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1986

### Interview with Selola Lewis

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Selola Wilson Lewis 1926-2017

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## CHAPTER TWO

An oral history with Selola Lewis of Rolla, Kansas, conducted by Marjorie Retzlaff on June 27, 1986:

M. RETZLAFF: Do you know what the cultural or heritage background of this school district or community was?

S. LEWIS: Not really. It was just a homesteading community. It's been here about since 1861.

M. RETZLAFF: How and when was it deemed necessary to build the school?

S. LEWIS: 195-, it was completed in 1953.

M. RETZLAFF: How big an area does the school serve?

S. LEWIS: We have a student who comes in from eighteen miles, but they have to bring him in.

M. RETZLAFF: How did the people decide on this location?

S. LEWIS: Well, I don't know. I have the history here, that you might want to read later. For a while it was moved from one place to another, the school building, so it would be close to the students who wouldn't have to walk so far. Then there's been some consolidation going on. There have been several small schools that were all compiled into one.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you know the cost of the school?

S. LEWIS: Well, not right off. I have it here though. I have to weed through those to see what book it's in.

M. RETZLAFF: You might just want to look later.

S. Lewis: I do have it here though. [pause] The building cost approximately \$70,000 and it's a modern [one], it will accommodate up to thirty-five

three sides and two benches in the center by the stove. We had a door and small windows on the south end. The students named it Antelope Valley. When I came here this was Antelope Valley. They ordered curtains and they had an antelope put on the front. Then when they dedicated the [new] building, they decided to call it Dermot because there used to be a Dermot School, in the city of Dermot, which was in Stevens County. That one has been gone, no one around here remembers when it was a town. We have a cemetery, the Dermot Cemetery, off here in the northeast.

M. RETZLAFF: How did this school differ from others in the area?

S. LEWIS: Other than by being about the smallest one, I don't think any.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you know of any particular problems the school had?

S. LEWIS: None that I know of.

M. RETZLAFF: Who hired and fired the teachers?

S. LEWIS: School Board.

M. RETZLAFF: Do they still?

S. LEWIS: I think they would be the main ones.

M. RETZLAFF: How often did you meet with the school board?

S. LEWIS: Why, I went to all the meetings for a while, till they unified.

M. RETZLAFF: Who did they unify with?

S. LEWIS: Rolla, District 217.

M. RETZLAFF: Okay, how did your school get the supplies and things?

S. LEWIS: I ordered them. Now since we have unified, I order them. I make out an order and take it into the office. It has to be approved.

M. RETZLAFF: Who employed the teachers?

S. LEWIS: School Board.

M. RETZLAFF: Was there ever more than one teacher that worked in the school?

S. LEWIS: Yes, its been several years ago now. I can't recall just how long ago. I can figure, about 15 years ago approximately, give or take. We had so many students we divided it in half. I took the lower four and she took the upper four grades. That was for two years.

M. RETZLAFF: Did any activities take place between schools?

S. LEWIS: Oh yes, when I first came there were five rural schools in this county. We'd meet and have track meets and spelling bees. We'd get together for a lot of things.

M. RETZLAFF: Was the school house used only for teaching or for other community events?

S. LEWIS: We had a club which is just a social club and they have a dinner once a month. Then we have the Arthritis Drive, we've had a few family reunions there and 4-H meetings. We have had, at different times, prayer meetings.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you know if any of the original equipment is available?

S. LEWIS: I know there are some desks around. We sold them when we moved into the new building. There may be a few things down in the old building, they use it for storage. But they sold most of it.

M. RETZLAFF: Did this school make any lasting contributions to the community?

S. LEWIS: Oh, I think that is one of the reasons that it stays, because when your school goes your community goes. Since it isn't a city, people go into three or four different communities that they go to for church and we send our kids to the high

school at Rolla. Other than just a meeting place and keeping the community having a tie, that's all I can think of.

M. RETZLAFF: What was the outstanding feature of this school?

S. LEWIS: Togetherness, I guess. [pause] Small towns [are like that]--Sedan's not real large and my mother was a teacher. She had wanted me to go out to a box supper. I shouldn't have felt this way, but you know how teenage kids are 'country kids, cause they look different, their clothes are home made' and I wouldn't go out there. I wished I had because I didn't realize I'd end up in a country school having box suppers. Now I have learned something. My mother was a wise lady, but I didn't realize it until I grew up. I came out to this little community which was a 'Church of God' community. They had ice cream socials and I realized it was fun. You could have fun in the country and how nice it was. That's the reason I have stayed. I didn't have to stay in the country, but they are really nice people. The only reason I moved out of this little country school (they offered to raise my wages) was because I was dating my [future] husband and the roads were just near impossible during the winter. They get bad. That is the only reason I moved to a little town nearby, it was real important then. [laugh] I moved into the next town, so he could call. It was on the highway. I stayed there two years and then I stopped [teaching] to have two sons.

