

Fort Hays State University

## FHSU Scholars Repository

---

College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse  
Oral Histories

Archives Online

---

1988

### Interview with Ella Meyer Murphy

Ardis C. Alexander  
*Fort Hays State University*

Ella Meyer Murphy

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

#### Content Disclaimer

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

---

#### Recommended Citation

Alexander, Ardis C. and Murphy, Ella Meyer, "Interview with Ella Meyer Murphy" (1988). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 97.  
<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/97>

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

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORAL HISTORY OF ELLA MEYER MURPHY

Ardis: Today is July 8, 1988, and I am interviewing Ella Murphy who lives in Ulysses, Kansas. Mrs. Murphy, I understand you taught at the Pleasant Prairie School in Haskell County. I am glad you are willing to share about your teaching experiences in the Pleasant Prairie School. What years did you teach there?

Mrs. Murphy: (looking at her photo album) These pictures will tell what years. I have them numbered. This must be the first one: 1929 to 1930. Then the next year was in 1930-1931, and my third year was 1931 and 1932 school year.

Ardis: Mrs. Murphy, what was necessary for you to apply for a teaching position? What requirements or qualifications did you need to teach in a country school?

Mrs. Murphy: Well, it wasn't very strict, but yet they wouldn't let me teach until I got my diploma.

Ardis: Earlier you mentioned that you were not allowed to teach.

Was it because you were not old enough when you graduated from high school?

Mrs. Murphy: I was out of high school and had graduated with fairly good grades. I think I was second in the class, but I didn't have the highest grades. In those days, you could go and get your normal training and I had had that. I went to Hays one year while I was waiting and took a normal training course.

Ardis: At the college in Hays?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, at the college.

Ardis: What was the normal training course like?

Mrs. Murphy: Well, it was the same old thing. It was basically the eighth grade subjects. We brushed up on those. It wasn't hard. I really didn't have to pass because I could have taught with my high school diploma by waiting that one year and having my birthday again.

Ardis: How did you apply for a job at the Pleasant Prairie School? Did you send out an application?

Mrs. Murphy: They came to me before school was out and they wanted me to apply. I just don't remember the particulars, but I went to church over there. The church was in their little schoolhouse. I knew them and was well acquainted, so that was the way. Of course, I applied. I think most of it was just talk and then they wrote out the application. I don't even remember giving them one, but they made out something. Maybe it was a contract. Then we had to wait. They thought maybe they could get it so I could teach before my December birthday, but they wouldn't do it. I don't remember who it was, something about the State, I guess.

Ardis: Yes, there are many requirements. I am certain the requirements are much stricter today than they were almost sixty years ago. Could you describe a typical day at school? What time did you arrive at school, what time did you leave, and what happened during the school day?

Mrs. Murphy: Well, I had to drive eight miles to school and it was on pretty good roads. I would get there anywhere from 7:30 to 8:00 and be ready when the children all came. I had to haul water. I did when I taught at Friendship, but I can't remember about Pleasant Prairie. It was a bigger

school and I believe they had a well. I've just forgotten. It was different then, the second year, when we served hot lunches.

Ardis: Were you responsible for the hot lunches?

Mrs. Murphy: Part of it. They would bring things that they would heat. They did that over at the other school too. Each family would be responsible for a week for part of the meal. I served lunches, or helped the children do it. They would wash the dishes, take their turns, and it all had to be worked out.

Ardis: What time did the children arrive at school?

Mrs. Murphy: Some of them wouldn't come until just about 9 o'clock. Some would come at 8:30, especially if they could play ball outside before school started. They liked to play ball. But, some would come in and be inside. I always tried to get out with them so if they got there early, I would go out with them until it was time to ring the bell. It was a busy time. A teacher has to be on their best to keep up with them.

Ardis: I believe that bell is still being rung every Sunday

morning to announce Sunday School at the Pleasant Prairie Church. After you rang the bell, then the kids would come into the school and then could you describe the activities of the day?

Mrs. Murphy: I don't remember how we did it there. It was all about the same. The bigger ones would help the little ones to get around and if there was somebody new, they would help them. I would appoint someone to take care of different chores every day. Now in some schools, I had the bigger kids and in some schools I didn't have any of the larger children, only the small ones and they couldn't do everything.

Ardis: How did you teach the different subjects to the children of all ages? When you had reading, were all the students included, or did you work with small groups?

Mrs. Murphy: I had about every grade each year I taught and it had to be worked out. I don't know, I just got in the habit of certain ways and I knew just what to do. I would come up short at the end of the day and be without a class or two, because when it was time for them to go home, you must have them ready to go home. Their parents didn't

want to wait too long. I just remember at first, it was a chore to get everything in.

Ardis: What subjects did you always have each day?

