and I found out the first day I had to cut a lot of classes short to get all the subjects in. The second day did go a little bit better, and a, we did go, a. I tried to find out just where each pupil was in their textbooks. And it was in the second day I found I had to enunciate and speak more clearly. I had asked my three second graders how far they had learned their Roman numerals, and they just looked at me. Finally, the little girl held up her hand and said, "I don't know any Roman

noodles, but I know my Roman numbers to twelve." And then I had to explain that, a, Roman numerals was the same as Roman numbers, and that's what I was talking about.

By the end of the week, I was commencing to settle down, and a, get along real well. They were really, the pupils in those days were very good in a, discipline, and whatever you said, they would follow that. They were, they were very courteous, polite, neat, and, a, the boys always wore overalls; the girls little print dresses, and all were very likeable.

Each day we did about the same thing. I always played on the playground with them because it helped pass the time too.

And a, this school, this was the first school I had ever taught at that was just a seven month school. After that the state had changed it to eight month school. But Monitor was a seven month school.

At the u., we usually did the same thing every week. We, a, in October we had a, a box supper, and of course, we had to furnish a program. We made enough money to buy a record player. We did have a piano, but I didn't play. And we did enjoy our record player the rest of that winter.

There was only one day that I had to a, call off school, and that's when we had a terrible storm, but then we had to make it up, and I made it up one muddy, Saturday when I, when I couldn't make it to town. (laughter)

We had, always had a, a Christmas program. You had a last day program, and usually a big dinner at the end of the day. And a, there was a county spelling contest that you got your pupils ready for. We usually went in with some other district, usually three or four districts went together for this spelling contest. Then the winners would come in to Mankato to a, to the regular. And they're still having it, that yet today. But it was quite an event in those, in those days.

I taught just one year at Monitor, and a, I decided I would try to go get a school closer to town. There was a little red brick school house just two

miles west of Mankato on highway 36, and a, I applied out there. And one day my brother-in-law called and said that White wanted to see me, so he came by after me after school. I had never said anything to the Monitor school about the next year's school. So, when I got home from this school board meeting, Mrs. Braddock, who was on the school board wanted to know what they wanted, where I'd gone. And, of course, I told her it was the White school and told her I had taken the job there. Well, the next day there was a big meeting over at Pearl's, and all the school board met, and after school they came over and wanted me to come back out to Monitor. And a, White had offered me \$75 a month which was one of the best paid jobs in the county at that time. And, Monitor said they'd give me 75 if I'd stay. But White school was closer to Mankato, and I could go back and forth, so I accepted the White job, and a, because it was closer. It was a much nicer building; it was a little red brick school house. It was a, had two store rooms. It was really nice. So, I went out there, and I taught at White school four years.

The school board members were Ira White, a, Elliott Green, and I believe it was a George, a, Vrett was the other. I don't know if his name was George or not, but I'm sure that it was.

I had a, fourteen pupils out there the first year. Now these pupils, in these two schools we did not have much of a change of pupils because most of the farms were owned by their parents; therefore, they did not move around. Out at White I had those fourteen pupils. I had a, three eighth graders; I had one seventh grader, three sixth graders, one a, fourth grader, two second graders, and I had three--the rest were all first graders.

I can remember at the time how, wondering how my first graders learned, especially that first year. But I did a better job the second year, mainly because my nephew was going to the first grade teacher in Mankato, Mrs. Whitley, who was a very good teacher. And each evening I would question this little nephew what he had done in school and look at his pictures, so I kept, found out a pretty good idea of what to teach to the first graders, and I followed her ideas with my first graders all the time I was out at White because I had first graders out there.

All of these lived in the district if except, a, a, Carrol Logue. He came from another district that had closed and brought in two little boys. He was an eighth grader, and, a, the other two little boys were in the first grader. Well, that was why I had more students out there the first year.

I was, the first day I wasn't a, lonesome out at White. I had gotten used to where I really loved to go to school after that.

