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### Dessie Bellew

Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier

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Interview Date: October 2, 1980

Interviewer: C.D. - Clayton Dobbins

Interviewee: D.B. - Dessie Bellew

C.D.: I am Clayton Dobbins of Tryon, Nebraska, interviewing Dessie Bellew of Tryon, Nebraska, for Ernest Grundy of Kearney State College. The date is October 2, 1980. He is involved in collecting information on country schools. This is a part of an 8 state project – project, which aims to discover and then perpetuate the history of rural schools. The project is sponsored by the Mountain Plains Library Association and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The project will deposit these tapes and other information collected in a central location for the use of future researchers. He'll also set-up meetings in such organizations as public libraries and historical museums using the film and the other materials gained in the project. Now Mrs. Bellew, would you first of all tell me a little bit about your fer- personal self? Where you were born? Where you went to school? Where you educate- Where you were educated? How you received this education up to the times that you got your degree?

D.B.: Can you hear, am I okay? I am Dessie Bellew of Tryon, Nebraska. I received my education at the elementary school in Tryon, and went on to the high school at Tryon, graduating from there in 1937. And the following fall I went to Chadron State College at Chadron, Nebraska, where I got my teacher's certificate.

C.D.: How many hours did it take you to get that certificate in those years, Mrs. Bellew?

D.B.: It took 9 hours, and that was good for 3 years with 1 renewal.

C.D.: Okay, what did you take in those classes? Anything in particular, such as music, art...?

D.B.: Yes, we took art, we took music, we had several method classes – Geography –

C.D.: Where in your first encounter did you first teach then?

D.B.: I taught about 9 miles South of Tryon, at District 29.

C.D.: Is that district still there?

D.B.: No.

C.D.: What has happened to that district over the years?

D.B.: Well, over the years, it was finally – put in with the Tryon grade school at District 4, we joined their district.

C.D.: Alright – did you, at the time you started teaching, were there restrictions on where you had to live? And – and where did you live and how did you get back and forth to school? [2:36]

D.B.: Alright, I lived with my mother and my brother 3 ½ miles south of Tryon, and rode horseback down to District 29. I taught there 3 years, my pay was 50 dollars a month, and – oh, I enjoyed it, I think I had 5 students the first year, I'm not sure – three or something like that.

C.D.: How many years did you teach in this first school?

D.B.: I taught 3 years.

C.D.: 3 years at that school, and then where did you go from there?

D.B.: Then I went to – District 26. That's West of Tryon. And I stayed – I just taught one year there, I stayed with a family and I called the children to school. And I had – 6 pupils up there. And – I taught one year there, and came back to Tryon and took District 4.

C.D.: Now District 4 is the town rural school, right?

D.B.: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

C.D.: Okay.

D.B.: And I taught there one year. And during that year I decided to get married. So I got married in December.

C.D.: Did you lay-off some time from teaching while you had your family, or did you have your family and go right on teaching?

D.B.: No, there was a few years that I didn't teach.

C.D.: And then when you came back to teaching, you came back to MacPherson County, is that correct?

D.B.: Uh-huh.

C.D.: And where did you teach, then?

D.B.: Let's see, I went to – District 11, and that was Redman's school.

C.D.: So that school was about 9 miles or 10 miles south of Tryon.

D.B.: Uh-huh. [4:38]

C.D.: Alright.

D.B.: Now that school has been vacated, it's – closed down. Went in with – it was 10, and Chillerson school right north of it was number 11. When they combined them, then they called them 21 – 21.

C.D.: So you would probably concur that you have taught in almost every elementary rural school in MacPherson county at one time or another.

D.B.: Yes, I think most of them.

C.D.: In the 38 years that you've been teaching, you have taught – almost every adult in the county, plus most – a lot of the adults in the county, plus a lot of their children and grandchildren, then, haven't you?

D.B.: That's right. Yep.

C.D.: Well, were there any spectacular things in your transportation back and forth to these rural schools when you first started teaching? [5:25]

D.B.: Yes – when I first started teaching in that first school south of home, I rode horseback. I had a special pony, he was a lively pony, had lots of vigor. Run off from us every once in a while. But I rode him to school, one morning I was going along a nagal[?] and he stumbled and fell with me, throwing me over his head. My lunch scattered out on the ground. I picked it up, put it back in, and went on to school. Many mornings, it was so cold – and I'd be so cold before I would get there – I would get off and walk a ways until I warmed back up, then I would crawl back on my horse and ride a little bit further, until I got to the Newberry's home, and I had a gate to open right at their yard, so I'd open that, tie my horse up, and go in and get warmed up. And then I'd proceed to go on to school, which was about, oh, half a mile.

