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Interview with Billie Biel

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Billie Louise Machu Biel

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An Oral History with
Billie Biel, One-Room Schoolteacher

by
Sara Anne Cole

for
Research Seminar in Education
Dr. Allan Miller, Instructor
Fort Hays State University
Summer, 1984

An Oral History with
Billie Biel, One-Room Schoolteacher

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this oral history is to gather information from Billie Biel about her experiences as a one-room schoolteacher.

Variables

Independent variables of Billie's experiences are as follows: the era during which she did her one-room schoolteaching, the consideration that she received her own education in a city school, and lastly, that she was required to have some advanced education before she was allowed to teach.

The dependent variables used in this oral history are the constructed questions used in the Stone Schoolhouse Project. This interview will be recorded on a cassette tape and then be transcribed.

Background

Reading an early account of a one-room schoolteacher's duties made me wonder how far education in all its aspects, had traveled. As a professional, it is worth discovering the advances that have taken place.

Significance of Study

It is a truism, of course, to say that one can learn from the past, and so it is with education. By learning

what the rigors, i.e. building fires, custodial work, expected attire, morals, etc. of the one-room schoolhouse, were in the early days and juxtaposing them with those of the present, perhaps, through projects like this, we can understand how far education has actually come. In so doing, focus can be directed on today's problems and advances.

Questions

The questions Billie will answer will provide us with information on how and why she became a teacher. She will tell us how the students dressed and behaved, explain how the school day was arranged, what subjects were taught, and what type of parental support she received. Also, the importance of the school in the community in that period of time will be heard.

Pleasant Valley and South Beaver
Schools of Wichita County

These two school districts are located in Wichita county in western Kansas. In the year 1887 the schools in Wichita county were organized under the jurisdiction of one county superintendent. At that time there were 48 districts, of which Pleasant Valley was one. South Beaver was not formed until 1946. Each district was supposed to represent a three mile area with the schoolhouse located in the center of that area. Then, even more frequently than now, district lines were changed. These changes usually came about because a family wanted their children to attend a particular school. To send a child to a certain school, parents had to live or own land in that district, or barring that, special permission was required.

The earliest recollection of the Pleasant Valley School was that of a little red schoolhouse. It burned down and was replaced with the stucco building in which Billie taught. Pleasant Valley was not located at the center of its district as were the others in the county. This was very annoying to some of its patrons, but they were overruled when attempting to have it relocated.

South Beaver was formed in 1946 from the St. Theresa, Carwood, Beaver Valley, and part of the Eagle school districts. These districts only had a few children in their schools and were consolidated for economical reasons. At the same time, Pleasant Valley was expanded for the same reason.

Following can be found three maps of the school districts of Wichita county. The first shows the 48 districts as of 1887-1888. The second shows the districts before reorganization in 1946. The last shows the districts in 1953, the boundaries during Billie's teaching era.