M. RETZLAFF: Where was this school?

S. LEWIS: This was at Satanta, it was the only town I taught in.

M. RETZLAFF: What was your pay then?

S. LEWIS: That was \$2,000, and it averages out to \$222 a month. This [Pretty Prairie] was \$215, this was my first salary, and heavens, I bought about as much as I do now. Because we made, when I started over here, about \$350 a month. I saved money and I took the whole family to school--two boys, my husband and myself. We went to Pittsburg [Kansas]

and I went to school . . . we'd saved enough and we ate well, ate out.

M. RETZLAFF: Was the teacherage always here?

S. LEWIS: No, I moved in the buildings. The old [school] building was down there along side of these trees. I taught in the old building the first year. We moved and lived in a little house about three miles north. I had a baby in diapers--baby one and two. Then they were building the building.

My dad taught at Rolla at that time and he said they were looking for a teacher and there again, I'd always heard that you got the culls when you were hired late and every school I have had, except Satanta, I came in just before school so I don't believe that. I don't feel I'm a cull but anyway, my dad said, 'We're going to build a school and a teacherage.' So I came up here. They began to build the building and then they built the building. We moved here before the building was completed. I moved into [both house and school]. Then they added this room on because of my baby in there. She had hives and she couldn't stand to be touched. I said, 'I'll just rent or buy a trailer house.' I did move a trailer house up to put the boys in because it [the house] was too crowded. Then the school board came in and added this [room] on.

M. RETZLAFF: Where did the funds for the school construction come from? Do you remember?

S. LEWIS: They made bonds I think. The bill for a building fund passed legislation in 1949, and that gave them the [go ahead] to start planning the funds for the building purposes. They levied bonds for \$45,000 to build it.

M. RETZLAFF: How did they raise the money then for equipment and supplies and things?

S. LEWIS: The same way I suppose, maybe they had money.

M. RETZLAFF: This is a section on land and buildings. What materials were used to build with?

S. LEWIS: It is a brick, long brick.

M. RETZLAFF: Who owns the schoolhouse?

S. LEWIS: Well, it would be the district, as far as I know. Now the land will go back to the Milburns. There is a newspaper article in here, if you'd like to look it over later, where he gave the land for building purposes, but the land will revert back to the Milburns when this is gone.

M. RETZLAFF: How was the stone moved to the building site? It's not native, is it?

S. LEWIS: I don't know. It isn't native.

M. RETZLAFF: How about the water supply?

S. LEWIS: We have a well.

M. RETZLAFF: What type of heating, lighting and toilets?

S. LEWIS: It's all modern, we have gas heat, electricity and they [the lights] are florescent.

M. RETZLAFF: Has it been that way since you have been here?

S. LEWIS: Yes.

M. RETZLAFF: What were some of the physical problems of the building?

S. LEWIS: Well, none with this one. Now the old one we had a lot of, the year I came, in 1953 we had dirt. It seemed like it blew every Friday. We have those close-top desks and the desks would be almost full of dirt, so there was a few days that we turned school out early, because the dust would just come in. While I was cleaning one day, helping my husband who janitored that first year, one of the constructors came in and said it was coming in the new building too but not as bad. That was our only problem.

M. RETZLAFF: Were there any physical changes in

the school house during the years of use?

S. LEWIS: The new building?

M. RETZLAFF: The new building.

S. LEWIS: No.

M. RETZLAFF: Any additions?

S. LEWIS: The only thing we have added was last year, they added carpeting and they added a new front door. And air conditioning has been added.

M. RETZLAFF: Who's in charge of the upkeep?

S. LEWIS: Unified School District 217 is now.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you know what the boundries of the school are and how they were set?

S. LEWIS: Not for sure.

M. RETZLAFF: What is the function of this school house today?

S. LEWIS: Well, the kids and I feel that we have had quite a few reporters come out and they always kind of think of us as a relic of the past. Well, the kids and I don't feel that way. That's our present because they have been born [in the community], I have seen them since they were babies. They have come to the school house for programs and been included. We've grown up together. So this is our present, this is not our past.

M. RETZLAFF: We are going on to the section about some of the curriculum. What levels of school and age are incorporated in this program?

