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1988

### Interview with Ruth Jones

Linda L. Jones  
*Fort Hays State University*

Ruth Jones

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CHAPTER II  
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

This oral history of a one-room schoolhouse teacher is with my mother-in-law, Ruth Johnson Jones, of Formoso, Kansas. It is taking place at her home on June 24, 1988. Today we are going to go back in time to when she was teaching in a one-room schoolhouse.

Linda: Ruth, can you tell me when you began teaching?

Ruth: I began teaching in September of 1924.

Linda: Why did you decide that you wanted to teach school?

Ruth: I think that I had always wanted to, that was one reason.

Another reason is that that was one of the few openings that young people outside of high school could do.

Linda: Ruth, you have told me that you progressed very rapidly in school, sometimes taking two years in one. When did you graduate from high school?

Ruth: In 1924.

Linda: And how old were you then?

Ruth: I was seventeen.

Linda: Did you begin teaching right away then?

Ruth: I graduated when I was seventeen. I turned eighteen in July, so when I started teaching I was eighteen.

Linda: Did you have any training beyond high school at that time?

Ruth: No, only we took the normal training courses. We would take

the normal training examination to get a normal training certificate. And that is what I taught on for several years.

Linda: And that was taught to you right in high school?

Ruth: We took normal training courses in high school.

Linda: You've told me that you've taught in many schools that were one-room schoolhouses. For the purpose of this interview, we're going to be talking mainly of Pavonia.

Ruth: Pavonia is my home school, where I went to school, where my brother went to school. Then I came back and taught there for two years.

Linda: Can you tell me some things about Pavonia? What ages of students did you have there?

Ruth: From first graders, some of whom were not quite six years old up to eighth graders. I had one seventh grader there who was only about a year younger than I. I had a girl I had gone to school with who had been in my class in grade school.

Linda: How did she feel about you being her teacher?

Ruth: I really don't know, but I think she rather enjoyed it.

Linda: It didn't seem to cause her any problems?

Ruth: No, I don't believe that it did. I think she felt that she knew me quite well because we were neighbors and had gone to school together. Maybe she felt a little bit, should I say, freer with me than she would have with a stranger. She was a very timid, backward girl.

Linda: Do you have any idea why that school was built in that particular area?

Ruth: If I have been informed correctly, during the early days there had been a sod and combination dug-out in that area that had been used as a schoolhouse, and I've been told that in that not very large building there were seventy pupils. That was replaced by a wooden building that I can just scarcely remember. It was also used as a church part of the time and I can remember going there for church services. I just have a faint picture of it. This newer building was built to replace that, for if I remember correctly, it was very, very old.

Linda: How large would Pavonia have been? How much space would you have had?

Ruth: It had a large single room and a hallway, and it was really larger than we needed for the number of pupils we had at the time. That was what made it very hard to heat and very hard to do the janitor work. It was large, but I can't give you the exact measurements.

Linda: After it was built, did it continue to be used for things other than school?

Ruth: Not as much as the older building, I think, because there was a church that had been moved into the neighborhood, so they didn't have church services there again. It was our voting place, and if there were any community meetings, they were held

in the school, but that was rather infrequent.

Linda: How was it decided which children would attend Pavonia?

Ruth: I really don't know. I think anyone who lived in the district and was six years old and under sixteen could go to school there. But there were children who came outside of the district if they lived too far. I think they received permission from the school board. They would also ask the teacher if she was willing to have them come.

Linda: You said earlier that you felt the building was too large for the number of pupils who attended?

Ruth: There was at the time I was teaching there. There were not too many, perhaps eight to a dozen, maybe fifteen at the very most.

Linda: And they were in all different grade levels?

Ruth: In all different grade levels, yes. The school was large enough that they could have had twenty-five to twenty-eight pupils in there quite comfortably.

Linda: Can you remember much about the school board?

Ruth: There were just three members.

Linda: And how were they selected?

Ruth: That's something I do not know! I don't know how they were selected. Let me qualify that by saying that in the spring they would have a meeting and I believe they were just chosen. If someone wished to resign as director the members who were

already on the Board would choose someone to take his place.

They had a clerk, a director, and a treasurer.

Linda: Do you remember who any of the people were who served on the Board?

Ruth: Yes, I remember Charles Haecker, William Stansbury, and possibly a Rothchild. There were several Rothchild's in the district, but I can't remember which one. Those were some of the early ones.

Linda: Did the parents get involved? Was there any organization similar to a P.T.A.?

Ruth: The parents really didn't get involved. When they hired a teacher, it was turned over to her. The parents never got involved unless there would be a problem. This was not a good thing, but it was the way it was done in those days.

Linda: Did you feel that if you needed to consult them about a problem that they were supportive?