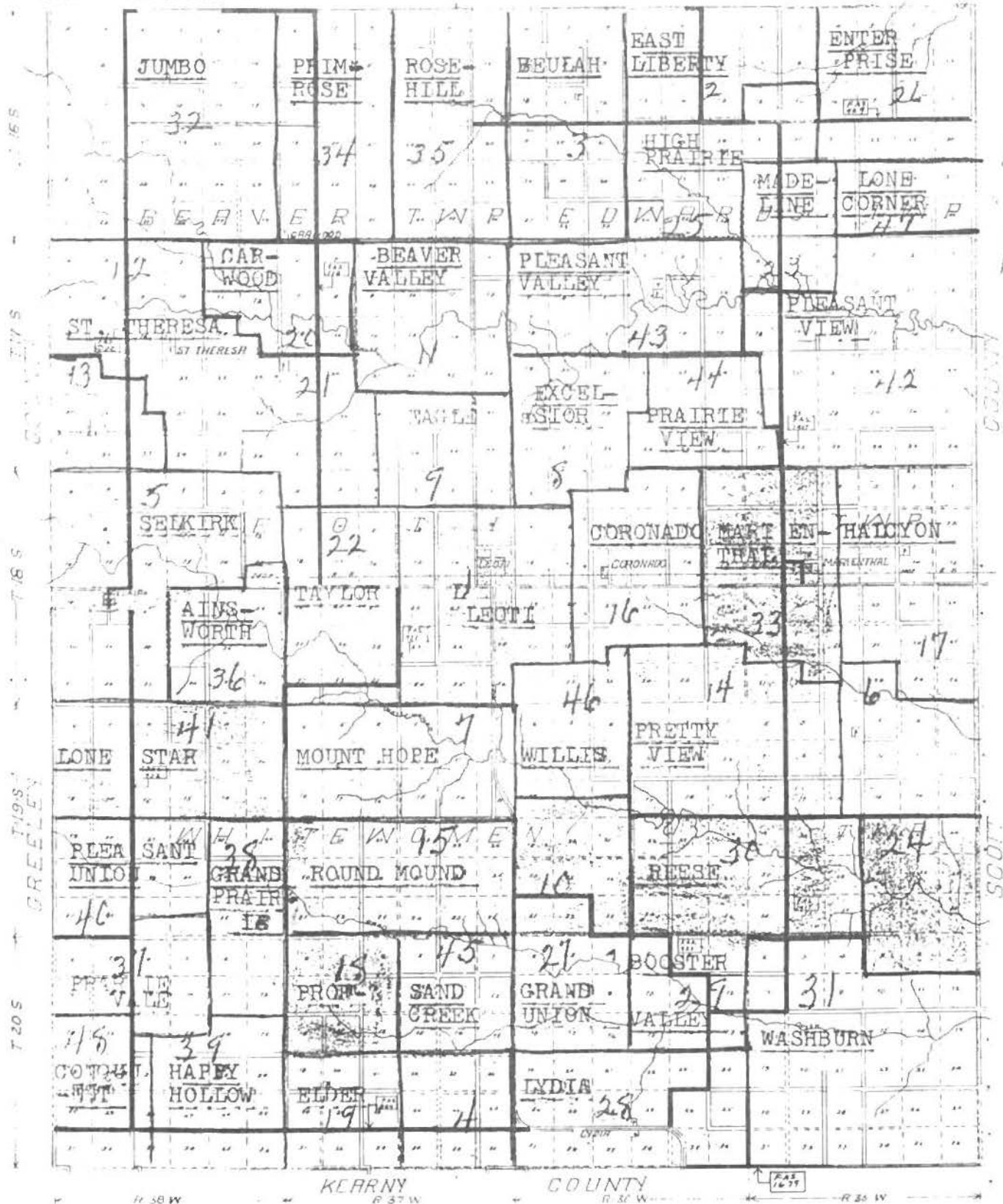
WICHITA COUNTY
ROAD MAP

Map of Districts as of 1967 - 1968

WICHITA COUNTY

WICHITA COUNTY

WICHITA COUNTY



STATE ROAD
COUNTY ROAD GRADED
ROADS NOT GRADED
SCHOOL
RICH

FAS SECONDARIES

ERNEST ROYER CO ENGR
Eliza Atkinson

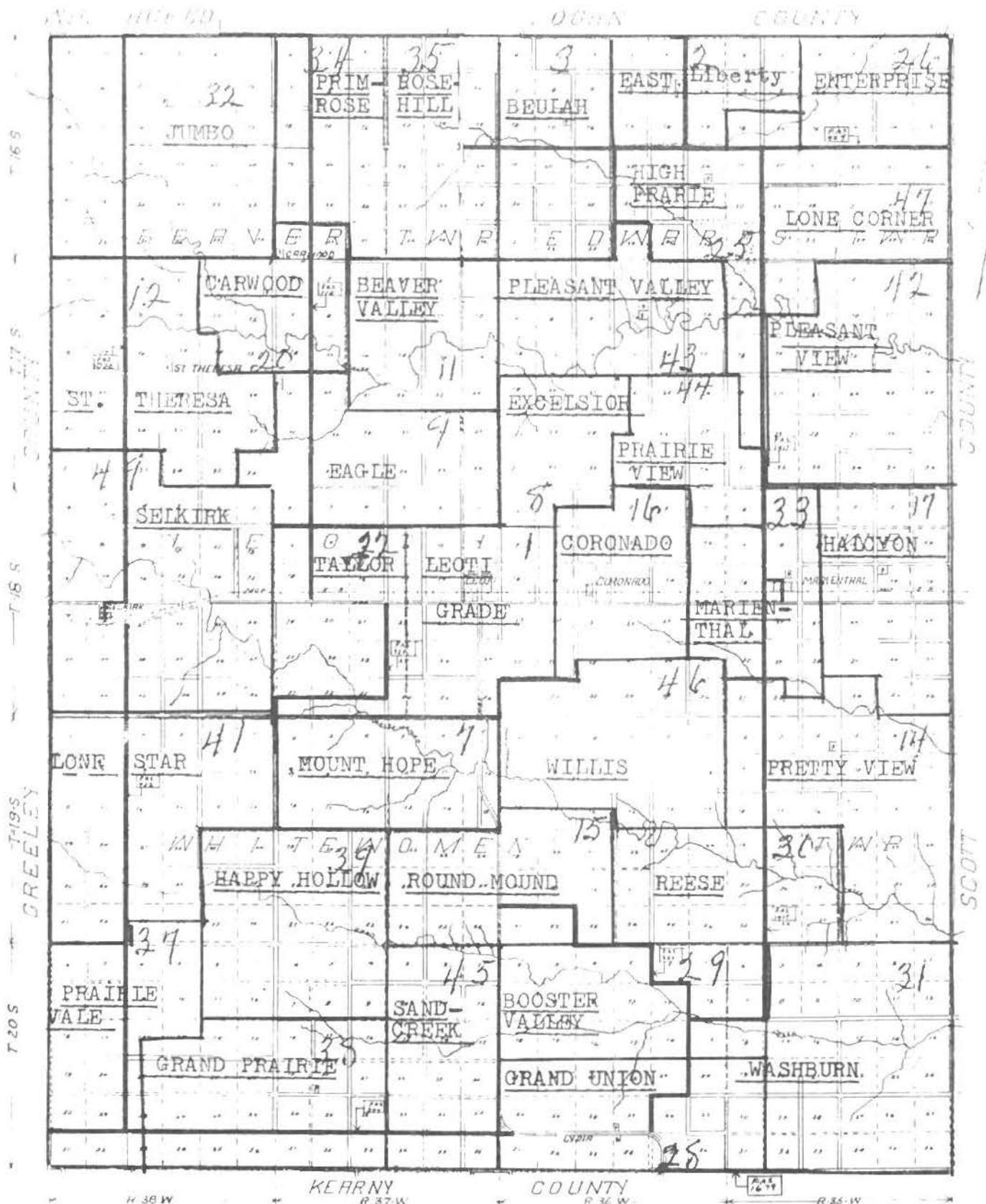
No name for Dist. Nos. 4, 6, 10, 13, 21 and 24