S. LEWIS: When I first came over here, I had eight grades . . . now it is grades one through six. They come in by the law. They are six years old when they come in. They turn seven--usually pretty quick and it goes up to sixth grade. They are around ten and eleven.



M. RETZLAFF: Would you describe the school day and how it fits in?

S. LEWIS: We have two buses and when the children get here I start my day. I start at 7:45 every morning because I don't want to waste time. They come in and they are ready to work. We start with the flag salute. If there is something that's happened that they want to talk about we just share and get that out of the way. I start with the first grade first, because the older children have the skills to go ahead. When I start, I like to get a few of the more difficult subjects out of the way early, so I usually have math and reading the first part of the day. I just go right down the grades for first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth and then I start over.

M. RETZLAFF: How?

S. LEWIS: I'm flexible, if I see a child that is working and isn't quite finished (my biggest class is usually five, this year it was six) I'll just play it by ear and do something else until I see they're finished. So we are flexible and I go with one subject until I feel I have finished it for that day. Then over the week I've covered a week's work. I don't [have] you know, thirty minutes shut-off or forty minutes, and it seems to work. I know it works because I have seen it go full circle.

M. RETZLAFF: What teaching methods were used?

S. LEWIS: Well, I feel I'm a traditional teacher up to a point, yet I think I am modern. I try to keep up with the times. I don't know what you'd call it . . . I use part of the new math. It came in and went out, but it had some good points, it was misunderstood I think, a lot, so I try to keep what works. I keep whatever it's called, whatever age it is. My classroom is like an open classroom, but I am still traditional enough that I want quietness and I want them working. I then loosen up and usually let them work in groups or on different projects.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you happen to know anything about

the various educational materials that were used throughout the history of this school?

S. LEWIS: I don't feel like it's changed that much. We live in an area that have--they have the equipment, just like we have a VCR in the classroom. We have a computer. We have a tape [recorder] and overhead. I don't feel that we are lacking in anything like that. It has been as up to date as most any school has been throughout the years.

M. RETZLAFF: What size is the school library?

S. LEWIS: Roughly a thousand books or over. It looks like it's over.

M. RETZLAFF: Can you kind of describe the curriculum of your school and maybe how it has changed through the years since you have been here?

S. LEWIS: Well, after Spudnik I think is when I noticed it most. It's pretty concentrated. I have a concentrated program. We do take time out for projects and things like that, but I pretty well go with the heart of the matter. In science if we are studying plants, I will pool all of them together, all six grades. Sixth graders get certain things out of it and first graders other things. I feel it's impossible to have six science projects going and do any of them justice. That seems to have worked over a period of time. I aim for a period of six years, by that time I feel that I will have them pretty well ready to go on. After Spudnik, it seems like there was more pressure put on science and math . . . . I think in today's world, the fast pace that we are living, they try to shove too much, too soon. Some children can handle it, some just can't do it.

M. RETZLAFF: Were any special classes or unique educational services offered?

S. LEWIS: I don't know what you mean exactly by unique. But we do have, just like I said, this is a one-room school, but this is 1986 . . . . We can almost say we have a special school. We had a child who was born with something on her lip . . .

I think she came out here because she was made fun of. She was a bright little girl. She didn't have any problems other than that growth. She had such a lovely personality that kids would tell her 'we don't even notice it.' Then we had a speech problem. We had a little girl that was born with brain damage, I will show you her picture later. She's doing great. We never treated her different. It breaks my heart sometimes when I get a report from Children's Hospital at Denver because I don't think she was that slow. She was college material. She is doing fine. She is getting special help. We have had a physical therapist and an adaptive PE teacher. We have had a gifted teacher and a LD teacher. That one year we had all of them. It was like Grand Central Station. We had that little boy who was adopted and brought in. He had been abused, verbally I would think mainly. He was a handful and I have no training for that. We had a woman come in and work with him. That one year was enough to last about ten years. This year, I don't have any, except the gifted program. Gifted is the only one I have this year.

M. RETZLAFF: Do the teachers come out then?

S. LEWIS: They would come out, maybe for once a week, sometimes twice, but we serve the kids.

M. RETZLAFF: How would you describe the atmosphere of the school?

S. LEWIS: Relaxed, informal, we are like a family and I have had people from different parts of the country drop in. PM Magazine came out and filmed us. They all remarked that it was like a large family. I treat them like my kids. They get their ears boxed, literally I don't box them, but I get on to them like they were my own. And the kids, you know how kids are, they will stick up for each other. They tell them all [the reporters] that we stick together like a family.