C.D.: Well I suppose after you got to school, then, you probably still had to build a fire.

D.B.: Yes. All the cob or chip fire, whatever we happened to have to burn, and sometimes you'd get a stove or a fire that would go, and other times you had troubles. It was always cold.

C.D.: And – I'm assuming you did your own janitorial work. [6:50]

D.B.: Yes, all of it.

C.D.: Did your own sweeping, and carrying out the ashes, and so forth.

D.B.: Mm-hmm, yes. Get out supply of fuel for the day in the night before we leave, usually.

C.D.: I imagine your plumbing was a little building out behind.

D.B.: That's right.

C.D.: Alright. What – what types of subjects did you teach when you first started teaching, Mrs. Bellew? Was math and science, reading and math – what were the main stays of the education that you taught?

D.B.: Oh – reading, spelling, English, Geography, oh – arithmetic, we didn't call it math, and I don't know, we didn't have much in the line of science, if we had any science. We might've had a little later on. It seemed like it was mainly reading and spelling.

C.D.: Without mentioning any names, what could you tell me about what some of those people are doing today that you taught in the early years when you first started? You remember any of those people, are any of them still living around here?

D.B.: Well, yes, I had –

C.D.: And if not, where have they gone and what kind of education or jobs have they received?

D.B.: Well, I really can't tell you for sure. I had Andy Newberry, and he lives at Loup City, and he's retired. And I had Mabel Coleman, and she lives in the Dales of Oregon, I think just a housewife. And then I had the little Cockins' boys, and I'm not sure where – one is in Iowa, one is at Walt Hill, Nebraska, and the other three, I don't know where they're at. Then I had Mearl and Clara Rose, and last I knew, they were in North Platte, but, as far as their education, I don't know – too much about it.

C.D.: How about students on down the years, have you had any – can you think of any students – how many students do you suppose you've had that have gone on to college? Or, through finished high school and gone on to college?

D.B.: Oh – I wouldn't have any idea, probably 10, maybe more than that.

C.D.: Maybe 10 or more?

D.B.: Uh-huh, I have quite a number that went on to college, and went in to teaching profession.

C.D.: Okay – so what you're saying, then, if I understand you correctly, is you feel that the education that you students received in the rural school was a good education that allowed them to go on to school and become teachers themselves.

D.B.: I think so, yes. [9:20]

C.D.: Okay...What did you teach in the line of arithmetic?

D.B.: Well, the fundamentals that we needed.

C.D.: Okay. And fundamentals, you're talking about addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, probably some fractions.

D.B.: Yes. Mm-hmmm.

C.D.: Okay [long pause] I'm assuming that all of the buildings you taught in, except district 4 in Tryon, were all one room schools.

D.B.: Yes.

C.D.: And – probably not very large. Would you like to say anything about the quality or condition of any of those buildings when you first started teaching?

D.B.: Well, the first 3 years when I taught in a brick – block - school house, it was very poor condition. It had a crack all the way down through the wall like it would fall down most anytime. Then when I taught up at Daley's at 26<sup>th</sup>, West of Tryon, that was the only standard school at that time, in MacPherson County.

C.D.: Now when you say standard, you're saying the building itself was approved by the state?

D.B.: Uh-Huh.

C.D.: Okay.

D.B.: Now that's the only one that was approved at that time. And then the Ringgold was – well, the first time I taught at Ringgold, it was a large school, it was hard to heat, and the second they tore it down, built right in Ringgold, and that was a much nicer school. It had a bathroom, it was quite modern at that time.

C.D.: What kind of demands did your board members put on you as an individual? Did they expect you to be a leader of the community or just – just what were some of the things that they'd ask you, and you'd get an interview for a job, what were some of the things that they would ask?

D.B.: Well, I can't think of any particular things that they'd ask except one school near Tryon, they asked that we not marry during the school term.

C.D.: I see.

D.B.: Now that's – that's the main one there that stays in my mind.

