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Interview with Erma Ellis

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Erma Ellis

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CHAPTER II: ERMA ELLIS AND EDUCATION

COUNTRY SCHOOL STUDENT

Erma Ellis began her schooling at Prairie Lea, a white schoolhouse (Appendix A) with an outside pump, a water bucket, and dipper. Everyone brought a cup, and a row of tin cups hung along the back wall. There was a cupboard for lunch pails that were often syrup buckets. (The Ellis children lived close to school and went home for lunch. It was a rare treat when Erma got carry her lunch to school like the other children did.) The well-carved desks were double at first. A blackboard crossed the entire front wall, and there were some slate boards on the side. There was a recitation bench at the front by the teacher's desk. In one corner hung a world globe suspended by pulleys that would let it down when in use or raise it up to be out of the way. There were three windows on each side of the room with a coal oil lamp on a bracket by each window to be used for night programs. A center pole held two more lamps. As in all schools of this period, there was the unfinished picture of Washington by Gilbert Stuart. The heating stove stood in one corner near the door. It had a stovepipe that ran to the center of the room where the flue and chimney were located.

Erma was named after Erma Hunter who taught at the Prairie Lea school, which was nicknamed Frog Holler. The nickname was used because the school was located on Toad Flats. The land there was so flat that when the spring rains came the ditches filled with water and became wide and still. The water ran off very slowly, and the toads came to life. Toad Flats was so level

that there were no hills for the children to coast down in winter. Sometimes the road west of the schoolhouse blew full of snow. After school dismissed, the children used the drifts for coasting on their homemade sleds. Because the land was so flat, in the winter there was often ice on the field across the road. The children went there to skate in their shoes, not in skates.

Erma remembered she was scared and didn't know what to do on her very first day of school. Then Evelyn Smith, an older student, asked her if she would like to sit with Oltie. She sat in a double desk and shared a seat with Oltie Smith. Her first teacher, Gladys McClintock, taught all subjects including music, art, and physical education. She was also the custodian. There were usually eight grades with twenty to twenty-five pupils.

Erma enjoyed reading, and she treasured books. She read and reread, ad infinitum, the few books the family had on their bookcase. Five Little Peppers, Little Women, Elsie Dinsmore, Prudence of the Parsonage, The Goops, Mother Goose, and later Pony Rider in the Rockies, and Motor Boys on the Atlantic were her favorites. No matter how many times she read a book Erma always found something new in it.

At school, children played games like Blackman and Steal Sticks. In winter often the snow would be just right for Fox and Geese and building snow forts or having snowball fights. The little ones would make snow angels in the snow or snowmen. Another outside favorite of the small children was Drop the Handkerchief, or inside they would play Pussy Wants a Corner.

The coal house, which held supplies of coal for heating and corncobs for kindling, was a source of ammunition for corncob fights. Sometimes the bigger kids would get into the supply of cobs and have a real battle. Of course, they had to pick up the cobs after it was over. Baseball was the most universal game over the years. When the school was larger, two teams were chosen and occasionally the teams played other schools. When the school became smaller children played either Work-Up or Shipwreck.

The last day of school was always a big event with a basket dinner at noon and a program in the afternoon. In later years the program was in the morning with a basket dinner held at noon and a ball game in the afternoon.

In the spring of 1928 Erma took the eighth grade county diploma examination and completed her elementary school education. She participated in the county commencement exercises at the Methodist church in Lyons, Kansas, on Friday, May 25, 1928. (Appendix B)

Erma attended Lyons High School in Lyons, Kansas, and rode to school with a neighbor during the freshman year. During the sophomore year, she lived in Lyons with her grandmother. As a junior she did light housekeeping for her grandmother the first semester. Erma rode with older brother Peter the rest of the year as he was working on the new high school building. During her senior year, Erma drove her sister Alma and picked up two neighboring high school students on the way to school. This was

the first year for the new high school building and the first opportunity to take home economics courses. At the Ellises' home chores were divided according to interests. Erma preferred laundry, ironing, and caring for chickens; Alma preferred cooking and housekeeping. Their brothers could not believe Erma got A's in the foods class, and Alma received C's. They insisted the teacher didn't know what she was doing because they knew Alma was a better cook. The girls did not carry money to school. Sometimes an event would take place at school that required a dime or fifteen cents admission. Erma and Alma would go downtown to the grocery store and Judd, the storekeeper, would give them the money they needed and put it on the family's grocery bill. When their dad paid the bill at the end of the month, Judd always gave the girls a little striped sack of candy. Erma recalled a dust storm in 1932 when school dismissed early so the students could go home because the visibility was so bad. Small children remained at school until someone came for them because the dust on the streets was so bad.