Feb. 3, 1968

WINNEBAGO COUNTY

ROAD MAP OF School Districts

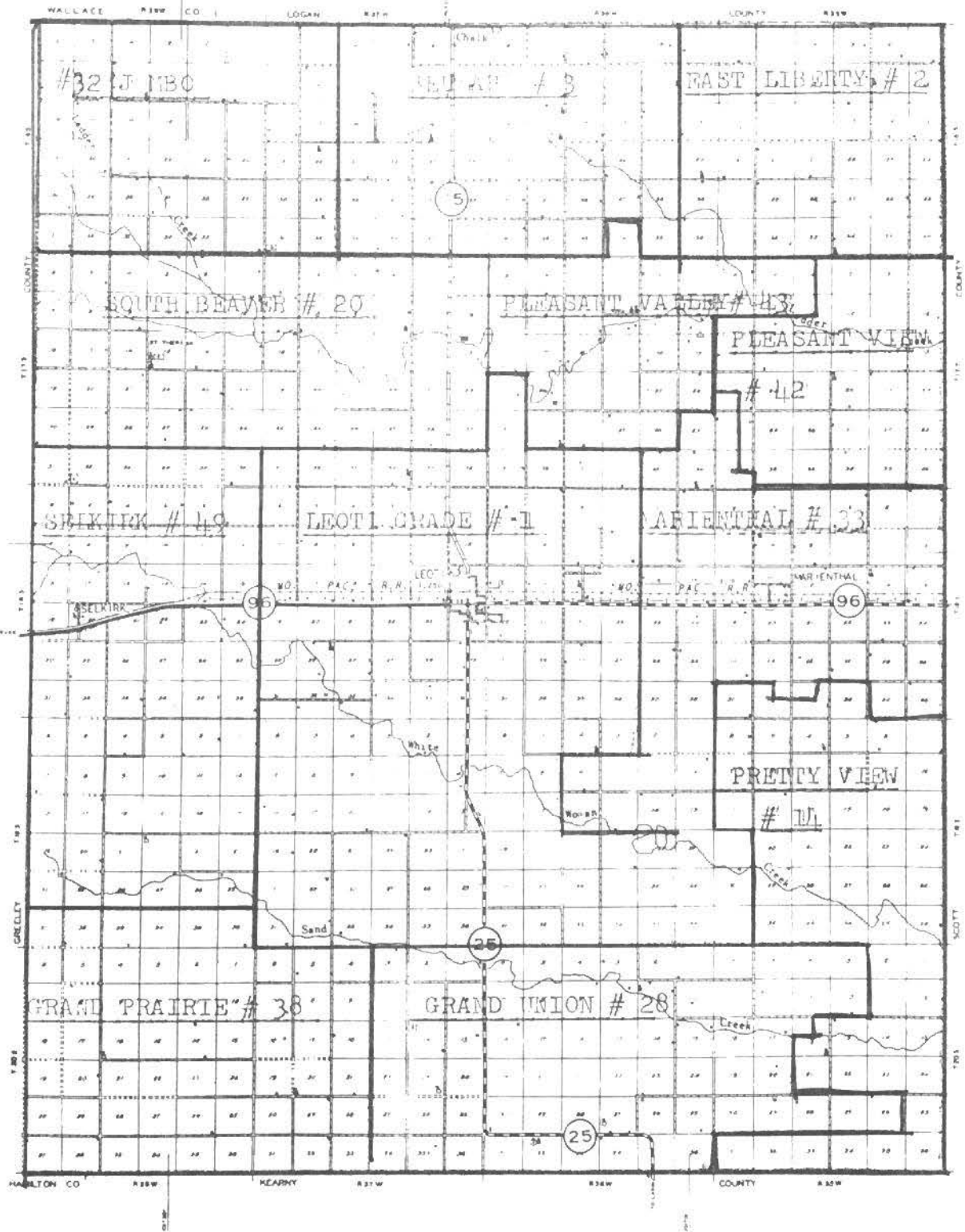
WINNEBAGO COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS BEFORE REORGANIZATION IN 1916



STATE ROAD
 COUNTY ROAD GRADED
 ROADS NOT GRADED
 SCHOOL
 CHURCH

FAS - SECONDARY

ERA EST ROYER CO. ENGR



Billie Louise Machu Biel

Billie was born on November 16, 1929, in Ponca City, Oklahoma. When she was ten months old, she moved to Kansas City, Kansas, with her parents. Her father, who only completed the fourth grade, was an auto body worker. Her mother, with a tenth grade education, was a homemaker. Billie has a younger brother and sister.

Billie started school when she was four years old. She attended several different grade schools which all contained grades kindergarten through six. Upon completing sixth grade, she attended Rosedale Junior-Senior High School. Grades seven through nine were considered the junior high. It was organized into a six period day, one period always being a study hall. Grades ten through twelve were considered the senior high. Again there were six periods per day with one being a study hall. During the senior year, a student could eliminate the study hall. Billie took general education courses in high school and graduated in 1947.

The next fall she attended Kansas City Kansas Junior College. While there she majored in fine arts with an emphasis in music. Billie went to school there only one year and then began her teaching career in the fall of 1948 in Wichita county in western Kansas. Billie taught for three years,

marrying in January of 1951. At the end of that term she resigned her teaching position to begin raising her family of seven children.

In 1959, Dr. R.B. Stewart, Principal of Leoti Grade School, asked Billie why she didn't get a substitute teaching certificate. Although she had some difficulty in obtaining this first certificate, Dr. Stewart vouched for her, and she finally received it. After that, three hours every three years were necessary to keep it active. Billie substituted or taught half time in the schools in Wichita county until 1971 when she decided to get a regular teaching certificate. She had decided she preferred secondary English to elementary after a substituting experience in 1969. All through these years, Billie had been taking extension courses. She also had attended summer school in 1970 at St Mary's of the Plains in Dodge City. She began in earnest in the fall of 1971. That first semester she took twenty hours at St. Mary's while driving everyday from Leoti (130 miles one-way) and taking care of her family. The second semester she did her student teaching block. She graduated in 1972 with honors.

Billie then taught English at Wichita County High School from 1972 to 1974. Her third year she moved to Syracuse High School. She then quit teaching until January, 1977, when she returned to Greeley County High School. The next fall she started a new program at Greeley County, teaching English as a foreign language to migrant children. The

following two years found her at Hubert Junior High, also in migrant education. During the fall of 1983, she returned to an English program at Wichita County High School. She is now beginning a master's program in secondary education with an emphasis in library science at Fort Hays State University.

Following is a transcript of the interview with Billie at which time she is 54 years old.

COMMENT: This interview is taking place with Billie Biel in Hays, Kansas, on June 26, 1984. Billie, I want you to know how much I appreciate your taking this time to visit with me about your one-room schoolhouse days.

QUESTION: First thing that I want to ask is, what made you decide to go into the profession of teaching?

ANSWER: Oh, that's an interesting question. I guess I really had never thought of teaching school until I had completed a year of junior college in Kansas City, Kansas, and I was working in the summer for Bell Telephone Company as a long-distance operator. I was living with a friend of mine, a high school friend, who had relatives in western Kansas. And one day she got a letter from them, and they asked why she didn't come out and teach in their school. They told her the pay was good, and they were sure she had the job. She thought it over and decided on the spur of the moment that she would do that. She'd been going to business school and didn't have a job lined up. She decided that she would do that. And she wrote back to ask if there were any other jobs available thinking of me. We found out there were several teaching jobs available in Wichita county. Uh, taking the name of the county superintendent, I wrote, and I got a teaching position. Up to that time I had never even thought of teaching. I had thought that I'd go into music professionally, but I wasn't really certain that I wanted to do that, and I thought, well, this pleased me, and I'll try it.

