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1987

### Interview with Mary Truan

Marie A. Burns

*Fort Hays State University*

Mary Truan

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#### Recommended Citation

Burns, Marie A. and Truan, Mary, "Interview with Mary Truan" (1987). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 80.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/80>

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## CHAPTER TWO

### ORAL INTERVIEW

Marie: This is an oral interview with Mary Truan, conducted by Marie Burns.

Marie: Mary, can you enlighten me as to what subjects were taught in the school?

Mary: We had the good old reading, writing, and rithmetic. Then we had geography, history, and for the upper grades, seventh and eight, there was a agriculture book. We had penmanship.

Marie: What was the length of the school day?

Mary: From nine to four, but the teacher was required to to be there by eight-thirty.

Marie: OK. Then you were always there by eight-thirty?

Mary: Because, I had to start the fires, especially in wintertime. You had to have the fire started and the school warm for the children when they arrived.

Marie: And...The school year, what was its length?

Mary: From the first week in September until April. Eight months was the term and it was the first week in September that we started and then finished up in April.

Marie: AH! What were some of the teaching methods you used?

- Mary: Well, ah. I just can't remember that there was a method. I was teaching and I followed, what do I say, followed instince. This has got to be taught. I knew the book, or lessons for the day or the week and then we just **put** it over to the children.
- Marie: Were there any examples given in the book that you could follow?
- Mary: Really not. Really not. There was a list of questions usually at the back of the chapter on different things. That would kind of help me. And if I could see the child couldn't understand what we were studying..... Geography and history seemed so hard for so many of them. I don't think they were really interested in it, that's why. And then we had.... The most we ever had was a set of pull down maps. They were encased in a wall and you'd pull them down and you'd try to point out. Now, one school I did have a globe. It helped a lot and then the little maps that were in their books help some on that. But, the reading, writing, and those things....and we had no supplemental books. We just had that book that we went by.
- Marie: And anything else that you could invent along the way.
- Mary: Yes. Anything that I could help.

Marie: OK! Good.

Mary: Make it a little easier or help them to cope with what I was trying to put over.

Marie: Was there anything such as a special class, such as L.D. or Special Education?

Mary: No Sir! No. No way.

Marie: Can you describe a typical day? What did you start with in the morning?

Mary: We usually started with reading. Well we called the school. We rang the bell in this case. They had to stand at their desk and we would have the flag salute and a prayer. We always had a prayer. And then we'd have the reading classes. That I remember was always first. And then, I just can't remember how I did the rest of them, but I managed to work them all in. And I would have, well the difference....through the years of my eight years of teaching. I run from one year I had two students. **That** was the least I ever had and I had as many as twenty one,so. We had to get all the classes covered in a day.

Marie: Ah, Ok. Did you conduct more than one class at a time?

Mary: No, but I would combine. I'd study the level of a child's mantality and maybe have the third and

fourth grade, there's one in each, they are studying together. Their writing. Writing I would have the whole group and that would cover, and save a lot of time by having the whole group do their thing at their desk. They didn't come up and they'd make the old ovals and the up and down lines. That was the first thing. There was a guide book...space lines on it. I can remember that.

Marie: Were comprehensive tests given for promotion of children?

Mary: No way. No way. No, just the final exams at the end of the year. Every month they would have tests. This is what the report card was gauged by, the results of those tests. There was never any competency test given.

Marie: How often did the report cards come out?

Mary: Once a month, once a month.

Marie: OK. Good. Ah, did the.....Now you said you had taught in several different schools. Did all of the schools that you teach in have libraries?

Mary: A shelf or two of books, a shel....The one particular school, the newly built one did have an extention to the main part and it was.....we used it for a stage when we'd have a program. Then there were shelves in there that there were quite a few library books.

Marie: How did you decide on a text book and where did it come from?

Mary: That was not decided by the teacher. It was decided by the county....now I don't know whether the state or county. The family had to supply their own books. Their own pencils. Their own paper. And now families with as many as four or five, even some have five children....They would hand their books down from year to year. There wasn't as much change like there is now. And, I can remember they, Markwells at Hays. That was the one big family trip to Hays to get their books. And, I want to think that Markwells had a second hand department where they, people who just couldn't afford the new texts could buy the second had, if they were luck enough to have some in store. And, families would then....even the members in the district. One family would ring the telephone and contact the others. Do you have such and such a book that Johnny had last year? And, maybe they could luck out there.

Marie: What was the atmosphere of the educational program in the school district that you taught in? Was it loose or strict?

Mary: No, we were strict. We had to be strict. When

When you had as many as twenty-one children in one room and had to cover classes, learning for all of those, you had to be strict. And, there was no problem. No problem. They liked it.

Marie: Can you tell me what some of the rules were in your school that are different today?

Mary: OH, there is no comparison. I visited school last year. I'm a grandma now, 78 years old and I visited my grandson's classroom. And, I couldn't believe.... thinking back when I was eighteen, my teaching experiences, I couldn't believe I was in a grade school room. It was that different. I said..... I was directed to my grandson's room. Well he wasn't there. Well isn't....I was told this is his room. Yes it is, but he's over for special help. So I was directed down the hall to another room where he and three or four other children were with another teacher getting help with their math. Simple addition problems. So, I never had anything like that. We just had to see it along and if they learned it all were able to pass at the end of the year.

Marie: What were some of the special observances in your school?

Mary: I always managed to have a Christmas program. Ah...

We never had a piano. Some of them played the harp. We never had a piano so we never had a music contest. And, I can't remember that we had spelling bees, because, transportation wasn't..... district....the parents couldn't be bothered hauling and my one car couldn't hold all of the children, but, we would have a nice Christmas program. And, Oh, they would memorize, we put on dialogues, and they'd speak pieces. Everyone had a part in it and they anticipated this. They loved it. Loved it. And, put out their best and wore their best. And, then the district would be all generous and Santa Clause would come and treat them to sacks of treats. And, this was the happy day.

Marie: Did the parents ever help you do anything with the production? The Christmas production? Did they ever come in and be of any assistance?