The, a, this was my first eight months school, and, a, most of it, most of the schools then had cisterns. I can remember once, a, out at White the second year, I had to carry water about a half mile, a, from Elliott Green's, but after that they had the city bring out water to put in the cistern, so you didn't have to a, carry it quite so far.

We had a nice library out at White, and of course, I could get into the county superintendent; you could go, always go in there and borrow books, and I would always take out about, oh, ten or twelve books every week from the county library that I would use.

The school house was used out there for community activities, for elections, and for their board meetings.

The eighth graders, the teacher herself passed each one of her own pupils on her recommendation except when you got to the seventh grade, you had to take a county exam in Kansas history, physiology, and geography. Now those grades would carry on to the eighth grade; whereas then you would take a test in all subjects, and of course, you had to make an average of 75 or you wouldn't go on to high school, but none of them that I know except this Lilly Severson ever finished high school. The other, the boys stopped the first year.

I taught in White school for four years. I had, a, first graders every year. Very interesting group. The, I, I liked it out at White; it was a nice group. The first year I rode with a, one of my classmates, Helene Jacobs who taught in a school just two miles south of me. The second year I rode with Ethel Reystead. She taught west and south

south of town about six miles, and the last two years I walked. There were many mornings that I did not have to walk, because everybody, you might say everybody in the county knew who taught out there; and Bob Turner run the Mankato Hotel. And if somebody was going west of Mankato, from the Mankato Hotel, traveling man, he'd say "Now if you find a lady out there going west, you pick her up and take her. She teaches out to the red brick school house." And there was a man from Concordia, he was a food salesman, and once a month he always picked me up and took me out because Bob told him he had to. Other people, the only time I really had to walk all the time when it was a downpour or it was real, real cold; then I walked all two miles.

We had the, a, usual curriculum that we had out at Monitor, and a, I had a, for help, you, I took the teacher's, there was a magazine called The Normal Instructor and Grade Teacher. Well, you got most of your ideas from that because you weren't furnished very many things to work with in a school although I did have this library. I had a, a, oil stove out there and a, we had a, we took one small child and one of the upper grade ones, and they had to wash the dishes. And I can remember when, a, one of the little Ebersson boys started to school. I'd had the one, his brother in the first grade, but the next year he started, Murrell. He wasn't about to wash dishes, and he didn't that first time. He just sat down and wouldn't wash dishes. But I remember the second time when his turn came along, he got up and took the tea towel and wiped the dishes. I imagine mother and brother had worked on him in the meantime.

But they were a very easy group to work with. Discipline, you didn't have very much discipline because children minded so much better than they do nowadays. You asked them to do something, they did it, and they did it willingly. The only a, one time I did have a discipline problem, they were not supposed, one day I let them out about three o'clock because we'd finished tests, and they were to go straight home. Well, Carroll Logue had brought his car that day. So, he asked two or three of them to go to town. They went to town, and I had seen them go past the school house. Well, the next morning I didn't say a word. I just waited until four o'clock, and at four o'clock I said, "Now all of those who went to town yester-

day, you're to stay until five today, the rest of this week." So, they had to stay until five. They never went to town after that, and I'm sure their mothers and fathers didn't want them to town, so the discipline was well accepted.

We had a barn at both of those, well, in fact, every school, rural school, they always had a barn. Sometime you had boys and girls who rode horses, not very many, but usually there were one or two. But at White, none of them rode a horse; they either walked or came with Carroll Logue.

We had our usual programs out there, a box supper, a Christmas program, last day program; that was, that was always expected of you in a rural school to put on a program, several times during the year.

I taught out at White four years, and from there I went to, a, Mankato Grade School where I taught the fourth grade and taught there, a, twelve years, eight of them as principal of the grade school. And I quit at Mankato, a, World War II, because I followed my husband three-and-a-half years during the World War.

