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Interview with Laura Quakenbush

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Chapter 2

Paul: We are here with Mrs. Laura Quakenbush of Sublette, Kansas, and we appreciate your letting us come into your home and letting us do this oral history of your experiences as a one-room school house teacher. We'd like to start out in the area of curriculum at District #17, or the Kalvesta school in which you taught in Scott County and/or Finney County. What subjects were you expected to teach?

Laura: Well, I have a long list besides the reading, writing, and arithmetic, spelling, English, history, geography, agriculture, Kansas history, and civics. Now, the history, of course, was offered in grades fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. Geography was offered in fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. Agriculture was in seventh grade and health in seventh grade, and Kansas history and civics were eighth grade subjects, and, believe you me, you busted a button to get them all into a day.

Paul: That sounds real interesting. Now that you have all those subjects to teach, like you say, there was not a whole lot of school day, or what was the school day? How did you fit all those subjects in, and what was the length of the school year as you went along?

Laura: Our day was nine to four, and we went an eight-month period for the school. You didn't fit all the subjects into any one day. The subjects you did not neglect were reading, math, spelling, and handwriting. You almost knew that those were required and necessary. Now, for instance,

health. When we had seventh grade health, you were pretty sure all the children in the room had one ear on what we were saying or on what you were talking about. I think the same is probably true of geography. The only extra material that you had for teaching anything was a set of maps. They were delightful maps because they were probably . . . well, one on the wall of District #39 when I was attending school still showed Santa Fe as the county seat of Haskell County. It had long since been moved to Sublette. So many times these maps were so outdated, but they were just so fascinating to children. So when you taught geography, first graders listened, second graders listened, and it was so fun. The length of the school day was nine to four. That really bore heavily on teachers, I'm sure, because of the fact that anytime you took a break or relaxed, if you had a discipline problem, that's when it would be getting out of hand. Fortunately, I never did have very many of these.

Paul: O.K., you talk about all the things you had to teach. What methods did you use to get across the subject matter that you were teaching?

Laura: Memorization and drill. That's most of what it was. Now, you must understand that is, for instance, the first year I taught in District #17, I had two first graders. I had two eighth graders, and quite often, without being told to do so, maybe Leon would say, "Could I take my book and read to George?" (who happened to be his older brother). Well, of course, you welcomed that. His brother welcomed it and it was a break for both of them. You knew he got some good help, and children helped each other. (For example) "Oh, you shouldn't say that because that isn't

right"; or "no, that's not the way you do it," so that was the one thing that helped the teacher a great deal, when other students helped.

Paul: Moving on to another little area about teaching aids, I know that today we have computers in our classrooms that really seem like an innovation that will help children. Was there anything back in the 1940s when you were teaching that you really thought would be a great innovation, still continues on today, and is used today quite often, or is there some teaching aid you had then that was really of importance to your teaching day?

Laura: Aside from just small tricks and little bits of psychology, I can't think of any. No. Ah, I remember as a first grader, though, that my first grade teacher would cut construction paper into little strips, probably 3" x 2," and write 100 with a big black crayon on those. I remember having used that in kindergarten and in first grade as I taught. Those things, little pieces of psychology like that, but equipment, no, there was none of that. I'm glad to be away from a lot of that.

Paul: So if there was not teaching aids available, probably was it due to the finances or just the techniques weren't available or the mechanization was not available to have these kind of things or what was the

Laura: No, I think, I think the money could have been available, but the farmers were a very, very conservative lot. It was not their way to spend great sums of money. This old treasurer's book I have would show you that: 1923 in school District #39 in Haskell County, total amount spent for school purposes that year was \$882.78. I dare say, in 1923 that

would have looked like a lot to a farmer. If he had that much in a bank account, he'd have felt, "Hey, we're ready for the winter." So I think they were just conservative.

Paul: You mentioned earlier about students in the classroom. What was the range of ages, and how did you get the school day fit in--like did you have K-8 and your day was set up how to get each group of students the material they needed?

Laura: The first year I taught in District # 17 in Scott County I had seventeen children, and of those 17 children, two were beginners and two were eighth graders. And I simply, everything in between, if you could combine it, you would. If you . . . for instance, math . . . you knew you had to have math everyday, so you simply wrote down a schedule and you put down all those classes in mathematics. You knew that you couldn't have more than two to three minutes. As you taught, if you found a fourth grader who was really hurting in math, well, pretty soon it was pretty natural, I'll just have third and fourth grade math together today. "Would that be all right with you boys and girls?" "Yes, that would be OK with them (you know)." We had great big recitation benches at the front of the school classroom and normally you were at the board or at your desk, or in your chair and you called third and fourth grade math and the children arose and came to that bench and did their recitation. They were always delighted if they could go to the board and work. We did lots of that because quite often some children would be almost destitute, without paper and many times without pencil.

So much of the work was done on the board if you could arrange it that way and if you had someone who was having difficulty, well, then you just, "Oh, we'll have these classes together." That worked a lot of your problems out. But finding time and keeping to a schedule, it almost had to be a religion with you during the school day. You did allow an extra 20 seconds for recess for anything, for instance, because you knew, I have to get back and I have to get these classes in today. As you went along, oh, I dare say the first month of the school, children learned, I learned a lot more than the children did. But after that the children, you know, they learned and they knew when it was ready. They were ready to come to class, they had books, pencils, and paper ready. The minute you said their name, they were up there. You got right into things.

Paul: I know Kelly here, she teaches gifted students. What did you do as a teacher to make sure the slower students . . . you don't have, I know you probably didn't have roving instructors like we have now for gifted education and special education, L.D. students, and that. What did you do to help those particular students in those particular areas that were more gifted and whatever?