Mary: Really not. Really not. I did have a Valentine party and the mothers did bring cook.....invited their mothers and the mothers did furnish the cookies. I furnished the punch or drink, what ever we had. And, we had a little program then. And, that I can remember, but no other time. There really wasn't time for programs when you were teaching



all these grades and getting it all done. There just wasn't. So, but, the Christmas we did take in. Oh, we...that was the big event.

Marie: How about graduation exercises, were there....

Mary: There was never a graduation. We never got to give the final test in our school. The children were prepared in our schools and then the parents were responsible for getting them to, oh, a center. Now speaking of Walker and Hope Valley, that's south of Walker ten miles. The parents took them to a public school there. And, some disinterested party would be there to supervise, ah, the test that day. And, then I think they were sent in and graded at the county level. And, a passing grade was sent out, or the results were and they were usually passing grades.

Marie: There was never a cap and gown service form of graduation in the eight grade.

Mary: Nothing. Nothing. And, when they graduated it was April. The last day of April. Getting close to the first of May. Busy, busy. This was all rural district where I taught, and the families were busy. There was garden, and farming, and baby chicks, and more fresh cows. Cows and calves to attend to and then there just wasn't time for.....Let's

get home and get busy.

Marie: Can you describe what a typical day would be like for you, before school started and then after school was out?

Mary: For me?

Marie: For you.

Mary: Well I stayed at home all but one year, all the years I taught. And, I got up. I had two little sisters still going to school and got them ready. And, as I drove to my school I passed their school. So I would leave them off. Now, that was morning. Get dressed and ready and be there by eight-thirty. Then the day just flew at school. Noon hour, there was no supervision for the school grounds, but the teacher. So, I'd play ball with them. We'd play drop the handkerchief. Every game they'd come up with the teacher would go out and play with them. After school I didn't have to tidy up the building myself. There were pairs assigned to clap erasers. Go outside and clap the erasers. Then the boards... Two were asked to sweep. They were assigned that job to help sweep and, ah, to help. Yes. It seems like we did that after school. Um, hum. I would have an agreement with a parent in that respect.

Marie: Would you say that teaching ways or habits are

Different today than they were?

Mary: Oh, they are so different, so different. There is no comparison.

Marie: Ah. How were the teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community? Did you have a code of ethics or morals that you had to follow, or felt like you had to follow?

Mary: Well, I just.....Yes! Yes! She's a teacher. That would be whispered. That's a teacher. That's a teacher. And, it was expected that you be all lady. All the way.

Marie: How about dating? Was it frowned upon by the community for a teacher to marry at that time?

Mary: I don't remember a married teacher in my..... Men were alright if they were married, but I don't remember a lady teacher that I went to a teaching meeting with that were married. A-hum. We were just all single ladies. That is in the earlier years of my teaching. The first years.

Marie: Ok. Were you in charge of any extra curricular activities? Such as, spelling bees, or taking charge of anything after school that would happen in the school house?

Mary: No, I never had anything like that? (Chuckles)

Marie: Was there ever a problem with teacher turnover?

Mary: No. No, they just....there wasn't that many, ah, ah, When you were hired you were just hired for your eight months and you taught your eight months. I don't remember any teacher. Of course there weren't married teachers, so there were no pregnancies. And, ah, I just don't remember that at all.....of any turnovers in the middle of a term.

Marie: Did more than one teacher work in the school?

Mary: No. I was alone.

Marie: Was there ever a principal?

Mary: (Chuckling) No. No. We had a county superintendant and he would pay use a visit. I want to think it was in the fall and then in the spring. And, boy the county superintendant is making his rounds. Now you be on the ball. I want that desk in order and orderly. We kept a ledger in the school and that was a big deal. He would sign the.. or any other company, but there weren't parents week, like we used to have or any of that. But the county superintendants coming was it. He would supervise. Sometimes he would ask questions, but his days were filled just like ours. He didn't have the time to terry to long.

Marie: Did any parents ever come in to observe?

Mary: So seldom. So seldom did they come. Never.

Fathers would drive up through the lull of the winter to pick up children. They'd sit out in there cars. Visit. Never.

Marie: What evaluation system was used for the teachers?

Mary: I just can't remember how or what they did to evaluate us. There's nothing that I can remember about that. If your experienced that ment something. And, the word got around.....word of mouth. Either at the church steps or in the grocery store, that she's a good teacher or I'm not pleased with our teacher and that's about all the way they were evaluated. That, I can remember.

Marie: How was the discipline problem handled with the children?

Mary: You just handled them yourself. You just did. You never called in the parents. And , the children were sent to school, respect that teacher and obey that teacher. There wasn't these things, the parents stopping in. Now, I'll go way back before I started teaching. I started in a little country school. I was left handed. We had moved into this settlement. I couldn't understand German and I couldn't talk German. And, I couldn't understand it. Everybody else in the school talked German. They were being taught in English though....and I

was left handed. Born left handed. I started to write with my left hand. A Nun taught this school. Now, this was a public school, but Nuns taught. There were two teachers and then one was a house keeper. And, they lived in a little house right next there to the school, between the school and the church. And, this teacher came and said, "You use your other hand." "Don't write with that hand." And, it just seemed nature had me back using that other hand. That Nun would come back and slap that left hand of mine and just humiliate me. And, the other kids would snicker and say things in German. And, I walked to school. It was a little over a mile.

Marie: Where was this at?

Mary: This was at Vincent. This little Catholic settlement. Aha. It was all High German and Low German and Volga Germans that lived there and all went to that school. And, they managed to have that little church there and they managed.....It was a public school and the Nuns fought to teach there because they got so much better pay then they got in a Catholic school. And, so I went home and told my mother that Sister....."Why are you crying?" I said, "Sister slapped me again today." "Why

did she slap you?" And, I's say, "Why I used the left hand." Well instead of my mother getting on the phone or getting up there and having that teacher fired like they do now a days, Mother said, "I'll fix that." She took out a piece of hair, it was cut "Buster Brown" style, and she braided it and put a bow in. Now she said, "You feel up where that braid hangs, and the side that the bows on." "Use that hand and then the teacher won't have to, Sister won't have to slap you." That's how the discipline problems, parents never interfered.