Ruth: The majority of them were, although there were a few that possibly would not have been.

Linda: Did the parents have anything to do with the hiring and firing of teachers?

Ruth: That was left up to the school board, although public opinion might have convinced them.

Linda: Do you remember any problems or controversies that arose concerning the school?

Ruth: I really don't. If there were any, they weren't big enough to be something that I have remembered. I can't recall anything in particular.

Linda: Do you have any recollection of when the school was closed?

Ruth: I do not know exactly, but it was in the early '30's, I believe.

Linda: Can you remember what the schoolhouse was made of?

Ruth: It was just a wooden building.

Linda: What type of heating, lighting, and toilets were available?

Ruth: Our lighting was gasoline lamps when we needed them. I hate to think about our heating, because the original heating was one of the jacketed furnaces, which brought in more cold air than it ever brought in heat. That was one of the things we had to put up with when cold weather came. We had such a hard time staying warm, and many time we couldn't get the schoolhouse warm until noon.

Linda: What was a jacketed furnace? What did it burn?

Ruth: The furnace is just like a big stove. It's almost like a wood-burning or coal-burning furnace like you'd have in your basement, somewhat like that. And there was a metal jacket around that was up six to eight inches off the floor. The principle was that it would bring in cold air off the floor, circulate it around the stove, and then come out at the top. But they did not work. I've had them in other schools and we

had the same trouble. The second year I was there I finally persuaded them to add a small coal-burning stove. I don't know what they're called, but they're long with a flat surface so that you could even cook on it if you wanted to. Then we would bring things for lunch in containers that we could set on the stove. We'd heat them so that we could have hot lunches.

Linda: I imagine the children really enjoyed that on a cold day.

Ruth: That was possibly the first time they ever had a hot lunch in the building. And we would sit around the stove and do our work until it got warm enough that we could sit at our desks.

Linda: Who did the hauling of the coal?

Ruth: They hired someone to do that unless one of the school board members would do it. They'd haul cobs that we would use to get the coal fire started. Those were stored in a building a little distance from the schoolhouse. Sometimes goodhearted children thought it was fun if I would send them out for a bucket of coal or cobs for the fire. Some of them liked to do that for the teacher because it was something different.

Linda: Were they so eager to help you clean it up at the end of the day?

Ruth: No, I never kept anyone to help me do that because most of them had quite a distance to walk. Most of them did walk to school; some of them had two or three miles, so unless they were kept after for some other reason...sometimes if they misbehaved,



staying after school was used as punishment.

Linda: Can you tell me why you taught for such short periods in the country schools?

Ruth: When I applied for the teaching position at Pavonia, I was told that they never hired a teacher for more than two years. Why, I don't know. They did allow several of the school graduates to return there to teach. That may have been to allow them to get some experience, or it may have been one of the ideas of one of the school board members. He was pretty emphatic about that. He told me before I ever signed a contract that I could expect to stay for two years if I gave good service, which I did. Some of the schools I left because there were better opportunities for better salaries closer to home. One of the difficult things out in the country schools was finding adequate housing for the teachers to stay. You usually had to stay with a family, and some of the places didn't have any room, but someone had to keep the teacher. And so you'd move on for better conditions.

Linda: Did you ever feel unwanted in any of the homes you stayed in?

Ruth: No, I don't think that I ever did. I had a few kind of funny experiences, but most of the time it was alright. While I taught at Pavonia I was able to stay at home and walk to school from there. Later on I had to board with someone in the district. As years went on I got my own car. Then I would stay

with someone during the week and come home on weekends.

Linda: Did you ever ride a horse to school?

Ruth: No, I never did. When I went to school, sometimes my father would get the horse out when the weather was bad and take me to school.

Linda: How did you get to school in the morning?

Ruth: I walked.

Linda: How far was that from where you were staying?

Ruth: Almost two miles each way, up and down hill.

Linda: What time did your day begin at school?

Ruth: School started at nine o'clock, promptly, and it was out at four.

Linda: What kinds of work did you have to do at the end of the day before you could go home?

Ruth: Sometimes there were lessons that I had to prepare there. Much of it I would take home with me. Water containers had to be emptied, especially in cold weather because they would freeze. Ashes from the stove had to be carried out. I had to see that there was fuel brought in for morning. And the biggest job was sweeping the big floor. The floors were a hard wood of some kind and they oiled them instead of varnishing. Then we used a sweeping compound that was nothing more than sawdust with oil in it. We'd sprinkle that all over the floor and then we'd sweep it up because it gathered up the dust. A certain amount

of dusting had to be done. Desks had to be cleaned sometimes and other cleaning had to be done...even to the extent of washing windows sometimes when they got too dirty!