C.D.: Uh-huh. Well I know that's some – something that always used to be there.

D.B.: Mm-hmm.

C.D.: It was wanting single teachers and I – guess I don't understand quite what the reasoning was, maybe you can tell me?

D.B.: I don't know what the – why –

C.D.: Don't really know, then.

D.B.: No.

C.D.: Were any of these buildings where you taught around MacPherson County used for any community activities?

D.B.: Yes, a number of our schools was used for Sunday school – and usually there was a Christmas program put on by the school. – Well, election – of a county election was held at Ringgold, I know we always got the day off. Can't think of any other things, but – literary was held, too, that was quite common in our schools.

C.D.: Now, you might explain just a little bit to me what "literary" is.

D.B.: Well, it was – a program in the evening, and it was put on by anyone that wanted to take part and just have a program for the evening – we just did it that way.

C.D.: Adults took part in it as well as students?

D.B.: Uh-Huh.

C.D.: Okay. I suppose back at the time when you were teaching, and earlier years, even up until the last 3 years, Christmas programs were probably one of the important events of the year.

D.B.: Yes, I think so.

C.D.: Okay – and they – were they made up by quite a bit of music?

D.B.: Oh, music, presentations.

C.D.: What kind of music did you teach in your schools?

D.B.: Just mainly singing. [13:17]

C.D.: Music appreciation, in other words, more or less?

D.B.: Uh-Huh, Uh-Huh.

C.D.: Okay. Did you play the piano?

D.B.: No. I don't play.

C.D.: So you used, probably, the phone-record player, or phonograph?

D.B.: Or if we had some others, who was good in music, they would come help us.

C.D.: Did you have students do reciting in class?

D.B.: Did we what?

C.D.: Did you have students do reciting in class? Recitations?

D.B.: Yes. Yes.

C.D.: What plans of recitation did they do?

D.B.: Oh, they liked poetry, for one thing.

C.D.: Did – do you do as much recitation in class today as you did, say, 38 years ago when you started out? Or 20 years ago?

D.B.: No, I don't think so.

C.D.: Now, do you think that's good or bad?

D.B.: Well, I think that that's alright, to do it that way. [14:05]

C.D.: Do you think there was a value in recitation?

D.B.: Well, yes. I guess you can say yes and no. I just – I think there was a value to it.

C.D.: Uh – did you ever have any serious problems with patrons of the community because of the way you taught? Or how you taught? Or how you disciplined your students? Or did they all pretty much say, "if you get in trouble at school, you get in trouble when you get home"?

D.B.: Well, to a certain degree. I – I don't know if I had any real trouble with any of them. If we did, we usually could talk it out. See how you each felt.

C.D.: We'd like to make just a statement here about ethnic groups. To my knowledge, McPherson County has never had any ethnic groups, is that right?

D.B.: As far as I know, it is, yes.

C.D.: I think if you go back, maybe to your parents' day, or maybe your grandparents' day, there were some black families and maybe some Indian families lived in the county at one time.

D.B.: Mm-hmm, we had a black-Negro family that lived east of us at home. There was no children in the family, but – we neighbored with them, exchanged work with them, just the same as if they were a white person.

C.D.: Uh-Huh.

D.B.: There was no difference.

C.D.: So, you're saying, of the people who did migrate in and out of here, there were never any ethnic problems?

D.B.: I don't think so. No, we have had Indian children in our school, even here in district 4, but, really, there was no problem. [15:40]

C.D.: Did – since you didn't have any ethnic groups, I guess you didn't have any language problems.

D.B.: That's right.

C.D.: I'll ask you a little bit about your curriculum. And yet, I'd like to have you go into a little bit more detail on the type of reading that you taught, and how you taught reading when you were a little school, all the grades were in the same room, hearing the same thing.

D.B.: Well – usually, while we were having one class, like of reading, the others were preparing something else. I suppose there were some children who didn't really get their own lesson. They'd listen, but – well, an individual reading books. For some children, that might have been a problem, but for most of them they were able to go ahead with their class work and recite without too much interruption.

C.D.: Do you see this type of teaching where you have to do everything in the same classroom with all the children present, do you see that as a detriment, or do you see that as being a value to students and to yourself as a classroom teacher?