Marie: That's neat. While you were teaching at Walker, (Mary interjects....South Walker was my first) where did you live?

Mary: I lived at home. Let's see. That was about seven or eight miles from home. And, I drove a Model A that my brother owned. And, I signed that contract for seventy dollars a month. And, I was able to pay my brother. I bought the gas for the car. I imagine it was eight or ten cents a gallon then. And, I'd pay him a little bit for using the car. When I couldn't have his car..... Now, he went out west....was he putting up silage or something, and he went with his car, then I rode horse back. And, there was an old hitching

post at this school that I could tie my horse to.

Ah-mm.

Marie: How long did you teach at South Walker?

Mary: Just one year. And, this new Hope Valley was built. That was on down another seven miles. It was a new school. A larger school and they were paying better money. I applied and I was hired.

Marie: Do you remember what your salary was there?

Mary: Of! Ninty-five dollars a month (not audible) but I had twenty-one pupils.

Marie: Did you still live at home when you were teaching at Hope Valley?

Mary: I still lived at home, yes. Ah-m. I lived at home.

Marie: From there you....You taught at Hope Valley, how many years?

Mary: Two years there. Two years.

Marie: And, from Hope Valley you went out west, right?

Mary: Yes.

Marie: Do you remember what the name of the school was there?

Mary: I cannot remember the name of the school, it's to many years. It's in Sheradin County, but I cannot remember the name of the school.

Marie: How long did you teach there?



Mary: One year.

Marie: Do you remember what your salary was at that time?

Mary: Yes. Yes, I went out there for ....Let's see. Did I tell you that at Hope Valley I started at ninety-five and got up to one hundred and... The second year they paid me a hundred and ten dollars. Cause I had done a terrific job. So by word of mouth by the mothers in the district... Then they had a lot of applications. There was somebody applied that, well, had relatives, there was strings. I mean that knew somebody, that knew somebody as the old saying goes. And, as competition...So I didn't get the school. And, we were starting to feel a little pinch. Teachers were more plentiful. So I knew somebody, a distant relative in Western Kansas. And, they needed a teacher badly and I went out there. And, I want to think my salary there was one hundred dollars a month too. And, I was ready to get on the move. To go some where else, and do something.

Marie: And, you stayed there one year?

Mary: One year. One year.

Marie: And, from there you went.....

Mary: I got caught in a terrible blizzard with six children

in my car. And, to get to the place where I boarded we had to drive almost a half a mile through a field. There was a road through a field. And, I..... this blizzard was in March. And, I left the school. I could follow by way of the posts and turned into this place, but there was no posts here and everything was snow. And, I found myself going in circles and wound up in the corner of the section. I recognized what corner of the section by the mailboxes. So I left my car. By then it was stranded. I meant just no way could I find my way. And, the blanket I had in the car...I had the children all grasp ahold of that and I lead. And, we walked a quarter of a mile down the hill to another farm house. By then their little fingers were frost-bitten, some of them. And, my knees were frost-bitten. I had boots on luckily. And, the lady got some snow and thawed us out and kept us all night. Now, that did turn me against Western Kansas. I'll be honest with you.

Marie: After your teaching experiences in Sheridan County, where did you go next?

Mary: I came back home. I missed a year. My father was ill. I missed a year of teaching. I had planned on marriage, this didn't materilize. So then

depression was hitting right and left. And, I applied. And, I had a good record as a teacher. The prices were dropped. And, I got the Phillips School south of Hays.

Marie: Ok. Do you remember what your starting salary was there?

Mary: Yes. They had applications for as low as fifty dollars. But, they hired me with my experience for sixty-two fifty.

Marie: Can you tell me who tried to undercut you in that district or that school?

Mary: Well, frankly, my cousin was one. A cousin of mine who needed teaching.

Marie: Did she have any experience?

Mary: No. She wasn't experienced.

Marie: Just a rookie teacher.

Mary: Aha. She was just new and there were seven tirls in that family and they needed to get them out and get them finding work.

Marie: How long did you stay at the Phillips School?

Mary: I stayed there for a three years. The first year I taught it, there were two pupils. A sister and a brother. The little fellow was just beginning. He couldn't talk a word of English. And, his sister was a seventh grader. It was a large brick

school. And, there was two children. And, rather than to heat the great big room with the coal, we were saving everything. Times were hard. A depression had hit. They had a library room, a small room. Now, the books didn't take up any room. So I moved two benches in there and a teachers desk and this is the only room we heated then. And, we saved money for the district.

Marie: Ah.....

Mary: And, word got around that, my how well these.... There was three different of these families. All brothers lived in that districe. They were sending their children to Munjor. Too, I think it was a Catholic school there. I'm not sure. Then.... That was back in 1932 and 32, but this one family didn't. They sent them there and the word got around. So all three brothers sent their children. So I jumped from two students to eleven the next year. Many of them spoke very, very poor English. And, it was so different. Nuns taught them at Munjor and it was so different and they knew I demanded respect. And, the one was a belligerent little bully. He was a seventh grader and he knew he had to mind me and behave. He didn't know what to do so he just got up and beat on the wall

with his fist as hard as he could. He let out his anger that way and I just looked at him. Looked him right in the eye and said, "Now if you're through you can sit down." I think I stunned him so that I didn't beat him back, cause maybe he got it at home or in other schools. By the end of the term we were just doing fine and everybody was loving everybody and we has a beg....Then my mother was on the farm. You couldn't sell pigs. There was no demand for them. So rather than shot them and bury them, we would butcher the young. We roasted a whole pig and I had a big Thanksgiving dinner at the district. Why people, all people, all came and just one of the happiest times of their lives. This was all, this here Volga German Class and the Phillips enjoyed it right with them. They were all their neighbors, but they had never just associated that much, but everybody knew everybody. So....