Bill: Mrs. Groves, I understand while at White school you also had some unexpected visitors one time.

Lydia: Yes, it was the normal training class from Ionia, and they were visiting several schools around, and it wasn't quite noon yet, so they thought they would stop out here at White school until it was time to go to lunch at Mankato. And, I was having a first grade math class, arithmetic in those days it was called, and of course, they were frightened because we had visitors which was unusual in a rural school. I couldn't get them to talk, and, a, this was a little math book that I had brought in extra, and I was trying to get them to talk, and I asked them what the pictures were in this book; and, a, they looked around and were real quiet for awhile, and, a, one little boy yelled, "Those are sows!" And, of course, that was quite, we had a lot of laughter. The big youngsters laughed, and the people from Ionia thought it was quite funny. And, it embarrassed the first graders, but we did a little talking after that.

Then another time, I didn't tell you about the Halloween. Back in those days, they really pulled Halloween pranks. And, the first year out at White when I went to school the next morning, there was a great big lumber wagon up on, in front of the door, up on the stairs. And, of course, the school board had to come and take it down. Ane one year they said, I can remember they said they found a, a wagon up on top of the school house. So, each year after that, the school board, two of them would take turns, and they'd stay all night at the school house just to keep them from tearing things up. And, of course, your toilets were always turned over. You always had an outdoor toilet, toilet in those days, and you can expect them to be turned over on Halloween night.

It was while I was out at White that I started taking extension courses and, a, went to summer school. I started working on my, a, state certificate. I had, in the meantime, I had to, had taken the second Jewell County certificate, and, a, those were hard to take because you had so many subjects to take. The first time I took it before I started teaching, you had to make an average of 80 in all those subjects; I don't know, I think there were 17, or something like that, four. Then if you got an average of 90, you could get a first grade certificate. Well, I had two second grade certificates, and kept working until I got a first grade certificate, but during this time, I was working at, a, for a state certificate. I was taking extension courses and going to summer school practically all of that time.

I taught also in a third rural school which was after World War II. My, I had taught, taught twelve years in Mankato Grade School. I quit to follow him. When we came back, we had bought two farms. And, when we moved out on the second farm which was in 1952, a, the school board there found it hard to get a teacher, and they asked if I would come and teach. Well, my certificate had expired, and I had to take eight hours of work before I could get my, a, state certificate renewed. Well, I started work. It was quite a chore because we were also remodeling the house. And, I would have to go up to the school house every day, every afternoon while the men worked on the house and work on my lessons because I

couldn't do it at the house with all the pounding and going on. But, I got my renewal that year. I taught out at East Union.

There, a, I had less pupils than I had ever had. A, I taught out there two years. It was a wooden building, a, but it was nice. The upstairs was heated with, a, an oil furnace. We had a complete basement, and it was heated with a potbellied stove downstairs which made it nice for me to burn waste paper during the day. And, a, they, out at East Union they had, a, community group that had a meeting once a month, and not only the community came, but for miles and miles around, people would come for this because there was a program. We didn't have to furnish the program. They had committees that got their own programs, but it was quite a gathering place out there.

There, I found it was much easier to teach because I had taught in grade school and gone to college and gotten my certificates and things, so I'm sure I did a much better job out at East Union than the first five schools I was in (laughter), because of your experience. I had more materials to work with. I had maps; I had a sand box and better playground equipment, although the main thing we did at recess and noon was play tag or something like that. We had a merry-go-round out there, swings; of course, we had those at the other schools too.

It was the first year, I had, a, a, I meant the second year, that was when we adopted our daughter, and she was eleven-years-old, and I can remember I had two fifth graders and they were eleven years old too; now she was really a fourth grader, but I worked with her during the summer, and, a, I enrolled her in the fifth grade with those others because of the same age; and she got along pretty good, although I did have her take reading, not only with the fifth grade, but with the fourth grade too because she had missed quite a lot of school really.

