### Fort Hays State University

## **FHSU Scholars Repository**

College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories

**Archives Online** 

July 2021

# Interview with Mary Baxter

Jolene Fisher
Fort Hays State University

Mary Baxter

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors

#### **Content Disclaimer**

The primary source materials contained in the Fort Hays State University Special Collections and Archives have been placed there for research purposes, preservation of the historical record, and as reflections of a past belonging to all members of society. Because this material reflects the expressions of an ongoing culture, some items in the collections may be sensitive in nature and may not represent the attitudes, beliefs, or ideas of their creators, persons named in the collections, or the position of Fort Hays State University.

#### Recommended Citation

Fisher, Jolene and Baxter, Mary, "Interview with Mary Baxter" (2021). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 44.

https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/44

This Audio Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives Online at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

### A PROFILE ON MARY BAXTER



DATE OF BIRTH: May 8, 1940.

PLACE OF BIRTH: She was born in their house in Knob-Knoster, Mo.

OCCUPATION: College Secretary

MARRIAGE STATUS: Married

NUMBER OF CHILDREN: 1 girl - 24, 1 boy 21.

CURRENT AGE: 45.

JF: And first of all were you a scudent or a teacher?

MB: I was a student.

JF: Okay, and when did you go to school?

MB: I entered the first grade in 1946 and graduated from the eight grade in 1954.

JF: Okay, and what time did school start and end?

MB: School started, you mean like in the day, or what time of the year?

JF: I think in the day.

MB: It started at 8:00 in the morning and went til 4:00 in the afternoon..

JF: Okay, and what did you do during recess and noon hour?

MB: Well, we had a fifteen minute recess in the morning and a fifteen minute recess in the afternoon, and usually we were allowed to have free time to do what we wanted to like play with maybe something we brought from home, or play on the, the merry-go-round, that was the only schoolground, playground equipment we had. And at noon we had and hour in which to eat our lunch, and play, and this was always had to be planned activities, the whole group had to play the same thing, we wern't allowed to do what we wanted to. So it would be like in the spring, maybe baseball.

JF: Like P.E?

MB: Yeah, and then other times when it was too cold. Well I guess we had to go outside everyday though for a little while, because in order for the teacher to keep her sanity I suppose she had to send us all outside for a little while, but we did other things like hide-and-go-seek, or blind-mans-bluff, or whatever the popular games were.

JF: Okay, and what did you bring for lunch?

MB: Well, well we didn't have any electricity in those days, so you were pretty limited in what you could carry in a sac lunch, because it had to be something that would keep.

JF: like bologna?

MB: No we couldn't bring bologna because it wouldn't keep, because we didn't have any refridgeration at school most of the time it was pearut butter sandwich or maybe a jelly sandwich, and apple, cookies, something simple like that.

JF: And how did you find out if you weren't having school?

MB: I don't really remember that part(Laugh), I don't remember not ever having school.

JF: Darn, right?(Laugh)

MB: Maybe, I suppose the only reason why we wouldn't have school was because the wheather was so bad, and if the wheather was so bad that the teacher couldn't get there we couldn't get there anyhow so it didn't make any difference. Ah, and if the teacher was sick, they always brough in a substitute.

JF: What rewards for grades did you get from the teacher and parents? MB: (Laugh)I think they gave us attendance certificates at the end of the year, and my parents didn't believe in rewards for doing scrething you were suppose to do anyhow so I never got rewards for attending on my own. (Laugh) from them.

JF: And what punishements were given?

MB: Well I never did get much punishment. I was little Miss Goody too Shoes. (laugh) so, but some of the students might of

JF: Your brothers?

MB: (Laugh) Yeah, might of been punished by having to stand in the front of the schoolroom up against the blackboard with their back to the rest of the class and their nose in a little ring that the teacher drew on the blackboard, or sometimes you wouldn't be allowed to go outside during recess time you'd have to stay in the schoolroom.