M. RETZLAFF: Did any of the students you are teaching or that you did teach go on to become outstanding?

S. LEWIS: Well, I think most of them. (laugh) No,

I have one that is a lawyer and one's a mechanical engineer. I have quite a few who are teachers. My son is a vocational coordinator for the High Plains which used to be at Garden, now it's at Ulysses. We had quite a few nurses. My daughter hopes to be a physical therapist. You know it's hard to get accepted, I don't know if she will, but she is going to try in September anyway. They all turned out to be pretty good citizens and that is pretty important. I don't know of any that's become famous or anything. Maybe they will before it's all over though.

M. RETZLAFF: Okay, we're ready to go on with the section about the teacher. What years did you teach here?

S. LEWIS: From '53 to the present. I started my thirty-third year [in teaching].

M. RETZLAFF: How many years schooling did you have in order to teach?

S. LEWIS: I had two years when I started and then I went spring and summer terms until I finished.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you have any advanced degrees?

S. LEWIS: No, I have lost my master's hours about three times. I was just ready to finish and my little one came along. By that time my oldest was ready to go to college and I just never got one.

M. RETZLAFF: What did you have when you first started, in comparing it to now, did you have a particular code of ethics or morals you had to follow in your private life?

S. LEWIS: I never was given a set of rules I had to follow. But I don't live a very fast paced life, so I probably won't get rules. I don't smoke, I don't drink and I don't carouse around, so I was never called on the carpet for anything.

M. RETZLAFF: Was there ever a problem with teacher turnover?

S. LEWIS: Well now, when I came here there were

three little boys in the third grade. I started to work with them on multiplication and they gave me a lot of talk and I thought I was just a new teacher. I was twenty-one, maybe twenty-three, and I thought they were just trying to get by. One of the eighth grade girls said they didn't have that. So I started going back to find out where I would find them and they were about a half a year behind. I began to wonder why and I was told that they had a real good teacher the first half of the year. She 'got her tea towels hemmed' and so she got married. Then they had two other teachers and you know, they just didn't take hold after that first semester.

M. RETZLAFF: How did you start out the day when you first started--is it the same as now?

S. LEWIS: Pretty much, depends on the kids I have. Sometimes they like to go and hang the flag. I let them and we play the Star Spangled Banner. We do different things, because when we are together so many hours I try to do something, the same things in a different way.

M. RETZLAFF: What kind of punishments do you dole out?

S. LEWIS: I am not a very strong disciplinarian. Like a boy I had here for the 25th celebration we had. He said I had a funny kind of discipline but when I spoke they knew that I meant it. I don't know any way to describe it. I don't paddle. One day my husband made me a paddle and we were talking about it. I said, 'Oh, I'm giving free samples today, anybody want to volunteer?' Three little boys came up and one boy bent over. He had on tight pants and I got a good swing. The other two backed out. We went on with classes and he didn't tell me until he got in high school. He said, 'You know that day that you gave me that spanking? That hurt!' He still drops in and if anybody needs a spanking today he tells that story. That one swat has lasted about 30 years. In fact, that little red pillow over there, his daughter bought it over to me for 'teacher's paddle' and I know its because I paddled him that time. But I don't spank, I may give them a hard look, but they'd better not move.

M. RETZLAFF: What was the length of the school year and the school day?

S. LEWIS: When I came and for several years, I don't remember just when they quit, it was eight months and then we went to twelve months.

M. RETZLAFF: You mean nine months?

S. LEWIS: Yes, nine months, we went to nine months.

M. RETZLAFF: What changes were made, in what years, any major changes?

S. LEWIS: Other than being consolidated. That is when our seventh and eighth [grades] went to Rolla.

M. RETZLAFF: Was there a principal used along with the teacher?

S. LEWIS: No, I am sort of head teacher. I have sat in on principal's meetings as a head teacher.

M. RETZLAFF: Then who evaluates you?

S. LEWIS: The Superintendent of Rolla, Neill Hays.

M. RETZLAFF: Not before they were consolidated?

S. LEWIS: No.

M. RETZLAFF: There was none?

S. LEWIS: In fact, I taught without a certificate, excuse me, without a contract, for several years because they said, 'We want you to have a Halloween program and a Christmas program and teach the kids.' That's what I've done.

M. RETZLAFF: I am ready to start the section on students. What was the cultural or heritage background of this school district or community?

S. LEWIS: I don't know very much about that, just that they are famers, ranchers. There isn't any outstanding nationality or any thing like that.