QUESTION: Uh, what was the name of your school?

ANSWER: My first school was Pleasant Valley, District No. 17. Then I taught there for two years, and I went to South Beaver School. And I don't remember the district number for that one. Pleasant Valley School was about 14 miles northeast of Leoti, Kansas. South Beaver was about 14 miles northwest of Leoti.

QUESTION: Did the names of the schools have any particular significance?

ANSWER: Uh, not that I am aware of.

QUESTION: Uh, when ...

ANSWER: I do need to say that South Beaver School was named that because it was on Beaver Creek in Wichita county.

QUESTION: When you, uh, wrote about the job and found out that there were some, did you have to come to Wichita county for an interview.

ANSWER: No, uh, my first correspondence was with the county superintendent who described the job, told me what my duties would be, and what the pay would be. She forwarded the letter to the schoolboard because each, uh, country school had its own board in those days. And they wrote back asking for me to send a picture of myself, and later I found that they chose me because they liked my looks or one man on the schoolboard liked my looks. At the time I didn't know that, and I'm not sure whether it would have bothered me at all. But later when I thought, you know, that they only chose me because of my looks and not because of my qualifications that was a little disturbing to me.

QUESTION: Uh, speaking of qualifications, were there any that were required of you for the position?

ANSWER: I really don't remember for sure how many hours I needed to start teaching but I did know that I needed to take a reading class and something in art. So I went to Wichita State during the month of August before school started. I took a two hour reading class and a one hour art class. And that was enough to get me certified for the winter.

QUESTION: Okay, now you mentioned that you, uh, wrote to the superintendent and that's how you found the job. Uh, you know, I'm sure, there are teachers that got fired, uh, in those days as well. Who fired teachers? Who made that decision to get rid of a teacher?

ANSWER: I really don't know for sure because I don't know of anyone ever having been fired until later years. I know that the county superintendent had jurisdiction over the school districts, and I suppose that if they had wanted to fire me that the schoolboard would have referred it to her. But I'm not sure whether it would have been a mutual agreement or whether the schoolboard would have. But the schoolboard really hired me because they gave me the contract which I signed and the schoolboard members' signatures were on the contract.

QUESTION: And, uh, when did you start teaching? What years?

ANSWERS: I started in 1948. I taught at Pleasant Valley School for the 1948-49 school term, for the 49-50 school term. Then I went to South Beaver School for the 50-51 school term.

QUESTION: How come you, uh, changed schools?

ANSWER: Well, because I could get better pay at South Beaver. I was getting \$250 a month at Pleasant Valley School which

for that time was very good pay, but and they would have given me a raise the second year. They asked if I wanted more money, and I told them I didn't feel that I wanted more money. That I needed to improve. Now I wonder why I did that, but I didn't ask for more money. I could have gotten it. However, I did go to South Beaver because they were paying \$300, and I didn't think that Pleasant Valley would pay, would give me that good've pay. My friend, who came to western Kansas at the same time I did, taught at South Beaver School one year. Then she got married and was in an accident and didn't teach any longer. So that was the end of her teaching experience, and I came and took over.

QUESTION: Uh, you mentioned how much you did get paid. Okay, how did you get your paychecks?

ANSWER: The schoolboard brought me my check each month.

QUESTION: An individual from the board?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: Like, did it come at a certain time each month?

ANSWER: Yes, but I don't remember what that time was.

QUESTION: Today teachers get paid over the summer or their salaries are stretched over the summer. Were they in those days?

ANSWER: No, our ... At that time all the schools except ... except the grade schools in town and high school were eight month schools, and we didn't get paid over the summer.

COMMENT: So, you just had to accumulate your money.

ANSWER: Um-hum.

QUESTION: Today teachers have some fringe benefits usually in the form of hospitalization. Did you receive anything extra?

ANSWER: None.

QUESTION: Where did you stay during the school term? Let's talk about at Pleasant Valley at first.

ANSWER: Okay. While I taught at Pleasant Valley I stayed with a couple name Hallie and Eileen Schwindt. They did not have children. They lived about five miles from the school. Eileen generally brought me to school in the mornings

and came back to pick me up. When the weather was stormy as it was the first year I was there, Hallie sometimes had to bring me to school or take me to school on a tractor. They happened to be a couple who liked to travel every winter, so during the times that they were gone, I stayed with another family right across the road from my school. They were Bob Smades' family, and I had one of their children as a student. And there was quite a difference between the two homes. Hallie and Eileen had a new house. Very beautifully furnished. Everything very particular and in its place, and I had a room to myself. And I paid room and board to live there. When I stayed with the Smades' family, the house was unfinished. It didn't have electricity, didn't have running water, didn't have a bathroom in the house. So I checked my papers by kerosene or gas lamps at night. Uh, they brought water in from the outside. Sometimes I helped the kids do that. And, of course, the bathroom was outside, and I had a really interesting experience. One evening to get out of the door there were no steps because the house was up on big blocks because it wasn't finished, and I had to go out to the bathroom along toward evening. It was beginning to get dark, and I jumped out of the door onto this big block, and when I did, I saw a little snake just on the other side of that block, and I began to yell. The son who was in about the ninth grade, I think, that year, uh, thought it was very humorous and came out and killed the snake so that I could get back into the house, but. I, uh, it really frightened me for a long time. And they didn't have gas heat as the other family did. I can't, I guess that they had butane, but the house was very cold. I slept upstairs in a room with my student. And her mother would put a brick on the stove during the day so that at night when we went to bed we could put that brick in our bed. And, of course, we couldn't go outside at night to the bathroom, so we had a chamber pot in the closet for nighttime. And I really thought that was roughing it. But I was younger then. It didn't really bother me a lot. But it happened that the lady in this family was also a teacher, and we had a lot in common. And we're still great friends today.

QUESTION: You mentioned that you were younger. How old were you when you first started at Pleasant Valley?

ANSWER: When I started, I was 18. Then in November I was 19, but for several years I was the youngest teacher in Wichita county.