After graduation from Lyons High School in 1932, Erma decided to become a schoolteacher. She traveled to Hays, Kansas, and enrolled in college. Erma Ellis' course selections included elementary school education and methods classes. (Appendix C) After practice teaching third grade at the campus school, Miss Ellis sought employment in the spring of 1938. She learned of an opening at the Rice County school of Fairplay, and she went to Pollard to interview for the job with the director and the clerk

of the school board. After the interview, they told Miss Ellis, "We don't know you or if you can do a good job, but your two brothers come in here all the time. So we will hire you." She did not receive a code of ethics or list of expectations of teachers. There was an unspoken assumption that teachers would set a good example and not dance, smoke, or drink.

COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHER

Miss Ellis began teaching in 1938 in the rural school Fairplay District #46 in Rice County, Kansas. The twenty-four year old teacher had a sixty-hour state certificate from Fort Hays Kansas State College. The school was located near the very small town of Pollard and was known to most people as the Pollard School. Fairplay was a small public school with twelve students. The students usually walked to school, some from nearly two miles away.

The school was open to anyone in the district from grades one through eight. There were two students in the first grade, one in second grade, three in third grade, one in fifth grade, one in sixth grade and four in seventh grade. Pollard was a farming community. Very few students were future college students, partly due to farming demands and partly due to the cost of higher education.

Fairplay was a one-room wooden structure with a coal stove for heating, outdoor toilets, and a well. An outdoor pump supplied water for the school. There were three windows on each side of the building and a blackboard in the front of the room.

Because there was no electricity, the school was at times dark on cloudy days.

A school board elected from the district was the ruling force of the rural school. The three-member school board consisted of director, clerk, and treasurer. This board met once a month to conduct school business. The board was responsible for everything from hiring teachers and deciding if school should be dismissed in inclement weather to preparing the school building for the term and selecting wallpaper for the classroom. The clerk of the board reported the expenditures for the district totaled \$1,136.21 during Miss Ellis' first year of teaching. District #46 received state and county apportionments totaling \$28.29 and \$1,465.45 from district taxes. (Appendices D and E)

The state school book commission selected the textbooks for Kansas rural schools. Each student provided his or her own books. Late in the summer before the school term started an ad appeared in the Lyons Daily News. The advertisement noted that school books, both new and used, were on sale at the Duckwall's store. (Appendix F) The curriculum consisted of following the textbooks. Miss Ellis did not recall receiving a curriculum to follow. In social studies, students completed a workbook.

Rural teachers attended a teachers' institute, officially called the Rice County Professional Institute, at Lyons for five days in August before the beginning of each school year. The county superintendent organized the institute. Teachers received grade books, planning books, and instructions for the year.

Ninety teachers attended the August, 1938, institute. The topics presented included "Lessons You Forgot," "America Discovers Beauty," primary topics, geography, and moving picture reels of Holland and Japan. (Appendix G) Speakers advised the teachers, "If you have traveled, talk to your students about other places you have visited. Most of them have probably never been out of the state."

Miss Ellis read stories to her pupils about other places. Two favorites were books from the county superintendent's library. Bob Flame Ranger was about Yellowstone National Park and With Daniel Boone on the Carolina Trail described fictionalized accounts of Daniel Boone's travels. When the county superintendent's office closed years later, Miss Ellis purchased these books from the collection.