Linda: Tell the story about the bad dust storm. Did that happen during this time?

Ruth: That happened several years after I taught at Pavonia. That schoolhouse was located in the midst of a wheatfield. Wheatfields were on three sides of it, clear up to the school grounds. And it was dry; the wheat had not come up too well in the fall. This building was not as modern as Pavonia. It was an old building with windows on both sides of the room, big tall windows. This was in the '30's and when the dust began to blow it would get so dark sometimes we could hardly see in there. The dust would seep in through the windows and under the doors. One time I remember it got so dark we could not see until I lit the coal oil lamps that we had. The children were frightened, and I admit that I was, too. We gathered all around in a little group, and I read and told stories to them as best I could see to keep them quiet. This went on for quite awhile. Finally, one of the members of the school board and his two sons came in and took charge of us. He saw to it that the children all got safely home and then he told me to follow the taillight of his car (I had driven my old car to school that day) down the road. I could not even see his taillight, it was so dark. Finally I

began to find my way a little better. But whenever I came into a wheatfield it was just like driving into a black night. I made it home. We didn't have school the next day, but when I came back the day after that, there was thick dirt all over the floor, all over the desks, and over each window there was a black "fan"-like of dirt that had blown in right at the top of the windows. But this same man and his two sons came with scoop shovels and shoveled it out. They helped me clean the walls and the desks. It was the worst dust storm we ever had. I've never forgotten it.

Linda: You mentioned that the windows in this school were different than they had been in Pavonia?

Ruth: In Pavonia the desks all faced the south so the windows were all on the east side of the building in order to allow the children to get the light from the windows over their left shoulders. This other building was different; it had cross-light, which made it more difficult to see. In Pavonia the windows were built up about 4 to 4 1/2 feet. They were high enough so that most of the children could not look out of the window from their desks.

Linda: Did you like that idea as a teacher?

Ruth: It was the idea of the people who built the building. It was a good idea. They were up high enough so that the children were not gazing out of the window all of the time, which they would

have been, otherwise. It made it a little easier.

Linda: If you had a major problem with the building, what were you to do?

Ruth: I would notify the school board and they would see that it was fixed.

Linda: Were these school board members good to help out?

Ruth: I usually found them very good to help, because most of them were very interested in their schools. Some of them had very little education themselves. I know one of them in particular could scarcely read. But he was interested in the school because he was wanting his children to learn, and he helped all that he possibly could.

Linda: Were they good to provide all the supplies that you needed?

Ruth: They had a set sum each year from which to order things you needed, and I could order from that amount. I don't remember how much it would be. But they would tell me that I had so much money I could spend to order what I needed or thought I needed. But it was up to me to do it.

Linda: Did you feel the amount was adequate?

Ruth: It wasn't as much as I would have liked to have had, but it helped. But blackboard erasers, chalk, things of that kind, also our sweeping compound and brooms, were all furnished outside of that amount. That amount was for other necessary supplies.

Linda: How did you get your water?

Ruth: There was a cistern that supplied the water. And it was one or two of the children's duties each day to get the water. We had the water coolers, the stone jars, up on a stand. Of course, they couldn't reach that. That was another thing that I had to do...keeping that clean. Then I had to put the water in there. It had a spigot and a bucket down below. Each one of the children had their own drinking cup; we didn't have a dipper.

Linda: My grandmother has told me stories about the water dippers that were used when she went to school.

Ruth: Several years later I taught in schools where the dipper was used and it was very difficult to get rid of it. But I was finally able to convince them that we were not going to use the dipper.

Linda: And what about toilets?

Ruth: They were the outdoor type, the girls in one corner of the schoolyard and the boys in the opposite. That was another one of my duties...to inspect those every so often and see that they were clean and in order.

Linda: Can you think of anything else regarding the school that might be of interest?

Ruth: We didn't have a great deal of playground equipment. We did have this metal pole with chains on it. The children would run

around it. The pole would turn and the children would catch hold of the chains and let them carry them around.

Linda: I thought from the picture that this was a maypole you were making!

Ruth: No, that was a piece of school equipment ("giant stride").

Linda: I'll bet there was a lot of bumping into each other with it!

Ruth: Oh, yes! But they didn't seem to mind. We had a merry-go-round, which I didn't like. I couldn't ride on it; it made me ill every time I got on it!

Linda: Did you have recess often?

Ruth: We had one morning recess of fifteen minutes. We had an hour off at noon, and an afternoon recess of fifteen minutes.

Linda: Did you have any swings or slipper slides?