M. RETZLAFF: Were the majority of original students of a particular religion?

S. LEWIS: Oh, I think that is kind of interesting. I have marked this. I know we have had several religions and I thought that was a little bit unique. Just last year we had eleven students and out of that we had four . . . Methodists and I am a Methodist. We had two Catholics, one Latter Day Saint, and two Lutherans. The year before that we had two that were Seventh Day Adventists and one from the Church of God. I think that is kind of unique, because when I first taught it was all Church of God except one child. They were good people, they just weren't church goers. I say this gives us a chance, especially because there are differences in the Catholic and the Mormans, particularly because I say to the kids 'If I should say anything that offends you or is against what you believe, tell me. It will be ignorance on my part, you know.' Besides we take coke to the river to cool it. Well, of course, the Mormans don't drink tea or that sort, so I said, 'Fine, what can you have?' So we learned and that has taught us to be tolerant to others and to be understanding. We talk about it. I say, 'Heavens, if we can't talk about it with eleven of us, heaven help the world.' So that's really been a good opportunity, but I thought it was unusual to have that many different types of religions represented.

M. RETZLAFF: What was the usual age a child began school and did this stay the same or vary through the years?

S. LEWIS: No, it has changed. It used to be if you were five before December 1 or January 1, you could go to school. Now they have to be five before they start kindergarten or on September 1.

M. RETZLAFF: What were the ages of the children at the school?

S. LEWIS: Okay, they varied from six years old to eleven.

M. RETZLAFF: Just, for example, this past year. How are they divided?

S. LEWIS: Okay, I had one first grader, and I had six second graders, no third grade this year, two fourth, one fifth and one sixth. . . . out of that group, I have three that are qualified for the gifted program. I have one I think I'm going to recommend to be tested.

M. RETZLAFF: How many students went to the school, the total number if you can remember?

S. LEWIS: . . . I don't know off-hand, lets see . . .

M. RETZLAFF: What was the average number?

S. LEWIS: In all?

M. RETZLAFF: Per year.

S. LEWIS: Well, that usually runs around fifteen. We've had as high as twenty-six and as low as ten.

M. RETZLAFF: Okay, what teacher aids were made available and did this have an effect on any students that might not have been in that room at that time or at that grade level? Something special that you would have done?

S. LEWIS: I like a blackboard and a piece of chalk. I think that is kind of hard to beat. They have bought anything I have asked for, but I have more equipment then I have time to use. We have tape recorders and we have film projectors. We have computers and the kids all use them. This doesn't bother us while the rest of us are working. So I will have different ones doing different things--tapes that they listen to. I can't think of anything unusual other than that.

M. RETZLAFF: What are some of the special observances?

S. LEWIS: Like what?

M. RETZLAFF: Like your Christmas programs.

S. LEWIS: Okay, now we have an annual box supper.



They have had this for years until this year. I'll tell you about that. Then we have our Christmas Program, we have a Valentine Tea for all the ladies in the community and the pre-schoolers and they have a sack of valentines for each pre-schooler. We have a hayrack ride. We go on to the river and play in the sand. We go, with Rolla, to Amarillo every other year. The kids vote, if they have to pick one, they go to the river. I don't think they like to ride that well. They like it [Amarillo] after they get there. We usually do both of those. We have an annual school picnic on the river.

This year I had asked different times--times are getting so busy and children have so much candy. That is what the money from the box supper goes for--Christmas treats. Everybody gets a big sack of candy. I thought, well maybe, they would like to drop that since kids have too much candy now and the cost is getting almost prohibitive. This year some of the ladies in the club said, 'We talked and maybe it would be better not to have the treats this year.' I said, 'Okay, that would be fine and not have the box supper. We'll just have a donation box.' They said, 'Okay.' We all brought salads and sandwiches and the donations ended up being more than we got from the boxes. I said, 'Well, how do you want to do this then?' They wanted to just get a candy bar for the kids in school. 'Well,' I said, 'and give them out that night.' They said, 'Yes, that's okay.' I said, 'What about the pre-schoolers?' Well they hadn't thought about that, so we gave to the little kids. One mother whose child is going to Rolla (a seventh grader who always went out here) said, 'Well, the seventh graders aren't that grown up either. They like their candy.' So I said, 'Well, I will just get a candy bar for everybody who comes.' 'Okay, that is great,' they said.

When it came right down to it, why some of them got to thinking they didn't want their tradition changed, so they ended up having their peanuts, fruit and sack of candy. Their sack of treats, but we didn't go in for the Christmas candy. So I don't know what they will do next year. We'll see. When it comes right down to changing an old tradition they just don't want to do that and they have always supported it.