Laura: Well, my first year of teaching I had one young man, very bright boy, and he was interested in boy scouts. His parents did take him to Scott City the sixteen miles to a scout meeting once a month. That helped a lot because we could drill him on various things there. He was interested in history, and I was able to get books from Scott County Library, as well

as from the Garden City Library for him to check out. That library was rather well equipped. We had well over 200 volumes and they were good books. You understand way back then, during these days, for instance, I would say, 1923-37 maybe, schools, a school library might consist of six or seven volumes of the same grade books, Bobbsey Twins, those kinds of things, and you did not read them once, you read them several times. Then when you grew so bored that you could no longer read those over, that was when you went to the encyclopedia and you just whetted your own curiosity. "Well, I think today I'll learn about rubies," or "No, today I'll see what it says about turnips." That kind of thing. In my own personal case, that is how I came so acquainted with the English language because I would go to the dictionary, great big unabridged dictionary. I could find so many fascinating things in there. What language did this word come from? What was its stem? "Hey, this word can be a noun or a verb," "this one can be whatever."

Paul: Now as a teacher, did you guide the students in that direction to go to encyclopedias and then have them bring back a report or just an oral or verbal report or written report?

Laura: Normally, it was an oral report because you wanted that information shared with every child in the room. You didn't want to make that child feel the least bit put upon by having to write a report. If he could share all that information, then other kids would ask questions: "Well, I don't know," "Well, why don't you read that again, George, and find out for

us?". And "Do you have any books at home about this?" and quite often parents would send magazines to school.

Paul: So you had a set of encyclopedias that you would direct study from so you used the encyclopedias as a reference quite often.

Laura: Right! Very often.

Paul: Now that leads us into the textbooks. What kind of textbooks did you have for the subjects you mentioned earlier, that helped you, and who decided who got the textbooks, and who decided what kind of textbooks you would use and that kind of good stuff?

Laura: Well, the textbook list was decided by your school board. There was the treasurer, the director and the, I think she was called secretary, but I'm not sure. And they decided on your school book list. When I was in school in District #39 in Haskell County, that was when Kansas was still operating its printing press and they decide what books each school used. I read the Kansas Primer and right in the front is stated "State of Kansas," and when you opened it there was the Little Red Hen story that you are probably very familiar with if you have children. Then by the time I began to teach in District #17 and Scott County, we had this new system. That is when they began to water down the curriculum, in my opinion, and I should add that very hastily. We then began to teach social studies. We grouped history, health, agriculture, all these subjects that we had that were sort of extras, history, geography, agriculture, health, Kansas history, physics, all those kinds of things were grouped as social studies. That made it much, much easier because,

well, you could go to the library. Now at that time you could go to the County Superintendent's office, normally, would have a great many books. And you could go there and borrow for maybe a week or maybe two weeks. You could take it out to your school and use it and then take that back and get a different book for reading.

Paul: So there was no basal series, so to speak.

Laura: Yes, there was. There were basal series. I'm trying to think. It seems to me that it was Scott-Foresman Readers, which I began teaching with. I don't remember the author of the geography or the history books, but, ah, I do know they were no longer the State of Kansas.

Paul: OK, that leads us to the next question to ask. You have these textbooks and you have these students grouped as far as different ages in a one-room school house. How did that make the atmosphere of the school? Did you have to have a pretty structured time, or was there time for the kids to interact? How did you structure the day and what was the atmosphere of the school? Did you have to be pretty strict or kind of let kids interact a lot? I know you probably had to be in some instances. How would you describe your teaching methods?

Laura: Well, you never wanted to be too strict, but I'd always work on the theory . . . all my teaching career I've always worked on the theory the first week I am the hardest, I'm more lenient after you learn to know the children. The first day of school, I'll say, "George" (that is his given name), oh, was back at the dictionary and the old bell set there beside it, and when I went to ring the bell after the recess or lunch--it was after

the lunch period--I started to pick it up and it fell all apart. So, I went back to the playground and began to play. Some of the children said, "Well, aren't we going to go to work?" I said "Well, the bell won't work. It fell apart." You could tell by the looks on faces the children were, well they were just really amazed-- "How could that happen?" you could tell from the look on George's face just who had taken it apart, of course. So he went in and put it together. We rang the bell and had school. After that, I did not tell who did it. I knew I'm sure at that time. I never scolded him for it. I never said anything. But after that--he had to try me one time I guess--and after that everything went smoothly as they could be. The children knew it was rare for a child to have a watch or a wristwatch and they kept track of the time by asking you, or you would say, "It's 12:45. We have 10 more minutes," or whatever. Recess and lunch period was almost like physical education because we really learned the ball game rules. We talked about how you pitched, how you batted, even if we were just playing ring around the rosie. You know, you have to follow an established set of rules. That was more or less our period for that. During the school day, ah, right before lunch I always insisted hands had to be washed. Now you must understand all the water in this school building was carried there by a person. And you did not waste it. It was a great big, ah, stoneware jar, a fountain, with a button you pushed and you held your cup under, you, know. And there were no such things as paper cups, and I was just amazed. I had my own personal cup and, boy, if I thought anyone had drunk from that cup I

wouldn't have drunk water that day. But families would bring a cup. This was the Schmidt family, this was the Beach family, this was the Armentrout family, etc. And that's--it was respected. Each family drank from their own cup. But I insisted that hands must be washed before lunches were eaten so at a certain time I would give a signal and whoever was to wash hands first, you know, they knew that day, well, they'd start in. On Friday afternoons, quite often, we always had spelling tests on Friday and somehow or another in rural schools kids vied to see who could get 100's in spelling. I don't know why, whether it came with time or what. Then if we all did well, then we would, oh, some days on Friday, we would draw pictures or maybe we would have an extra time of math and we would have cipherring matches. Sometimes parents would come, and maybe read to us or have a cipherring match with us. There was one gentleman in the community when I taught in District #17 who would come in and we never knew. He was just an old farmer, and he always came in his overalls and his denim jacket. He would knock at the door and one of the kids would say, "I bet that's so and so." Sure enough, it would be. "Are you having a cipherring match today?" And the kids loved it.