Ruth: Yes, there were some swings on the grounds, too. And we had balls, softballs and bats, and some volleyballs. We used to play what is called "anty-over" over the coal shed along with a lot of other games that we played. The one thing I remember about this district is the great deal of fun I had with the children. I was young enough to enjoy it. Most of them were my neighbors. We had lots of fun playing games at noon and at recesses. In the mornings before school started they'd play. There was quite an area of pasture land and timber with a creek on it adjoining the school that we were allowed to play in besides the schoolyard. There were no trees on the schoolyard.

but there were trees here. And we played many, many games there. Not "hide and go seek", but what they called "gray wolf". I can't remember the names of all of them, but sometimes we would start a game that might run for a month before we'd end it. We had lots of fun doing it! And we played softball.

Linda: I'll bet it was hard to get back to "school" after recess.

Ruth: Well, in fifteen minutes it was usually a matter of "drop the handkerchief" or something like that that we could play in a hurry. Of course, the first thing they had to do was get their drinks and leave the room if they had to. And then we'd play a few minutes...just to get a little exercise so that we could sit still the rest of the day.

Linda: How did you ever manage to keep everyone on task?

Ruth: It wasn't too hard because we didn't have big groups most of the time. I did one year when I taught. I had all eight grades, from first grade on up, in a very small building, and that was difficult. But most of the time I didn't have all of the grades. And then, the children worked together. If a first grader needed help and an eighth grader had a little time off, he'd help him. And I would oversee it. They learned a lot by listening in on other classes. Our class periods were very short. Some of them we couldn't have every day, but the basics we did. But they were only ten or fifteen minutes at the best, and divided up in a day, you just had to work hard to do it.



Some of them had written lessons while others were doing oral work. Another thing we did in the country schools...I don't know if children would even know what it is today...but every Friday if lessons were all caught up for the week, from the last recess on we'd have a spelling match. They'd choose up sides. We'd divide up equally, trying to have both first graders and second graders opposing each other so it was equal. Or we might have an arithmetic match or a geography match, the same way...or both! And that was something that they all rather enjoyed because it was a "letdown". They could all have fun, but they were all still learning.

Linda: Did you feel that the attitudes of the children toward school were good?

Ruth: I think the majority were. I can remember a few who did not seem to care if they were there or not. Two, in particular, I remember, had a learning disability of some kind. At that time we didn't know enough about them. Today I know more and possibly something could be done to help them. It could have been their eyes, because we didn't have regular eye checks. Or, it could have been something else. They came from a home where there was no reading material whatsoever. Their father stumbled a great deal when he read; their mother took very little interest in school. All of those things together made it very difficult for them. And in a way, I think they resented having

to be in school. The one who had been in my class in grade school was still there when I came back five years later to teach. I taught her for two years.

Linda: Was "dress" of any great importance to your students?

Ruth: Not really. Some were more concerned with that than others. A few were not always as clean as they should have been. Others dressed quite well. It varied with the family, just as it does today. They had all grown up together and knew each other. I don't remember that anything was ever said about it.

Linda: Just as a thought, what would you think of students wearing uniforms to school?

Ruth: I don't know...they might get to be expensive. I think it would be very monotonous to look out over a room and see everyone dressed alike. Maybe you'd pay more attention to their faces and personalities if that was the case. From the child's point of view, it might be a good thing since many can't always afford to buy the latest thing.

Linda: Did you follow any particular curriculum?

Ruth: Yes. The State (Department of Education) set our curriculum and our books were approved by the State. At that time we had a county superintendent, and I don't know if he chose out of the approved books the books that were to be used by the county or not, but we all used the same books in the county.

Linda: What subjects did you teach?

Ruth: All the subjects that were taught from the first grade through the eighth grade. I didn't have all the grades, but it would include arithmetic or math, reading, penmanship, spelling, English--those were the basics. We started geography in the fourth grade on through seventh. In seventh and eighth grade we had Kansas history, agriculture, government, physiology or health, and in the reading classes in the upper grades we had the classics as well as our reading books. We'd have the classics two days of the week and the rest of the time we'd use the other. It was just an additional reading book.

Linda: Were the classics what we'd consider classics today--for example, Shakespeare or Dickens?

Ruth: No, most of them were lengthier stories, but they were not quite that difficult. We didn't have anything like that in the grade school.

Linda: Did the teachers have any input in choosing the curriculum?

Ruth: At that time, we didn't.

Linda: Did you have any problems with that?

Ruth: We just accepted it; that's the way it was when I was in school, so we just accepted it. Some of the books we used I think are better than some that we use today. At least I like them better!

Linda: Were you able to supplement the curriculum with other materials?

Ruth: Yes, that was one thing we could do, to make things interesting. I used posters and booklets, things that were unusual that the children didn't have available.

Linda: Where would you get those things?