Mrs. Murphy: Well, the main subjects. Some of them you could have every other day and you could go back or go ahead. Some subjects weren't so hard. The harder subjects, especially if they were having trouble with them, I'd always try to get those in each day.

Ardis: Reading?

Mrs. Murphy: Reading and arithmetic and also spelling. The bigger kids could help themselves with subjects like government and history. They would all work together and I allowed them to do this.

Ardis: How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community? Were there some moral ethics that you had to abide by?

Mrs. Murphy: I think so. More than now.

Ardis: Could you describe them?

Mrs. Murphy: I think they did not want their teachers to smoke. I did not smoke and I never did, but I know some teachers did. That was one thing and just how you conducted yourself in a group. I think you had to be very careful, at least I did. I tried to be careful and I don't think I ever had any trouble, at least nobody ever said anything.

Ardis: Were you in charge of any extracurricular activities?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, we had programs that we presented. Those were extra. We really worked on those!

Ardis: Could you describe the programs?

Mrs. Murphy: We always had a Christmas program. That was always Christmas songs and a few little skits about Christmas. And then they would have box suppers. They always liked to have a box supper. They would bring lunches, the girls would fix up a pretty box.

Ardis: Was that event held in the evening?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, it was held in the evening and there would be a little program at first and that made money. I think



we used that for the program at Christmas, money for the treats at Christmas. And sometimes we would have other programs, but we usually had our box supper and our Christmas program. That was it.

Ardis: Did you have a program at the end of the school year?

Mrs. Murphy: At the end of the school year, we would have just a short program and they would have a picnic lunch.

Ardis: While you were at Pleasant Prairie, was there a teacher turnover among the country schools? What caused the teacher turnover?

Mrs. Murphy: What do you mean by "turnover"?

Ardis: I know in some country schools, the teacher might just stay one year and then move on to another school, and then some teachers would stay for a number of years at a certain school. Was this a problem?

Mrs. Murphy: There was problem. Now with me, they knew I lived close and that I would probably be there. And, they wanted me to be there still after I was there three years, but I felt like I should go on and it would be

better for all of us. I had another good offer. There were many tears shed and I just about decided not to leave, and go ahead and teach another year, but it would have been just the same thing the next year.

Ardis: You lived at home with your family, your parents, when you were teaching there at Pleasant Prairie?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, I did.

Ardis: Were you the only teacher in the system at the time you taught at Pleasant Prairie?

Mrs. Murphy: No. After they build the new schoolhouse, they had a man for that. I didn't have anything to do with that.

Ardis: The high school?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, the high school. They would put that curtain down, I don't remember how it was anymore, but it made two rooms. They had the south part and we had the north part. There were two doors, one went in that room and one went into our room.

Ardis: After they build the new school, then there was another

teacher. Did you work directly with him?

Mrs. Murphy: No, when we had a program we worked together or we worked together out in the yard when they played games but as far as teaching responsibilities, I didn't do anything. He taught, I think, the freshman and sophomore grades. I don't think the high school lasted after I quit, but I'm not sure.

Ardis: In reading the information about the high school, I found that it was open for only two year.

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, that is what I thought. Two years. There were some sophomores and there were freshmen. The sophomores had to go on to Sublette to finish high school.

Ardis: Was there a principal at the school?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I was the principal and I was not under the high school teacher. I just went in and did like I always did. He wasn't my boss and I wasn't his boss!

Ardis: Did you have a county superintendent?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. We had a good superintendent. She would come out and visit and we always had a big visit. We always had a good time.

Ardis: Today in our education system, teachers are evaluated. Someone observes your teaching and then you are evaluated. Did you have any experiences of evaluation?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I don't think so. She was probably evaluating me, but I didn't know about it. She never did tell me.

Ardis: How were discipline problems with the children handled?

Mrs. Murphy: I didn't seem to have many and I always got them settled. There was a time or two when I had a problem. I had one little boy, it wasn't so much of a discipline problem, he just didn't want to study. Finally he came around. He wasn't going to study, he didn't have to study! I don't know how he did that! You have to make them think they have the best of you, but he found out that he was in the wrong. I had a lot of eighth graders one year at Warrendale. I didn't have any discipline problems with them, but we were really busy getting all those kids

through. We really had to work. They all made it. Mervin and Arlin (Alexander) were at Warrendale that year. I had quite a few eighth graders at Pleasant Prairie, too. Some of the schools I taught in didn't have any eighth graders, just the little kids.

Ardis: Did the female teachers handle discipline differently than the male teachers?

Mrs. Murphy: I suppose so.

Ardis: If you had a serious problem, how did you handle it?

Mrs. Murphy: I would think about it and think about it, what I should do, and then I would usually, if we didn't get it settled one day, I would get them in the corner the next day and we would talk about it. We would just keep talking about it until they would finally behave themselves. I can't remember now what it would be about, but sometimes the bigger boys would pick on the little ones. I did not like that. Then, they would pick on some of the girls. That was most of the trouble I would have and it wasn't really bad.