We had, a, two girls there who rode a pony to school. They lived a mile-and-a-half. We had a nice barn where they could, a, house their horse. And, a, there we not only had this community meeting, we also had the school's Christmas program, your Halloween. Halloween was a, a, place where, a

time when you (change tape) and the children always liked it because I would let them wear their outfits all day, so they had to wear something simple. But they enjoyed it where they could wear costumes all day, and then we always ended up having a little time, a program in the afternoon, a game.

We did, a, I did lots of a, about once a month, we usually, I let them have a ciphering contest, a spelling contest, and then I used lots of geography contests. Whatever continent or what we were studying about, we'd take that map and find places on it, and write. Someone would write a name on the board, and the rest of them would have to hunt it, and really it got the children learning to hunt places on the map. And I have always liked the map to teach geography, and it is a hard subject to teach because children don't like it, but when they get to know places, I think it makes it easier for them.

I taught out at, a, East Union two years. Then we closed the school because several of them left, and I went to the a, Montrose Grade School from there. And, a, I rode the bus, the bus went by our place, and I rode the bus with our daughter and two others of us, so most of us got to ride before we moved to Mankato.

Bill: Mrs. Groves, we've seen your background, particularly at the three schools. We're going to cover a few more questions over various areas, and some of these we've already answered a little bit, but I think it will still be interesting to touch upon some of them again.

In the curriculum, particularly in the one-room schools, what subjects were generally studied?

Lydia: Well, about all subjects. You usually started a day, I did anyway, with reading because I usually thought it was important. Then you tried to get in one extra class with the seventh and eighth grades before the first recess. Then after the first recess, I always had my math classes or my arithmetic classes as they were called then. Then you always tried to get in a few spelling classes before noon, because if you didn't get some extra classes in, you didn't get them in all during the day.

After noon, a, after lunch, we usually had our English and language classes, and a, maybe finished up the spelling classes or Kansas history, and the last period of the day I usually had my geography classes and then tried to finish up all the other subjects before four o'clock because our time was from nine to four. And you had a busy day getting all of those subjects in during that time.

Bill: What teaching methods were used?

Lydia: Well, a, usually you didn't do any particular teaching method because you had such a short, short time. Sometimes you only had two minutes or three minutes for a class, and, a, especially when you had more students, you usually assigned them a lesson and that would keep them busy while the rest of them, while you were having the rest of your classes because you had to find something for them to do. They had to do most of their own studying, and then you just asked them questions or, a, had your tests or something in that time. And they weren't very long classes. You couldn't get them all in. I don't know what teachers did when they had all eight grades. I never did have all eight grades. The most I had was six grades in Union, in Monitor, and in White. Out at East Union, I just had five classes.

Bill: Did you have any special classes in the one-room school such as special ed, or LD, or any title reading programs?

Lydia: No. That wasn't even, in the first two schools I taught there wasn't such a thing then. They didn't have those programs, and I don't believe they had very many of them when I taught out at East Union either, but we didn't have any of them.

Bill: What were some rules of the school that may be different from today's rules?

Lydia: Well, you never had very many rules. Children always obeyed, and, a, I don't know as there were any set rules. The school district never, the school board never told me, that I had to do this or I had to do that. You just used your own judgement.

Bill: Did your, a, schools, did the eighth grade children, did they have a special graduation exercise?