M. RETZLAFF: What systematic evaluation do you use?

S. LEWIS: Observance, working with them, testing. I don't hold with testing altogether . . . you can pretty well tell because you will have students who are great test takers and those that are not test takers. I think it is a combination [of things], but I think the daily work is a big factor.

M. RETZLAFF: Do they get regular grades?

S. LEWIS: Oh yes, I give regular grades. Music, I think, they get 'S', 'S' and 'U'.

M. RETZLAFF: What's the greatest distance that is traveled by any student?

S. LEWIS: About eighteen miles. We have a boy from Richfield. The bus goes by there, to go to Rolla, but this woman has chosen to bring him in, she has to bring him.

M. RETZLAFF: Have they always come by bus?

S. LEWIS: Well, when my husband first came here, he was the bus driver and janitor. We drove our station wagon then. They have the bus now.

M. RETZLAFF: What type of graduation exercises did you have?

S. LEWIS: When we had the eight grades the schools would rotate having the programs. We had it here one time--just like any graduation ceremony.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you feel that this kind of, this type of, education has helped your students? Can you list some pluses and minuses?

S. LEWIS: Yes, I think the biggest benefit is they hear. I don't care how sophisticated and technical we get, learning is repetition. Some of them are like sponges and they absorb a lot. Ones that are slower, they hear it reinforced over and over and over. I think that is a benefit.

Another benefit is that they learn to tolerate younger ones. This is something they learn, to get

along with all ages. We modify our plays. We modify our games to include all ages. I don't think it hurts them any. They learn to think for themselves. I have a few rules--like one in the restroom, one in the hall. If they need to drink water, they go and get it. If they need to go to the bathroom, they go. One day I had them raise their hand for everything. That is all I got done. I didn't teach, I answered hands. So this works for us. They know pretty much what they can do and what they can't do. I think this, I think this helps them. So I think this is a plus.

I really feel the only minus is I'm not a coach, and I don't pretend to be. I don't have the athletics. We play games and things like that. That would be the only thing, they don't have the athletics. I really feel that seventh grade is soon enough anyway, but I am in the minority on that I guess. [laugh] That is the only really thing I think hurts them.

I have asked students who have gone on to college--my son graduated from Hays, some from Provo, Utah, KU and I have asked others. I say, 'Now be honest with me. Has it hurt you?' They said they didn't think so. One of them said that out here they know there is so much to learn, because what they see other kids [learning]. A lot of kids when they see just one grade they think they know a lot. Out here they realize there is lots to learn.'

I intermix, like I have a gifted boy, a sixth grader, but I never thought of not calling on him if I wanted him to read with a first grader on a play, or a second grader. Then I'll have a second grader work with a sixth grader. That way if someone really needs it they aren't stigmatized because they see a gifted child working with a first grader in a reading class. I think that is good. I have always told them when you help someone else that doesn't hurt you, it only makes you better. A lot of them, if they see that someone needs a little help or is having a little trouble on multiplication they may offer to help them. If a young one needs some reading, extra reading, which they usually do, one of the old ones will take that. It's like a family in that we help each other. I told them that always makes you stronger.

M. RETZLAFF: Do you have a music teacher?

S. LEWIS: Yes.

M. RETZLAFF: A P.E. teacher that comes out?

S. LEWIS: We don't have a PE teacher. We have a music teacher who comes out. In the beginning and for years they didn't. Because I felt, some of the board members felt, that if they wanted a piano lesson, or like that, the parents would take care of that and they didn't. I told them I could work around a music teacher if they wanted to come out, you know, and have piano or whatever. Because you know, when you have eight grades (or six) you can always work around; but they didn't really believe, go for it. A few years ago we had music three days a week. Now the music teacher comes every morning. Then the band teacher said if you have four kids out there, because his band was getting small, that if you have four that are interested in band I will come out. We ended up with about eight that year. Then last year they only had four that were in band. Now we are going to be losing one of those, so we'll have three next year. Whether he'll come out for three I don't know. We don't start them until they are about fourth graders. We don't have any coming up except for second graders that will be third graders next year. He comes out twice a week.