Ruth: I would send to companies who would offer maps or things like that. Some of the things I would provide because I had access to school catalogs and I could buy things that weren't too expensive. Often I used my own money because I felt like it was worth it to add a little interest to the classes.

Linda: Were there other companies who made similar offers?

Ruth: Toothpaste companies and other companies who wanted to advertise their material. I had one poster I remember that showed the process from wheat to making a loaf of bread. Cheese companies offered similar products, also.

Linda: What were some of the special observances you celebrated?

Ruth: Halloween was a fun day. We made posters and jack-o-lanterns and anything we could do. Of course, we had nothing to do with going out for treating because the children lived too far apart and I don't think their parents would have allowed them to do that. At Thanksgiving we'd make turkey posters and read stories if we could find them about Thanksgiving...just anything like that. Christmastime, we'd have a Christmas program, usually, and the community was invited. We had a Santa Claus and a tree if we could possibly get it. The children would exchange gifts.

and it was customary that the teacher furnish candy for the children. And sometimes if there weren't too many little preschool children in the neighborhood there was some extra candy for them. Sometimes I'd include a little gift for each one. Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays we observed with, again, posters and stories if we could. St. Valentine's Day was lots of fun. The children made their own valentines. We had a big valentine box and such as that.

Linda: So they exchanged valentines?

Ruth: Yes. Now Easter usually wasn't observed because we were out of school. You see, this was a seven-month school. We were out of school before Easter, so we didn't, as a rule, observe that.

Linda: Why did your school run for only seven months?

Ruth: Well, it was customary. The first early schools in this country only ran for three months. And many times that would be after harvest was over in the fall, when the corn was all husked and brought in. They ran for only three months in the winter. At that time the children went to school until they were seventeen, eighteen, and sometimes twenty years old or more and they needed the boys, especially, out on the farm. They increased school to six months. They might run for three months, have a break, and then go back for three months. I've seen that on some of the old contracts my aunt had. Finally, I believe it was a state law that said we had to have seven months

of school. Later on it became eight months; now it's nine months. But we had to do in seven months what the town schools were doing in eight months because we were all taking the county examination.

Linda: You have said that the county examinations were pretty tough?

Ruth: Well, they were rather hard. The children worked hard because they were so afraid that they were not going to be able to make the grade and pass.

Linda: Did every class have to take the county examination every year?

Ruth: No, this was just for the eighth grade. And then we'd have a county-wide graduation ceremony in Mankato.

Linda: Would you have a graduation ceremony at Pavonia?

Ruth: No, not at the school. There were too few students, probably only one or two at the most.

Linda: Was eighth grade the highest one could go at the school?

Ruth: Yes; it was the equivalent of junior high today.

Linda: Can you remember how many children would participate in the county graduation ceremony?

Ruth: I couldn't tell you how many, but I know there were quite a few. It was surprising, but there were many more children in the county then than there are now. There were many schools that were rather small, but there were more of them. And I think the grade school in the town had their own graduation.

Linda: Did you teach any kind of music?

Ruth: No, I did not attempt to teach music!

Linda: Did you even have a piano in the school?

Ruth: If I remember correctly, there was an organ, but it was not in good shape. Music was just not one of my strongpoints, although I wish it had been.

Linda: Over the years, how did things change regarding what you felt was expected of you as a teacher?

Ruth: I think we had more freedom then. When you were hired as I was in a country school, there were certain rules of conduct that you had to approve, but they were not too much different than they would have been anywhere else. You didn't drink, you didn't smoke.

Linda: Did anyone ever check on you?

Ruth: No. You lived in the community and the community saw you. You had to dress appropriately.

Linda: Didn't you say once that the superintendent would check on you periodically?

Ruth: Well, he would come by once a year for a short visit. I don't remember him ever coming more than that. It was a state requirement that he had to do it.

Linda: You didn't know ahead of time that he was coming?

Ruth: No, we didn't.

Linda: How did they evaluate you if no one ever checked?

Ruth: I think mainly by the way the children reacted and how others felt that the children were doing. And some people were very interested. When their children would take their papers home they would look at them and try to evaluate them and see if they thought they were doing alright. They trusted a lot to us.

Linda: Would you have to write their tests out?

Ruth: Yes, I wrote many, many of them out, and they wrote out their answers in essay-type. I still think that one of our failings in school today is that we have too many true/false questions and young people today don't know how to write. I've seen too many papers come back with poor spelling and poor English structure.

Linda: I imagine you had to do a lot of your work in the evenings. How would you have managed that if you'd have had a family at home?

Ruth: Well, I didn't have except when I was living at home with my mother and father. I had my own room and I could use it to do my work. During that time I would often stay late at school to work because I had my desk and supplies there.

Linda: Did you know of any male teachers during that time?