The county superintendent's role was a combination of superintendent and principal. Lewis Baldwin was the county superintendent when Miss Ellis began teaching. He visited the rural schools once or twice each year and observed teachers, students, and the facilities. Schools submitted their monthly and yearly reports to him. He made the arrangements for eighth grade examinations and commencements. The county superintendent's office also contained a library for the rural schools. Most schools had limited libraries.

Miss Ellis was the classroom teacher, janitor, physical education teacher, art teacher, music teacher, school nurse and counselor--all rolled into one. In later years the county hired

a music teacher that visited the school once a week for music. The first year Erma received \$70.00 or \$75.00 per month for a school term of eight months.

She drove seven miles from home and arrived at school at approximately 8 a.m. to carry out the ashes, start the fire, and warm the school for the students. Miss Ellis cleaned the wooden floor with a broom, dust pan, and sweeping compound. The sweeping compound was like sawdust with oil. Other cleaning tasks were cleaning erasers, washing blackboards, and dusting. Miss Ellis was in charge of cleaning the building during the school year.

In August before Miss Ellis' second year of teaching, she and patrons of the school district gave the building a top to bottom cleaning and prepared the school for the approaching school term. The workers removed the old wallpaper and put it in the stove. They applied fresh wallpaper and paint and cleaned the building. Before leaving the school that evening, someone lit the stove to burn the old wallpaper. It made so much heat that the building caught on fire and burned to the ground. However, school began as scheduled. Miss Ellis taught the eleven Fairplay children in the neighboring Prairie Lea school building since it was not in use that year. The annual report showed the district carried no insurance that year, but the district purchased insurance on the new school building in the following years. When the new school was finished in two months, it had a basement and electricity.

The chief emphasis of the school day was the basic fundamentals of reading, spelling, writing, and math. With several classes, it took some doing for Miss Ellis to give each class the needed time and quality of teaching. Lesson preparation was of great importance to insure that each student received his or her share of time in class. There was no kindergarten. At the beginning of the year it was very easy to tell which of the younger children had gone to Sunday school. Those children knew how to sit and listen and follow a routine. The younger students learned from the older pupils as the older students worked on more advanced lessons. The older students sometimes helped the younger ones with schoolwork. While one class was in the front with the teacher, the other classes studied lessons at their seats. Miss Ellis planned lessons, graded papers, and prepared for classes before the children arrived in the morning or after the students left in the afternoon. Students arrived a few minutes before school started and left the school grounds shortly after dismissal. The daily schedule went something like this:

- 9:00 a.m. School opened with the flag salute, the Lord's Prayer, and some singing.
- 9:15 a.m. All grades participated in reading activities.
- 10:30 a.m. Recess was spent outdoors, if the weather permitted. On stormy days the children stayed inside at recess time.

- 10:45 a.m. Math sessions were held for all grades.
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch was eaten from pails which students brought to school. There was no hot lunch program. Students played outside, if possible, after finishing their lunches.
- 1:00 p.m. During story time, Miss Ellis read to all the children while they rested from noon playtime.
- 1:20 p.m. All grades had language and spelling classes.
- 2:45 p.m. Social Studies and sometimes art lessons were taught.
- 4:00 PM Children were dismissed.

Recess and noon playtime provided chances for the children to use some of their extra energy. Students enjoyed the outdoor basketball goals and a rope swing at recess. They sometimes played Pussy Wants a Corner or ping pong if it was stormy. During the winter, they brought sleds for coasting down the hill into the ditch and they had snowball fights. Other favorite games were football, Blackman, and baseball. After the lunch playtime was a story time. Miss Ellis read to the students as they rested to settle them for the afternoon lessons.

She felt the most important functions of education were that the children learn to read, write, and get along with other people. There were few classroom rules. Children did not speak out of turn or whisper unnecessarily, and they got their lessons done on time. Miss Ellis was a firm believer that students

should be able to read well, to understand the fundamentals of math and how to use them, and to write legibly and with correct sentence structure.

One year a second grade boy became ill with severe kidney problems. He was confined to his bed for most of the second semester. To keep in touch with the school and to give needed practice, all the students wrote letters to him every Friday during English period. By end of the year, every student could write a newsy letter with correct sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. This was quite an accomplishment, especially for the younger students. Even though the child was not in school, he learned to write good letters by responding to the letters he received. This was one example of an attempt by Miss Ellis to have an activity that everyone could take part in from first to seventh grade. There was no eighth grade that year.