Paul: You mentioned cipherring. That's a term we don't use anymore.

Laura: Oh--addition, subtraction, division, multiplication. And you gave long problems and big problems. As heavy as you knew the traffic would bear. If you had two first graders at the board up there, quite often you gave a very simple one. But they wanted the hardest ones they were

able to work. None of this two and two stuff. They really wanted a big problem. You know, to them "big" mattered.

Paul: So as far as you had your ciphering matches, we're having our school spelling bees right now. Did you have big school spelling bees?

Laura: Well, yes, we did. But everyone in school was eligible to go. On a certain day we took all the children to the county seat. There every child entered. First, you had to spell a written list, 40-50 words, whatever. And then if you passed that you were eligible to stand and enter the vocal test (oral) spelling. And, oh, if you did that, you were almost a hero, and many times children were known to study very hard at home. Spelling words off of cereal boxes, newspapers, out of the Bible, catalogs, anything at home if the word was good.

Paul: Ah, as far as music goes, were you in charge of the music curriculum too or did you cover much music? Like myself, I wouldn't be a very good music instructor because I can't carry a tune in a bucket. So I'm curious how some teachers handled that particular area.

Laura: Well, I was really quite lucky. Now when I was in a school in District #39 in Haskell County, I was always very lucky to have a teacher who could play the piano. So we did enjoy singing. We call them very aged tunes now, you know, "Yankee Doodle" on back. Now when I taught in District #17 in Scott County, there was a Mrs. Hunt who came in one hour a week and we looked forward to that. I did especially as a teacher because, boy, during that hour I could accomplish a lot while she was in complete control of those children. You understand, when you're

teaching in a rural school, you teach nine to four and there is no one else with whom you share any responsibility. But when Mrs. Hunt was there, she was delightful and they played tonettes, and they played, and they sang. She . . . I suspect, we had the most out-of-tune piano in Haskell County, or it seemed so to me and even my ear's pretty tin. But not once did she grimace. She would just go ahead and play and they would sing. Then she would look at me and shake her head like this from side to side. I knew she was saying: "Oh, this piano is so out of tune, but we're going to sing anyway." But even so, the children enjoyed it. Then once a year, there was a music contest county-wide and we again went to the county seat and each child could perform a solo if they wanted to. And, let's see, I was trying to think . . .

Paul: What was the means of transportation to these spelling bees?

Laura: Parents.

Paul: So you could all hop in a particular parent's . . .

Laura: Well, ah, no, each individual parent pretty much took their own child.
Yes.

Paul: So you didn't have like a school bus or a school cart or something.

Laura: No. That followed a long time after. Parents just expected it to be a part of their child's education.

Paul: What about athletic events? You mentioned baseball earlier, that you taught them the rules. Was there any inner school athletic competition during that time period for the K-8 program that you were involved in?

Laura: Well, we had what we thought was a pretty good ball team at our school. Doris Breyfogle was teaching down at Dry Lake, and so I said, "Doris, sometime let's get our kids together and let's have a game." "Fine." So we arranged a day. The parents came, and they backed us. It was all right if we took half a day off. We couldn't take a whole day, you understand. We ate our lunches at school and we all loaded up our vehicles, and down to Dry Lake we went. A matter of eight-ten miles, whatever it was. They were expecting us. Had the bases all tied down and everything ready. We had a good game that day. A couple of the fathers were the officials and we just had a good time.

Paul: Now, you had K-8. Did Kindergarten have a graduation, and then second grade, or did you just have, skip up to eighth grade and the eighth grade graduation? What was your. . . .

Laura: Well, there was no kindergarten.

Paul: There was no kindergarten. So all this time I've been saying . . .

Laura: There was no kindergarten. That's all right. Well, it is hard to fathom a school without a kindergarten now, and I'm glad--oh you. If there is anytime you need someone to get out the big guns and shoot for something. I think it's marvelous that we now have speech teachers and helpers for those people who would be held back if they couldn't reach for extra material. I think it's marvelous you have all these extra teachers because I had children at this time with speech defects. I didn't know--I was not trained. I did not have the vaguest idea how to work with those. There was one young man to this day who does not

speak well, and I do see him occasionally in Scott City. If only he could have had a speech teacher when he was, when I started teaching there he was in fourth grade. If he could have even started at that time. It would just have helped him so much. I didn't know what to do. But school graduation, after all the children had completed their work, usually on the last day of school, parents would come in and they would have what they called a big dinner--basket dinner. That day we usually prepared a program for them. We would just have all kinds of recitation and little dialogues and sing (most of it acapella) and that sort of thing. Then the fathers and the sons would go out, and sometimes the girls would enter too. They would have that ball game on the playground. Unless it would rain or was muddy or something like that. Then the only graduation was held for my eighth graders. They went to the county seat, and the county superintendent was in charge of that.

Paul: Was this at both District #17 school and Kalvesta?

Laura: Yes.

Paul: So they went to the county seat at Scott City and Finney County?

Laura: Yes, land! It was complete with the march up the aisle and the whole bit presenting the diplomas. It was done very nicely. Girls had special dresses, boys had to get new suits. My goodness, you know, you had to get dressed up for your eighth grade graduation.

Paul: So all the district schools would join together on that one particular ceremony?

Laura: Right--one graduation.