Ardis: Mrs. Murphy, can you remember when the one-room school house was built?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I sure don't. I just don't remember. I know it must have been there a long time.

Ardis: I understand that you taught in the one-room school for one year and then the two-room school was built?

Mrs. Murphy: I think they built it through the summer. I am sure we had school in it the next year.

Ardis: Was it in the same location?

Mrs. Murphy: Right there on that corner. I don't know if it is in the same spot or not, but on that corner. I think they moved the old one away because it was on a foundation. I don't know what they did with it.

Ardis: Who built the new school?

Mrs. Murphy: I don't know.

Ardis: Can you remember what led the community to erect a

a new school?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I can't remember. That was such a little school and it was crowded.

Ardis: Could you describe the one-room school?

Mrs. Murphy: It was just like a lot of them were. It sat facing the west, on the corner, and the door was on the west and I believe that was the only door. All the schools I taught in had just one entry. You had a place where the water was kept in a bucket. It didn't take much water but it was a little work to get it ready each morning and then empty it each evening so you would have fresh water for the next day.

Ardis: Did each child have their own drinking cup?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, but we had problems keeping it clean and the pans and everything. I think the boys and the girls washed their hands in one and we always used lots of soap, anyway, I tried to make them use lots of soap! We were just about like a family. Now at one school, we just had a bucket and we would just dip into that to get our

water. If one kid had a cold, I'm sure we all got it.

Ardis: What was the floor like? Was it wooden?

Mrs. Murphy: It was a wooden floor.

Ardis: Did you have curtains on the windows?

Mrs. Murphy: I think we had blinds and had curtains down at the bottom part.

Ardis: What was the heating like in the one-room school? You mentioned something earlier about "building a fire"?

Mrs. Murphy: You usually had a stove in the corner or else at least halfway in the room with a big piece of tin around it to make the heat go up. The stove was in the middle of that. You had a door in the middle of it that you would open up and you would put your coal in, or whatever they burned, or perhaps some corncobs. They would bring corncobs and we would have piles of those. You started the fire with the corncobs and it soon heated up. Somebody had to keep watching and filling it up



when it was real cold. Of course, that was usually my job. I would get them busy and I would do it. It was a job. When you think of it, I would hate to go back to that!

Ardis: When I go to school each morning, I certainly do not think about the heat nor the water, and I am sure that the restroom facilities were outside?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, they were outside. Cold and snowy, you would have to run out there.

Ardis: You probably did not have any trouble with children wanting to go to the bathroom all the time?

Mrs. Murphy: No. No. They hated to have to go! But I do remember I worried about them washing their hands and one child getting something from another.

Ardis: What did the school look like on the inside? You mentioned the curtains and the blinds, were the walls painted?

Mrs. Murphy: The walls were painted and they would do that every

year. It was always nice and clean when school would start and, of course, they would clean it up again for the next year. I can remember of all the places I taught, the floors were wooden and they were usually badly worn, and they didn't have anything over them - just bare wood.

Ardis: What were the pupils desks like? Did they each have their own desk?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. I believe they were chairs with a drawer in it and a place out here to write on and then the drawer where they put their books.

Ardis: Was the drawer underneath the chair?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, underneath, I believe. Maybe they had a lid that lifted up. I believe they got new desks when they built the new building.

Ardis: Did you have a blackboard?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, we had a blackboard.

Ardis: Did you have a bulletin board?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, we had a bulletin board, blackboard, and a library.

Ardis: Tell me about the library?

Mrs. Murphy: It was a pretty good sized library and had lots of books in it. Nice books. I'm always been a book fiend. If you look around my house, I've got books everywhere! Lots of children are like that. First thing they would do was to go to the library and see what books they wanted to read.

Ardis: Did you check the books out so they could take them home?

Mrs. Murphy: They really enjoyed the books and I know they had good books there. You know, most libraries do have good books.

Ardis: Did you have many visual aids, like maps or globes?

Mrs. Murphy: No, not very many. After they built their new building, they got some new maps and they were real nice. All of the schools I taught in, the board members were very good about getting new maps and things like that each year.

Ardis: I think I can probably answer this next question without asking, but were you the janitor of the school?

Mrs. Murphy: I sure was! For all of those years, too!

Ardis: Did that include washing all of those windowpanes I noticed in the picture? Did you do that on Saturday?

Mrs. Murphy: I didn't get it done very much, but I'd do like I do in my house, I'd do the ones that showed the most! After they got the new school, there was a boy who was a freshman, who worked as a janitor. He did most of the sweeping, There was much sweeping there with the basement and all I had to do was keep my room clean. I didn't have to do any of the downstairs. I believe he was hired and that helped. But at all the other schools, I had to do it by myself. Sometimes I would have boys who would help me, but that usually didn't last long. They'd get tired of it!