Marie: What about the last year there? Was this the last year that you were there? What was it?

Mary: The second year.

Marie: The second Year?

Mary: The second year. The first year I just had the two Just the two and we just lived like a little

family. And, I guess they all lived within a mile and two miles of the district. So the families visited. That's how their Sundays were spent. They go to church, have their dinner, and then they'd go visiting their relatives. The word got around about how nice and what these children were learning. And, evidently their behavior must have impressed the other cousins or the uncles and aunts. And, the next year when that enrollment, they came bringing them in by the wagon load. I was stunned, but pleased to be busy.

Marie: How many students did you have the last year you taught?

Mary: The last year I taught there, lets see, eleven or twelve. I'm not sure. Or did I have the ...I always said the "Daily Dozen". I think I called it the "Daily Dozen". Um hum.

Marie: How much schooling did you have in order to be able to teach? Tell me about this.

Mary: That is the joke, isn't it. Now, I and they say she taught on a high school education and one month summer institute, in the summer. I came to Hays and stayed with my grandmother who lived here. Couldn't drive back and forth from south of Victoria. That would have been terrible. I stayed with my

grandmother and it seemed that I walked down to Fort Hays. I took some of the courses. And, did I take a test to see what.....That I took at the court house. The court house was involved some-way. But, that's remembering back an awful lot of years. Don't forget that.

Marie: Ok.

Mary: Aha. That I'm not sure of that.

Marie: Do you, are, you remember when the school house was built? Let's just talk about the Phillips School House. Do you remember when that one was built? What year was that:

Mary: No. It was a brick. A very nice building. I don't remember. But, I can tell you about the Hope Valley one. I lived that so much.

Marie: Ok. Ok.

Mary: Now, the South Walker was an oldy. Hope Valley, when I taught there....Oh, I wanted that so bad. And, the nice money and a new building. And, it had a library, and it had indoor toilets. So, boy, and I got that with that good price of ninety-five dollars. It was just completed that summer. Why was it built? Because, the old school, Hope Valley, the name, it was in a valley. Well the termites practically ate it up. They just started

falling through the floor. And, there was no way of repair. And, the people at one time.....Hope Valley....just took care of the English. The Catholic families around there, that is the Volga Germans, the High Germans, the Low Germans and the Volga Germans did not send their children to these public schools. So it was just a few English families. Well they became more, maybe economical is the word to use. Started visiting each other and decided to send them to these public schools. The heck with driving those seven miles away. For some of them it was. So they built. It was built by the district. They had to replace it and they moved it a mile out of the valley. Hope Valley is the name of the school yet. Was until they closed it and moved it a mile and a half north.

Marie: Is it still standing?

Mary: No, just a few years ago it was torn down. After this consolidation and closing country schools. It had a basement and it had a furnace. Of course it was my job to dire that furnace and have that school warm. And then, it had indoor toilets. Indoor toilets. Now they were not the flush, because we had a cistern-----in the ground. And, we had a cistern, but if the rains didn't come at the right



time and keep the cistern filled with water off the roof, someone from the district hauled water and put it in the cistern. But, there toilets were filled with a chemical and a liquid and chemical and so much water. And, they were built much like the stool, but they were open. Oh, that chemical had a terrible smell. And, those were in the classroom. And then the coat....The boys coat closet was the room you went into before you went into the toilet. And, the girls had one, too.

Marie: That sounds like it was a pretty fancy school.

Mary: Oh, that was. We even had a stage area. Which the library made the stage. And, we really put on a big Christmas program. Let's see, what else was there about Hope Valley that I wanted to tell you? Oh. Was the land purchased or given to the school? This land, the man would not give it. He took an acre out of his quarter of land. His own quarter and he leased it to the district. I think at no charge. But, should the school ever discontinue, discontinue having school there, the land was to go back to him. And, it's only been fifteen or twenty years ago that the school was closed. That's when they started consoladating.

'Pay them to haul their children into town. Buses didn't come out there, but they paid you to haul them in. Central station which was Gorham and Victoria. Then, where did the funds come from to construct that school? It seems the district raised the funds. Now, did they get a levy? I don't remember that. I just don't. I just can't remember and....Did the community help finance the construction? They didn't help finance, but they did, all the community man came and helpwork to get it done by the time, first of September.

Marie: Can you remember whether there was a cost to the students to enroll in this Hope Valley School?

Mary: Not one cent. Not one cent. Just the books. They had to be responsible for their books, pencils, and papers, and their crayolas.

Marie: Ok. Did you ever have a voice in how much money you were going to make?

Mary: No. You told what you got. When you were a first year teacher you just hoped you got a school. And, you didn't ask for anything. Then after you had your experience and by the way of the grapevine, you heard. Well she's a good teacher. Or, they like her. Or, she's doing a good job. You could say I'd like to have this much. And, the school

boards were tight. They watched every penny. Every penny. You really didn't have much to say about it. What was your salary your last year of teaching. Alright, I started with seventy dollars. Then I got up to past the hundred mark. The depression hit. Teachers by the dozen....and I never did get....I have a friend who's alive here today. Living in Hays. And, she settled for thirty-five dollars a month. Younger than I am by four years. But, I never....sixty-two fifty was .....sixty-two fifty was low.

Marie: Boy you sure couldn't make it on that now a days, could you?

Mary: Right. And, I saved money. Saved money at that.

Marie: WOW!

Mary: See the difference?

Marie: How did you get your paycheck?

Mary: That was cute. Alright, the oldest one, my goodness. The school board was three members, president, secretary, and treasurer. Alright, the treasurer wrote out your paycheck. And, if he wasn't coming to pick up the kids, then he would send it with his oldest child. It would be sealed in a envelope. And, it would be in that lunchbox, or that school bag. And, he was given strict orders to give this to

teacher at the end of the day. At the end of the twenty days, at the end of the month. Now, and then if he came after the children he would bring it. The treasurer of the school board.....If he didn't have children then he never came to school.

Marie: Where there boundries that said you could not send your,...if you lived on this side of the line that you couldn't send your kid to that school over there?