Miss Ellis recalled some of her favorite lessons in the one-room school. The Fairplay students completed science projects. Two projects she remembered were a Hopi Indian adobe house made from mud and cardboard and a volcano that erupted with the addition of chemicals. One time students found an opossum in a hole in one of the trees by the school. Miss Ellis took full advantage of the students' interest in their find, and each student wrote a story about the opossum. During the discussion about the opossum, Miss Ellis grabbed the P volume of the encyclopedia to present more information about the opossum. She looked and looked, but she did not find the article. One of the

children shyly suggested that she look in the O volume. Embarrassed at her mistake, Miss Ellis continued on with the lesson after finding the article in the correct volume.

There were times when Miss Ellis' methods did not work as anticipated. George had a terrible cough. He coughed and coughed for several days. Some of his classmates who did not have coughs began coughing whenever George coughed. Before long the noise became distracting. Hoping to eliminate excess coughing, Miss Ellis suggested that since George's cough was preventing him from getting any school work done, his mother should keep him home from school until he recovered. To the teacher's surprise, George stayed home from school until his cough went away and the other children stifled real coughs for quite some time after her talk with the children. The fake coughing was not a problem again, but Miss Ellis had not counted on George taking the advice and staying home!

Dean was the only student in his class one year. He took forever to get anything finished. He spent twenty to thirty minutes arranging his pencil box before he started working. He took his time completing assignments to the point that Miss Ellis became frustrated. One day during a timed math test he zipped through the problems. He seemed to like the timed test, so Miss Ellis suggested he tackle his work like it was a timed test. He got more done, but he began to stutter terribly. Realizing her mistake, Miss Ellis eased up and Dean quit stuttering. Dean was a student who just couldn't be pressured and rushed.

At Christmas time and on the last day of school the children presented a program for the parents and community. The programs included songs, recitations, and dialogues, and they were highlights for the children. At Halloween the children presented a program, and then members of the community attended a bonfire, wiener roast, and bobbed for apples. (The children did not Trick or Treat in those days.) These events were important parts of the community social activities, and nearly everyone in the community attended.

The children were very well-behaved, especially when compared to some of today's students. One day two of the twelve-year-old girls told Miss Ellis that one of the boys, Marvin, kept hurting them. He twisted their arms and hit them, and it hurt. The girls asked Miss Ellis to make him stop. Miss Ellis felt the boy was a very good boy; he was not what she called a bully. She had a talk with Marvin and reminded him that he was growing up, and he should remember it. She explained, "When you were small and wrestled or scrapped with another, you had to put all your strength into the fight. Now you are growing up. You have a man's muscles, and when you use them you hurt others who are smaller or weaker." She forgot all about the incident until the last day of school when the girls confided in her that Marvin was the nicest boy in school. All he needed was to be reminded that he was a big boy now.

During the 1941-1942 year the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and all the children were interested in the news of the

day. Seven boys and one girl enrolled in Fairplay school that year. The favorite songs they requested every day were "Let's Remember Pearl Harbor" and the Army Air Corps' "Off We Go into the Wild Blue Yonder." Though not an accomplished musician, Miss Ellis played the piano well enough to get through most of the requested songs.

The next year the school joined in the nation's request to collect scrap iron for the war effort. The school that gathered the most scrap iron per pupil would win a trip for one pupil and the teacher to the nearest shipyard building Liberty ships. The whole neighborhood joined the seven boys in the school that year and collected scrap iron. In the center of the district was a machine shop that had received several tractors and combines in trade. That iron gave the small Fairplay school a huge boost. They collected more scrap iron per pupil than any other school in the state. Erma Ellis and seventh grade student Dale Evans won the trip to Houston, Texas, to christen the ship. The Liberty ship, U.S.S. Amelia Earhart, represented Kansas. The name was chosen by a vote of school children from all over the state. The christening was the closest Miss Ellis had ever come to champagne. She commented, "I can't think of a better use for it than to smash it over the nose of a ship. I still have the red, white, and blue ribbons that wrapped the bottle and pieces of the bottle." (Appendix H)

Fairplay and the other rural schools Miss Ellis taught in were farming communities with permanent residents. Very few

students moved into or out of the district during the school year. There were no clothing codes, and the children wore garments practical for the rural life. The boys usually wore bib overalls with blue chambray shirts. The girls wore print dresses, often made from feed sacks.