Ardis: Was there any physical problems with the structure of the one-room school that was a hinderance? Something you would have liked to change if it had been within your power?

Mrs. Murphy: It was the water supply. Warrendale had water and it was modern. Down south, they had their toilets outside, but they did have water in the building to drink and wash their hands.

Ardis: After the new school was built at Pleasant Prairie, did it have indoor plumbing?

Mrs. Murphy: I think so, I believe so.

Ardis: That was much more convenient, wasn't it?

Mrs. Murphy: It was. It was just really nice. That first year it wasn't, but of course, I was familiar with everything, so it wasn't too bad.

Ardis: Were there any special classes or any unique educational programs that were available to the students at Pleasant Prairie School?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I don't think there were. We just got in what they told us to. That was about all you could do. We would have a speaker come around and then we would have visitors once and awhile, but it was mostly just subject matter.

Ardis: You mentioned the eighth graders earlier, and if I understand correctly, the eighth graders needed to take a competency test in order to receive their diploma. Can you describe the procedure of this test?

Mrs. Murphy: You had to give tests throughout the year every two or three months. At the end of the year they took their tests in town.

Ardis: Would they go to Sublette?

Mrs. Murphy: They would have gone to Sublette. Now they don't do that. Then they had a county superintendent and they were the ones who gave the tests. That was a big day when they went for their tests. They really weren't too hard. Of course, some of them didn't pass.

Ardis: Did all of your students pass?

Mrs. Murphy: Mine did. I never had any fail. They just about did sometimes, but as far as I know, everyone passed. They weren't hard tests. It was just about what they had taken all year, but of course, they worried about it!

Ardis: I am sure they did! Did they have a graduation program at the Pleasant Prairie School?

Mrs. Murphy: No, it was held in Sublette.

Ardis: A county-wide graduation? I'm sure that was a very special day and event for each eighth grader and his or her family.

Mrs. Murphy: It was. I was there three years and I guess I probably went three years. I don't remember.

Ardis: You mentioned the Christmas programs and the end-of-the-school year program. Did you have spelling bees?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes.

Ardis: Were several schools involved in the spelling bees?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. This was more after my own children were in school because I remember taking them. They would have a spelling bee and go to a neighboring school like Warrendale. I remember doing that two or three times. I don't believe we did with any other schools.

Friendship was such a small school, usually there was only about six or seven students and there wasn't any other school out there in that area, but Pleasant Prairie and Warrendale sure did get together for the spelling bees. They would sometimes have races, maybe make a whole day of it. Just had a big time!

Ardis: My husband recalls the trackmeets and the baseball games that he participated in and I believe the children did look forward to those events.

Mrs. Murphy: I can remember when I was in school over in Finney County. There were three schools that would get together. We would get together at one place one year and another place another year and the third year go to the other school. That was at the end of the year and we just looked forward to that. We didn't do much else. There wasn't much else for kids to do in those days.

Ardis: Were you able to select the textbooks that you wanted to use or were they already selected?

Mrs. Murphy: They were put out by the state. You had to get certain text books. They did change them once and awhile. They



were the same in this county and I guess they were probably the same all over the state. The arithmetic, readers, geography, and history books were the same and sometimes we would have a music book. They were chosen by the state.

Ardis: So, you were also the music teacher?

Mrs. Murphy: I really wasn't a music teacher, but I would play a little bit and we'd sing songs.

Ardis: Did you have a piano?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, there was a piano. Some schools had a pretty rickety one, but sounded about the same when I played, so it didn't matter if it was a good one or not.

Ardis: I'm sure the children enjoyed that.

Mrs. Murphy: They did! We would usually sing every morning. They would choose what they wanted to do, whether they wanted to sing or play a game. There was different things that we had that we enjoyed doing.

Ardis: What games might they choose?

Mrs. Murphy: There was one game in which they would put their heads down like this (demonstrated putting head on folded arms on the table) on their desks and someone would go around and tap them on the back of their heads and then that person had to do something and then it would be that person's turn. I have forgotten exactly how it was played, but something like that. Then another child would choose another game. We had lots of games and they could play them by staying at their own desks. They would have fun.

Ardis: What was the usual age a child would begin school?

Mrs. Murphy: About six or five. Like with me, my birthday didn't come until December and I had to be put off a time or two and that is why I can't understand why I came out of high school too young. Well, I do know. My first year the teacher died and I didn't go to school anymore that year and the next year the teacher put me in the second grade because she said I knew too much. I think I read while I was at home. My mother would help me. Another year, my cousin and I were in the same grade and the teacher said we were a year ahead, I think it was in the fourth

grade, so she put us right in with the fifth graders. We got along fine. In fact, one of the fifth graders didn't graduate, but we did.

Ardis: That might have something to do with why you finished high school young!