Mary" No, because alot of children in this Hope Valley district belonged in Hope Valley district, but they sent their children to Vincent. That was a public school to, but they got the Catholic teaching there. And, they got to go to daily mass. There was a mass. Eucharist celebration. And so there was no limit on that. And, I want to say.....I want to think they were four miles square, the districts. Now, maybe, they were larger, but I rather think as I can remember Hope Valley, where later years I lived. that the children lived as much as two miles from the school east, two miles west, two miles north, or three of two miles south. I asked another teacher. This other teacher lives in town, but she could not remember. She thought six miles square. You know three by three. But, I thought it was it was four by four.

Marie: Was there ever, did a parent ever have to say, "I'm not going to send my kid to this school, because I don't like it." And, just move away?

Mary: No, there was no turnover. There was no moving. See these were rural districts and they were on the farm. Either papa got them...or the farm... they were struggling to pay for and raise there.... And, there wasn't this moving at all. Now, there was no such thing as oil wells in those days. You lived there and stayed there.

Marie: Can you think of any traditions that were associated with Hope Valley school, or any of the other schools you taught at? Anything that would be outstanding to the community or heritage of the people?

Mary: Well, there were definitely....At first, when Hope Valley was in the valley it was definitely an English settlement. And, that's the only ones that went there. Then they moved north and the district developed a better fellowship. And, the new school attracted the High Germans and the Low Germans in that area. And, they got along surprisingly well. But, the school board at the time I went, and signed my contract there were all of the English. Ah-ha.

Marie: Do you remember any of the names of the school

board members?

Mary: Yes very well. It was Jim Truan, Ed Truan and John Kruger. Now, Kruger wasn't English. He was, the name Kruger is German, but their not Catholics in the sence of the word. And they are all dead now.

Marie: Ah. Is there anything that you'd like to tell me about these guys that would be interesting for people to remember them by? Did thay have andy... Did they have any children in the school?

Mary: They had children. Each one had, Kruger didn't, but his nephew lived, his sister married a Skurlock who was Krugers hired man at one time. And, lived on part of the Kruger land. She had this one son, and, he came to Hope Valley. And, he was the only child. The Krugers were wealthy. In fact John Kruger was our Ellis County Commissioner for a good many years. And, he helped us get good roads out in that area, to by the way (chuckles) See you know somebody that knows somebody. And a..so.. he had this nephew. Came from way down the river. Lived on some of the Kruger land, south end of it. Andq they brought him to school faithfully, morning and night. They were wealthy people. She had a maid all the time. He was always dressed so well, and had the nicest lunches. And, he wanted to be

teachers pet so badly. The teacher couldn't afford that. He is now a lawyer in Kansas City, and keeps the Kruger place which he inherited for just a summer hide-out, or get-a-way.

Marie: Is this Jim Truan or Ed Truan related to your husband?

Mary: Ah, Jim was my husbands father. Aha, and it's Ed Truan the other one. He was a brother. Lived in the district and sent all of his six children to Hope Valley. I had the last two of them.

Marie: When you were teaching, was there anything such as PTA of Home and School.

Mary: No such thing. No. No such thing at all. We never even heard of it. We did get a weekly reader, it seemed, of some kind. But, that didn't have nothing to do with PTA. But, that was a little outside information that they got.

Marie: Who hired and fired the teachers?

Mary: This was the school boards job, completely. I don't ever remember a teacher being fired in my years of teaching. But, the school board did that. And, I would say that the wives had a little input. You know we just don't like that woman or, I don't know if I like that woman or....But, there was no one else. The board just made the decision.

Marie: Were there ever any activities between schools?  
Such as a..like.. Walker South and Hope Valley?

Mary: No. No..

Marie: Were ther ever any ball games or track meets?

Mary: No, I never did. And, I had just the seven at South Walker which I could have loaded in my Modal T and taken somewhere, but Walker was to big and they were not that friendly, it seemed. The Walker School. And, Hope Valley that was way down over there. And, they were very, very English bunch then. So these Walkerites didn't associate with them. And, there was nothing at the Phillips School. ....(Mumbled).....teaching Munjor by the time I got done there.

Marie: Let's talk about some students. Ah, what was the usual age of a child that began school?

Mary: They began at six. Now they wouldn't have to be six before school started. Like it is now. If they were six before the first of the year. Um-hm. Maybe, there be just one little first grader. And then you would pick out.....How did I gage that myself? That's a very super child there. She's got her work all done. Georgie will you help little Ann with her.....help teach her to write , or help teach her, her letters, or this and that.



Then in Hope Valley I was really privileged. We had, had the library and we had a little set up there. And, so Georgina who got all her classes done would take little Ann over there and help coach her.

Marie: Ok.

Mary: I'm just using names, but this is the way we did it to help. Um-hum.

Marie: What was the usual age at the completion of the eight grade? Did the, did kids tend to be retained or?

Mary: I kept one or two back in the years. It just wasn't with it, just didn't get it. And, I did hold them back. But, that was a sign of flunking. You had to discourage using that word. I would tell the parents....that's when I would consult with the parents and say, "I think it do a lot better if Elmer would repeat this work, and, we see how he progresses next year." "I don't feel he's gotten enough out of this." One or two in all the years is all I've held back. And, I did have a mother thank me years later for having done that. He was just a, what would you say, a late bloomer. Seems like later on he got with it real good. But, at the earlier stage, he couldn't cope it.

And, the mother thanked me then of the progress he made later on. Now, I didn't take any special training. How did I know to do that? But, don't ask me.

Marie: Maybe it was just instinct.

Mary: Ah-hum.

Marie: Some people are just good at that. Did many kids ever move in and out of the district:

Mary: No. We never had that. Those old farm houses were there and remained.

Marie: How did most of the children get to school? Did they walk?

Mary: A lot of them walked. Nice weather, they walked. Had their little old lunch baskets in their hand. Their school bag in the other, or over their shoulder and they walked. Those over the two mile area were brought by their parents, or their big brother that was at home helping with their farming. I don't ever remember a big sister driving in that day and bringing them to school. Now, just imagine that. Now that of course is going back again fifty some years.