QUESTION: Uh, when, uh, the year that you were at South Beaver, where'd you live?

ANSWER: Uh, I lived on the farm with the friend that I came to western Kansas with. After that first year, she was married. Her husband was a farmer. They had a home, and they had a little bunkhouse outback. They fixed that bunkhouse up, and I had the room downstairs and a nephew of his had the room upstairs. So that when he wanted to come and go, he had to come through my place. But it wasn't really too bad. It was fixed up nicely, and they did have the conveniences so, and I ate my meals with them. And they provided me transportation to school.

QUESTION: You mentioned that school lasted for eight months, what did you do during the other four months?

ANSWER: After the first year I taught school, I went to Emporia State Teachers College. That's what it was called then. And I went to summer school. To renew my certificate, I think I had to have eight hours. And so, I spent the summer going to school, and then in August I went back to Kansas City and stayed with my mother. And I went back out to western Kansas along toward the end of August because we had institute. School didn't start, I think, until the first of September in those days. But I had to be out there about a week early for institute.

QUESTION: What do you mean by institute?

ANSWER: Well, I guess today we'd call it inservice. But the teachers came into town for two or three days. It varied from year to year of meetings. We were given our records that we had to keep, the copies of our Reed-Tracy tests which we were to give in the six weeks. There were speakers, and, uh, I don't think they were full day sessions. I think they were likethree half days, but where I was living out in the country, my friend and I stayed in town with a relative of hers for those three days at attend all the meetings.

QUESTION: You mentioned other teachers that came in for this institute. Uh, like how big a district are we talking about, how many teachers came in?

ANSWER: Um. Well, it would have included all the high school and elementary teachers, and all the rural schools. Our schools weren't as large then as they are now. I would say 130 people.

QUESTION: And there was one superintendent over all of these?

ANSWER: Yes, she was called the county superintendent.

QUESTION: She?

ANSWER: Yes, her name was, uh, let's see, uh, oh dear ... Her last name was Snell. Maybe I'll think of it later. And she was an elderly lady. Very nice. Very helpful.

QUESTION: And she was the person that you were responsible to?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: There was no principal?

ANSWER: Not in the rural schools. The elementary school in town had a principal, and the high school did. But not the rural schools.

QUESTION: Uh, did you have to meet with the schoolboard very often?

ANSWER: Never.

QUESTION: Just with the superintendent?

ANSWER: Yes. Now when my paycheck came it came by the means of the president of the schoolboard. Other than that I didn't really have any official contact with the board-members.

QUESTION: Uh, were you expected to conduct yourself in any particular way in the community?

ANSWER: I don't recall that anyone ever told me that I should. I soon learned that everyone knew my business, and, uh, I lived in a Methodist community. Although I wasn't a Methodist. And I knew that they disapproved of drinking. And I didn't attend the Methodist church. Otherwise, I don't recall that there were many restrictions.

QUESTION: Do you know how your school was financed?

ANSWER: I don't know for sure except that each school district had an amount of money, and I assumed that that came from a tax of the people within that district.

QUESTION: Similar to today?

ANSWER: Yes, except today the county, it is the county and not those small districts.

QUESTION: How did you get, uh, your school supplies?

ANSWER: There was a fund set up for me, and I had a checkbook, and I could buy materials if I needed them. I, uh, spent

that money for art supplies. Uh, for, we didn't have music books, but one year I remember I bought kazoos for all the children, and we learned to play kazoos. So that came out of that supply fund. Um, when we got ready for box suppers and I had to purchase readings or plays for the kids to do, that came from the money. And I'm not sure now how much money I had to spend each year. But I think it was about \$200 which for that time was all right. And I assumed that if I had needed anything, you know, very important, that they would have found money for it.

QUESTION: You were in, uh, two different schoolhouses. Why don't you describe, the physical description, of the one at Pleasant Valley?

ANSWER: Okay. The one at Pleasant Valley basically was one-room except that, uh, on the north side there was a small room which had been used as a coal room. Uh, they had never cleaned all the coal from the floor, and some old books were stored back there, and I could put art supplies back there. So we really didn't use that little room very much. The other little room on the north was where we kept our water bucket. We had to pump water from a well outside and put the water bucket inside. But the school faced south, and we were on a little bit of a hill. There was a large playground outside for the children to play. So it was very pleasant. But it was a frame structure, I think, because it was stuccoed on the outside. We no longer had a coal heater. We had a butane stove, and they had put venetian blinds in the school but nothing on the floor. We had just a bare wood floor, and in the evenings I put floor-sweep on it and then sweep it before I went home in the evenings. Otherwise all the cleaning was done by boardmembers, I guess, during the summer.

QUESTION: How about, uh, you didn't mention the lighting?

ANSWER: We had electric lights.

QUESTION: How about toilets?

ANSWER: The toilets were outside.

QUESTION: How about, uh, was there anything different about South Beaver?

ANSWER: Well, yes there was. At South Beaver they had been having a school lunch program. So we had one room upstairs with a little entry way. Then we had a basement so that if the weather was bad outside the kids could go downstairs to play. And there was a stove down there. Where if the parent brought a kettle of soup, and left it

in the morning, I could warm the soup and the kids ate hot lunches that way. The parents had a system set up which they did among themselves for bringing something that could be served warm everyday. Uh, I didn't have any trees at Pleasant Valley on the schoolgrounds but South Beaver did have trees planted all around the outside perimeter of their schoolyard. And, of course, in both places we had swings and play equipment for the kids.

QUESTION: Were there any physical problems with either one of the buildings?

ANSWER: No, I was really always very happy with both buildings. They were comfortable. They were warm in the winter-time, and when it was, you know, hot, it was cool enough.

QUESTION: You mentioned that the schoolboard kept the buildings clean for you?

ANSWER: Um-hum.

QUESTION: You didn't have to do much?

ANSWER: No, I really didn't have to do much.

QUESTION: But you did sweep the floors?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: Do you know who and when the schoolbuildings were built?

ANSWER: No, I don't.

QUESTION: Are the schools being used today?

ANSWER: No, neither building is being used. For a time another building was brought into Pleasant Valley and that building was to the north of the old building, and there were enough students that they held school in both buildings. At one time in later years, I substituted in the second building that was put there. But now that second one has also been removed, and the old original building is still there that is unused. The one at Pleasant Valley is unused.