D.B.: No, I don't think it was a detriment, then, really. They have to learn that they're going to have to work when there's others around them. [17:05]

C.D.: Namely, what you're saying is they have to be able to do their own work and be able to shut out the noise around them.

D.B.: That's right, yes.

C.D.: Do you think this is a good way of teaching?

D.B.: Well – there may be better ways.

C.D.: You wouldn't care to try and identify one or two of those, would you?

D.B.: Well, what about some of your tapes and – oh, you know, the different machines where they have the earphones – that would –

C.D.: Course – you go back 30 years, you didn't have that. [chuckles]

D.B.: No. We didn't have anything like that. We did the best we could with what we had, I guess.

C.D.: And it wasn't too bad?

D.B.: No, we got along and – the children all learned. Or I feel they did.

C.D.: [long pause] When you hear the term in the last few years of people in communities saying, "well, we want to go back to the basics," what do you think that means?

D.B.: Well, I suppose that means going back to the, what, 4 "R's": Reading, writing – no, 3 "R's", Rithmetic...but why would they want to go back? [18:23]

C.D.: That was a question that I had on my mind. Why would they want to go back?



D.B.: Why don't they want to go on in progress, make more progress, cause we have so many more things to work with now than we had when I started teaching. It makes it, well, a little more interesting for the students. Or, I feel that it does.

C.D.: Alright. Do you – did you feel that there was an important place in your teaching for phonics?

D.B.: Well, you know, I can't remember as – if we had phonics right at first. But I do think it's very important.

C.D.: Over the past decades, phonics has kind of been in and out of education, hasn't it?

D.B.: Uh-huh, mm-hmmm.

C.D.: Why do you think that's happened?

D.B.: I don't know why it happened, but it shouldn't have happened.

C.D.: Are you saying that you feel phonics is an important part of teaching?

D.B.: Ver- a very important part. Nearly every book – every textbook you pick up has something in the line of phonics. No. And I think it's very important.

C.D.: Would you consider the rural schools where you taught they run – they wanted the school- they wanted the schools as open concept? Are you familiar with the term open concept?

D.B.: Not really. [19:52]

C.D.: The term open concept in the city has really – they have one large building opened up and they're doing about the same things as what you have done in the [don't know] school for the past 30 years. And, so, it seems to me that there must be some value to it if they're trying it in the city schools.

D.B.: Well, I would think there would be. If there isn't any value to it, why do they always tell you that if you have children who have gone to a small, rural school, or small schools like ours, if they go into a larger school they're ahead of the other pupils in that larger school.

C.D.: I'm glad to hear you say that.

D.B.: So, there must be some reason. You'll find that through here all the time, when they go into a larger school they're advanced and able to hold their own –

C.D.: Could you cite any particular disadvantages to our rural schools of the past?

D.B.: Any disadvantages?

C.D.: I know there were disadvantages because you didn't have electricity and you didn't have gas heat and you didn't have libraries, and things of that nature. But let's zero in right on the education of the student.

D.B.: [long pause] I don't know. I know there was a lot of – probably. I can't think of any right off-hand, though.

C.D.: If you can't think of any, then they must not have been too important of – drawbacks.

D.B.: Well, maybe they weren't – that's it, maybe they weren't considered drawbacks in those – in those days.

C.D.: Maybe – Maybe you consider that just like I think of terms of being poor when I was a child. I didn't think of myself being poor because I didn't know any better.

D.B.: That's right [21:36]

C.D.: So...

D.B.: Our school's were all pretty much alike, I think. Our rural schools. So maybe we didn't –

C.D.: Do you think they did a good job of teaching the basics?

D.B.: Well, I think some of them did, some of them probably did – did a better job. I mean they weren't all qualified alike.

C.D.: Do you know a lot of people on the county ranches or otherwise who have gone to a rural school and are very successful in their enterprise today?

D.B.: Uh-Huh, yes.

C.D.: What did you do with poetry in school?

D.B.: Well, we had quite a lot of poetry, but – I think it was spoiled in a lot of ways for us because we made the child memorize it all instead of just listening and enjoying it and memorize – you know, if you did a poem, you had to learn all of it. Maybe that's alright for a few times, but it spoils it when you make them memorize all of it every time.

C.D.: Are you saying that you think memory work such as that is bad now?

D.B.: No, I don't think it's bad, but I think can use –

C.D.: You can overdo it.