Um, okay, what tricks did you pull on the teacher? MB: I never did pull any tricks on the teacher. Mary? JF: MB: I said, I was, I was little Miss Goody too Shoes. (Laugh), Okay, what were the first subjects and the daily routine? JF: I don't remember much about the daily routine, you realize this was thirty some years ago, my memory doesn't go back that far (Laugh), but since it was an eight grade classroom with one teacher, probably we started with first grade, maybe reading in the morning, and then she kind of just advanced up to each class, doing a particular thing each day at a particular time. We never did have all eight classes in one year though so it, a lot of years it would be maybe four or five grades, no other grades, JF: Oh, no one else in the other grades? Uh hum, but I don't remember about the a, the a schedule or anything. MB: And did you have any special duties? JF: MB: I probably was teachers pet most of the time(Laugh). So I probably got to do a lot of things for her like clean the uh JF: The erasers MB: Like the erasers (Laugh) uh. JF: What special things do you remember about the teachers? Well, I only remember two teachers, I don't remember if that's all I had or if I just don't remember the others. I remember the first, the teacher I had in first grade was a young unmarried girl that probably just had gotten out of college, although I don't think they had to have a college degree at that time they could just have two or three years They just had to pass a test after the eight grade. Yeah, as long as they were a little smarter than the students so it didn't matter if they had college, and she taught the first four years, she was pretty much just a young unmarried girl that was out for a good time, there wasn't much discipline, not a whole lot of learning, so probably it was a waste of time the first four years of my school life and then the next teacher I had uh hum, was a older lady that was married and had children and very very strict. And she came in to our school she was just appalled at how dumb we all were, so she had her work cut out for her and we all hated her immensley because she made us work so hard, but then I remember eventually liking her and probably she was one of the best teachers I ever had. Because she did make us learn, and had discipline. Okay, and what fun things did you do? JF: MB: Well, (Pause), you mean outside of the Probably in the classroom. JF: In the classroom, I don't recall any fun things. MB: You quys didn't play any games or anything in the class? JF: Ah, we might have but I just don't remember them. MB: JF: Okay. Oh. I remember onetime in art class, we only had art maybe once a week, we were making, doing something with the stuff that you squish between your fingers, I don't remember what you call it now. I remember we all got in trouble for making so much noise, but I guess that was a fun

thing.

JF: How was the school financed?

MB: It was financed through taxes that were collected in the district, and ours must have been a pretty poor district(Laugh) at the time because we didn't have a whole lot of money for anything extra, our school library

was two shelves at the back of the building, and in eight years I attended there I don't ever remember getting a new book so by the end of my eight years I think I had read every book on those shelves three or four times and we didn't have any playground equipment except the one merry-go-round, and finally, we had a pie supper or something, boxsupper, whatever they called them in those days, where you, each girl brings a pie or a box lunch and then they have an auctioneer auction em off and then supposeably your boyfriend buys them and then he gets to eat with you and that money was used to buy a swingset which we were sooo thrilled to get because it was such an improvement over what we had had(Laugh)

JF: One merry-qo-round(Laugh)

MB: (Laugh) Yean, one merry-go-round.

JF: Okay, how were the teachers expected to conduct themselves in the

community?

MB: Well, the were su(Pause), expected to be of very high morals and our unmarried teacher I had in the first four years of school she had to live with one of the schoolboard members so they could keep an eye on her, and she could not have a gentleman come to call unless she was well supervised and they were not allowed to smoke or drink in public, and never say a cuss word. Just very strict. And I assume that they figured that a person who was married was going to conduct theirself in a proper moral attitude and then I bet, so they didn't watch them as closely but they sure did watch the unmarried ones.

JF: What were some of the teachers extracurricular activities?

MB: I don't remember that they had any extracurricular activities in our particular area, you mean something that would be related to the community? IF: Yeah.

MB: I sure that they were expected to go to church and maybe

JF: Participate in all the events?

MB: Yeah, there wasn't a lot of all that much going on in the community anyhow. It's kind of a dead community.

JF: Okay, who hired and fired the teachers?

MB: Well each school had their own board, district board, that's not what they called them

JF: A district board?

MB: Yean, and they would hire

JF: Okay,

MB: My dad was always on the boards it seeems like.