Mrs. Murphy: That must be it! You know, I've often thought about that and that must be one of the reasons I graduated from high school so young and couldn't teach that first year out. In 1918, when the flu was so bad, my first grade teacher and an aunt and uncle died from that flu. There were so many people ill that they just didn't have school anymore that year.

Ardis: I am sure that was probably a very hard year.

Mrs. Murphy: It was. I can remember. I was old enough to remember that!

Ardis: Did many children move in and out of the Pleasant Prairie School during the school year?

Mrs. Murphy: No.

Ardis: Those that started in the fall usually finished in the spring?

Mrs. Murphy: There was one little girl, I saw her picture here. I remember her daddy worked for John Jones. He was a cowboy. He came from Texas. I don't know where his wife was. He had this little girl and she was so cute and so smart and that is the only one. The rest were usually there all year.

Ardis: What was the greatest distance that the students traveled to get to school?

Mrs. Murphy: Not too far. I had to come the farthest.

Ardis: How did most of the children get to school?

Mrs. Murphy: Most of their parents would bring them.

Ardis: In cars?

Mrs. Murphy: I think some of them drove. Now, the Taton boys, they had a buggy and drove it with a horse.

Ardis: Then you had a horse that you had to take care of during the school day?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, you had to keep the children away from it. Some of the children wanted to play with it and pet it.

Ardis: Were the Taton boys George and Bennie?

Mrs. Murphy: No, Howard. George and Bennie were out of school. I had Howard for three years. He was in the sixth grade my first year. I had him during the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. He brought somebody else from down that way and they rode with him, but I can't remember who it was. I know at Warrendale, they had two or three kids that rode horses. One child rode and two of them rode one horse, so I had horses at that school, too. Now, when I went to school, my uncle lived on a mile past us, just a mile from where that TV station is over there, and he would come by and pick us up in a buggy. I remember several runaways. Children were scattered all over the road. There was about six of us that rode in the buggy. Thank goodness! Nobody ever got hurt!

Ardis: About how many students did you have each year when you

were at Pleasant Prairie?

Mrs. Murphy: You can see from the pictures. Looks like about between fifteen and eighteen students most of the time.

Ardis: You taught first through eighth grades, correct?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, first through eighth grades.

Ardis: No kindergarten?

Mrs. Murphy: No. I had to have kindergarten work to get those first graders started.

Ardis: Did the mothers help their children quite a bit before they entered school? Did most of the children know their A B C's?

Mrs. Murphy: No, not always. It was just about as well if they didn't. They would soon pick it up with the others.

Ardis: Did you ever have a first grader that could read at the first of school?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I don't think I ever did. But, they might know how to count.

Ardis: What type of occupations did the students usually have after they graduated from the eighth grade? Did most of them continue with high school?

Mrs. Murphy: I think so. I think most of them went on to high school.

Ardis: After high school, what did the majority do for lifetime occupations?

Mrs. Murphy: I think they went on to college at different places, as well as I can remember.

Ardis: Did some of them come back to the community to live?

Mrs. Murphy: Some of them did. Some went into the service, but many came back to their county and then they went on from there.

Ardis: Do you remember any student or students at Pleasant Prairie that were exceptionally "outstanding students"?

Mrs. Murphy: Well, I would say Howard Taton. He was good in everything and friendly, He was good to me and he was a good student. I understand he was ornery at times, but at school, he was always good. He was a likeable kid. He helped me run things. Wilma and Melinda (Alexander) they were good. They knew a little bit about everything and they could always help and they were good help. They helped me with the other students and that would help them to get straightened out sometimes. Melinda was in the eighth grade that first year and Wilma might have been about two years behind her.

Ardis: Did you have Nora and Dora?

Mrs. Murphy: No, they were in the high school. They had graduated from grade school before I went to teach at Pleasant Prairie, but after the high school was opened, they attended.

Ardis: Then you had my father-in-law, Leslie Alexander, when he was in the first, second, and third grade. Right?

Mrs. Murphy: He was your father-in-law? Let's see, here is this picture of him on his first day of school and his new



lunch bucket. That was his first day of school and my first day of school as a teacher.

Ardis: I'm sure you could probably share some interesting stories about Leslie that I have never heard.

Mrs. Murphy: He was a cute little kid, just like a boy, and he was ornery, but never caused any trouble. He liked to joke and play jokes. Things were funny to him. Now, I had one boy. I just didn't know how to treat him. He was scared of school. Apparently somebody had made him afraid of school. I had a terrible time with him. But, he finally came around. The kids teased him, but he would ask for it sometimes. Then, there was another boy who was sick much of the time. I just remember kids like that. I felt so sorry for them. When they had trouble, I'd work so hard with some of them. You just had to work all the time. You can't treat them like the other children, but you'd have to be careful and not make the other children feel you were neglecting them.