D.B.: Overdo it, too much. I always enjoyed poetry and I think – I know a lot of them who didn't.

C.D.: Did you have students who wrote poetry? [23:08]

D.B.: Oh yes, we all tried it, I think, at some time or other. Some of the students were better at writing.

C.D.: Are there any students that you recall during the time that you were teaching that – today are doing any writing of any kind?

D.B.: Not that I know of.

C.D.: What kinds – what types of grammar did you teach in rural school?

D.B.: Well, we used the Han-Shell Grammar Book, I know that was, at that time, seemed to be quite a favorite – book. It was kind of difficult – I think grammar's one of those subjects that's –

C.D.: Did – did you do diagramming?

D.B.: Uh, some, yes. Some parts of it was interesting, other parts I – didn't care for.

C.D.: Was that just an exercise, or did you see that there was some value in diagramming sentences.

D.B.: Well I think that there was a value to it, I don't think it's done as much today as it used to be, but I still think there's – there's some of that that you need it as - basic.

C.D.: What did you do as far as the teaching of art?

D.B.: Um...

C.D.: Did you have time for it? Did you have a class where you taught art?

D.B.: Yes, usually our Friday afternoon's last recess was our art period.

C.D.: Was this all in class – kind of a thin-lined, draw as you get and give them, or did you take them outside and maybe do some scenery [not sure]?

D.B.: Both. And the fall was a good time of the year for going outside and having an art lesson.

C.D.: What did you do in the field of history? [25:04]

D.B.: History?

C.D.: I don't know if you called it history. As I recall, my grade school we took something called Civics, I'm not sure what it was, but –

D.B.: Well that's more the study of your government. Your history, well, I know the 8<sup>th</sup> graders – 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, maybe, had to take civics, but most of ours was like the history of your own state, and things that you knew that they had to learn, and –

C.D.: So you taught about the same things then as you do today or – starting with the elem- the lower grades teaching home, and then town, and then city, and then county, and then state, and branching out as you got up into the grades?

D.B.: Yes.

C.D.: Did you do memory work in the field of history? And Social Studies?

D.B.: What do you mean - ?

C.D.: Oh, learning the names of the presidents, or the states of the United States, the capitals and –

D.B.: Oh, I think so – back further, in the earlier years, we, probably, did more with that than we do right now.

C.D.: Do you think that was busy work, or did you see a purpose in it? [26:08]

D.B.: Oh, I don't think it was busy work.

C.D.: We hear a lot of people say "busy-work" –

D.B.: Well, they're just doing busy-work to keep them –

C.D.: To keep them out of your hair. [chuckles]

D.B.: out of mischief, yes. [chuckles] There's certain amount of that they need to know.

C.D.: Now you started teaching when there wasn't such a thing as gas heat or electric lights or television or radio, to speak of. A phonograph, maybe yes. What do you think of our educational television in school today and have you used it at all?

D.B.: Well, I haven't used it too much, we do have – we can get television sets from the book mobile, but – we have used it in our lower grades, the kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> –

C.D.: Do you think that – Do you think that there's something of value in it?

D.B.: I think so, yes. There's lots of good, oh, programs on the TV that would be interesting for the younger grades, younger students. [27:02]

C.D.: What – What resources were available to you when you started teaching? And when I say resources, I'm talking about maybe people who could come in and talk to your classes, or libraries available, or things like that. Was there anything in – in those days?

D.B.: Well, mainly, it was having someone, like, in the community that could come in and talk or show the children something. I can't – it was a long time before – I can't remember really when we had the first library.

C.D.: Did – did the county superintendent come out to your schools and visit quite often?

D.B.: Yes –

C.D.: Did they – did they bring library books or anything with them when they came? Or they were mostly on an inspection tour, I guess.

D.B.: I think more or less on an inspection tour. I think they came only about once a year. Later on they might have brought us a few books, it was – it wouldn't be very many.

C.D.: Over the years that you've taught, did you think that the county superintendent's roles have changed from being an inspector to being a resource person?

D.B.: I think so, yes. Definitely. I don't think they're there for inspecting, I think they're there, more or less, to help us. And that's the way we would like.

C.D.: Do you have any – do you have any resources available – available to you today?