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

MB: Well it was a one room building, and they only nest we had was a coal pot, a coal burning pot bellied stove that set over in the corner, and that was never started until morning when we went to school. Usually the teacher was suppose to get there a little early and get it to get burning, but it didn't heat out much further than three feet from the stove so when it got extremely cold we had to sit around the stove all day to keep warm, and then when it started getting warm in the springtime the buildings were just real real hot they all, we didn't have any kind of fans because we didn't have any electricity. And there was no air conditioning of course, and then the floors were so awful, I remember the school that I went to it just had wooden floors that they came in every spring after school was out I think and put this oil on them to treat them. They had all kinds of splinter in them. So they were not the best of conditions.

JF: What subjects were taught?

MB: Well we just had the very basic subjects, you heard the saying reading, writing, arithmatic, that was about all we had. That was a subject we'd be taught everyday, and then maybe once or twice a week we'd ah have social studies, and science, history, and then maybe once a week we'd have art and once a week weed have music. Music was something that was really quite bad if you had a teacher who didn't have any musical ability. I remember one teacher I had didn't play the piano so it was kind of a

JF: A drag(laugh)?

MB: A drag to even have music at all(Laugh). And our science courses, we had no scientific things to work with so it was all just out of the book, but the other courses were just basic things that everybody learns.

JF: And what were the ages of the children at the school?

MB: Well, you started the school in those days when you were six years old, unless your mother was a school teacher, and then if you could start when you were about four if they wanted to take you to school with them and start you in the first grade, and bother with you. So there were a few then who started really early, but most of the time it was six. We had no kindergartens so there was no pre-school type thing and most people graduated when they were fourteen, unless they failed to pass a grade or if they started really young they could get out a lot sooner, or if you were smart a lot of times they would jump you two or three grades just to get you out early. They had no laws in those days about how many years you had to spend in a particular school or

JF: How long, (cough) how long was the school year?

MB: Started in september and usually september first and it went to I don't remember how long it went in May, because most of the kids that went to school with me were farm kids so we probably got out in time for the boys to help with spring farming, but I don't remember just how long we did go in May.

JF: And was the schoolhouse used for any other activities besides

teaching?

MB: Well I think, yeah they used them for things like 4H meetings, extension meetings, community type things. Because the community was supporting the schools, so the schoolhouse really belonged to the community.

JF: How did the school get its water?

MB: We had a well outside the school that had a pump on it, everyday some, it would be somebodys job to go out and get a bucket of water from the well and fill up this little thing that was a water fountain type of a thing, it was probably a glass jar that had a spout on the end of it that you could push in and water would come out.

JF: In the class grades did everybody go in sequence?

MB: Not necessarily because if a grade did not have but one student, and maybe the next grade up would have more than one student, they would some, sometimes skip you up to that grade. For instance after I finished the fifth grade the next year I was going to be the only person in the sixth grade, and there was going to be two or three people in the seventh grade and so they skipped me from the fifth to the seventh and then they next

year I skipped back to the sixth. And then after I completed the sixth I went back and took the eight, which was kind of confusing but it seemed to work. But they didn't skip math, they took it in the order it was supposed to go, even though I was taking ah seventh grade work in everything else, I still took the sixth grade math, and then the next year I took seventh, and the next year I took eighty but I was the only person working on math in that particular grade. So that helped you get through math because I don't think they could of skipped around on it you probably needed to take it in sequence. But it was kind of confusing.

JF: How many students went to the school?

MB: I don't remember us ever having more than ten people, probably eight was more of an average. It must have been a pretty small district.

F: Okay, when did the school open and close, the years that it first time

opened up?

MB: I don't remember when it opened, I know that the year that I graduated from the eight grade was the last year that they had school there. Cuz the next year they consolidated all of the country schools and brought them into the school district in the town, and so kids from that time on were bossed, bussed from the rural area into the town school.

JF: What district was it in?

MB: I dont't rem, I don't know what the number was it was part of my home district. I think all of the country schools were under the townschool jurisdiction. They were just kind of subschools.

JF: Okay, what type of occupations did the students take up?

MB: (Laugh) I really haven't kept very close tabs on any of the students, um, I am sure that some of them are still into farming. Um, I am a mother and a secretary, um I don't think any of them that went to that school ever became famous or known. My brother went to the school and he works for United Airlines in Las Vegas. AH, one guy that went to the school is in the state penetentary, (Laugh) so they have a variety of occupations I don't think any of them became anything too spectacular though.