QUESTION: Do you know why ...

ANSWER: I mean the one at South Beaver is unused.

QUESTION: Do you know why the schools closed?

ANSWER: Yes, because unification came along, and it was no longer feasible to keep those rural schools open.

QUESTION: Did your schools differ from others in the area?

ANSWER: No, I think that we were pretty much the same except that I probably in both cases had a better building, physical facilities, than some of the others in the county. There were some that were better than mine. In the south part of the county there was a school called Lydia. And it was a completely different building in that it was two buildings and a small kitchen. And the children could have hot meals there, too. And it was very modern because they had electric lights and, uh, heating that was indoors. And then in the very, very south part of the county another rural school was built just before unification, and it also was brick. A very nice building. But outside of those two brick buildings probably the two schools that I had were one of the nicest in the county.

QUESTION: You mentioned that the school year lasted for eight months, how long was your school day?

ANSWER: We started at nine in the morning and ended at four in the afternoon.

QUESTION: Did everyone living in your community attend this school?

ANSWER: Yes, I think so.

QUESTION: There was no reason that somebody couldn't go there?

ANSWER: No, not that I know of.

QUESTION: And the children were all treated the same?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: What was the usual age for a child to begin school?

ANSWER: Well, we didn't have kindergarten then, so the child started at six years, I believe.

QUESTION: And how old were your oldest students?

ANSWER: Well, they were eighth graders, so around 14, I think. 13 or 14.

QUESTION: So what would you say was the average number of years the student spent in the school?

ANSWER: Eight.

QUESTION: And what was the greatest distance traveled by the student to school?

ANSWER: Hum. I don't think the distances were great in my school district. Probably not more than ten. Probably not more than ten miles, I think.

QUESTION: And how did most of the children get to school?

ANSWER: Their parents brought them in cars. They didn't have busing then.

QUESTION: They didn't walk?

ANSWER: A car or pickup. Only a few walked. There were two families within walking distance. The people across the road that I stayed with and then to the west there was a family. Those children could walk. That was only about a mile.

QUESTION: Did the children have to pay anything to attend the school?

ANSWER: No.

QUESTION: How about their books?

ANSWER: Well, in those days you bought your books in town. They had a book list which the county superintendent furnished. And they bought their books and materials.

QUESTION: How did most of the students dress?

ANSWER: Very casually because they were all farm children.

QUESTION: Did the girls wear pants?

ANSWER: Not often in those days. Mostly they wore dresses. Uh, it wasn't, a few had blue jeans, but it wasn't stylish to wear pants in those days.

QUESTION: Were the majority of the students of a particular religion or nationality?

ANSWER: In this community they were mainly Methodists because their church was, oh, less than half a block west of my schoolhouse.

QUESTION: How about nationality?

ANSWER: No particular ethnic group.

QUESTION: Did any of your students from the schools go on to become outstanding?

ANSWER: Yes, one young man, his name is Jim Shafer, is now a psychiatrist in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Uh, he was a fifth grader the first year I taught school. Uh, I had two brothers in the eighth grade that year. One of them, Lionel Rickford, became an engineer. His brother is a farmer in Wichita county. Umm, I think probably of those students, the others have stayed around. One young man who was an eighth grader that year is a postal carrier. And I suppose you would say that he is successful in his field. Others have married and have raised families.

QUESTION: Umm, what type of occupations did most of your students eventually take up?

ANSWER: I was going to say farming, but then I don't think most of them took up farming. Umm, we had the one who became a doctor, and the one who became an engineer. One of the girls that year, uh, is a homemaker and very active in church work. One eighth grader is now a farmer. Uh, of the sixth graders I had, I had only one seventh grader. I saw her a couple of years ago. She is married to a minister and still is in Kansas. And she was working in the library in her school. She doesn't have a degree, but she was helping out as an aide in the library. Of the sixth graders, one young man is, I thought he was going to have a career in music but that didn't work out, and he's now working in the maintenance department for the Wichita County School system. The other one, I don't know what happened to him. Another young lady, who was in the fifth grade that year is essentially a homemaker but works in the community. Others, I think, have become homemakers. Very few of them are still in farming at that first school.

QUESTION: How many students did you have?

ANSWER: The first year I had 17 students in seven grades. And that was interesting because I had never ever set foot in a rural school until I went there, and now I wonder how I ever managed. I think I was just too ignorant to know the difference because when I look back I think I didn't know what to do when I went there. I just plowed right into it, and things seemed to work out. The students seemed to learn. Sometimes I think that they did it, not I. Because they've all turned out to be good people and very successful in their areas. Now, you know, I'd be afraid to go in not knowing what to do or where to start. But we all worked together, and I think that I was young enough and close enough to the ages of those

older students that I seemed more like a friend to them than a teacher. And they all were cooperative.

QUESTION: Do you want to describe a typical school day? For instance, how did your day start out and then progress through it?

ANSWER: Well, first we started by ringing the little hand bell. And the students would generally be outside playing around the schoolbuilding. When they came in, we had opening exercises. We had the flag salute, and generally we sang a song. Uh, in those days we didn't, we weren't required to have prayers, so I don't think that we did that. And then we'd get into classes. Uh, I don't remember if I had my schedule set up, but we had reading, math, English, uh, social studies, health, and you know, occasionally I had music and art. But those were the basic subjects. I generally had the older children, when they weren't studying, they were helping younger students. I only had one first grader that first year, thank goodness. So I spent a lot of time with her helping her to learn to read. And I would take turns with each group of children. You know, try to have some recitation in each area. But we were very busy. Then we would stop to take an hour off for lunch. Most of the kids brought their lunch, so we could sit around the steps and eat lunch. And they could play, and we would start again at one o'clock, and we'd go 'til four.

QUESTION: We have, like today, in the elementary schools they have recess. Did you have breaks like that in the morning and afternoon?

ANSWER: Um-hum. Fifteen minutes in the morning, fifteen minutes in the afternoon, and if it were particularly nice warm weather and we were having a good ball game, we might stay out a little longer. That was pretty much left up to me.

QUESTION: Did you have any discipline problems?