Ruth: There were a few, yes.

Linda: Was it acceptable for a man to teach?

Ruth: It seemed to be, but not many men took it up. For one thing, the salary was not very high. They considered teaching "women's



work". I don't know if the men teaching were making any more money than we were, but none of us were making very much. Times were hard and very difficult for most people, and many of these districts just didn't have a great deal of money to spend.

Linda: Did you use corporal punishment?

Ruth: You weren't supposed to, although I did use it a few times when it was just absolutely necessary. One time that I can remember was really funny. I had a student, a big fellow, who was possibly just two years younger than I was. He wouldn't do anything that I asked him to. He wasn't really mean, but he just couldn't behave himself. I don't remember just what he did...something that I told him he just could not do, he did. So I picked up a paddle and paddled him. He stood still and let me do it. The next morning his father appeared at the schoolhouse door and I thought, "Oh--oh!" He came in and said, "Miss Johnson, you did the best thing you could possibly have done when you used that paddle. That did more good than all the talking in the world." I had no trouble with him after that. And the funny part is that in later years I taught with his wife, and we laughed about this many times. I didn't hurt him, but it was just the fact that I would do it. I guess he realized I meant what I said.

Linda: Do you think male teachers would have been inclined to use corporal punishment?

Ruth: They might have been.

Linda: I think many of us have images of teachers' back then walking around with rulers in their hands all the time.

Ruth: No, it wasn't like that. There might have been a few cases. Sometimes you'd take a ruler and tap somebody on the head if they were whispering, but you didn't hurt them.

Linda: Did you have to submit monthly progress reports?

Ruth: We had to keep a school register of daily attendance and we sent out report cards at the end of each month. We had to record the grades in the register. I don't remember if at that time we had to send in a monthly report to the superintendent's office, but we did later on, every month, on grades, attendance, and so on. The grade cards then were different from what we have now, but many were quite similar. They indicated grades, attendance, and attitudes. Then the parents had to sign them and send them back so that you could be sure that they had seen them.

Linda: Can you tell us more about the finances of the time?

Ruth: Times were really hard. This community was made up of small farms and it was hard for people to make a living on 160 acres. They just couldn't do it. Today much of the land has been turned into pasture and farmers are raising cattle. The farms have become bigger, but as a result, there are just four children or five living in this district now. At one time there

were quite a number. On just 160 acres with dryland farming, the people were just not rich at all.

Linda: Did the money for the school come from taxes or donations?

Ruth: It came from taxes.

Linda: Where did the land come from that the school was on?

Ruth: I'm not sure about that. But in each township there are thirty-six sections, and Section 36 was called school land. It was set aside, and when it was sold the money was used for schools. I don't know how that was done because sometimes there was more than one school in the township. The two that I remember in our district are Pavoria and Sweet Hill. There might have been others. I don't know how they managed to do it, but they did. Things were not as expensive as they are now. The land and the school building were supported by money they got from the school land. This was in Richland Township.

Linda: How did the students get their school books and other things they needed?

Ruth: They had to buy all their own books and all their supplies, papers and pencils. At that time in penmanship they used ink and pens instead of ballpoints. The main supplies were a big tablet for tests...they didn't use much notebook paper at that time...the schoolbooks, ink, pen, ruler, eraser, pencils, and a pencilbox. They had to have one.

Linda: What if a child could not afford these things?

Ruth: Often there were secondhand books the children could buy. I don't know if the county helped with that if the children just couldn't afford it or not. Later on I think there was some aid for the poorer students.

Linda: None of your children had that problem?

Ruth: I don't think so. All of them managed some way or other.

And books were passed down from brother to sister or from cousin to cousin, and so on. They got pretty threadworn.

Linda: Were there any enrollment fees?

Ruth: Oh, no. It was free, public education. Any child in the district could go, and with permission, children from outside the district could go. Sometimes children from our district would go to another school if it was closer. They weren't as strict as they are now. Now with the unified school districts it causes quite a hassle for a child to go to another school, even if it's almost next to them, if they don't happen to live in that district. I know there have almost been some lawsuits over it. And in this district, so many of the people were renters. The first of March was the date of change-over if you were going to leave and move on to another farm. A lot of them seemed to move every year. So you had a turnover of children. You'd have new children coming in the first of March and school was out the end of April. It caused a problem. Or you had children leaving then who had been with you all year. Then

you'd have to make out all the reports to send with them to their new school.

Linda: What was your salary?

Ruth: My starting salary was \$60 per month for seven months. The second year I taught it went up to \$65. In different schools after that it remained \$65 or \$75 and slowly rose until I began teaching two-room schools. Then it rose from \$75 to \$80. I quit teaching in 1946 when Bill and I were married. I was teaching in Montrose then for \$100 per month for eight months.