School closed when Miss Ellis became ill and missed a week of school. Schools did not hire substitute teachers, partly because there were few substitutes available and partly because teachers rarely missed school. If the teacher was sick, there was no school until the teacher was able to return to the classroom.

At the end of five years Miss Ellis was not able to drive the seven miles to the Fairplay school due to gasoline rationing. She accepted a teaching position for the 1943-1944 school year at the one-room school in her home district, Prairie Lea District #35. Due to ill health, Miss Ellis was unable to finish the year and only taught one month. When Miss Ellis became ill, a temporary teacher filled in for one month until a permanent teacher was found to finish the year.

Three years later, when Miss Ellis was able to return to teaching, Rice County was in the middle of consolidation. The smaller schools merged with other schools into larger, more efficient schools.

District #46, referred to as Fairplay, disorganized on May 14, 1945, to become part of the Union District #46. The Union District #46 formed on May 14, 1945, but it continued to be

called Fairplay.

Miss Ellis taught at Keystone District #31 (Appendix I) during the 1946-1947 school year before it consolidated with Fairplay. Only four students attended Keystone that year. Miss Ellis earned \$160 per month, and the total operating expenses for the school year were \$1,534.60. The district's final balance at the end of the year was \$2.66. (Appendix J) The patrons voted to disorganize the district on February 8, 1947, and to join Union District #46. Keystone remained a separate school until the completion of the term in April, 1947.

Mrs. S. J. Smith shared this history of the Keystone school with Miss Ellis. Keystone was the first school her children attended in Kansas. In 1876 the school term was three months. Her husband, Mr. Smith, taught the school for the sum of \$25 per month and boarded at home. The schoolhouse earned the nickname Hard Scrabble because the community had such a hard time getting it built. The first meeting called determined if there were enough children in the district to insure the voting of bonds to build a schoolhouse. A major issue in the decision was if the women should go to the meeting and vote. One or two men said that voting was for men to do. Then someone said, "If my vote will insure my children an education, I for one will vote." The women went to the meeting and they voted. There were just enough votes in favor to justify the bonds. The bonds carried, and the schoolhouse construction began. When the frame of the building was up and ready to be enclosed, a wind blew it down. Albert

Winn, James Kinney, Charlie Winn, and S. J. Smith donated the hauling of the lumber from the town of Ellsworth across the prairie. There was no road to follow, but they knew the direction to go, and they arrived with no problems. While the men were at Ellsworth, the light at the Smith's window attracted the wolves. Several wolves came up and looked in the window at Mrs. Smith and her little children. During this time a woman had to be brave for the sake of her little children.

The following term Miss Ellis taught at Kansas Center. At the time of settlement's founding it was believed to be the exact center of the United States. The founders thought the community would become a great place and appropriately named it Kansas Center.

At the end of that term Kansas Center consolidated with Fairplay. The annual report for Union District #46 included the Kansas Center school as a part of the district, but Kansas Center functioned as a separate school until the close of the school term. According to the report, this was the first year in Miss Ellis' teaching career the district paid parents mileage to transport their children to school. The district's cost for pupil transportation was \$448. (Appendix K)

In the 1948-1949 school year, Miss Ellis taught at the former Union Four school called Sunny Four. The school had running water and indoor toilets. (Appendix L) Utility costs that year were \$183.54. Twenty-six students enrolled, and the total operating expenses for the two teacher district were

\$7,459.26. The district spent an additional \$7,140 in capital outlay expenses. Marvin Behnke was listed as the grade school principal. His salary was \$2,400 and Miss Ellis received an annual salary of \$2,000. (Appendix M) Miss Ellis taught the first four grades, and Mr. Behnke taught the upper four grades. On February 11, 1950, Sunnyside District #12 annexed to District #4. The larger school district officially became known as Sunny Four.