JF: What type of graduation exercised were performed?

MB: Well, graduation was from the eight grade, because that's the year that you completed elementary school and went to high school. So they brought all the rural school districts in to the, the school in town and we had graduation exercises all together at the end of the school year. They would have a ceremony much like that of the high school graduation, except you didn't wear a cap and a gown, everybody was expected to be dressed up though, it was a big deal though because all the girls got new dresses and the boys might get the first suit that they ever owned, you know, a tie. And we had a speaker, we all sat upon the stage and when they called our name we walked across the stage and got a diploma.

JF: From eight grade?

MB: Uh hum.

JF: Where there any special classes or unique educational services offered?

MB: No. We were just a basic school.

JF: Where did the funds come for the construction of the school?

MB: I would imagine that they came from taxes, I don't really know because the school had been there a longtime before I started to school and only the building belonged to the district. The land that it sat on was land

land that was some land owner had loaned to the district so that when the country schools closed down, that land all went back to the origional And then the buildings had to be moved off of them unless the owner of the land wanted to buy them and then he could buy them for maybe a dollar or something. If they didn't want to buy them then they moved them off, and some of the buildings were retained by the communities, like there would be what they called a community center would rent the buildings from the land owners and use them for meetings and always the school district or the school building was used for things like elections and things like

JF: What was the cultural background and heratige of the community? It was all very rural farming. I think almost everyone I knew who MB: went to that school farmed. Agricultural background.

How big of an area did the school serve?

I don't how they divided up the districts because if it was a township, it wasn't a county, becuase there were several schools within one counr

county. I-It might have been just so many miles because I can remember that there was probably four or five schools within a four or five area, I

don't know how they divided up they area.

Okay, what was the average number of years a student spent in school? Well, by the time I graduated from school, I think most people were going through high school, because society had gotten more fluent then and we were just getting over the depression. So most kids were able to go ahead and finish high school, they didn't have to go out and work and help the familiy make a living when they completed eight grade. JF:

Except for maybe, girls maybe would of been more apt not complete high

school because maybe some of them got married young. JF: Okay, name some of the roles of the school.

Well we had a dress code, girls could not wear blue-jeans to school in those days, so if i-in the could winter if you had to walk to school which most of the students did, had to walk at least a mile, you had to wear a dress and then underneath a dress a lot of us wore pants, long pants to keep our legs warm walking and then we would remove them when we got to school and put them back on, but you just couldn't wear blue-jeans by there It was very tabu.

Okay, what did the students have to pay to go to school?

Well, it was free, our books were all free, everything was free. Was there any organization similar to the PTA, or were the teachers

and parents involved much together?

Well we didn't have a PTA. I think that you didn't have to have organized uh, things in those days to get people to help out the parents were not that involved in other things, other than making a living, and everbody knew that when there was something to do everybody knew that it was just there job, they didn't have to be asked. If you had kids in school there, you just expected to do stuff.

How did you get back and forth to school?

Well most of the students had to walk, and we had to walk about a mile to school because, there were a lot of roads that were not graveled in

those days, so in bad wheather there was no other way to get except walk because you couldn't get through the mud roads, the school happened to live on a ,or a be situated on a gravel road, but a lot of the kids lived back off of roads that were not graveled. And we always walked through a field because it would of been too far to walk around our road to get to school. You had to walk in no matter what kind of wheather, there's muddy you just put your gollashas on and shloushed on up to school(Laugh), if it was raining you just put a raincoat on and went ahead and went. My dad never did take us to school much, unless the wheather was really, really bad. I remember a couple of times, once when it was snowing really bad, a like a blizzard type of thing, so he got out the old now sled and hooked the horses up to it and took us to school that a way which was really a big deal. We thought that was great fun, and then once in a while we would ride horseback to school. I don't know why we didn't do that more often. I think it was probably because there wasn't a good place to tie a horse up and leave it all day. And probably the teacher didn't like for us to have our horses tied up outside the schoolhouse all day long, but sometimes whern the wheather was so bad we would have to do something that she didn't really like. And then sometimes when the wheather was really cold I would develop up a stomach ache

大大学の大学を大きないというできます。

JF: (Laugh)

MB: Just before time to go to school and I would stay at home.