Marie: Ah. What types of occupations did some of your students eventually take up.

Mary: Well I have a couple of three lawyers, that did go on. Some very successful business men. And, of course, every family had a farmer go on. Go on from where daddy left off. In that day you could buy land. And, you could pay for it. And, establish a nice unit. And, some of the....A few of the girls have gone on to college, and become good teachers. They had to be college girls be then. I mean they had to realize college not just institute, like I did.

Marie: Ok.

Mary: One of my real fast Walker students went on and took a beauty school after she finished high school. Beauty course, and she was my beauty operator for years later on. Of course, that was an achievement. A lot of them just went home and filled a cedar chest and helped momma and hoped to get married. And, that's the way they wound up. So...And, lived happily ever after.

Marie: That's a good occupation.

Mary: Yes, right and there was.....

Marie: So, would you say that about half of your students wound up going to college?

Mary: No, I wouldn't say that percentage back from that day. No, I wouldn't say that many. What would

I say. Not over twenty percent, I don't think. Not over twenty. Let's see now. I'm counting three, four of Hope Valley. Four out of twenty-one pupils. That would be twenty-one percent, yes.

Marie: What was the average number of years that a student spent in school? Did they go the full eight years?

Mary: Oh yes. They had to go the eight years. That was a rule be then. Way back when my mother went to school, it was just four years that they had to go. That's going back a hundred years. But, all they had to go was four...they had a... My day you just had to go the eight years. But, I elected to go on to high school. And, this high school was all you needed at that time. And, a lot of the boys didn't go on to high school. They went right on into the farming field with their fathers. And, would get outside jobs.

Marie: Did it cost to go to high school?

Mary: There weren't the public schools in the area like there were now. I when..I grew up I lived south of Victoria. There was no high school at Victoria. And, why that far you wouldn't drive every day with those old Model T's or Model A's or what ever we had. My folks sent me in here and I stayed with

my grandmother. They couldn't afford board and room for me. Well there wasn't board of room high school here. So I went to a Girls Catholic High School. But, a lot of the.....Now the Hope Valley group there was no place. No place. Hays was the closest place and Hope Valley was twenty-seven miles from Hays.

Marie: Girls Catholic High School is Marian High School, right?

Mary: It is Marian High now. But, back, I graduated in 1927. I started in 1923 or 22, and it was two vacated houses right north of St. Joes church. And, it was right across the street from where my grandmother lived. So I had it made, because I didn't know when I came to Hays, to go to school if I was supposed to walk down the sidewalk of the street. I knew that little about city life. Now, that's the way children were raised. They just didn't get to town.

Marie: What was the dress and the over-all appearance of the students that you taught?

Mary: Frankly, I think the children look better than they do today.

Marie: The children were dressed pretty neat, then?

Mary: Very neat. Frankly, I think they come out of

school now they just look sloppy. They were dressed neat and they were always clean. And, most of these children got up, those that were old enough to, and milked a bunch of cows, fed calves and did their work before they went to school. Still they came. I can't say that they ever smelled. Nobody, very few had bathtubs. Now, how did the parents manage so well? They came to school neat and clean.

Marie: They were very organized and determined.

Mary: Aha. The little girls was always dresses, and mothers did make the dresses.

Marie: Did the little girls ever wear slacks or jeans?

Mary: Never, never then. No, no way.

Marie: Not even during the winter?

Mary: No. No.

Marie: Tell me about some of the activities that you guys did in school. I remember the other day when I was talking to you, you said something about sledding.

Mary: Oh, yes. We had a hay meadow across from Hope Valley. Built on a slope. And, they brought their sleds, so we went sledding at noon. Teachers had to go right with them. You didn't dare take them across the road, off the school grounds without teacher being with them. And, I was rather..

shocks feed so those, I allowed them to go hide behind the feed shocks right outside the fence. Drop the handkerchief, all those old games. And, then when it was ugly out.....Could you let nineteen or twenty-one children go out, and they bring in a lot of mess and a lot of dirt. Of course, we had a porch at this school and I managed to bring an old rug from home for them to wipe their feet on. And, then we would play sit down games. Indoor games at school. Um-hum. Guessing games and things like that.

Marie: Let's go back a little bit. What year did you start teaching?

Mary: In 1927. I graduated in May of 1927. I went to institute all through the month of June. Went home and helped my folks with a big harvest. And, started teaching the first week in September. At seventy dollars a month. And, helped my folks buy a lot of things. And, saved money for myself.

Marie: How did you manage to get a car?

Mary: My brother had this car and he could not afford to keep it up. So, I, my folks didn't even have a car, and they needed one badly. Oh, dad had an old model touring thing, open, it was terrible. And, he found a good Dodge for two hundred and fifty dollars. But, dad didn't have the money. And,

I had saved enough money that I just gave dad two-hundred and fifty . I was staying home, enjoying seeing my family prosper. And, in appreciation for my high school, which really didn't cost them that much, just gotten me..ah..on..I'd come in... They'd put me on the old Plug. Now, that was a train that came through Victoria. Now, dad would usually come in on Friday and get me after school. And, I'd go to the farm and help my mother with all kinds of work.. She still had a last child when I was going to high school. And, then they would take me to Victoria and put me on the Plug. And, that came through Victoria about noon or afternoon. And, then I'd get off at the depot here and I would have a bucket of eggs and all kinds of different things for grandma. I managed to pack that from the depot. Of course. I left..grandma...I left... clothes. I didn't have a lot of clothes to pack. But, I would bring the eggs, and butter, and cream in for grandma. And, walk from the depot to 207 West 15th Street. And, thought nothing of it. Now a young girl.....and then as the days got shorter, that old Plug got in and it was almost dark. Why I'd be afraid to death to let my child walk from that depot down there at the tracks. You know where it was, up to 207 West 15th. now.



But, then there was no thought of that.

Marie: Did you ever have any problems getting back and forth during the "Dirty Thirties" when you were driving?