Ardis: I'm sure that it was very difficult at times.

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, it was.

Ardis: I am sure that the first year you taught, you spent many hours in preparation?

Mrs. Murphy: I did. I didn't know what to do sometimes.

Ardis: Did you have anyone that you could visit with in order to get new ideas or just share your problems with?

Mrs. Murphy: Noone except my mother. She had a big family. There were eight of us. I would go home and would ask her. My dad, he'd say "Just give them a good spanking!" That was his way. Now, he didn't spank any of his own kids, so I don't know what he would have done!

Ardis: What was the cost of education to the student and their family? Did they pay fees?

Mrs. Murphy: No fees. They bought their own books. The school did not furnish books. They were told which ones to get and they had to get them.

Ardis: So that was the expense to the family?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. Now some schools bought the books, but any school that I taught in, it was the parent's responsibility.

Ardis: The students furnished their own paper and pencils?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes.

Ardis: What about art supplies?

Mrs. Murphy: Those were supplied. I would get them or they would get them for me and we would just use out of what we had. Sometimes I would make my own.

Ardis: Where did you go to get supplies?

Mrs. Murphy: I remember I used to order some from a catalog. I would order art paper, but sometimes I would go someplace like to the drugstore or bookstore and get supplies. I would get them at Garden City if I was up there.

Ardis: What was the dress and overall appearance of the students?

Mrs. Murphy: I think most of the boys wore jeans and shirts that matched. The girls, they didn't have those crazy things

they wear now, but most of the girls wore dresses. I guess the girls were still wearing dresses all the time up until I quit teaching. Some of them I liked, but oh, some of them I hated! Some of the little suits were cute. Some of the boys wore overalls.

Ardis: Let us think about the school district and the community. If I understand right, the boundaries for the district were set. Were students allowed to attend a school outside of the district that they lived in?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, I think so. I know out there around Big Bow they did. There were families that lived right on the boundary line and they were allowed to go into Big Bow instead of to the country school. Up by Friendship, there were some families that lived in Kearny County, but they would attend Friendship.

Ardis: Who decided this?

Mrs. Murphy: I think the board did. They would just agree. If it was closer and if they could make it easier for the family, they would allow the children to attend. The roads were pretty bad then and no one wanted anyone to

get caught out on the roads in a snowstorm.

Ardis: Was the Pleasant Prairie School used for community-social activities?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, it was. I know we had Literary at Warrendale.

Ardis: Was the one-room school at Pleasant Prairie used for a church when you were teaching there?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, it was used for a church and a Sunday School. We had get-togethers for school functions there like a spelling bee contest. At least once a year we would go over to Valley or they would come over to Pleasant Prairie. We always had a good time and played lots of games. The mothers would come to the spelling contests.

Ardis: After the new school was built there, was it still used for a church?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. The whole time I was teaching there, the building was used as a church.

Ardis: Were there any traditions at Pleasant Prairie that were

any different than the other schools you taught at?

Mrs. Murphy: As I can remember, it was just about like the other schools. Friendship started having a Sunday School after some time. But at Pleasant Prairie, the church was always in the school.

Ardis: Was there a school board for the Pleasant Prairie School?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes.

Ardis: Do you remember any of the school board member's names?

Mrs. Murphy: O'Neal - Oscar O'Neal, who lived up north of Freys, and Fred Frey. I'm not sure who the other one was.

Ardis: How were they elected?

Mrs. Murphy: They were elected at their meeting. They had to hold office at least three years and there was always one going out and that was who they voted on.

Ardis: Did the school have any organizations similar to P.T.A.?

Did any of the mothers help you for any reason?

Mrs. Murphy: The mothers would offer to help and if we would do something special, they would help or if you needed something made for a program, like a costume, someone would always volunteer.

Ardis: Who hired and fired the teacher?

Mrs. Murphy: Well, I don't remember. They just got together and hired you.

Ardis: "They" refers to the school board, right?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, the school board. They would get together on their own and talk it over. They would come to the school early or after school and talk to me.

Ardis: When you were teaching at the Pleasant Prairie School, were there any controversies surrounding the school at that time, something that would be of interest?

Mrs. Murphy: I just can't remember any. We got along pretty good, but there was always someone who had something, but

they didn't do anything about it, just a lot of talk!  
And the best thing for a teacher to do is just not pay  
any attention to it. Someone always wants you to go and  
tell someone else something. I didn't do that. I let  
them go themselves and talk to another.

Ardis: Did the school make any lasting contributions to the  
community?

Mrs. Murphy: Some of the schools planted trees around their buildings.  
Most places didn't have water to do it. Then, when they  
got the water, they planted trees. The children really  
liked to do that. I know we planted trees at Friendship,  
then they moved the schoolhouse and the trees were farmed  
over.