M. RETZLAFF: How do you see the future of the school?

S. LEWIS: I don't know where they are going to come from, right now I have probably ten for next year. I have a lot of people ask me, 'Do you worry about it?' No, I don't worry about it. Obviously if the good Lord's willing we will have it and if he isn't, we won't. There was one time we were down to nine. I told the Superintendent, 'Well, Mr. Hays, well, what would be my role for next year?' He said, 'Oh, I think we can find a place for you.' I didn't want to go and spend a lot of time for nothing so I didn't do a lot of preparing. Then I had eleven when school started. Two walked in and both of them claimed to be number ten so I

just let them. So I don't know, we don't have that many babies in the community coming up. I feel like when I lose my group of third graders it might toll the end--unless--you used to have the farmers. When the farming situation was better, it was not uncommon for one man to hire two families and this kept me. The ones in school now are permanent. I mean they are well established farms. So I would say I hope to teach five more years. I hope to see this group out and then I don't know. But I don't worry about it.

M. RETZLAFF: Thank you. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

S. LEWIS: Not that I can think of, other than show you my things and you might have some questions. We, the kids, we have sang on the TV and we appeared on PM Magazine Show and Bruce Huss was out and filmed us. (See Appendix C, page 34)

## CHAPTER THREE

### SUMMARY

#### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Selola (Sally) Lewis was born on September 26, 1926 in Newkirk, Oklahoma. She grew up in a family where education was important. Her parents were both teachers and her father also coached. She attended grade school in Elgin, Kansas. The family moved to Sedan, Kansas. There she attended junior and senior high school, graduating in 1945.

Selola then attended Oklahoma A & M College in Stillwater, Oklahoma, for two years. Her parents moved to Kismet, Kansas, during the summer of 1947. There she met her future husband, Ernest. The superintendent in Kismet told her they needed a teacher up north (Pleasant Prairie) near Satanta. It was already late in the summer because she had her room assignment to return to Oklahoma A & M College. Her folks had been skimping to send her to school and she did have two younger sisters who were about ready to start college. Selola decided to "check it out", although she had said she didn't want to teach in a country school.

The evening that she went to interview, there was a prayer meeting. It was a small Church of God community. After the meeting, she met with the school board and was hired. She then began having doubts about her ability since she had not had any methods or technique classes. The board said she had more college than most teachers around and they still wanted her to teach. She began teaching when she was 20 years old.

She taught in that one-room school for a year. She then taught in town (Satanta) for two years. After her marriage, she and her husband moved to Kismet, Kansas, for two years. Circumstances didn't work out as planned and Mrs. Lewis decided to return to teaching. When she heard of the job at Dermot, she applied and was hired. The first year she taught in a white frame building. At that time the school was called Antelope Valley. The next year a new, modern building was opened and the name later changed to Dermot. Her husband worked as bus driver and custodian. This was in 1953 and she has now taught there for more than thirty years.

Mrs. Lewis worked on finishing her degree

during the summers and graduated from Pittsburgh State Teacher's College in 1957. She took time out from teaching when her sons were born, but continued teaching when her daughters were born. She had asked if she should quit, but the school board said there was no need to resign.

We were grateful to Mrs. Selola Lewis for giving us permission to record an interview and for all the information she supplied on her life and experiences as a one-room school teacher.

#### CONCLUSION

Historical research has been a means of helping understand the past to improve the future. The knowledge of rural education in Kansas has been increased by this study. Mrs. Lewis was a unique study in that she has taught in a one-room school when there were many and now when there is only one left in the state. She has noted many changes in the interim. One thing has not changed. That is that education has always been important to rural Kansas parents. The children of Dermot School have benefited from both the one-room school and especially from having a dedicated teacher. Mrs.



Lewis's abilities and philosophies have been some of the main reasons Dermot School has survived. This became apparent to the researchers throughout the study.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Rolla School District has set a minimum of ten students for Dermot School to remain open. Nine children pre-enrolled for the 1986-1987 school year; therefore, there is a chance of the one-room school in Kansas becoming extinct.

After this study and some reading about smaller schools, the researchers feel that more studies should be made on this type of school. Consideration should be given to dividing schools, instead of consolidating them, especially at the elementary level.

Another interview with Mrs. Lewis should take place to gain more information about her experiences. It would also benefit the research to get other interviewers' opinions, responses and insights.

## APPENDIX A

### HAPPENINGS IN A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL

Written by Selola Lewis

I had made four snowmen out of chicken wire and covered it with cotton batting. Inside I put my first graders. One little fellow fell--he was like a turtle on his back--during the play I reached out and set him back on his feet and the play went on.

\*\*\*\*\*

In one Christmas play a boy playing Santa came through the fireplace. This was fine during practice, but the night of the performance was a different story. The padded Santa suit was just too big for the fireplace and old Santa got stuck and pulled the fireplace over. It was good for laughs anyway.