Paul: Is there anything else that you would like to mention about the curriculum that you don't feel we have covered thoroughly enough, that you feel might be interesting? If not, that would lead us into the area of discipline if there's nothing else you want to cover in the area of curriculum.

Laura: Well, at Christmas you were expected to provide a Christmas program. You always did. You even got someone to come in and play Santa Claus. Ordinarily, we drew names. The teacher was expected to give every child a gift. You know, they had just done it that way from time immemorial. You can imagine how distraught you would be. Now let's see. These two youngsters are eighth graders, and they are going to go into high school next year. What in the world! I wouldn't want to give them the same gift I gave these two children over here who are first graders. It really posed a lot of problems.

Paul: Was it a financial burden too?

Laura: Yes, very much so. My first year teaching I made \$60 a month. Buying gifts for 17 children. It took all my salary almost. It was just something you did. You really like the kids, or at least I did. I was really lucky cause I always liked the children I taught.

Paul: Thank you for that, and now we'll kind of move into the area of teacher expectations and discipline.

Kelly: We are beginning on teacher expectations and discipline. I would like to comment that I feel today's teachers don't realize how lucky we have it. We have a custodian. We come to school and our room is ready. I

would like you to discuss preparations you had to make and things you went through before and after the school day. What were your responsibilities?

Laura: Well, first of all, when I rose in the morning, I boarded in a private home. As quickly as I could get myself washed and dressed, then I liked to go and help the lady. She had two sons, a husband, and a hired man. There was no other lady. I felt, after all, I only paid her \$30 a month board. Can you believe that? So I would set the table and do anything else I could to help her get breakfast on the table. Plus the fact I made my own lunch. I prepared that and packed it. Then, a typical day, many times, almost all the times I would walk the mile, three-fourths of a mile it was, up to the school house. Now in cold weather quite often Mr. Armintrout would take me. When you got there you still knew . . . I never could bank that big, old, fat stove so that it would hold coals overnight, try as I would. But the room was always cold. Any water that was left you had to throw it out because there was a danger it might freeze and break your water fountain. I would get the fire going immediately.

Kelly: Did you have to go get the water?

Laura: No!

Kelly: Okay.

Laura: Someone brought that to us. But, of course, after I made the fire . . .

"Where to wash your hands?" No where, until that water was brought in. It would probably not arrive until a full fifteen minutes. Well, I

always tried to go to school rather early. First of all, I knew that family needed time to themselves in the home. I needed to be out of that house so that they could have some time with their mother before they came to school. In the second place, I liked to get that fire started early so that room would be warm. It was hectic. I was always well provided with coal, with kindling, and with papers. It wasn't a matter of lacking for anything to start with.

Kelly: What about the cleaning duties? Were you responsible for that?

Laura: Oh, yes! The school house had been cleaned before I went. The windows washed, everything was sparkling clean when you went in. I never ever washed windows in a school house unless there was a dirty mud storm, dust storm affair, and then sometimes you were forced, but usually you weren't bothered with that. At the close of the school day you would take a small can and you would dip it into a big drum of sweeping compound which was, I suppose, sawdust with oil. You scattered that along one end of the room and then you started sweeping from that end of the room going toward the other, and as you went, that oily compound, then, that kept the dust down. Well, after you'd swept, then there was always this eternal job of dusting the desk tops and those kind of things. Normally, children would like to help you with that in the morning. You didn't always have to tend to that in the evening. Children would like to help you take care of that.

Kelly: You mentioned before that you paid the family \$30 for boarding and you had mentioned before your salary was \$60. Am I correct in understanding half of your salary was already gone?

Laura: You're right.

Kelly: So what did your boarding include? Your meals and your laundry?

Laura: Meals and, no, that did not include any laundry.

Kelly: OK, so how did you get that accomplished?

Laura: Well, my parents lived in Haskell County and either they came for me, or I had a car and would drive down. I would come home and do my laundry over the weekend.

Kelly: So, the responsibilities before and after school, are really one big significant change. Do you have any other things you would like to share with us about teaching habits that have changed?

Laura: Well, the thing I have noticed most in my own teaching is . . . at that time I was concentrating so very hard, I must do this and this and this. I was trying to cover all the factual material. I have since learned that you embrace as much of it as you can, and if there is something that has to slide, well, you look it over and if this subject isn't taught nearly as strong as some other part of the subject, it's not going to . . . you won't feel like you're shortchanging the child as much. You learn . . . well, there were days when you learned there were things out in the road that were more important than what was on the printed page. One morning we noticed a train that was backing down. Here is a little railroad from Scott City to Garden City about two miles west of U.S. 83.

We noticed this train going down that road very, very slowly. So we stood and watched it because we were a little more elevated than that and we could see down there. We found later that this was a cracked B & O train that was being sent across country. It had been going across on the railroad that goes through Scott City. There was a wreck west of Scott City. A train had gone off the tracks. So they had backed this cracked train, backing all the way from Scott City to Garden City, and backed onto the main line at Garden City and headed on west. Well, we read about it in the papers then. Those children felt like they were a part of that. So sometimes . . . well, the day there was a wounded hawk in the yard. Well, we had no way . . . and the little boys thought it would be all right, we could walk up and almost catch it. But I didn't dare let them touch that because you know, a hawk's beak is dreadful and its feet would still tear. It gave us a lot to talk about.

Kelly: Ethics, I'm sure, is a concern today and was a concern in your day. Tell us about how the community expected a school teacher to conduct herself.

Laura: Well, you conducted yourself like a lady at all times. I didn't say "gosh" and "darn". My slang had to be very, very cautiously used. You didn't stay out till all hours of the night. If you were married, you knew you didn't come to school the next day because your contract was automatically cancelled.

Kelly: Can you explain to us why?