ANSWER: Not the first year, and really I didn't have too many the second year. The second year I had a new little boy come to the school. And he just was a character, and finally towards the end of the year, I spanked him. And, uh, I think that he remembers that to this day. And this year I happened to have one of his children, and I've wondered sometimes if he ever told her that I spanked him. Outside of that, I never really had any discipline problems.

QUESTION: Did you have any special rules?

ANSWER: No, I don't think so. I think if the kids talked too much, I'd just say quiet down, and they did it. Parents

expected them to behave in school, and they checked with me frequently, and if things were not going right, I was to tell them. And I had a lot of parent support from the home then.

QUESTION: What types of textbooks did you have?

ANSWER: Well, there were textbooks for math, for reading, for English, for geography, and I think we had health. I don't remember whether or not we had science textbooks. We didn't have music books. We didn't use one. Then also we were on a six-week grading, and we were provided with Reed-Tracy tests which I think were produced here at Ft. Hays. Uh, Dr. Henry Reed was the author of those in conjunction with other people. At Leoti we have Dr. R.B. Stewart. He was an osteopathic physician, but we also was principal of the grade school for many, many years and at one time he was mayor in Leoti. But they were printed, and they had answer keys. And we were required to give those in each subject in each grade every six weeks. And we were expected to have covered the material on those Reed-Tracy tests.

QUESTION: Did you offer any special classes or unique educational services?

ANSWER: No.

QUESTION: How about teaching aids?

ANSWER: I guess we didn't know what those were in those days.

QUESTION: How about maps?

ANSWER: Well, I think that we had maps, wall maps, in the school that were provided.

QUESTION: You mentioned you had these Reed-Tracy tests, uh, and that you had six-week grading periods. Did you send, uh, grade cards home?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: And were they based on the results of the tests?

ANSWER: Somewhat, I had daily grades and then they were averaged with those test grades, and there were cards. I turned in records to the county superintendent.

QUESTION: Did you give like, like uh, letter grades?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: Did you have a library?

ANSWER: No, but the county superintendent had shelves and shelves of books in her office which was in the old courthouse at that time. Uh, generally on Saturday I would go in and see her, or maybe every other Saturday. And we could checkout books from her office and take out to our schools. So I generally did that.

QUESTION: You mentioned that there were other schools in your district?

ANSWER: Um-hum.

QUESTION: Okay, did you have activities that took place between those schools?

ANSWER: Not usually, except that, uh, the Catholic school at Marienthal liked to play baseball, and they challenged my school to play a game of baseball. So we went over there one time and I. I ... My students thought I was a wonderful baseball player, and I wasn't. I never ever could hit a baseball, but one day practicing in our schoolyard, I hit a baseball, and it went all the way across our schoolyard which is very large and across the road into the ditch. And they thought I was fantastic. I never played baseball with them after that because I wanted to keep my reputation. But we practiced a lot, and we went to Marienthal. One of the parents took us over there, and we played Marienthal that baseball game, and we lost. But I got a black eye in the process. I was sitting on the bench, a ball flew over and hit me in the eye. I had a black eye for about two weeks, and my students thought that was really humorous. Then Marienthal returned the favor and came to Pleasant Valley to play a baseball game. They also beat us again, but the kids enjoyed that. I don't think that it was something commonly done.

QUESTION: Did you have any special observances?

ANSWER: Yes, uh, every year for Halloween and Christmas I was to have a box supper. So we would rig up a curtain in the schoolbuilding. There were hooks and wires because it had been done there before. And at the north part of our schoolroom was the stage. There was a piano, in both schools as a matter of fact, and, uh, I would order readings and plays. We practiced for a long time before Halloween and Christmas. And the parents were very good about making costumes for the kids and props. And we would put on a program, and then there was always the box which was auctioned off. And of course in those days, the thing was to try to get the teacher's box. If the teacher had a boyfriend, he was supposed to try to get it, but the other men had

lots of fun trying to get the bid up so that your boyfriend couldn't get the box. The first year I didn't have a boyfriend, and I think the man who bought my box was someone that I didn't care for. But I was required to eat with him since he bought my box. And that's as far as it went. Then, I think, the second year my husband now, I was going with him, he got my box, but they bid him up. And then that money stayed with the school and that was what helped us to have funds to spend. And I think if I remember correctly, our box suppers were usually pretty good. We'd get like two hundred to three hundred dollars.

QUESTION: And then the money went to your district?

ANSWER: Um-hum.

QUESTION: It didn't stay particularly in your...

ANSWER: In my school.

QUESTION: It did or did not?

ANSWER: It did.

QUESTION: Do you remember some of the things you bought with the money?

ANSWER: Oh, art supplies, and those kazoos that I mentioned about before, construction paper, paints.

QUESTION: So some of your supplies?

ANSWER: Um-hum.

QUESTION: How about, uh, did you have music contests?

ANSWER: Not then, at least not in the rural schools.

QUESTION: How about spelling bees?

ANSWER: No, not when I was teaching in my schools.

QUESTION: Were there any organizations similar to today's PTA?

ANSWER: No.

QUESTION: But you did feel that the parents were supportive of the schools?

ANSWER: Yes, they really were. For example, I had a little first grader that first year who kept getting stomachaches, and I was really concerned because she cried, and I didn't

know what to do for her. I think I fixed her a place where she could lie down on the floor, you know. But this went on for several days, and finally one of her older brothers or sisters in the school told her mother at home what she was doing. That mother brought a bottle of castor oil and a spoon to school the next morning and said now Janet if you get a stomachache again you just get this bottle of castor oil out, fill the spoon full, and make her take it. She said just say, well if you are going to have a stomachache, you have to take some medicine. And she said, and I think this will cure her of the stomachaches. And it really did hurt me, but I made her take that spoon of castor oil, and she didn't have a stomachache after that. But there were a number of times that parents knew what was going on because the other kids would go home and tell them. And if they thought there was a difficulty, they'd come and give me some suggestions, and I used them. Because they knew I was young, and I didn't really know what I was doing, I think. They were very tolerant.

QUESTION: Did you every go out to visit the students and their parents?