During this time the county music teacher held an annual music festival. All the music students from the rural schools of the county came together for a joint program. At the festival the Sunny Four school bottle band presented some numbers. The musicians filled pop bottles with water and tuned them. Gallon jugs were the bass. It was a great experience for the students to learn about the scale, harmony, and rhythm.

Miss Ellis recalled that Kick Over was a favorite game of the Sunny Four students. Using a round ball, the students kicked the ball over the line. The opposing team then kicked the ball back over the line from the place the ball landed. The team lost if the ball was not kicked back over the line to the opposing team.

The school board hired Miss Ellis at Sunny Four to replace the teacher of the first four grades, Mrs. Marvin Behnke. The Behnkes planned to adopt a child and Mrs. Behnke resigned to care for the new child. When the plans for the adoption fell through, Mrs. Behnke asked to return to her former position at Sunny Four.

Miss Ellis completed the school term and she applied for a position at the Union Five school.

Miss Ellis taught two terms, 1949-1950 and 1950-1951, at the Union Five school. She received \$2,200 for the 1950-1951 school term. The total expenditures in 1949-1950 were \$7,347.42. The district received \$6,500 from the county treasurer and collected \$53.94 in state and county apportionments. There were thirty-one students. The second year Miss Ellis taught at Union Five there were thirty-four students. In 1950-1951 total expenditures for the school district were \$7,821.22. The school received \$7,896.16 from the county treasurer and collected \$67.58 from apportionments. (Appendices N and E)

Union Five's two-room school was three miles north of Lyons and Miss Ellis taught grades five through eight. Union Five was a result of the consolidation of three schools, Prairie Lea, Pleasant Hill, and Oakland. The Oakland school was the original District #5 school.

In 1945 Prairie Lea school held its final basket dinner and program. Three students attended the school that year. Oltie Smith, Edwin Clarke, and Pete Ellis were the school board members that closed the school and sold the furnishings and building. (Appendix O) Wiley Bolton bought the building for \$400, moved it to his farm, and set it by his farmhouse. Land for the school, as with most rural schools in the area, had been donated by the landowner to revert to the landowner whenever the school was no longer in use or the school closed. Orvil Ellis donated the land

to be used for the school, so the land reverted to the Ellises' farm. On May 21, 1947, the patrons of Prairie Lea District #35 voted to consolidate with District #5.

Prairie Lea's neighbor to the south was Pleasant Hill, and the two communities were neighbors in many ways. The neighborhoods held picnics, and the two schools sometimes joined in last day activities. Miss Ellis thought that only six or seven students attended Pleasant Hill the last year the school was open. Pleasant Hill closed when the consolidated District Union Five organized on May 21, 1947. The schoolhouse sold in 1948 to George Schumacher who moved it to Great Bend and remodeled it into a home.

The Oakland school, built in 1918, was moved in August 1948 and became the Union Five school. In 1918 it was one of Rice County's superior schools. The wooden frame building featured two cloak rooms, a work room, and a basement for community dinners. A furnace in the basement heated the school. (Appendix P) When the school reopened as Union Five, it also had running water, indoor toilets, and a telephone.

One year as students listened to baseball's World Series on the radio, Miss Ellis drew a diagram of the baseball field and the players' positions on the field. The drawing helped the students learn to listen and picture what was happening in the game. The children soon learned to listen and follow the game.

During the time Miss Ellis taught at Union Five, the county purchased a movie projector, and teachers could show films of

other states, historical events, and science areas. Miss Ellis had her first experience with sexual discrimination when she went to the county superintendent to borrow the county movie projector. She was astounded when Mr. Baldwin asked, "Do you have a man to run it for you?" After recovering from her surprise at such a question, she asked him if it was more difficult to thread than a sewing machine. He agreed that it probably wasn't. Miss Ellis took the projector and showed the movie to her students.