D.B.: Yes, we have our book mobile, we have the county library and the county superintendent's office, we can also use the North Platte Library, and – the library Lincoln – at Lincoln, the Commission down there, we can get books from them. We have lots of different places where we can get library material today.

C.D.: How about specialists – specialist types of people? Are there any of those available to you in the last few years?

D.B.: Yes. We have – Unit 16 where we have speech teachers, we also have resource teachers that are available to us.

C.D.: Have – do you consider those a valuable asset to your program?

D.B.: Some of them are, and it's like some for other teachers, some of them not. It seems you find that some of those teachers know what they're doing and others we haven't received too much help from.

C.D.: Lack of experience or – they need more interest.

D.B.: I think so, uh-huh.

C.D.: What did you do with the students in the past that are now being worked with a resource teacher?

D.B.: Well, I really don't know – too much about it. We have – we tried to help them, you know, in any way that we could. Maybe we weren't always righting what was wrong with them, you know, so that – but we tried to help or give them extra help.

C.D.: Do you look back over your 38 years and think that maybe there's a little Johnny down the road somewhere that you wish you could've helped more?

D.B.: Yes. Yes. Definitely.

C.D.: What type of help is there available today that you didn't have then?

D.B.: Well, we have all these resource teachers, and these speech teachers.

C.D.: If you get a good one, you think they can be beneficial to them?

D.B.: I think so, but it seems like we get a good one maybe one year, or they stay one year and then they –

C.D.: A lot of those people are beginning teachers, aren't they?

D.B.: Uh-huh, yes.

C.D.: And that, of course, we all had to learn to start – begin somewhere.

D.B.: That's right. I know in 38 years that I've been teaching, I – I've learned a lot of things. I – you learn right along with the children.

C.D.: Is there anything in your background of education that you're not doing today that you think that you did in the past that you'd like to do again?

D.B.: Oh, probably, we've learnt over a period of time better ways of doing something that, you know, that - would profit – the children would profit by. Now that's like our phonics program, when I started I'm sure there wasn't much in the line of phonics taught. But I think it's very important, and it – [end of first side of tape at 31:44]

[Beginning of second side of tape]

C.D.: I just have a couple of more questions to ask you, Mrs. Bellew – Over the years, I know that you've taught in practically every school in the county, and you've stayed in this county, so the community must have a pretty high regard for you and – and your role as a teacher. Did you ever feel like any of your school boards kind of had the feeling that – the teacher was their property?

D.B.: Oh, I don't know that you would word it quite that way. That we were their property. Sometimes I don't always agree with what they – you know – what they tell us of what we are expected of us, but I don't know what you'd consider [trails off].

C.D.: I know that you said one time, when you first started teaching they didn't want you to get married-

D.B.: Mm-hmm.

C.D.: Did any of the schools have any restrictions on you dating or going out on Saturday night or going to dances or anything?

D.B.: No, not for me, they never – I don't think so.

C.D.: Sounds to me like what you're saying is that this county was a little more open-minded than a lot of our rural schools in America.

D.B.: Mm-hmm. I think that they always kind of felt that our weekends were on our own, we did pretty much as we pleased, within a limit, I guess. We knew what was kind of expected of us.

C.D.: Wouldn't it be interesting to be back on probably about 50 dollars a month, that you started on?

D.B.: I don't really – I don't know, I wouldn't want to much – although, I was able to save enough money to go on to summer schools- to summers on that 50 dollars a month. And you know it's pretty hard to save anything now to go to summer school, and you get lots more –

C.D.: In the final – in the final stage of our interview, what problems face our country schools today?

D.B.: Well, they're just gradually going out.

C.D.: what do you contribute that to?

D.B.: Well – I suppose one thing, a lot of these little places have been bought up by larger, you know, ranchers. I would think that that would be one thing that would contribute to that.

C.D.: Have you seen any successful movement from the state level to consolidated schools? Do you that – have you seen that as a threat?

D.B.: Well, yes, I think that's a threat – but, I don't think that it's something that would work out here for us.

C.D.: Why do you say that? [34:39]

D.B.: Well, we're too far out, how would we – they'd have to have a bus system, seems to me like.

C.D.: On some occasions, that bus would drive 30 miles just to pick up one student.

D.B.: Mm-hmm. They'd be leaving early and getting home late, they have such a long distance to travel by bus. I'm not saying that consolidation is not alright, but I think there's something that could be worked out that would be better.