ANSWER: Uh, yes, from time to time parents would invite me over for Sunday dinner. One I remember especially because these were the children who just lived about a mile from school. Uh, their parents were farmers and both of them were people who really believed in education, and they wanted to become educated. The man was not particularly a farmer, but he was struggling along trying to be. Later, they did both go to school and become teachers after their children were away from home. Uh, they invited me over for Sunday dinner, and we sat around and talked afterwards and visited. And then I think it was Look magazine that they had a lot of back issues from, and I think there was a quiz of some kind in those, and they got those out and started quizzing me to see how much I knew. And I was very, very embarrassed. And I was a little bit angry because I felt that they were trying to show me that they knew as much or more than I did. You know, I didn't really think that that was right. Uh, consequently when I was invited there again, I didn't go because I felt that they were putting me down. Uh, they were rather religious people. I happened to wear nail polish and through the children in school I found out that they were rather disapproving of the fact that I wore lipstick and nail polish. You know that was ... Everyone did that at that time, and it was at the time that we wore red nail polish. That's not stylish now, but it was then. Or the dark purples. And, uh, their daughter who was in the seventh grade, I think, rather admired me, and she wanted to wear lipstick and nail polish, and they wouldn't let her. And I think that they felt that I was encouraging her. I really

didn't do that because I knew that they didn't like it. But she at one point would bring her pink nail polish to school and put it on there at school and leave the polish and remover at school and remove it before she went home. So her parents didn't know that she did that. But, uh, other people invited me, and generally it was one time. They did their duty, and that was it.

QUESTION: Like one time a year?

ANSWER: Um-hum.

QUESTION: When could a student graduate?

ANSWER: We had eighth grade graduation then as we do now. Uh, students from all the rural schools went into Leoti and graduated with the eighth graders from the elementary school. At that time we had grade school, one through eight, an elementary school. But there was an eighth grade graduation. And I think we still do have an eighth grade graduation as a matter of fact.

QUESTION: Do you remember anything about the graduation exercises?

ANSWER: No, I don't think I ever went.

COMMENT: I'm surprised that you weren't required to go.

ANSWER: I probably should've, but I don't remember at the time.

QUESTION: You mentioned that the schoolhouse was used for the box suppers. Were there any other social activities that took place there?

ANSWER: I don't think that mine was. Uh, a schoolhouse north where the lady who lived across the street or across the road from the school, where I sometimes had to stay, was a teacher at this school up north. And they had Grange meetings in their schoolhouse. That was a farmer's organization. But outside of that, I don't know of any activities that they were really used for.

QUESTION: Did you have any extracurricular activities involving your school besides the ones you've already mentioned?

ANSWER: No, uh, one year, the second year I think, after I had been to Emporia for summer school, when I came back the kids were active in 4-H. And they were wanting to learn

square-dancing and some folk dances. While I was at Emporia that summer, we had dancing lessons out in kind of the main building on this cement slab. Uh, somebody came and taught us several different dances. The Schottische, the polka, and put your little foot, and several of those. So I helped the kids learn some of those dances as a 4-H activity. Then one time the circus came to town and one of the parents loaned me a car to take the kids to town to the circus. They didn't ask me if I could drive. And I couldn't drive. But I took the kids to town, and I think now what a terrible thing that was. I know I had a hard time because the car kept dying. You know, in those days it was the gear shifting thing. And uh, I had a terrible time, but I got them there and back to school, and no one was injured. I wouldn't even do that now. I wouldn't have the nerve to do that.

QUESTION: You had one car and how many students?

ANSWER: Well, I think that somebody else took a car and that I had to drive this other one. The second year I didn't have as many students as I did that first year. Probably had ten. So there must have been two cars, but I know we went to town to the circus. We took a day off school to do that which now we wouldn't be allowed to do.

QUESTION: Uh, you had 17 the first year and only ten the second?

ANSWER: I believe so.

QUESTION: How come?

ANSWER: Uh, well, we lost the four eighth graders, of course. They graduated, and there was only one seventh grader moving up. That would have been 13. We must have had a family who moved because I didn't have, I might've had 12. 17 minus 4. I maybe had 15. I might've had 15. Hum, probably 15. I think then when I was over at South Beaver I had just ten over there.

QUESTION: Are there any traditions that are ...

ANSWER: 17 minus 4 is 13, I only had 13 that year.

QUESTION: Are there any traditions that are peculiar to your particular schoolhouse.

ANSWER: Traditions, I don't think so.

QUESTION: In summing up, Billie, what do you think, feel were your greatest accomplishments or fondest memories of the one-room schoolhouse?

ANSWER: Well, it really surprises me now that those children learned as much as they did, and I would ... Considering that I lacked training working with children. That I wasn't familiar with the subject areas, that I wasn't familiar with how that type of school operated. I think the thing that helped me was that I was young. I was close to those children's age, and there must have been some kind of rapport, because I really think they were more responsible for their learning than I was. I think, too, that that the situation with the parents was much different then. I knew that I had support from the parents. I don't always know that now. Uh, I felt that the students really learned quite a bit. But I think that they learned to work on their own and individually a lot. Even though I had 17 kids in seven grades, I could give some individual attention that I sometimes can't now with the large groups of students. Uh, one thing that I remember a lot about that school was that in the evening when everybody left. And everyone left all at once at four o'clock. And I'd be left by myself, and there was this terrible stillness and especially in the fall. There was just a really, really lonely feeling about being left in that schoolhouse by myself until someone came to get me. But I never ever dreaded going to school. Never. I always looked forward to it, and I really thought teaching was a lot of fun. Uh, and when those kids come back to see me they always remember the fun times that we had. And I think that's really neat. It's been, uh, really interesting to see them when they come back, how they've changed, what they've gone on to do, and what's really interesting now is to be having their children and maybe grandchildren in those families. I always think that it's helpful when those new kids come up to have known how their parents were at that age, and maybe we were not supposed to remember that. But sometimes I can really see qualities in the children and the grandchildren from, from their parents. I just thought it was a neat experience.

QUESTION: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

ANSWER: Well, the only thing that I would add probably was that when I came out here I really didn't think about making teaching a career. But I think because I enjoyed it so much in those rural schools it just got into my blood, and I don't want to do anything else.

COMMENT: Again, Billie, I would like to thank you for taking this time to visit with me.

ANSWER: You're welcome.