- Lydia: Not in your school, you didn't, but they had to take these examinations, and usually, there was a, a Jewell County graduation exercise. That was for all of the eighth graders in the county, and they would get together and at that time there was a program. You, they were introduced and given their, a, certificate out of the eighth grade.
- Bill: Where did that take place?
- Lydia: Ordinarily, at first, in those first two years, we had an old opera house in Mankato, and that was always held there because usually all the parents and neighbors and relatives came to that. It was usually full at this eight grade graduation exercise.
- Bill: We've talked about the school day at the school. Can you describe a typical day for you before and after school?
- Lydia: Well, before and after school the, a, just usually, you'd get up. Before school, you'd go to the school house; course I had always had it cleaned, but, a, then after school, you could go home and usually there was some little work that you had to do. But there weren't very many activities that you could go to, so it was very, and, a, my school boards at both schools never did tell me that I had to do this or that I had to do that.
- Bill: So your activities were primarily just in regard to preparing for school.
- Lydia: Yes, right, that's right.
- Bill: How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community?
- Lydia: Well, my school boards never said there were any strict rules about things, but I think it was just accepted that you had to behave yourself, but they didn't say whether you could date or whether you could do this or that. They were very lenient with what you could do. Nothing was ever mentioned.
- Bill: Was there ever a problem with teacher turnover?
- Lydia: No, I don't know of anyone. I suppose that school boards could fire you if they thought you had done

something you shouldn't do, but I had never heard of anything.

Bill: Did you ever work in a one-room school with more than one teacher?

Lydia: No.

Bill: Did you have a principal for the schools?

Lydia: No, you were your own principal, and teacher, and janitor, all put together.

Bill: Was there a set evaluation system used for the teachers?

Lydia: Well, you had to keep up with your certificate, that was the main thing. And, as I said before, I worked on the county, a, certificates because I didn't take all of the normal training courses; and during the time I had those I started working on my state certificates.

Bill: You've mentioned that you went to school at other colleges and the like after you were teaching and in the course of your teaching. When did you receive your degree?

Lydia: I worked with extension, went to summer school; I didn't get my masters, a, my B. A. degree until 1960. It took me thirty-three years to get my degree, and all of it was done night work, extension, summer school work. I didn't attend a college during the winter at all, so it was a long, hard course, but I finally got it.

Bill: In 1960.

Lydia: In 1960, thirty-three years, it took me to get it.

Bill: Thirty-three years, and you were always teaching, I think.

Lydia: Teaching all that time. Then, later when my husband started teaching, we moved to California, and we started, well we worked, started working on our masters at Emporia, and a, we both got a masters degree out at Fresno, California.

Bill: Along the lines of building and supplies, and we've talked about your three one-room schools.

I understand White school, there was a significance to the name.

Lydia: Yes, White school was named after Hayes B. White. He was one of our state representatives to Washington, D. C., for a number of years because all of that land around there was owned by Hayes B., and his sons farmed it when I was out there. Like one of my school board members at White was Ira White, and he was a son of Hayes B. White.

Bill: Okay. I also understand there was some irony involved in two of the school houses in which you taught, about 1955.

Lydia: This red brick school house that I lived, that I taught in out west of town, which was a brick school house, and East Union which I taught in in the 50's after World War II, in 1955, we had a tornado come from the a, a southwest, came up through Mankato. It blew White school to pieces, destroyed it and went on northeast to East Union, and it was, a, simply demolished. They just found, just boards all over. And, the funny part about East Union. We had this basement that we could play in during the winter time, and we always spent a lot of time down there because I always fixed a fire down there in the potbellied stove, and it was always warm. We had a rail; you had to go out in the hallway, and go down the steps into the basement. There was a railing you had to hold on to, but it was loose, and I would never let the children, a, play on it or even lean against it because I told them it was loose and if they would fall down on the cement, they could hurt themselves. The funny part about the tornado when we went up to look at it, the only thing left standing at East Union was that railing that I had told the children never to play on or lean against.

Bill: In the course of the several years spent in the one-room school, what was the, a, usual age for the child to begin school?

Lydia: Well, I don't know as there was any particular, because I had some youngsters, they started at five and six; if they would get six before the year was over, they were allowed to come. Now they can't do it because they have to be in the first of the year, you know. So, I had five-year-olds and six-year-olds in my first grades.

Bill: What was probably the oldest age that you had for a student?

Lydia: A, the eighth graders, the eighth graders were probably, I think fourteen, was all.

Bill: So most of them were about the same, typical as today.