JF: I would too.

MB: (Laugh).

JF: What system of evaluation was used for grading?

MB: Well you mean like what did they give you

JF: Like A,B,

MB: Okay, we had the E, and F system. (Pause)E,F,C,and D I think. An E was the very best you could get, and F was failure, C was

JF: Citizenship?

MB: C was middle of the grade, and D was just pretty close to failure, but I don't, I don't, I think it was based on like on 90-100, 80-90, 70-80, and 66-76, pretty basic. It wasn't on a curve or anything.

JF: And how many days a week did you go to school?

MB: We went five days a week.
JF: And how long were the days?

MB: From eight in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon.

JF:

JF: What were the special observances of the school?

MB: We usually had maybe three or four social events every year. Probably the first one would be our Halloween Party, and these would all be evening events were the whole familly could come and take part, because the rural school was probably the main social activity for the people in the community, so they were very involved in it. But we would go to elaborate measures to dress up on Halloween and get to the schoolhouse after dark and in our costumes, and not be discovered by anybody so that no one would know who we were, so most everybody would walk, and so that way you could come in and they wouldn't recognize your car or recognize who you were with; so you could walk in to the school and have a costume on and maybe no one

would know who you were becuase your little brothers and sister and maybe even parents could participated. So anyone who wanted to could dress up in a costume with a false face on and try to fool somebody. And we usually had things like bob for apples and pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, and some of those great games that kids nowadays would thing ridiculous. (Laugh). And then prohably othe Bextusosialy expetites will the school and we he of istend a lot of time maybe five or six weeks before Christmas practicing on a play that everybody would have a part in and in getting it all perfected so we could put it on for the parents and we would practice our music and Christmas Carols and things like that and Santa Claus would come to give out the presents under the tree. Usually we drew names. And then bought a present for the person whose name you drew. And then Santa Claus would pass those presents out. And in my early years of school I guess I still believed in Santa Claus because I always thought that it was funny because when it came time to pass out the presents my dad was never around, and \_ always wondered why he got up and left just as Santa Claus came in. But as I got older I realized that the reason why he did that was because he always had the job of playing Santa Claus. I don't know why it took me so long to figure that out. I guess I must have been pretty naïve for somebody that was in school. I don't think many kids nowadays don't know about Santa Claus by the time their three or four years old. And then they would have treats for all the kids in the district, even the little brothers and sisters. They would make up a sac of goodies for everybody like we would have hard candy, maybe peanuts in a shell, an orange in each sac and then Santa Claus would pass those out. I don't remember how those The district must have had a little money for something like that. And then we would put on our pagent for everybody which was such a exciting time because we would have the shh, the uh partition up at the front of the schoolhouse and we had these wires stretched across and we laid sheets over them and divided them into two sections and part of the characters would be on one side and part would be on the other, and as your part came up you would come out from behing the curtain and do your little spill, whatever it was, a speech or part of the pagent. We always did the Christmas pagent, and somebody got to be Joseph and somebody go to be Mary. And then we sang all the traditional Christmas Carols and maybe we would have a candlelighting service. I think that school in those days were more There was not the thing about not having, you know, religious oriented. about having the school and church separated and everything. So we, we did do the Christmas story from the Bible. It was not tabu in those days. And most rural communities were more religiously oriented anyhow, so. And the next social event we might have would probably be around Easter time. And we would have some kind of a play that we would put on. Do some music. Have an Easter egg hunt out in the, the a lawn. And then we would always have an end of school thing. I guess they did give out some awards for maybe perfect attendance and reading awards and different things. Not, not anything very big that I remember. But then we would put on some kind of entertainment for the parents. I remember on time, I think it was when I was in the second grade, ah, I got to do a duet with another boy. in first grade. He was my boyfriend. And my mother had to make a long

dress for me. It was the first long dress I ever had. I was so excited. And she made it out of chessecloth if you can imagine that. She must have put something underneath it(Laugh). I think cheesecloth would have been a little risque. And we sang this duet and I remember the duet was "School days, school days, dear old golden rule days." And I got to kiss the boy at the end. I was so excited.(Laugh).

JF: (Laugh).

MB: My first so, my first opportunity to perform for the public.