Mary: Oh, that was terrible. Again the fence row and mailboxes.....said yes. And, our car, we had paid... I think two hundred and seventy-five. Now, it was a used, a demonstrator and a nice looking car and I absolutely ruined the crankshaft, in that it ate so much dust. That's going back and forth to the Phillips School. I drove twelve miles to go to that. And, just burned up the car. And sometimes....ah..I stayed at Jenny Phillips and the Phillips Ranch. Sometimes when the visability was aha....And, the parents were very thoughtful. They would pick up the children when they saw it was... The sky turning red if the wind was from the South. And if it was from the west and north it turned black. So, the parents would come and pick up their children.

Marie: You could tell which direction the dirt was coming from.

Mary: Yes, you could by the color of it. And, sometimes when I knew I couldn't make it the twelve miles I'd stay at the Phillips Ranch.

Marie: While you were doing your teaching you got married, right?

Mary: Yes, yes. That was in the depression years.

Marie: How did you manage to teach and hang on to a husband and take care of a home and everything else at the same time?

Mary: Oh. I had managed to buy a good fur coat in the years of teaching. And, I was...We had an old wood burning stove. We couldn't afford coal and there was wood on the creek. You could get it for just cleaning it out. So the husband passed his day. There was nothing to do, Nothing to make money at. So he would hitch up the old team of horses and drive over with the lumber wagon and put up wood. And, there would be logs, and then we'd have to split them. Well he'd split them and the smaller pieces I split. I can remember putting on that fur coat and goin out there and chopping wood to keep warm at night. (chuckles) That's the truth. And, ah...lets see I was twenty-four by then twenty-five. And the love but bit. And so I got married at the holiday time so I wouldn't loose any teaching time. And, and then back and finished out the year. And, then I taught another full year. And, that's when the

dust storms....When it started letting up that year. The year we married they were terrible. And, that was the year that he bought when we married. Ah...for two hundred and seventy five dollars. And, I ruined the crankshaft in it with just driving through the dust. Um-hum.

Marie: How did your husband enjoy having a working woman in his house?

Mary: Well, he was just so glad to see that big paycheck of sixty-two fifty , he didn't object. He kept up the house beautiful He learned to cook. He didn't really learn to cook that much, but he did keep the house well. He washed the cream separator. We milked cows. That was his share of the income. And, folks had no money. Neither folks when we married, so my mother gave me four milk cows. She realized how good I'd been at home and to show her appreciation she didn't have money, she gave me four milk cows. And, he had four milk. So that was big income. And, then..ah..his folks for Christmas, butchered a beef and shared it with their three married children. And, they gave us a hindquarter, because I was teaching and didn't have time to be home cooking the stews and soups and things, because I never got home from school until

five o'clock. And, then the other sister-in-laws was very, very unhappy and jealous. And the neighbors critized. Here that Loran and Mary are making all that money, and the Truans gave them the hindquarter, and poor so and so only got the front-quarter. That's petty stuff, but it's worth telling. Just the talk of the community.

Marie: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us.

Any interesting stories that you can think of?

Mary: Oh Dear. I've talked a long time now, haven't I?

Marie: That's alright.

Mary: Recreation, maybe you know now when you see how you night club and go out and eat and all the partying and all the drinking. We didn't have that. We couldn't afford to do it. And, you'd be surprise, surprised what fun we could just make among ourselves. Now, we enjoyed playing cards. In fact that's where I learned to play bridge. And, the neighbors, there were...ones in all families around. We'd light a kerosine lantern and we'd walk. It would be a mile, close to a mile. We had neighbors a mile west, we had neighbors a mile east, we had neighbors a little less than a mile north. About half a mile. We...We'd light the kerosine lantern and we'd walk, and go play cards. And,

then they would return the visit the next week. That's how we would...aha...And, I don't know, what did , we always managed to have lunch or something. Sometimes I baked....that I would. Of course with packing a school lunch I had to bake. I had to keep something baked up. No freezer.

Marie: Did you ever take any treats to your kids?

Mary: Oh, yer. Yes. This one family, the Phillips School especially. I had those two. They were well fed and well cared for. That's when the Hurls moved in. As I said the next year, the other family was having a baby. Mother was sick in bed with milk leg. And, I went to visit her after school. Told the father when he brought them in the morning. Don't come after them this evening. I want to visit, Anne was her name, and see your new baby. So I took the children home and saw her. And, the dear mother was in bed. So sick. And had milk leg, a real swollen leg. I wasn't familiar with it. So, on my way home, I knew, I didn't have time.....by the time I got home...I didn't have any meat on hand....But I passed my mothers house. Who was widowed by then. And, I said, "Mom what do you have?" "Could you cook up a big kettle of soup and we'd take it to the Hurls?"

And, she said, "I baked bread today, too child."  
And, I said, "Well I'll go home and bake a big cake." I remember we had pumpkins and we made pumpkin cake. Pumpkins kept all winter without refrigeration. We didn't have a freezer. And, I said, "Well mom, I'll fix a cake then." Those poor children came to school and in their lunch pail, they had bread and onions. Sliced onions and bread. Occasionally an apple, but they managed, and always were happy. So mom cooked up this big kettle, she had canned beef on hand. She cooked up this big kettle of soup and shared her bread and I baked a big cake. And, then we left early enough that morning, and it wasn't a dusty day, thankgoodness, and took it to the house. The joy I brought to that family. The children didn't want to go to school when that good food came into the house. And, I said, "Don't you worry, I have enough, we're gonna have it at school to." We had another kettle and then we heated it on the old heating stove and.....

Marie: This brings up a question. Do you think the teachers of today are as caring as they were when you were teaching?

Mary: Well, I just.....

Marie: Maybe they are about the kids, but do you think

they're as caring about the family itself?

Mary: No, that touch I'm afraid is lost. That touch is lost. Ah, to a certain degree. I have a daughter teaching in Great Bend. She teaches the fourth grade. And, I've seen her teary eyed over particular cases. But, there's no such sharing like this. You know this doing the personal thing. She'll talk about it, and tell how bad, and she's taken clothes to some of the homes, but all in all I don't think so. I don't know. This is the only experience I had with my.....But, I'll say that visiting my Grandson's school left me very cold. Um-hum. There just wasn't that...ah-ha.