Linda: Was that considered a pretty good salary?

Ruth: Well, it was considered pretty good for the times. One hundred dollars a month would go much farther than several hundred a month would now. You didn't make any money; you lived.

Linda: Perhaps that is why you were only allowed to stay two years in Pavonia. If you stayed any longer they'd have to keep raising your salary.

Ruth: You've got a point there. They would have felt that they had to raise my salary. And I don't know if the school district was really as hard up as they led me to believe, but I know the valuation of that land was not too much. Our home place is on the edge of it and we have some better land than many of those people do. Much of it is in pasture and in many years it has pulled in quite a little income. But at that time, it didn't.

Linda: At that time were salaries set? Could you request more money if you really needed it?

Ruth: No, the salaries were set and you had to abide by it. If you needed more money, you went somewhere else where you could get it.

Linda: Was it hard for districts to find teachers?

Ruth: I don't hardly think so. Times were hard and young people were trying to work. There weren't many openings for women. When I graduated from high school it seemed that you either went on to college, and most of us needed to earn some money before we could do that, or you took nurse's training, or you taught school, or you got married. That's about all there was.

Linda: How did you get your paycheck?

Ruth: It was usually sent by the treasurer. He usually had a child in school and would send it with him. If not, he would bring it to me.

Linda: Do you know what happened to the schoolhouse after it was closed?

Ruth: Yes. When they finally closed the school it was sold. It was torn down and moved to Montrose. Much of it went into building a home in Montrose which one of my friends now lives in.

Linda: Is it much the same?

Ruth: Oh, no, you wouldn't know that it was part of the

schoolhouse, but that's where much of Pavonia school now is. I think of it almost every time I go by Cecil's. It's a simple home, but it's not bad at all.

Linda: What happened to the equipment and supplies that were there?

Ruth: I don't know if they had a sale or not. At that time I was teaching elsewhere. I just don't know. There wasn't a great deal of equipment, just desks, a teacher's desk, maps and globes. We did have a very small library; it probably had fifty books in it. When I went to school there, I would hurry through my work so that I could go get a library book to read. Most of the books were Greek mythology. From the time I first started to read until I left that school I read Greek mythology, and I learned to love it!

Linda: Where did those books come from?

Ruth: I have no idea who ever selected those books for a grade school. They were so much above our reading level that I was probably the only one who ever used the books. In fact, some of them looked very new when I checked them out. Some of them were Roman history.

Linda: Do you think they might have been donated from a personal library.

Ruth: They could have been, or perhaps the State (Education Department) sent them out. They all seemed to run in a series. There was a lot of Norse mythology, also. But there was no

fiction. Some group sent out books on Kansas. In fact, I have one of them. I have no idea how I came to have it. Probably I had borrowed it for some reason and had just not returned it when the school was closed. It's the only thing I have left from there.

Linda: Did you maintain the library when you taught in Pavonia?

Ruth: Yes, I had the very same one! We did add to it, though. By that time we were allowed to buy so many dollars of approved library books; we were able to choose the books from a list that was provided, so while I was there I was able to add about ten books.

Linda: Did the children enjoy them?

Ruth: Oh, yes, they made good use of those books; they didn't read the others (mythology). I think I was the only one who ever read those! But I just wanted something to read, and that was all that was there. We had no magazines, nothing like that. Once I finished my work, I didn't know what to do with myself. So I would read.

Linda: That seems rather sad to add just ten books to a library.

Ten books today is just a pittance. Can we talk some more about the students? Did you have any as old as twenty?

Ruth: I did not. But one of the girls was my age, eighteen, when I started to teach. We had been in the same grade in school, and then I had run off and left her. There were just the two of us



in our class, and she was just so slow that the teacher got disgusted. The work was too easy for me so the teacher let me skip a grade. Then you could do that. Today you can't easily do it. A few years later when I taught at the Bluebird School, a boy was there who must have been seventeen, a big husky fellow. His sister was a little younger, and she also went to school with me. She lives in Formoso now, and we have a great time talking over many of the things that happened. There were possibly one or two others who were very close to my age. That year at Bluebird was the year when I had all eight grades. I also had to prepare hot lunches for all those children.

Linda: How did you manage that?