JF: Your first kiss.

MB: I think I've been a ham ever since.

JF: Okay, did the school have any particular problems?

MB: I don't remember our school as there was not any discipline problems I think. We didn't have any kids in our school other than those that would be going to school, the normal school age. I know in some districts where they would have older people going to school. Like you could go to, I guess you could go to elementary school as long as you wanted to and there would be some districts that would have older boys going that would create a lot of problems for the teacher. I mean they would be like sixteen, seventeen years old and still be in the elementary schools. They were discipline probelems but we didn't have any older kids in our district by the time I got into school. People were pretty much going to school when they should be going to school.

JF: And what was the name of your school?

MB: Our school was the Maple Grove School. It was probably because there was a lot of big maple trees out in the lawn.

JF: Okay, and did you have a mascot?

MB: No, we didn't have a mascot. JF: Who employed the teachers?

MB: The teachers were employed by the, the boeard, the school district board. They would have, have them come in and interview and they would pick somebody from the people they interviewed. But I don't think they ever had a big choice because I don't think there was that many people teaching school in those days. Because, most people were too poor to even get an education. So there weren't a lot of teachers available.

JF: Was a principal used along with the teacher?

MB: We didn't have a principal. There was a superintendant though. It was the superintendant of the whole district that would take in all of the small schools. I guess he was the superintendant of the rural schools. Sometimes it was a man, sometimes it was a woman. And they would make suprise visits to the school. They would never let you know when they were coming. I know it was always so scarey because when I was in school we had lady superintendant and she was very homely as I remember it and scared me half to death when she came in. And she would always just kind of creep in the door and unannounced and hoping that she would catch the teacher doing something that she wasn't suppose to be, it always seemed like that anyways. And then she would sit down at the desk with each one of the students and ask them how they were doing. I would, that just scared me half to death because she was pretty homely. I remember that made an impression on me as a small child.

JF: What materials were used to build the school?

MB: Our school was built out of wood. In the area that I grew up in wood was the normal building material. We did not have stone. And also everything was made out of wood. It was painted white. It had, we had four windows on each side.

JF: Who was in charge for the upkeep of the building?

MB: Well, I think that they picked a different father every year. Because I remember that my dad had a responsibility for the upkeep on year. I don't remember him doing much upkeep though because, the floors, the oiled the floors that was about all they did. And maybe if a window got broken they replaced it. But I don't ever remember the school building ever being painted. The desk, they had initials on them from probably fourty years before. So there wasn't much mantainance.

JF: Do you know who built the schoolhouse?

I really don't know because it was built a long time before my time. Ah, what was the curriculum and how did it change through the years? MB: Well the curriculum that made the most impression on me was for the f. st grade. We used the Dick and Jane books. And, I think the were kind. of ridiculous becuase I remember even as a first grader I thought they were silly. And reading a book that said 'See Dick, See Jane, See Sally, See Spot, See Spot Run' I mean I even thought that was stupid then so I think they were a little below our level. But they used them every year that I n school. Because as you got passed the first grade, the next you'd be sitting in the classroom and you'd hear the first graders for that year reading the book that you did becasue there was no way you could escape listening to all the other students, because you were right there in the same class, classroom. And like the teacher would uh, start out using the morning for first grade, and then just work her way up to how ever many grades she had. And, so you got a chance to listen to every grade. Maybe that was helpful to because as you were, you know like in the lower grades you were also getting to hear the kids in the upper grades do their lessons. So you surely learned something for that. But one thing about our school, that I remember, they would not let us take homework home. had to do all our work in the school. Because I remember one time I was having trouble with this one math lesson. And I failed it about three And the teacher would not let me take it home and get help. And she wouldn't help me. And I just kept doing it wrong and wrong. And finally the teacher got sick and had to be gone for three or four days and then I took it home and my mom helped me with it. And I finally got it back to school and finally got through that one math lesson. That stuck in my mind very clearly. But we were expected to get everything done in the school building because you had a lot of time. While she was teaching the other grades, to do your homework. Besides that, most of us didn't have electricity anyhow so ther. s no way to study at night except by the coal barning lamps.

For some technical reason, the final 10 minutes of this taped did not turn

out.