C.D.: Do you feel like the students that you had in school, by the time they were finished with the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and ready to go on to high school, were they as well socialized as none rural students? The town students?

D.B.: I think so, yeah. Maybe not a number of years ago, but we have most of the people now that go in, take part in their activities, so I think so.

C.D.: Do you feel that your students that you taught in the rural schools had as good of grounding in the essentials as town students?

D.B.: Yes, I think so. Maybe it's because I'm – I've always been out in the rural, but I think they do.

C.D.: Now we spoke earlier about following some of you students to high school or to college –

D.B.: Mm-hmm. [36:10]

C.D.: And you stated that you know a few – you remember a few that are still living, and they've gotten a business for themselves, and recited some ranchers – are very successful because of the schooling that they received – is there anyone else that comes to your mind that may have become businessmen or bankers or ranchers or doctors or lawyers?

D.B.: No, but in this community, we do lots of ranching, that's where I was thinking I had – a number of girls that went to school with me that went on and taught about our ranch lives now.

C.D.: That – seems to me like what you're saying is a large portion of our rural population in McPherson County stays within our community.

D.B.: I think so. [37:05]

C.D.: Do you see as that being a threat in situations in the future, just a moment ago, small ranches being bought up by larger ranches. Do you see this as – do you see this threatening our students of today?

D.B.: No, not the students, no, I don't think so.

C.D.: Cause – we have some students in our schools today that aren't going to be able to go back on the home ranch, are they?

D.B.: That's right, yes. They'll have to go on and do something else to make a living.

C.D.: Does – do you think that that places an extra burden on the rural school teacher, knowing that those students aren't going to go right back to their farm and – do that kind of work?

D.B.: Yes, I suspect it would be.

C.D.: Do you feel that you have to do a better job preparing them than what you did 20 years ago? Or do you think that job was just as important then as it is today?

D.B.: No, I think the job was just as important then as it is today. They're going to have to be prepared for something – you know, some work.

C.D.: I'm going to just let you brainstorm here, just for a minute, as we wind this interview up – Do you recall the first day of school? Of teaching school?

D.B.: No, not really.

C.D.: So it must not have been anything that was spectacular that stuck in your mind about walking into that school for the first time?

D.B.: I suppose I was scared, probably. [38:33]

C.D.: Like anyone else going on to a new job for the first time, huh?

D.B.: Mm-hmm.

C.D.: Over your 38 years, can you think of any one or two moments that were the happiest or most gratifying moments?

D.B.: Well, I can think of one this morning that happened, when I went back up to school to visit. The little kids was – seemed like they was tickled that I was there. I had a letter from two of my students yesterday – and they said, “We like Audrey, but we miss you, Dessie.”

C.D.: Mm-hmm.

D.B.: So –

C.D.: That’s very nice, isn’t it?

D.B.: Mm-hmm.

C.D.: I think the next question you can answer without thinking very far. How about a sad moment?

D.B.: Sad moment? [long pause]

C.D.: How about just the latest information you received about yourself?

D.B.: Well, my eyes have gone bad already. And that’s kind of hard to take. Mm-hmm. I had hopes, that I’d be able to go back to school.

C.D.: Okay, we are concluding this interview with a lady who has spent a lifetime in the teaching field. In the time she had at school, she had kindergartners, she had a lot of kindergartners and 1<sup>st</sup> graders. She has continued in the educational field throughout 12 years of school, plus 38 years in teaching, all in the same county so we know that has been well-received in her community. This year was going to be her opportunity to teach in a 3 teacher school in MacPherson County, in a brand new school that had never been occupied before, and – I think the last few months, she was notified by her doctor that her eyes were going bad. At the present time we have a substitute teacher taking her place, and she is in high hopes that the doctors can find a relief for the situation that she has at the present time so that she can continue at her lifelong profession. Anything you’d like to add to that, Dessie?

D.B.: Well, it’s been 38 happy years, I’ve enjoyed it, all of it. The good and the bad. [41:23]

C.D.: Okay, that’s all we have for the questions, Dessie, so I thank you very much for your time, I’m certain that this tape will come in value on relating the legacy of the rural schools in Nebraska.

D.B.: Thank you.

Tape ends at 41:52