Ardis: Do you remember why Pleasant Prairie closed?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I don't know anything about that. I think the  
same thing happened in this county as did there, they  
started taking the children to town in buses. I  
know the Warrendale schoolhouse, it was such a nice  
building, but now it is just sitting there going to  
waste. What about the Pleasant Prairie School?



Ardis: That is basically what is happening to the Pleasant Prairie School. Occassionally the weeds are mowed, but it is not used for anything today.

Mrs. Murphy: That's sad. It's not used then for a church anymore? Have they built a new church over there?

Ardis: The church we worship in now was built in 1964.

Mrs. Murphy: Everyone thinks the children should have town training, town classes, and I guess it is cheaper in the long run than keeping each school open because that took a lot of money.

Ardis: Do you know how much money was budgeted at Pleasant Prairie when you taught there?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I didn't know that because I didn't live in the district. If you live in a district you would probably go to the meeting and find out, but I didn't go.

Ardis: Do you remember how much it cost to build the new two-room school?

Mrs. Murphy: No, I don't know that either.

Ardis: What was your salary the first year you taught?

Mrs. Murphy: I don't remember. I do remember when I taught at Friendship, I got \$70.00 a month and I hauled water.

Ardis: If you hauled water, did you usually get extra money?

Mrs. Murphy: I think maybe I did get a little extra for hauling water. I do believe at Pleasant Prairie, it was more than \$70.00 each month. I know at Warrendale, I got \$200.00. That was good wages - that was tops then! I do remember the \$70.00. That just irked me afterwards!

Ardis: So, you decreased on the salary scale after you left Pleasant Prairie?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. I don't remember why. They had a hard luck story and I think they paid me more the last years.

Ardis: The longer you taught in a system, did you get an increase for experience?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. They were just about broke when they started, and they had several pupils, so they had to have school. That was another case that they got together and decided I was going to teach, or else! Of course, I told them my bid. I remember they came over to my house to see me about teaching at their school.

Ardis: You lived in the Warrendale school district, right?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes.

Ardis: Did your parents live there?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes.

Ardis: When you were teaching in Warrendale, did you have any brothers or sisters as your pupils?

Mrs. Murphy: No, but I do remember when I taught at Friendship, my brother went with me. My sister was teaching at the school south of Friendship, and he went with her one year. We never had any trouble with him. He was a good kid and he always helped me get the water in and out. We carried it in a cream can.

Ardis: The very last year you taught school, do you remember what your salary was?

Mrs. Murphy: Where would I have been? I taught down south before I was married and then after I was married, I taught at Warrendale, so it would have been what I got there at Warrendale. I taught there after I had my two boys and my mother kept them. That was a terrible year. I never taught anymore after that. I just couldn't keep them at home. I think what I got was over \$200.00. That was considered a good wage in those days.

Ardis: I think it is real interesting that you taught after you were married and had your family. Somehow, I was under the impression that it was frowned upon hiring a teacher who was married.

Mrs. Murphy: They kept after me and I would finally give in. They would promise me a good raise if I would continue or come back and teach.

Ardis: Now, after you were married and were teaching, did you have a distance to drive?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes, I lived out north of town (Ulysses) and had to drive over and my mother lived here in town (Ulysses) and my husband and I would bring the kids down here on the weekends.

Ardis: How did you get your paycheck?

Mrs. Murphy: I had to go around to each board member. Some of the board members would gripe, gripe, gripe, and some were agreeable. That was the one thing I hated to do and you usually had to go two or three times because they would not be home. Sometimes I would like to never get my check! When I was teaching at the Pleasant Prairie School, they weren't so bad. They would usually have it ready and they would have things they wanted to tell me about or maybe there was something I wanted to get and I needed to tell them. It helped in that way, but yet even my last years, I would have to go around and pick up the check.

Ardis: Did you get three separate checks? A check from each board member?

Mrs. Murphy: Just one check with all three signatures. It had to be

signed by two and then you would take it to the treasurer last and he would make out the check.

Ardis: Did you get any mileage reimbursement for locating your paycheck?

Mrs. Murphy: No, and sometimes you would make two or three trips. No telephones in those days, so you couldn't call and tell time you were coming or see if they were going to be home.

Ardis: So, there were no telephones at the Pleasant Prairie School?

Mrs. Murphy: No.

Ardis: If a child was injured, what did you do?

Mrs. Murphy: I had only one student break an arm and that was at Warrendale. The boy was jumping and he broke his arm. My husband would drive me to school, then he would go on to work, and come get me in the evening, so I had no car there at the school. This kid rode a horse, and he couldn't go home on the horse. It happened during the

last recess, so I fixed him up and put a cool cloth on his arm and some relative went on home and told his parents and they came and got him. He was really hurting by that time.

Ardis: What did you do with children if they would become ill during the school day?