During one of the years Miss Ellis taught at Union Five, the school entered the Rice County rural school basketball tournament for two-room schools. There were only six boys in the upper grades who liked to play ball. Since they were so short in numbers, one of the girls and a fourth grader joined the team. (Appendix P) It was Miss Ellis' first experience as a coach. They were definitely the underdogs in the tournament. Union Five did not have an indoor gym, and the weather was snowy and near zero, but the boys had desire. They practiced shooting goals wearing heavy coats and gloves. The rest of the time during recesses they made a circle in the basement and passed the ball back and forth. The basement had a low ceiling so there were no overhead passes, just straight, hard passes to each other. They really learned to pass the ball and to catch it. This versatility in ball handling made it possible for the team to win the county championship against schools that had gyms or indoor play areas and practiced inside during the cold snowy weather.

The first game was with Rockville School. Union Five won in a last minute spurt that put them ahead by one point. The second game was against Union Two and Miss Ellis' team won in overtime. The finals were against Sunny Four. The two final teams, Union Five and Sunny Four, were the only schools with women coaches. The schools were neighboring school districts, and the students from Union Five and Sunny Four knew each other well. They attended Sunday school classes, church, and other community activities together. The players from the two teams sat down together in the middle of the gym and visited as they rested between quarters in the championship game. At the end of the third overtime the officials announced they would play to sudden death. The Union Five team scored first and defeated Sunny Four.

Miss Ellis felt field trips were good methods to extend the understanding of the lessons learned from books. When the eighth grade was studied government, she took them to Lyons to the court house to watch a trial. (This was before the days of television and Perry Mason.) They heard the prosecution and the defense speeches. It was very worthwhile, because the students learned something about how government worked. One of the cases the students attended dealt with an unintentional contamination of a farmer's water and land by the local salt plant. The rural students saw the legal system at work in a situation they understood.

During the years Miss Ellis taught in the rural one-room and two-room schools, eighth graders were required to take the Eighth

Grade County Diploma Examination and score 80% or better to be promoted from the eighth grade. According to the Rice County State of Kansas Department of Education Uniform County Superintendent's Records, the areas tested included social studies, reading, spelling, writing, English, and mathematics. In 1947 writing was not listed. Science was a part of the examination in 1948. Health and science became one part of the exam in 1950. Miss Ellis did not prepare the students for the test. She felt they prepared by completing their regular lessons. The eighth graders did not take the examination at their own schools. The students traveled to another school where county teachers, other than their own, helped administer the test. After the exam, the eighth graders promoted from the rural schools in Rice County participated in one commencement exercise at the Methodist church in Lyons. The Methodist church had the greatest seating capacity and hosted the exercises while the rural schools were in existence.

By May, 1951, Miss Ellis had taught in six rural schools. (Appendix Q) Four had been one-room schools and two had been two-room schools. Three of the schools were no longer open, and had consolidated into two-room schools in larger school districts. Looking back on those eleven years of educating rural children, Miss Ellis noted that they were good years. She taught children in the first through the eighth grades, but she never had to teach all eight grades in the same year. However, over the years she had the opportunity to teach all the grades and

classes. Some years, when funds were available, she received bonuses at the end of the year from the school board. Most of the students were children of farmers. They usually started school at the age of six, and nearly all finished the eighth grade. The only expense to enroll a child in school was to purchase the required textbooks. (Appendix F) Education was important to the communities and the families. The children were from solid families. There were very few single parents or children of divorced families. The children knew what was expected of them and how to behave in school. They wanted to learn, and most liked school. Parents were busy at home and seldom came to school except for the special events, but they were supportive of the school and the teachers. Discipline was not a problem. When a child misbehaved, the teacher simply pulled the student aside and talked briefly about the problem. When the school enrollments dwindled, the communities realized the neighborhood schools should merge. The communities were neighbors with similar interests, and since they knew each other so well decisions to close buildings and improve the children's education were reached without controversy.

Miss Ellis' teaching skills changed through the years. She attended the county teachers' institutes in August. (Appendix G) She enrolled in college courses from 1948 to 1951 that targeted teaching methods for elementary students. (Appendix C) Miss Ellis participated in the Rice County teachers Reading Circle group. The circle encouraged teachers to widen their education

by reading. Each month the group met and discussed the books they read.