- Laura: I have no idea. To me now . . . I wouldn't have worn slacks to school. Now when I walked to school, I did have slacks and I wore those under my skirts. I walked warmly to school. But once there, those had to be taken off and I taught in dresses. But I can remember when slacks were first allowed here in Sublette schools. We were told they would need to be slack suits, not a pair of slacks and a blouse. That was the way it started. That's the way it's evolved since then, thank goodness.
- Kelly: Were you in charge of any extra curricular-activities outside of the school day?
- Laura: Not really in charge of, but I had a young man, as I told you, was involved in scouts. He wanted to walk a boy scout mile, 12 minutes. He wanted it so he could do it and know that it was a boy scout mile. So at the recess period he would say, "I'm going now." I would look at my watch and then he would return. He would say, "I'm back." He got so he could walk that twelve-minute mile. He knew just how big to make his steps and how fast to go. So then he was interested in archery and I contacted the woodworking teacher in Scott City. He said, "If you and George will come on up we'll make bows, we'll make arrows." So I made a lemon wood bow right along with George. Had a lot of fun doing it. We got out and piled up some hay and made a semblance of a target. We had a lot of fun with it.
- Kelly: You mentioned before that a teacher was dismissed once she was married. Was there a great deal of teacher turnover either on her own

choice, or by the choice of her school district? Or once a teacher was in a position was she there for awhile?

Laura: No, I don't recall anyone marrying.

Kelly: What about turnover? Did people stay long or did they . . . ?

Laura: Well, I dare say, you stayed as long as you could keep those children progressing. My first year that makes me feel good, I drew \$60 a month. They built a new school house at the end of that year. It was a nice brick and tile affair. It did have running water. It had electric lights. It was still District #17. It was still one room. It still had that coal stove I had to make the fire in and my wages were increased to \$90. The third year I was there I drew \$120. It seemed to me they were very fair minded about it. Those were the going rates at that time and I felt very good about it.

Kelly: Did more than one teacher work at the school you were at or were you entirely responsible?

Laura: I was entirely responsible, except for the music teacher who came one hour of every week.

Kelly: Now was she a volunteer or was she paid?

Laura: No, she was a paid woman.

Kelly: Was there a principal at your school?

Laura: No, we all answered to the county superintendent. He was, I presume, in charge. That's where I got all my instructions. That's where I sent all my reports and that sort of thing.

Kelly: What evaluation system was used to determine whether a teacher would be rehired and how good a job she was doing?

Laura: You know, I don't know. Just now occurred to me that I had not thought of that.

Kelly: No one ever came in and . . . ?

Laura: The county superintendent visited me four times during the year. It was always very congenial. I remember one year he brought a bag lunch and happened to arrive at the lunch hour. He brown bagged it with the rest of us and we had a good time.

Kelly: You said that there was no principal at your building. Today teachers look at the principal as an outlet for our discipline problems. So how did you handle discipline problems with being the only person on the premises?

Laura: Now at District # 17 I don't believe I ever had a discipline problem. When I taught in Finney County out at Kalvesta, at that time it was not popular for youngsters to smoke. These were older boys in the school and I knew they were smoking out at the boys' bathroom. You could smell it on them when they came in. It was obvious. Of course, after school I'd go out Well, by that time they would have taken the cigarette with them when they went home that night or they moved them out. I was never able to find the cigarettes. So, finally, they began to be very, very . . . They were literally tearing down the outhouse is what it amounted to. They would knock off boards. You see, this outhouse would have a shield built out around in front of the door

and that went first, then parts of the door went. I spoke to the lady on the school board with whom I boarded. She said, "Oh, my goodness!" Her children hadn't said anything to her. Kids don't tell a lot on kids. She went right to the ring leader's mother. She almost knew I suspicioned who it was. That young man's mother was a very, very strict disciplinarian at home. But she was also a very loving lady. She was so apologetic. She came to me and she was so apologetic. The next day her husband and several of the other boys' fathers were there with hammers and nails. The men did not put the building back up. The boys did. That was their job.

Kelly: So you had an active support from your parents?

Laura: Very! Very!

Kelly: Did you see the parents very often? Did the parents bring the kids to school?

Laura: Yes, once in a while they'd stop by and ask. Other than that, no, parents never interfered.

Kelly: If you needed a conference or whatever, could you call and were parents real willing to come in and help?

Laura: Well, anytime you asked for help on a program or anything of that nature, they were always very willing. Most cooperative! And didn't mind doing it.

Kelly: Tell me what schooling you had to have in order to hold the job.

Laura: When I began teaching, I had a 60-hour certificate, granted by the state. I was a graduate of Garden City Junior College. It was called at

that time, not community college. I added to that at Fort Hays during the summer, then finally finished the degree at Manhattan.

Kelly: We have concluded the area of teacher expectation and discipline and we'll move now to building and supplies.

Paul: You mentioned earlier that you had your old school. Could you describe it? How it was physically? What it was made of? Do you happen to know who built it? When it was built? That kind of information:

Laura: The people with whom I stayed, her father and two of his neighbors, had built District #17 schoolhouse. It was probably built as early as 1912. Those three men did the major portion, hauling the lumber out from Scott City and building it. It was just a foundation, and this white building was built on top of that. There was one door entrance, three windows on each side, big pot bellied stove in the middle with a huge metal jacket all the way around it, so the children couldn't fall against it and be burned or anything. It was lighted. There were little brackets along the walls and little kerosene lamps sitting in those. They gave me one of those when I left there. I have it yet today.

Paul: So the men that built it, were they carpenters?

Laura: Nope, just farmers.

Paul: They did it out of the goodness of their hearts to provide a school?

Laura: I suspicion they were paid a small sum for it. But they probably did it to provide a school as much as anything.