Marie: Is there anything else?

Mary: Now, some of my friends and relatives that would come and visit, they'd come and visit the school. See visitors were very scares. But, now, I would say some of the English people like old lady Schurlock, when she had a cousin or somebody come from away, would bring them to school, where her only son went to school and visit. And, my friends and.....There was a different introduction and different everything. You made the children feel well....I've known this aunt for a long time, you know. But, I didn't get the feeling here. Maybe years have changed me. So I'll not criticize

the school system on that.

Marie: You told me a story last week. Last week when I talked about this kid walking out of your classroom.

Mary: That was a discipline problem.

Marie: That was a discipline problem?

Mary: Yes.

Marie: Did you have many of those?

Mary: That was the only one and it stands out in my mind. Yes. Yes. Now he was a, we have a term for it. If I study on far enough, maybe four years of collage, I'd know what it was, mentally. What. Just fly off the handle and just loose his mind, so to speak. And, I corrected him on something, and he just got up and stomped out, and went out that front door, and slambed the the door in the middle of the afternoon. And, I kind of peeked out around and couldn't see him. Well he'd went down in the same meadow where I'd lost that watch and he hid. But, he was smart enough to know, who the, by God, dad would tan good if he didn't get back and be in that school. So when the buggies, or the cars started coming after the kids, he came back to the school grounds. And, then little sister told on him, but mother was a little like son and she just didn't



know if I was treating her Bob right. Some of her children were so homely. And Bob was a good looking boy, but he had this problem. So I didn't even go home and tell my mother the problem. It bothered me the way he acted. Should I expell him? What should I do with him? How should I handle this? So nothing was said. I thought, I'll see what tomorrow brings. He was at school the next day just as nice as could be. And, nothing was ever said or done. But, the next sunday at church his mother came up to mom and she said, "That's sure ashame the way Bob and Mary had it out last week." And, my mother said, "What happened?" "I don't know anything about it." Well his mother felt so embarrassed, she walked off.(Chuckles) So I finally had to wind up telling my mother, if it had mattered any. But, I'm telling this to tell you that I didn't have anybody to help me solve my problems. But, I studied Bob enough to know if we just let, let this go....he got this out of his system, and he behaved alright after that. And, I administered the same kind of correction, maybe a little more decile later. And, we got along fine, so.

Marie: Wonderful.

Mary: I didn't have to have a psychologist in the that either. (Chuckling) Where would I have got a psychologist back fifty years ago in the country?

Marie: That's right.

Mary: Yes.

Marie: Ok. Anything else?

Mary: Well, I hope this hasn't bored you. It's wonderful that at seventy-eight, I can remember things.

Marie: It is wonderful.

Mary: It pleases me to reminisce. Ah. I did an interview for my daughter. That course she took this summer on the "Dust Bowl Days". She took notes from me, real briefly. Not a tape recording. Took these notes, went home and compiled it and got ready to read it to her husband and broke down and cried. Couldn't read it.

Marie: Well, we're going to add these notes to this oral history, if that's Ok with you.

Mary: Aha. If you want to. Yes.

Marie: Yes, I'd like to.

Mary: Is it off now?

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIOGRAPHY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Biography

Mary Tholen Truan was born on August 18, 1909. She is the daughter of Fred and Clara Dortland Truan. She was born in the rural farming town of Gorham, Kansas. Mary had two brothers, Edward and Ted. Both are deceased. She has four sisters, Oliva, Mildred, Alice, and Ester.

Mary attended Vincent Rural School in Vincent, Kansas. She started at the age of six. Upon completion of the eighth grade, Mary went on to high school. She attended Girls Catholic High School in Hays, Kansas. While attending high school she lived with her grandmother. She finished high school at the age of eighteen and decided to take the one month institute required to become a teacher. She was able to get this through Fort Hays State Teachers College.

She turned nineteen on August the 18th, and began her teaching career the first week in September. Her first assignment was at South Walker, which was approximately three and one-half miles south of Walker, Kansas. She taught there for one year. From Walker she moved on to bigger and better things. For two years she taught in the Hope Valley School, which was eight and one-half miles

south of Walker, Kansas. Wanting some new scenery and feeling the need to try her wings, she took a position in Sheradin County, Kansas. After being there one year she decided Western Kansas wasn't for her. Mary, then decided to move home and took a year away from teaching. Her father became ill and Mary realized the need for extra income. So, she applied for the position at the Phillips School and was hired. She taught there for three years. This was to be her last teaching job.

During Mary's second year she fell in love with and married Loren Truan. They lived on a farm south of Gorham, Kansas. There they raised a family. They have four children; Jacqueline, Jerilyn, Marilyn, and Loren II. Mary's children are all married and have given her nine grandchildren.

In 1980, her husband, Loren passed away. It was at that time when Mary decided to move from the farm. She now resides in Hays, Kansas. Mary is seventy-eight and is still very active. She delivers meals-on-wheels, visits St. Johns Nursing Home at Victoria, and is also involved with the Community Church in Gorham, Kansas.

#### Conclusions

This oral interview took place at Mary's home here in Hays, Kansas on June 29, 1987. Mary is seventy-eight years old. She lives alone and is a very active person.

Mary, prepared for this interview by reviewing a list of prepared questions and locating several items which

were related to her teaching experiences.

#### Recommendations

Mary would be willing to give more interviews. She has more interesting stories to tell.

Further studies could be made of other early educators in Ellis County who are still living and have taught in one-room schools. These studies could provide much information on the history of education in Ellis County.

Research could be done on the South Walker School, the Hope Valley School, or the Phillips School.

The oral history may be used by future Fort Hays State University students to compare one-room Kansas schoolhouses and their teachers.

This oral history may also be of interest to the Ellis County Historical Society as well as the Kansas State Historical Society.