Lydia: Yes, yes that's right.

Bill: What was the greatest distance traveled by any of the students, as a rule?

Lydia: Well, as a rule, none of them really traveled more than, those two little girls out at East Union, they had a, about a mile-and-a-half. That was about the most except those three at White that, a, came from this other district. But of course, then, they had a buggy that they came in part of the time, or later in the year, he would, a, he had a car.

Bill: What type of occupations did the students usually take-up after they graduated?

Lydia: Well, I never did have very many who went on to high school, so most of them the girls were farm wives, and the boys were farmers. Lilly Severson graduated from high school, but she was a farm wife.

Bill: Were most of your students from any particular cultural or heritage background?

Lydia: No, they weren't from any particular cultural.

Bill: What about social class?

Lydia: Most of them were just, a, average Americans. I didn't have any what you would call poor. Back in the, in the 30's, it seemed like everybody was poor. They were just average students.

Bill: How many years was the student required to go to school?

Lydia: The law then, aw, I think it's the same today, you had to go through the eighth grade or, sixteen years of age.

Bill: We have a question, "Did you have any outstanding students from any of these schools?" Did anyone

although I'm sure they were all good people, did anyone go on to become famous or gain particular renown?

Lydia: No, I never had any.

Bill: What about the cost of education for the student and that student's family? Can you determine about how much it cost for a kid to go to school each year?

Lydia: Well, I really wouldn't have any idea. They had to, they lived on the farm, and you know they had their own food there. Most of the parents raised their own food. A, they did have to buy their own books which was sometimes rather hard in the 30's, but I never had any student that didn't come in that didn't have their books and their paper and pencil and crayolas. You could always expect that he got that the first day of school.

Bill: Who hired and fired the teachers?

Lydia: The school board.

Bill: Did anyone else have any input like county superintendent or anyone like that?

Lydia: Well, I suppose if there was a bigger problem you could take it up with the county superintendent which was in charge of all the schools in Jewell County. Every county had a county superintendent, and, a, most of my time was spent under, a, E. C., E. C. Whitley, no, Ray D. Hodgell, it started. Ray, a, Hodgell was a, he was strict. I had had Ray in school, and he was a very strict teacher, very strict. And, in fact, I didn't like him very well until I commenced to teach. The first one I taught out at, a, Monitor, he visited the schools which was required of county superintendents the first week of school which was a poor time to come, but he gave me a lot of hints and helped me a lot, and ever after that I always worked, a, during the summer and on vacation, and on his vacations, I was in charge of the county superintendents's office. So, I learned a lot about it, and he helped me a lot in teaching school. So I really learned to like Ray D. Hodgell; he was a good friend of mine.

Bill: Were there any activities taking place between schools? Did they compete?

Lydia: Well, there were a few. We had, a, every once in awhile we'd have, a, get, a couple of schools might get together for a spelling contest, or, a, ciphering match which was a very common in those days. Of course when we had a county spelling contest, three or four schools would go together to determine the winners. But other than that, one time out at White, I did have, a, two or three districts out there that had a girls' baseball team. And, I coached them. But, a, and they were quite good because the girls were pretty good-sized then. I had eighth grade girls from all the schools around. But other than that, that was just about all of the times they got to get, it was hard to get around in those days.

Bill: I think you mentioned that your first salary was \$75 a month, and it was an excellent salary for the times. How was your salary determined?

Lydia: A, really I started out at \$65 out at Monitor, and, a, they had told, Dr. Allen decided that wasn't enough, so they decided they'd give me 65 for the first half of the year, and if they liked me, I could have 70 the last half, which I got. But out at, a, White, I was given \$75 a month which was probably the highest, one of the highest wages in the county. And it was determined by the school board.

Bill: Did the teacher have any voice in the salary decision?

Lydia: You might suggest you'd like to have something, but they didn't always give it to you.

Bill: How'd you get your paychecks?