\*\*\*\*\*

One year we only had one girl. The play we wanted to do called for four girls, so three of our 'all-American' boys agreed to dress up like girls--everyone joined in. The cook got grapefruits and really filled the boys out. We had a lot of fun. One man in the audience said, "I didn't know we had that many big girls."

\*\*\*\*\*

On Halloween we had a masquerade. Anyone who wanted to dress up could. We had one gentleman in the community who usually came dressed as a woman. A group of men were visiting outside when in walked an ugly old witch who just nodded and went in to sit down. One of the men asked if it could be Bus and the others guessed that must be him. So the man went in and put his arm around the witch and gave her a pinch, then got up and left. He walked outside and who should walk up but Bus (not in costume as he had just come from a meeting.) Was the man's face red when he realized he had hugged and pinched his neighbor's wife. It was all in fun, so they all had a good laugh.

\*\*\*\*\*

Another Halloween an old lady (very well dressed) in black--complete down to girdle and hat with a veil fooled everyone--turned out to be an eighth grade boy who had dressed in his grandmother's good clothes.

\*\*\*\*\*

After one program a few stayed to visit and clean up. Otis Lee Daniels sat at the piano. As he played the songs--little heads would perk up and they would come forward and do their song and then wander away as others came forward. The program after the program was as good as the original.

\*\*\*\*\*

We needed basketball suits so the ladies and men in the community played a basketball game against each other. The men had to wear gloves and slippers. The ladies wore white shirts and red and white polka-dot bloomers. One older lady was the coach, she dressed much like a witch and carried a skillet. We got the suits and a lot of fun was had by everyone.

\*\*\*\*\*

One April Fool's Day we were playing ball across the road from the school. Two younger boys were walking around. All at once John came running and yelling, "Johnny's been bit by a rattlesnake." I started to run then said, "Oh! It's April Fool's." He said "Shucks, we found a crooked stick. Looks like a snake." He went home and told his Dad about it--his Dad didn't think it was funny--because it wasn't uncommon to find rattlesnakes by the flag pole, under the jungle gym, you name it--one could be there.

\*\*\*\*\*

During class one day a girl screamed--seems a salamander was walking toward her from the activity room. (He looked like a dinosaur to a small girl.) An older boy took him outside--don't know how he got in.

\*\*\*\*\*

One hot day during the summer some of my supplies arrived. I opened the front door of the school and propped it open so I could carry boxes in, then decided to go ahead and put supplies away. When I went to close the door I heard a hiss--there was a snake caught in the door. I called my husband--he helped to remove the bull snake and let him go--bet he had a sore tummy.

\*\*\*\*\*

Elections are held in our gym and I wanted the students to be unusually quiet and good that day. In science we were feeding Cam. I put in a cricket--the cricket jumped on my arm and the lizard went after it--I screamed, throwing the lizard on the floor. The boys rescued it and peace was restored--only one making a noise was the teacher.

\*\*\*\*\*

APPENDIX B  
YEAR'S SCHEDULE

Written by Selola Lewis

- September: Labor Day  
School begins
- October: Annual Halloween Box Supper and Program  
--Children look forward to preparing a spook house. Ladies bring beautiful boxes filled with delicious food. A young lady's box usually brings the highest bid. This money is used to buy treats for Christmas.
- November:
- December: Annual Christmas Program
- January: Concentrated study period
- February: Annual Valentine Tea and Program  
--For all ladies and pre-schoolers in our neighborhood. A sack of valentines is presented to all school children and pre-schoolers.
- March: Hay rack ride to river
- April: Easter Egg Party  
--Egg hunt and treasure hunt.
- May: Play Day at Rolla  
Last day of school picnic at the river

During the year we enter the following: a poster contest, music contest, math contest, spelling contest and reading contest.

## APPENDIX C

### MEDIA COVERAGE

A lot of interest has been shown in Dermot School, its students and its teacher during the last few years. The school has been featured on television, in newspapers and in magazines.

Television coverage has included the students singing, a feature on P.M. Magazine and a segment on Bruce Huss's 'Pioneer Women Series.'

Articles have appeared in the following publications:

- KS Magazine, July/Aug. 1986 (see pages 35-36)
- Kansas Magazine, 3rd issue 1979 (see page 37)
- Hugoton Hermes, 1979
- Southwest Daily Times, 1981 and 1978
- Hutchinson News, 1982
- Topeka Capital Journal, 1983
- Wichita Eagle-Beacon,, 1984 and 1980