Paul: If that school hadn't been provided, in that particular place, by those particular farmers, where would the children have gone to school?

Laura: This was set up by the State of Kansas. Every so many miles distance there was one of these little schoolhouses built. They were established by the state. This was where the state decreed that schoolhouse should be built. When they built the next one, they moved it north and east because then it would be a little more center of the district. The man was willing to give them that corner of his ground. So that old school building was just torn down.

Paul: Right now we're talking about District #17?

Laura: Yes.

Paul: This was a public school, correct?

Laura: Yes.

Paul: After your first year, you mentioned this wooden one was replaced by what in those days would be modern brick, electricity, and running water. How did the kids react to that?

Laura: Very proud, and, "We take care of this." You certainly didn't write on the woodwork. "Clean your feet when we come in." "Don't you know we have a mat out there?" "Don't bring that in here. . . ." Toward each other.

Paul: Now did the supplies come new too? Did you get new desks? Or did you transfer old to new?

Laura: We transferred old to new. We had no more supplies than we ever had before. The shell was there, but we still didn't have much inside.

Paul: Still outdoor plumbing?

Laura: Still outdoor plumbing, right.

- Paul: So the school now had running water. Apparently, they had to get running water from a well?
- Laura: There was a well there. Went back to see that the other day. All the trees are gone. The well is no longer in sight. There's not one vestige of that building there. It's just a nice, level, irrigated field.
- Paul: There the brick building . . . that's no longer there. Did you have any provisions for fire drills or tornado drills? What were the procedures for those type things?
- Laura: There was just one door and just these few children to go out. The biggest instruction was to the older children. "The younger children are going to be afraid. Make sure we don't get out without one of them and that they do not panic." Sometimes you said, "I'll be the last person out. So I will close the door today." We always made sure, it was a fire drill. The last person out was to close that door to stem the oxygen. If there was a tornado drill, we knew there was a ditch just in front of the school building and we all would go out and lie down in the ditch. The first time we went, the children said, "Are you going to lie down too, Miss Miller?" I said, "Indeed I will, I don't want to get blown away." You had to do everything with them, just as they did.
- Paul: That leads me to this question. You had these procedures to follow. Did you have to make out these procedures? Or was there a teacher handbook available from the district to get these things accomplished?
- Laura: There was a little form we sent out monthly to the Superintendent of Schools. "Did you have a fire drill this month?" That was the only

thing. You knew that you should have, so you set up your own rules. No, we weren't provided anything. Then when it came to tornadoes in the spring, there was never any mention made of that. But the lady where I stayed, she had taught school. She was a wise lady. She was a college graduate. She said, "I do think it might be wise if you had a plan whereby you could get the children to the ditch." That was all the advice I needed. So we made plans and the children knew what they were to do.

Paul: This new school, did the same three individuals build it that built the first one? Did a construction crew come in and it was provided a little differently?

Laura: It was built and they moved it there. They've always said that you can't move a brick building. That was living proof that you can. It was so much nicer than that one that leaked dust and leaked air. The windows were up higher. It was better arranged. There was a coat room. There was more than one room. There was a storage room. Not very much in it because they didn't provide you much to store in it, chalk and erasers and a few things like that.

Paul: So you were still in charge of the upkeep of this building as well?

Laura: Yes, and did all the janitorial work.

Paul: Were there any other social events held at that school outside of the realm of school? Were there any church activities? Or county dances, or something like that held at the school?

Laura: At District #17, the building I taught, there were none. Now here at District #39 where I attended school in Haskell County, I can recall what we called a literary, that was held there. There were cloth curtains stretched on a wire at one end of the room. Back of that was the stage. It was the same floor the rest of the room enjoyed. People would make recitations, they would bring in people to do reading, or dances, or play their fiddle and guitar, or whatever. Literaries were very popular as I was a child growing up. Now the schools where I taught, there was a group of young people called the Rural Youth Group. They wanted to make some money, so they engaged the schoolhouse at one time. They had what they called a "pie social." All the ladies brought a pie. Then they were auctioned and if you bought my pie, then I would have to sit here and eat that pie with you. I think they probably had something to drink. Anyway, it made a great deal of money for them. They felt like it was very satisfactory.

Paul: What happened to the old wooden building?

Laura: It was torn down.

Paul: You now say the brick schoolhouse is no longer there. It's a plowed field. What happened to the supplies? What did people do with the supplies within that district, give them to a historical museum?

Laura: I have no idea what happened to them. That's how I came across this Treasurer's Book. Apparently there was no provision for this kind of record to be kept. This was in the possession of one lady in our

community and my brother got it for me. It has delightful information in it.

Kelly: We are now going to discuss the finances of a one-room school house where Laura was a teacher. She has in her possessions a book of budgetary expenses of District #39 where both she and her brother attended. She would like to share some interesting facts that she has discovered.

Laura: Well, this volume covers school expenses from 1912-1942. All in this one little volume (8 x 10, 1/2" thick). Can you believe that? Now, on one page they talk about in 1917 where they purchased a lock. School buildings in the early era were not locked. Miss Laura McKelen, who taught in our school told when she taught in Panhandle, OK, she was forced to wear a gun. Carry a gun. She never knew any morning when she went to school, who or what she might find in her school house. Quite often there were renegades. At that time there was a great deal of conflict between the Indians and the whites. So she was forced. In one place in here it talks about people who were paid, or a pencil pointer, or hauling H₂O. Here's one that says, "R. L. Statton, books \$59.50." I wonder what kind of book? Was it a new set of encyclopedias, or just what it was? And, as I told you, first drum of sweeping compound, second drum, kindling \$5.00. Certainly not something that we would need today. I'm wondering if there were first aid kits in any of these schools? Or what medical sort of thing. Now I know in my experience when I was teaching at District #17, one farmer hired a family to come in and work