Lydia: At, a, Monitor, Pearl Braddock was on the, a, school board, and I stayed at her house, and she always saw that she had the check ready for me at the end of the month. But out at White, I usually had to walk for it. Elliott Green would sent it with the girls, that is a statement that you could get it, then I'd have to walk to Ira White's which was three-fourths of a mile south of the school and then go up to Grant's which was a mile north and a half-of-a-mile east; and I walked after it.

Bill: After your experiences in the one-room school, you went to more conventional schools after that and taught for several more years in Kansas, Arkansas, and California. Are there any changes that you'd like to note, the biggest things noticed through those different years?

Lydia: Well, I think the biggest notice is discipline. A, I had taught in Mankato; of course, in Mankato we didn't have many discipline problems. Of course, that was in the a, a, 40's before World War II. There wasn't much change there; but then later on, I taught in California; and your discipline problems were a little bit harder because, I, I think the parents caused more discipline problems than the children did, really. I hate to say that, but I think that it's true.

Bill: Probably still true today.

Lydia: I think so.

Bill: That reminds me, when did you retire? When did you last teach in the classroom?

Lydia: I retired in, a, 1972 at Paris, Arkansas, and a, we moved to Fort Smith, but then I taught two years in Fort Smith. The first year I taught as a substitute, and, but, a, in January one of the teachers retired; and I was given her place; so I taught full time the last year-and-a-half in Fort Smith. Which was, we didn't have any problems there; in fact, we didn't have any Negroes in our school. It was a, I asked when I put in my application at Fort Smith, I said I'd just like to take substitute in schools around our house. And, a, we had four schools quite close. And, a, I had worked in all, in three of them as substitutes, but this good school was down a little bit farther, but that is where I got to teach for a year-and-a-half as a full time teacher.

Bill: Looking back at your experiences in Jewell County, do you think there was anything unique about the area or the county itself or the educational process in Jewell County?

Lydia: Well, no, I don't think so, except now we don't have any rural schools. They all go to town by bus or something like that. We had a lot, a, every little town had a high school and a grade school back in

those early times. Now there are only three high schools in the county where they've consolidated. We had a number of high schools in the early days, but now they're down to three, and I think that is, Mankato has a high school. Whiterock, up at Burr Oak is Esbon and, a, Burr Oak together, and the grade school children go to Esbon. A, Jewell has a high school, but then I think their pupils go to Randall. I don't know about the rest of them. I really haven't kept up on that this closely.

Bill: This concludes our interview with Lydia Dillon Groves, at least for the time being. We greatly appreciate the insights Lydia has given us, providing us the opportunity to take a glimpse at one-room schools. We hope to have the opportunity to visit with Mrs. Groves in the future about other good times and bad times witnessed while teaching. With over fifty years of teaching experience, Mrs. Groves has a great deal to offer us in education yet today. Thank you, Mrs. Groves.

CHAPTER III
BIOGRAPHY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lydia Belle Dillon was the fifth of seven children born to Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Dillon of Esbon, Kansas. Two of Lydia's siblings did not survive childhood, with one stillborn and one killed in an accident. The Dillons settled in Esbon after a stay where Lincoln, Nebraska, now stands. Mr. Dillon worked for the railroad and farmed. His people were originally from England where their name was "Dilling." Lydia's mother was from the Pennsylvania Dutch country.

Lydia was the first of the Dillons to finish high school and the only one to complete college. A sister Bertha and a brother Pete finished high school after Lydia.

Lydia's childhood was typical of the times, as she helped with household chores, some with the farm, and spent time doing school work. She attended grade school and high school in the Mankato public schools. The school term for the time was nine months, much like most schools today. The rural schools did go for a shorter length of time.

Lydia's college work was done at Fort Hays State Teachers College, Kansas State University, and Emporia State Teachers College, all by extension and correspondence. She took night classes and summer classes from Sterling College where she

finished her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1960, thirty-three years after high school graduation. She took advanced degree work from California schools at Fresno and Visalia, completing her masters' degree at Fresno State.

