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### Gail Basil Graff – Master Teacher

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#### Recommended Citation

Graff, Stacy and Horyna, Mark, "Gail Basil Graff – Master Teacher" (1997). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 276.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/276>

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**GAIL BASIL GRAFF**

MASTER TEACHER

STACY GRAFF  
MARK HORYNA

SUMMER 1997  
FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY

## CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH GAIL GRAFF

Gail Graff received two very distinguished awards in his forty-two years as an educator. In 1964 he received a Certificate of Service from the University of Kansas, for loyally serving Kansas youth. In 1993 he received a Career Recognition Award from the Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals(KAESP) for thirty-five years of dedicated service as an elementary/middle school principal in Kansas and was inducted as a permanent member into the Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals from Emporia State University. During Graff's forty-two years as an educator, he felt very strongly about sticking to teaching the basics which he referred to as the four R's, reading, writing, arithmetic and respect.

Graff's awards resulted from both family and teacher influences in his formative years and career. Graff was born about five miles from Centerview in 1916 where he was raised on a family farm. He was the youngest of five children. On the farm, everyone in the family, male or female, big or small, carried responsibilities, in addition to displaying great respect for their mom, dad, and elders. Graff along with his two older sisters and two older brothers, took pride in the work ethic they were taught from their mom and dad. Graff learned the definition of respect and hard work

on their family farm; and, because of a strong work ethic, respect, and hard work, his character was built on a strong foundation.

During his grade school years Graff gained a great love for education. Graff attended Centerview Grade School and High School which have since been closed because of consolidation. He had a fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teacher for whom he attained a high degree of respect, and who encouraged him to become a teacher. This teacher made going to school an exciting as well as a challenging experience. Graff decided that he wanted to make a difference in the lives of children as his teachers had done. He recalled that teachers were much stricter during his school years. A look was all it took to discipline students and using "the board" was not too common. Because of his great respect for his teachers, Graff didn't think of back-talking. He knew if he got in trouble at school he would suffer even greater consequences upon his arrival home.

Following his high school graduation in 1934, Graff attended Fort Hays State, now Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas, where he received a three-year teaching degree. At that time, a teaching certificate could be secured in two years.

After completing schooling at Hays, Kansas, he took a job at Red Mound School, a one-room school near Lewis, Kansas, in southeast Edwards County. He thought he was really in the money, for his first month's paycheck was the sum total of sixty dollars. He indicated sixty dollars went a lot farther in 1936 as compared with today. His first year, even though he was new to the profession, went fairly smoothly; however, he felt only having three students had a lot to do with that. Graff knew that it was of utmost importance to stay with a schedule so there would be some type of routine. Once in a while he would extend recess or lunch break, especially if he was not ready to get back to work.

Teaching in a one-room school was quite an experience, but right down Graff's alley because he was able to teach only the basics. Although he liked his first teaching job, he also thought it would be great to have his own classroom in a little larger setting, so in 1939 he took an eighth grade teaching position in Rolla, Kansas. This experience was a lot different than the one-room school, but much better. He just loved having one grade level to teach rather than the diversity of several students in one classroom at several different grade levels. He found the position much more enjoyable and much easier to teach.

In 1941, Graff made another move to the Tribune School district. This time he took an eighth-grade teaching position. In Red Mound and Rolla, education took place only eight months out of the year. Graff knew in his early years of teaching it was very important that the kids stayed home to help their mom and dad with the farming. While at Tribune he taught the traditional nine-month school term. Everything went fine for Graff at Tribune through the first half of the second year, that is until an opening at Kinsley became available for a half-time teacher and half-time administrator at Southside Elementary. Graff applied for and was granted this position in Kinsley. This was a very controversial move for him because of his leaving the Tribune district in the middle of the school year. Kinsley was near the family farm, and Graff was afraid if he did not take the job at that time that he would not get another opportunity to work that close to home.

When Graff began his educational career at Kinsley he assumed principal, teacher, and coaching duties at Southside Elementary School. When he first started teaching at Southside he taught sixth grade, and later on he and a colleague, Ruth Husted, taught the fifth and sixth grades for twenty-five years.

Coaching basketball was richly fulfilling and very important to Graff, for he felt that kids could learn a lot from playing together in athletic competition. The Southside basketball team had quite a winning tradition, and Graff demonstrated immeasurable pride for all the trophies displayed in the trophy cases at Southside. The most exciting part of his career came from teaching and coaching young men and watching them perform to their potential. Some of the most memorable moments in Graff's educational experiences came from the gymnasium at Southside. There was just something about the competition of Kansas athletics that gave him much gratification. Graff loved to keep up on all the basketball teams because basketball was by far his favorite sport.