TOWN TEACHER

Miss Ellis accepted a teaching contract for nine months to teach the sixth grade at Bushton Grade School in Bushton, Kansas, for the 1951-1952 school term. The position in the town school did not include janitor duties, and her annual salary was \$2,600. (Appendix R) For the first time in her teaching career, she moved from the family home to Bushton. Miss Ellis graduated from Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas, with a B.S. in Education in 1955. By 1956-1957 her salary had increased to \$3,600, and Miss Ellis added physical education classes to her daily schedule as she continued to teach sixth grade.

She took several courses in remedial reading and she began teaching some special reading in the primary grades in the fall of 1958. In the fall of 1959 Miss Ellis began teaching special reading at the elementary level full-time. Special reading in the Bushton Grade School meant Miss Ellis worked with the children who had difficulties with reading and who needed just a little extra tender loving care. Usually Miss Ellis worked with the lowest one-third of the first through fifth grades.

It was quite a jump from inquisitive and capable sixth graders to primary children having difficulties with learning to read. To stave off boredom, Miss Ellis enrolled in night classes at Sterling College. The only available course that she hadn't already had or had any interest in was French. The study of

French led her to the Emporia State College for a summer and to the University of Colorado at Boulder for several summers. She enjoyed the hikes arranged by the rangers and spent available weekends in the mountains hiking the trails.

About that time someone told Miss Ellis that for a vacation there was no place cheaper to live than in a college dormitory and no better or cheaper place to eat than in a college dining room. The advice was, "Just choose some summer courses in an area you would like to visit and enroll." Following this advice Miss Ellis toured New York City while attending a three week reading seminar. Then she lived in Nashville, Tennessee, at Vanderbilt University for three weeks when Nashville was a center of revolt by blacks at the lunch counters and blacks who were riding in the backs of the buses. She toured Washington D. C. between classes while at a reading course in nearby Pennsylvania. Another year Miss Ellis attended a reading course in Moorhead, Minnesota just across the river from Fargo, North Dakota, right after a tornado had ripped the city apart. She saw Chicago while attending a two week reading course at the University of Chicago. In 1968 Miss Ellis spent eight weeks in France, living with the Andre Lebreton family studying French.

The fourteenth year of teaching at Bushton brought another change to Miss Ellis' teaching position. She split the day between the high school and grade school in the fall of 1965. Miss Ellis taught French at the high school and special reading at the elementary level. At the end of the 1965-1966 school year

Bushton schools consolidated with schools at Wilson, Holyrood, and Lorraine. Miss Ellis became an employee of Unified School District #328. Her teaching position remained the same until 1972-1973 when she agreed to also teach the yearbook class.

Bushton schools and Holyrood schools merged to become Quivira Heights schools for the 1975-1976 school year. Miss Ellis taught French and yearbook at the high school in Bushton and special reading at the grade school in Holyrood. For the first time she dealt with problems resulting from consolidation. The Holyrood High School students who came to Bushton to attend Quivira Heights High School were unhappy. Bushton athletes had been their arch rivals for years, and now they were in the old Bushton High School. They wanted to graduate from Holyrood High School. After three years when those students graduated, the merging of schools was not of concern to the students or staff. The grade school students who went to Holyrood accepted the consolidation with fewer problems.

In the 1982-1983 school year Miss Ellis became a half-time teacher. High school students' interest in French classes dwindled, and Miss Ellis dedicated her time exclusively to elementary special reading students. In December, 1984, on her seventieth birthday, Miss Ellis announced her intent to retire at the end of the 1985 spring semester after forty-four years of teaching! (Appendix R)

When asked what she liked best about teaching, Miss Ellis replied, "The children!" Her favorite subjects to teach through

the years were reading, spelling, English, and later French. Just as a parent could not name a favorite child, Miss Ellis had no favorite age or school; she loved them all. She believed all the children she taught were outstanding. One of her former students became a Rice County Commissioner, and another one a minister, and many have contributed to their communities. Every child was outstanding and special in some way.