In August of 1938, Lydia married J. D. Groves of Mankato. J. D. and Lydia adopted a daughter, Daunele, in 1953. They now have two grandchildren, Roy Dale and Dawna Lynn who are in high school at Larned, Kansas.

Lydia's teaching experiences, also listed in the oral history, included three rural schools in Jewell County, Monitor, White, and East Union; twelve years at Mankato Grade School where she also spent eight years as principal; Sterling Grade School; Halstead Grade School; Albert Grade School; two schools in California; two schools in Arkansas; and several years in government nursery schools during World War II.

Conclusions

Hard work and dedication have always been two key elements in the life and career of Lydia Groves. As illustrated by Lydia's improvement in scores on her State of Kansas Teacher's County Certificates and her thirty-three year quest for a college degree, Lydia set an excellent example for her students to follow. Lydia had great respect for her students and for education, and she expected others to have the same.

As Lydia stated, the students' parents had to share the costs of the school building and its maintenance and the teacher's salary during a difficult economic time. Her

appreciation and respect for these difficulties expanded her love for the people and the meaning of getting an education.

Lydia's birth in 1908 was not that long after Mankato's birth in 1872 and the last Indian raid in Jewell County in 1870. World War I was not far off, and life was difficult for those who let it be. As noted in the oral history, even while teaching with a good salary, Lydia refused to label her students and their families "poor."

Lydia's high school career as gathered from the 1927 Boomerang provided perspective of what educational times were like in the 1920's.

The graduating class of 1927 began high school with twenty-eight students. Only eleven graduated with the class, and only eight of those were of the original number. Seventeen started the sophomore year, relating to what Lydia said about her rural school graduates going to high school for only one year.

Five areas of study were offered at Mankato High School: general science, social science, normal training, college preparatory, and vocational agriculture. In Lydia's class, four were enrolled in normal training, six in college preparatory, and one in general science.

The most varied classes were offered in the agricultural studies which were supported by the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 which created various vocations to help students decide upon careers and to train the students for the careers. Normal

training was established as an alternative area of study for those not planning on college to offer methods, practical suggestions, materials, and devices to prepare the students to teach in rural Kansas schools and grade schools. Normal training students were required to make twelve visits per semester of their senior year to grade schools and rural schools in the area. At the end of their senior year, normal training students took a test which if they passed, meant they had a two-year certificate to teach in Kansas. The students could also substitute teach during their senior year. Of the 1927 seniors, one male and three females graduated from normal training. For the 1927-28 school year, eight seniors enrolled, one of whom was a male.

The 1926 seniors, those one year ahead of Lydia, graduated twenty-six. Ten students, seven females and three males, went to college or business school; three girls and one man taught school; one man went to the service; two men farmed; two men and two women remained at home; two women married; one man and one woman had jobs other than farming or teaching; and one woman went to California. Not many young people got very far from home.

While educational costs per school child for the rural school were difficult to ascertain, figures for the average expenditure per school child in the 1920's were found in the Boomerang in a statement by Superintendent C. J. Dauner. Kansas averaged \$95.16 per child per year while neighboring

states Nebraska and Missouri averaged \$101.58 and \$79.38 respectively. For the continental United States, California had the highest average with \$175.94 and Mississippi the least with \$25.30.

Recommendations

More one-room school house teachers and students should be identified and interviewed which in turn would help bring to light more anecdotes and living history to education while still available. For example, in Lydia's history, the reason for White school being constructed of brick has been lost.

Further information about school buildings in Jewell County should be researched. At one time Jewell County had over 20,000 residents, many of whom attended one-room schools indicating there had to be many buildings sprinkled throughout the county.

Attempts should be made to add a one-room school to the Jewell County Historical Society's offerings before all of the buildings are destroyed to help assure the future an opportunity to look at one of the most important ingredients of the past.