Ruth: There was some equipment there for that purpose. They had an oil stove, some dishes, a dishpan and a way of heating water. They furnished dish towels and some other things. They asked me if I would be willing if the children would bring in food that was already prepared. The children in the district were to take turns bringing it. All that I was to do was put it in a kettle and heat it, then dish it up for them. The older girls were to wash dishes and clean up everything else. And they were very anxious to try it, so I agreed to it. I never had such a busy year as that. I had all the grades and it was a small building, so it was very hard to get things done. It worked for about three or four weeks; then the first thing I knew, someone

brought in unpeeled potatoes and a jar of milk for potato soup. I have had to teach class and peel potatoes at the same time! Today I wouldn't do it. I would put my foot down and say "Hey, this is not in my contract!" But I didn't have nerve enough to do it then. Then they began bringing "dressed" chickens, supposedly, but still with quite a few pinfeathers on. I had to cut the chicken up, add a package of noodles, and make chicken and noodles for them. That was going too far! I finally talked to my school board about it and told them I just couldn't do that anymore. It wasn't supposed to be that way, but some of them were just taking advantage of it. The children enjoyed it and the girls were very good about cleaning up and putting things away. That was very hard. It was such a small schoolhouse and we had one of the jacketed furnaces and we just couldn't keep warm.

Linda: What were the backgrounds of the children?

Ruth: There was a mixture of everything. There were German, Irish, Scottish. My grandparents and my folks were the only Swedes in the community. There was just a general run-of-the-mill, a mixture of nationalities.

Linda: Did you have students who spoke no English?

Ruth: No, I never did.

Linda: Did the different cultural backgrounds play a part?

Ruth: Yes, I think it had a lot to do with what they were able to

do and how they conducted themselves. It's hard for me to keep track of what I experienced while I was going to school and while I was teaching school. Some of it all runs together. But there was a boy...everytime he opened his mouth, every other word was a cuss-word. You never heard a little tiny boy swear like that youngster did! His aunt went to school there, also. She was a year younger, but a lot bigger than he was, so she would take Harold under her protection. She would make him behave...she even paddled him at times. The poor youngster had learned it at home. I didn't know much about the home environment. But that was one of the funny things that happened while I went to school there. Another boy in my class was a little bit of a tiny fellow. He was never dressed as warmly as he should be. He never seemed to have enough clothing. We all felt sorry for him. One day he came to school while it was sleeting and storming and cold. His eyes watered and by the time he got to school, his eyelashes had frozen shut and he couldn't see. He managed to get to school. And I think of that every time I see him now. He's a great big husky fellow, a little bit older than I am. He's been an auctioneer in this county; he's well known to everyone. Now every time I see him I think of that little bit of a fellow who came to school just chilled to the bone.

Linda: Have you often taught children of your former students?

Ruth: I have, some. But not here. I taught them in Lovewell and in Courtland.

Linda: And have you not taught children and grandchildren?

Ruth: And great-grandchildren! Yes, once I taught the sister of one of our school board members. Later I taught his children, then his grandchildren, and even his great-grandchildren! And one little girl was a first grader when I taught her at Pavonia. She married and lives east of here. I've even taught her grandchildren.

Linda: Do you know where some of your students are now?

Ruth: Some, not many. The two sisters I've mentioned who could not learn are both dead; they died rather early. One girl lives in California, but I don't know if she married or just what she does. A few still live in the area.

Linda: What kinds of occupations have they had?

Ruth: Some have stayed and become farmers or become wives of farmers. One boy lives in Washington or Oregon and works for some factory there. One, I know, is a car salesman in Los Angeles.

Linda: Were any outstanding in any way?

Ruth: None of those I taught at Pavonia have been outstanding, I don't believe. But some I have taught in other groups have been truly outstanding. One boy I taught in Lovewell has been a veterinarian in Superior (Nebraska) for years now. Another runs

a big dairy farm in Arizona. Most of the girls have worked at different things and then settled down and married. I don't know exactly what they've done. One or two are ministers; I don't think I've had any doctors. Those were all in the Jones family!

Linda: Did you enjoy teaching more in the one-room schoolhouse or in other programs?

Ruth: That is kind of hard to say, because I have enjoyed teaching all the time, but I particularly enjoyed this experience because it was my home district and it was with people that I knew, my neighbors. But I have always enjoyed teaching. There have been many changes over the years, changes in the equipment, changes in the supplies that we had, and changes in the attitudes of the children towards school. I have noticed that more than anything else.

In later years we had much better equipment, more and better supplies. But I don't think the children today learn any better than they did in these early country schools because they heard things repeated over and over and over again by the other children until it stayed with them. In my later years I found that we taught more things every day. The children did not have enough practice time so that they could retain it. Spelling was one area. I know people say, "Yes, but children can learn things quickly." They can learn, yes, but they don't retain the

knowledge. In the lower grades, especially, children need the repetition. It got monotonous for the teachers sometimes, but the children learned more. We're teaching a scattering of this and a scattering of that, but things don't tie together for them; they can't see how things are interrelated. That may be one of the reasons that we have so much trouble with our young people today.