for him. The little girl was fooling at the windmill and really damaged her middle finger on one hand very, very badly. When she came to school the next day, it was quite swelled. I said, "Well did your mother put something on it?" "Well, all we had was bacon frying" was what it amounted to . . . fat--hog fat she called it. I could see as the day wore on it was very painful to the child and her temperature went up. So the next day when I came to school I talked to my landlady and I got some Clorox. When the child came to school, we just began to soak it in hot H₂O and we put Clorox on it. It was the only thing I knew to do. There was no doctor available, there was no nurse. In several days then, it calmed down. It was all right. But her finger was disfigured. I feel sure that the bone was broken. She never did try to move it. They did not last very long. He found another job very shortly after that. They were probably there four weeks, maybe, at the most. So I've never known what happened to the girl. It does make you feel badly. I noticed in here (treasure book) that on some of these pages it tells total amount spent for the year. Amount spent for the year 1923 at Lakeview School in Haskell County, \$882.78. That funded teachers, pencil pointer, the floor sweep, hauling the coal, curtains for the school house, \$8.15. What kind of curtains? Shades, or blinds or what sort of thing? I looked and looked and nowhere in here could I find anything pertaining to the purchase of books, other than library books. Except in one case they paid for some Tracy tests. Now, I do not know what kind of test these might have been. But Tracy tests, they were for \$8.15 and that sort of

thing. Then I noticed also as I was going through way back here, tuition for a child. My brother said that in very early days they paid children for attending school. Now, I'm not sure what it said; but it says school tuition and lists all these people who attended the school, and my brother is among them. Attending school September 9-October 7, \$10.00. September 2 through 8, \$3.00, September 29 through October 24--\$10.00. Isn't that strange? I didn't know that. Insurance, \$2.65. What kind of insurance? I really have no idea. Did you know that the teachers were to attend teachers' meeting? To the county superintendent teacher delegate expense, \$4.00.

Kelly: Laura, we need to move on to the finances concerning the districts you worked in, District #17 and Kalvesta. Tell us about how the land was acquired for the districts. Was it given or purchased?

Laura: It was eminent domain. The school district could walk in and say, "Build here."

Kelly: Were there any problems with that system?

Laura: There was none that I was aware of. Now when they moved the building from one place to another in Scott County, I know there was no difference because this one gentleman was very glad to have it moved further north. It would enable his children, then, not to have to come so far to school.

Kelly: As far as you know, we've talked about that the people volunteered or were paid a small sum to build the school. Where did the supplies come from? Who financed the lumber and the bricks?

Laura: They were financed through county tax levy.

Kelly: Did the community help finance in any way?

Laura: Not to my knowledge. Not about which I know.

Kelly: Did it cost anything for a child to enroll in school?

Laura: No, nothing at all.

Kelly: O.K. Did they have to pay for a school lunch, book rental?

Laura: No, nothing like that.

Kelly: No cost at all to the student?

Laura: They brought their own lunches. They purchased their own textbooks.

A list would come out in the county newspaper and they would know they needed this list of texts. As a teacher, I always cringed that first day of school because here would come a few students with fancy notebooks, some with these old Indians head tablets. If you had notebook paper, gee, you were considered really lucky. Quite often, children would come to you, and, you know, hand bills that were printed on one side and blank on the other? They would have four or five of those and they would bring them. That was scrap paper and they intended to use that and not their good paper for figuring.

Kelly: You shared with us that your starting salary was \$60 per month and then you went up to \$90 and then \$120. Compared to \$60 when you started, what was your ending teaching salary the last year that you taught?

Laura: \$22,000 I think. That's so long ago in the past. It isn't that I'm afraid to tell you. I just don't remember.

Kelly: O.K. When you first began teaching, who determined your salary? You know--who said you get 60 this year and your second year you get 90?

Laura: I went to Scott County and I applied to the school board. I went to visit each one of the members. They said, "Now we plan to pay \$60 per month for our teacher this year." Well, I knew as a beginning teacher that that's probably what they would offer me. It was the going rate. Had I been able to offer them more education, I don't know, they might have paid more. They knew that I was just out of junior college, I had no experience, other than just what I had practice taught in classrooms in Garden City.

Kelly: So did you have any say in your salary whatsoever?

Laura: No, none whatsoever?

Kelly: Then how did you receive your salary? How often did your paycheck come?

Laura: At the end of the month after every 28 days, fourth week. As I would come home that evening, my landlady was also on my school board and there would be my check. She'd say "Oh, here's your check, Laura, and thanks so much." They were just very sweet about it. Now I know sometimes in this old journal that I have here way in the past in 1917, teachers were given school warrants. They would take that to the bank. The bank would say, if the warrant was \$60, they would say, "Well, we'll discount this so much, we'll give you \$40 for this." That's all the teacher got of her money. In other words, we're going to charge you \$20 for

interest, or how else would you describe that? But that was a very common way back here in some of these.

Kelly: So did you draw a salary in the summer?

Laura: No, we were paid eight months of the year. That was all.

Kelly: So did you have a job outside of school teaching in the summer?

Laura: Usually, you did.

Kelly: Is that the only way you could financially make it?

Laura: Yes, and I might say that I wanted to go to school my first summer. I wanted to go on to a degree. So I went to the bank and, with no collateral whatsoever, I borrowed and signed. Because that gentleman knew I had signed a contract to teach school the next year. I think he felt sure that my money would be forthcoming. So I borrowed the \$200 to go to school, knowing full well it was going to cut me short the next year. I had to pay that off and my other expenses too.

Kelly: We are now going to turn it over to Paul, and we are going to discuss the student's day.

Paul: First, before we get into that in your educational background, did you feel the education you got within the college prepared you to teach the students that you were now going to face?