Mrs. Murphy: There wasn't anyone close to the school, at least a mile to the nearest house, so the kid just had to stay at school until it was time to go home.

Ardis: Did you have any electricity in any of the schools that you taught in?

Mrs. Murphy: No.

Ardis: Can you describe the lighting?

Mrs. Murphy: I believe maybe there was electricity, a generator plant at the school.

Ardis: What happened when you were ill? Did you have a substitute?

Mrs. Murphy: I just had to go ahead and teach. A few times I was ill, I had a terrible headache and felt bad. But a teacher can go ahead and let the kids go ahead with their work by giving them their assignments.

Ardis: Was there a great amount of absenteeism among your students?

Mrs. Murphy: Some children were absent a lot. Sometimes parents would go somewhere and they would take their children with them. We had a family who had one boy who was the age of my boys, and when his parents would be gone and wouldn't get back, he would come home with my boys. I believe he spent more time at our house than at his! He would be at our home for three or four days, maybe even a week with no clean clothes and have no idea where his parents were or when they would be back. I would let him borrow some of my boys' clean clothes and fix him a lunch and see that he was in school. This kid sure didn't like this treatment from his parents, but there was nothing he could do. I just tried to be nice to him.

Ardis: Did the school board have policies you were expected



to carry out?

Mrs. Murphy: No, not the school board, but the county superintendent was the one you had to report everything to, such as student absentees.

Ardis: Did you have reports that were required of you to complete by the county superintendent?

Mrs. Murphy: Oh, yes!

Ardis: Can you describe your reports?

Mrs. Murphy: It would be a report on any illnesses or unexcusable absentees. You gave a general report. I didn't have very many. I think there are children like that today.

Ardis: Mrs. Murphy, we had completed all the questions that I had prepared to ask. Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share?

Mrs. Murphy: There are so many things that happened that I am sure I will think of much more later.

Ardis: Do you have any special memories of your teaching experiences at Pleasant Prairie?

Mrs. Murphy: They would have surprises on me sometimes. If it was my birthday, it was always a happy time. I still have many things the children gave me and I can still remember who gave it to me. A teacher receives many special things and it is hard to get rid of those memories. That was my first school and they were so nice. Seems like that is a very friendly neighborhood. It is a shame I don't get around to visit with them more, but I was always teaching and didn't have time after I got off work. It was interesting after the high school was in the building, and I remember one day when we were playing ball at noon. That was the highlight of the day. I was up to bat and Maynard Cook was pitching. I don't remember whether I was not standing up straight at the plate or whether I was in the right spot, anyway, he had already thrown the ball. I could see he was having a fit and dancing around, and the ball hit me right in the side of the head. Silly me, I just wasn't in the right place, anyway, it didn't knock me out. I sure did see stars! It scared him to death and he came running over there and he was so glad I was still standing up! We sure had a lot of fun play-

ing and we always looked forward to recess time.

Ardis: Did you have a planning period during the school day?

Mrs. Murphy: Oh no, my planning period was after school or at home.

Ardis: What are some of the biggest changes you have seen in the school system through the years?

Mrs. Murphy: They are sure much better and I think they learn more. Of course, in town, different teachers for different subjects, that makes it better. You had all the subjects, everything!

Ardis: Was there a subject that you did not enjoy teaching?

Mrs. Murphy: Yes. Government. History. I never liked those myself and I hated to teach them and some of the children loved those subjects! I didn't like arithmetic, but I got so I did. When I was in grade school, I hated it, even though I made good grades, but oh, I hated it! Now, I enjoy it. I think as I was teaching it, I learned about it and it became easier.

Ardis: I am sure you can agree with me that during your first year of teaching, you learned A LOT!

Mrs. Murphy: I did! I learned every year.

Ardis: Did you have the opportunity to attend workshops, take additional college hours, or attend in-services?

Mrs. Murphy: I went to Hays and Pittsburg several times during the summer. My certificate was getting down and it wasn't worth much and I about needed to go every year or go a term and get a different certificate.

Ardis: Can you explain your certificate?

Mrs. Murphy: I've just forgotten. At first, it didn't need to be renewed, then a law was made that I had to take a few courses, then, finally that wasn't enough, and it was necessary for me to go a term or get a different certificate. I never looked into it. Afterwards, I wished I would have, but I felt my kids were more important than the certificate. Then I began working at the hospital after the boys were bigger. I guess I didn't have to work, but I always thought I did! I

enjoyed teaching and I enjoyed working in the hospital.

Ardis: Again, thank you so much for sharing you memories about Pleasant Prairie.

Mrs. Murphy: I liked teaching. Some teachers I've heard of don't like to teach. They shouldn't be teaching and they should quit. My sister taught a long, long time and she liked to teach, too. I'm so glad I could help you. I'm glad to have met you. I enjoyed the Alexander family. I liked Arthur and his family and they were close to us and good neighbors.