Graff felt it to be quite challenging being a teacher and an administrator. He may have had to punish a student in his class as the student's teacher, and two hours later another teacher may have sent that same student to the office to be disciplined by Graff, serving as principal. Nevertheless, he still loved his job and all the challenges that came along with it. Graff was firm and very fair with his staff and his student body exemplified by his ability to think through situations, make a sound decision, and stick by that decision in a fair manner. In the same manner as

Graff was reared by a hard-working farm family, he found his career decisions influenced by the integrity and respect he learned in his youth.

After twenty-five years as a half-time teacher and administrator, Graff gave up teaching and became a full-time administrator. With the declining enrollment in the Kinsley School District, the Lincoln and Southside Elementary Schools combined, and Graff became the principal over both schools.

During his time at Kinsley as a teacher and administrator, Graff was required to update his provisional certificate. He returned to college in the summers of 1953 and 1954 in Lindsborg, Kansas, at Bethany College. After enrolling in classes at Dodge City College in Dodge City, Kansas, Graff received his masters degree in administration from Emporia State Teachers College at Emporia, Kansas.

As for changes in teaching methods over the years, Graff feels many of the teachers returned to "traditional methods" of teaching basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic, and respect. He never did think too much of the restrictive nature of scope and sequence or quality performance accreditation (QPA), which is state mandated at this time in our Kansas schools. When the state felt it necessary to require that a counselor be placed in every



building, he felt that it would be a waste of money. Graff felt that there were many other places that the money could have been used where it would do a lot more good. Counselors, he felt, would be a lot more worthwhile and effective at the high school level. In contrast, Graff felt the elementary homeroom teacher should be able to do most or all of the counseling that needed to be done. During his tenure, there were not as many teaching fads that would be here one day and gone tomorrow. He still felt that there was nothing better than good basic teaching. He indicated many of his teachers were getting back to the basics.

In his schools, educators were trying several approaches to a more meaningful education for the students. Children, ages six to ten, were given opportunities to learn in classes which implemented multi-media resources. In other words, children progressed at their own speed according to their abilities. He preferred these rooms be categorized as open classrooms. In these classrooms which utilized multi-media and computer assisted instruction, the teachers were able to give more individual help to students than they were in the traditional classroom.

His first grade teacher tried an approach which is called "perceptual learning" where she had them working in groups. Her Perceptual Center consisted of special games,

educational toys, records, physical aids to develop children's visual mobility, directionality, and eye-hand coordination exercises.

In his upper grades Graff encouraged his teachers to try a modified team approach. Teachers taught in their specialized field instead of the traditional self-contained setting involving all subjects taught by one individual. Consequently, the students in the upper grades did not have to have the same teacher for every subject. Even though a variety of methods and new trends were tried and tested, Graff emphasized staying as close to the basics as possible while incorporating new methods that had proven successful.

When it came to discipline, Graff implemented several methods. He thought corporal punishment was really unnecessary during his time as a principal because most of the punishment was done at home. In that respect, Graff was very fortunate because the parents, as a whole, were very supportive toward the methods he used. He felt that parents had better things to do than question the school due to the fact good behavior at home was supervised and expected as it was at school. Accordingly, he noted the fact that things are a lot different today. When he had to spank a student at school, it was a sure thing that when that student got home he would get another spanking. Graff felt the most

effective type of discipline he used was the good, stern, face-to-face talk, and he could be very persuasive.

In speaking with Graff during the latter part of the interview, he revealed that he felt his experiences with students in the past are very similar to the ones educators experience today. He stressed how students dress much better today than they did in the past. Graff explained kids were lucky to have two pairs of jeans, a few shirts, and only one pair of shoes, while today they may pay as much as one hundred dollars for just one pair of shoes. He felt that many of the problems with alcohol and drugs today are because kids don't have the responsibilities that they had in the past. When school was out, they had plenty of chores to keep them busy until dinner, and parents were there to supervise.

Graff seemed very pleased with all of his accomplishments he achieved in the field of education. He assured us that he would be more than happy to do it all over again if given an opportunity. Past students always displayed much respect for their former teacher and principal. He always gave credit to his great teaching staff because he felt they were the ones that made him look successful. He revealed that the credit for his success reflected back to his staff. He always knew that if he

didn't have a good teaching staff he was going to have a lot of problems. This attribute of knowing his staff and their capabilities, was a unique factor that helped shape Graff's career.