Laura: I learned a lot from my students the first year.

Paul: You think that's the same case today?

Laura: Very much so.

Paul: So that \$200 you were going to spend on schooling was in addition to your junior college hours? So you talked about certification. What was

your background as far as college goes and your educational background, and what do you need to become a certified teacher?

Laura: A long time ago they had what you call a "lifetime certificate." There are some teachers who still teach on those today. I did not apply for one because I felt that whatever I got when I finished college, that would be preferable to those. I wished afterwards I had. I kept adding hours and adding hours, and as I added hours then my certificate would be upgraded. There were different types of certificates, and I'm sorry I don't recall the names. I know there was the 60-hour and the 90-hour and like that.

Paul: All right now, getting to the students: Did you have a stable student population or did it fluctuate quite a bit at the school you taught at?

Laura: In District #17 I started out with 17 children that year. They stayed all year long. The second year I taught there I had fifteen children. Then there was this family and they had five children who moved in. Then another family moved into the south then there were five more children, and, let me tell you, we bulged at the seams with ten additional children. Twenty-five children. Those extra did not stay all year.

Paul: What was the ethnic make up? Did you have any Hispanic students or did you have religious affiliations?

Laura: There was some disagreement among the children where religion was concerned between two churches, but it was never spoken very much in the school. It was just, we just down played. The children knew--

hey, we don't go to that church, we don't do things like that. But it was accepted and that was it.

Paul: I know today in this area we do have a Hispanic population. Either migrants coming into work in the fields and whatever. I don't know when that happened. Did you have any Hispanics?

Laura: No, I did not. Now, when I taught at District #17 in Scott, that was just of the beginning of all this time. People coming through to do seasonal work. It was just at the onset of irrigation in this part of the country. I have watched that evolve all through. No, I didn't get any of that population.

Paul: Now the students that you did have you had through eighth grade. How many of them went on to high school or a college? What was their education after that? Or did the majority of the students take up a job right away, like in the farming community?

Laura: Oh, no, no. All those children finished high school. A lot of them went on to college. I have a very well known architect on the West Coast, I have a medical doctor in the East, I have an agriculture specialist in Garden City, I have. . . one of those beginning students became a minister of high standing, Christian church I believe. So, no, a lot of them went on to school. The families that lived in that community were good, upstanding people, reaching for better things. They saw to it that their children went on.

Paul: So it was a pretty financially secure district, so to speak. So they had the means by which to send their children on to school.

Laura: Yes. There was only one family, I think, that didn't send their children on to school. It was a single mother where the husband had died. She simply had no means to send those children on. They did finish high school, though, but they never did go to college.

Paul: O.K., you got the students. How long then did they have to stay in school? The parents kind of kept their education going, but if there was a particular child that wanted to end his education, how long did they have to go?

Laura: Age 16. They looked forward to age 16. Then I don't have to go to school, but almost all of them changed their mind because they went on to high school, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Paul: That about covers most of the areas we've indicated. Do you have anything else that really strikes you as interesting that you don't feel we've covered you might want to share with us?

Laura: Well, you didn't ask about dress and the overall appearance of the student. That is the funny part. They were very proud people. Have you ever worn ironed overalls or ironed jeans? They wore blue chambray shirts ironed slick as a whistle, starched and ironed, fresh every morning. Proud! I'm sure they would have felt, if they had been in a city school, they would have felt apart from the other children because they did dress differently. They were more rural in their dress. That's why some of our funny old pictures depict the people as being strange. Now I can understand why people say, "Oh, he lives way out in the 'boonies,'" because that's the way he dresses and that's the way he is.

Paul: O.K. As we attempt to tie things together, have you seen any educational changes that, in your opinion, will always be beneficial? You've taught in a one-room school house to a what would be called a modern school house here in Sublette. Is there anything that has gone on in that time that you feel will be of benefit to students you've taught and future students?

Laura: Definitely. The specialized teachers, speech teachers. One thing I think we are terribly lacking here is we don't have a nurse because I've seen things that needed your attention. A young man came to my door, the last year I was teaching in Sublette working on the paper at Liberal, and said, "Mrs. Quakenbush." If you had been there, you would not have known what he said to me. I knew without even looking up that Kent stood at my door. Kent had gone to school under me in Pratt. He has a terrific speech impediment. He worked with a nephew of my husband's in Liberal. That's how he got a hold of me. He said, "I just want to tell you I have five children and none of them have my affliction." All of his children had finished college. He had finished junior college. Many times at that point students were set aside and what we called "wasted," throw aways. But I knew that Kent had much more. I was teaching fourth grade. Kent was in fourth grade. His hard work and grace of God, because there was no one to coach him or to help him But the teacher along, we had recognized that, "Hey, that boy has a lot of mental power. You can't just give him a coloring page or a something

else to do." He could not hear and he couldn't speak. But he was making it.

Paul: So he was really appreciative of what you'd done for him. You must have been really proud.

Laura: I was twelve feet tall. He said, "I just came by to tell you "Thank you.""

Paul: So that's probably a good way to tie it up, to see the potential in kids and recognize that as teachers and work towards developing that. It really helps, in your opinion, to have the specialist around to help develop that a little bit to develop those kids to their potential.

Laura: I don't really feel that you can have too many and I don't think you can have too many teachers helping kids. I just glory in your spunk when you say, "I have an assistant and she's going to do this." That's great! Go to it. That's what it's all about.

Paul: Well, if there's nothing else you would like to speak to, we really appreciate the time.

Laura: Oh, I'm glad you're doing it.

Paul: Well, I really enjoyed it, and it's been a lot of fun. I appreciate Kelly helping us out. You've done a wonderful job for us. Thank you.