

University of Nebraska at Kearney

OpenSPACES@UNK: Scholarship, Preservation, and Creative Endeavors

Oral Histories

Country School Legacy

12-12-1980

Goldie Ewing Wilson Bigsby

Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openspaces.unk.edu/schooloralhistory>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Interview Date: December 12, 1980

Interviewer: S.S. – Sandy Scofield

Interviewee: G.B. – Goldie Bigsby

S.S.: Bigsby is being interviewed by Sandy Skolfield for the Country School Legacy Project. You might want to give me your full name here, since I just –

G.B.: I'm Goldie Bigsby. I – My maiden name was Ewing. And – I – I taught in a rural, one room school, as well as having – all my elementary grades in a one room school. And I was looking at it the other day, and my first term of school, when I was 5 years old, was three months long. And the longest term in my elementary years was 8 months. I was surprised when looking back through that – I made a grade every year, and you wonder, now we have 9 months for all [can't understand]. Anyway, I did a grade each year.

S.S.: What school did you go to and teach in?

G.B.: My – my education, you mean? Or teaching?

S.S.: Well, let's start with where you got – where you went to country school first.

G.B.: Right here, in this district where I live, Carter Canyon School, District #26, Scottsbluff County. And – when I graduate out of the 8th grade, then I had to go to Gering to go to high school. Because there were no grades higher in the district, and I had to pass a test in about 14 or 15 subjects before I could go to high school, because they wouldn't pay the tuition unless you passed the state tests.

S.S.: Remember doing anything in particular to prepare for that? [1:51]

G.B.: Well – just – study through the 8th grade. We always kept in mind that we had to pass those tests. And so we studied pretty hard. [chuckles] Most of our teachers at that time came from the East, we were [can't understand] lady in the school district who taught two years, who lived here, she homestead here, and so she – she taught us for a while, but – most of our teachers had to be imported from the East because there were no qualified teachers out here. It took very little to qualify, as far as that goes. I don't think that some of the teachers had an 8th grade education that were teaching back in the early 1900s. But they took some kind of a state test, I think, and got a teaching certificate. But – it was hard to get teachers. The wages were low – I suppose they compare the wages today as far as the price of things are concerned, but my they came out here and taught for 45 and 55 dollars a month.

S.S.: Okay, so, how did – how did you become a teacher, had things changed?

G.B.: Well –

S.S.: Somewhat?

G.B.: Not too much. Because I started teaching out of high school. I had taken a Normal Training course in high school, and started teaching after I was 17. And started out in the same kind of – type of school that I had attended, so I knew what it was all about. How you had to teach all 8 grades and – had to stay

in the district, and all the requirements of a teacher in those days were different than today, that's for sure.

S.S.: Can you elaborate on that a little? [3:42]

G.B.: Well, they of course wanted you to stay in the district, and you usually had to because you'd start from town that you had to stay with someone in the district, and – then, oh – they wanted you to be a good, moral character. I suppose if someone smoked a cigarette back then, that'd be the end of the contract right there. [chuckles] And – it was a – there was plenty of recreation and fun right in the school district, at the school house. We had Saturday night dances with the piddler[?] and somebody playing the old organ – and pie suppers, where ladies brought the pies and – bought them. And box suppers – fill a box with some food and made a lot of boxes. That money was usually used for – something for the school – what the school might need. There weren't – many – much equipment in school at that time. Because, I can remember, buying pictures, even, for the walls with some of the money we would raise. And lamps – we even bought the lamps that were on brackets, you know, and would hang around on the wall to give us lighting. And, if you wanted playground equipment, we had to raise money to buy that – and library books, too, we just had a very few books for our library. When I was going to school, we produced our own books, we had to buy our own books. But, later, they got – the district would buy the – books.

S.S.: Were you told what to buy, or was it kind of up to your parents' judgement, what to pick out? [5:21]

G.B.: The books? That we had to buy?

S.S.: Mm-hmm.

G.B.: No, the teacher would make out a list about the books she wanted us to have. And then it would have to go to Omaha before it could be billed, and it would come back. And she was without books for, you know, about the 1st month of school.

S.S.: What'd you do in the meantime?

G.B.: Well, we used old books that maybe our brothers and sisters – older brothers and sisters had used, we used those until we got our new books. But a book was something to be prized when you did get it, you took good care of it because you knew it was your own. But later, the district got somebody that bought the books, but got very few other supplies for you. [long pause]

S.S.: -The things in particular that happened to you, or went on in the school when you was – when you were a student that stand out in your mind? [6:09]

G.B.: Oh, let's see. The school house was up here at the top of the hills, about a mile farther West here, and – a beautiful place for a school house, and I can remember that – we would – roam around down through the canyons and pick-up pine cones and things like that, recess, [can't understand]. We had one man teacher, we really enjoyed him. He would really get out and play with us, we could sleigh down hills, have a good time. But that's the only man teacher we had – just the one. But, we played games, not any playground equipment, of course, to be had, so we played ring-around-the-rosie, and Annie-Annie-Over, and games like that – drop the handkerchief. And then when I was going to school here, we had literary exercises, and that meant once a month at the school house. That's when all the people in

the community would take a part, and we'd put on plays, and have debates, and recitations and singing. And that's about all the recreation, entertainment that the community had, outside of play parks. [chuckles]. We'd sing and dance to their singing – and you couldn't call it dancing [chuckles] if we sang, it was alright. Some of the people in the community was a little [can't understand] to dancing.

S.S.: Do you remember any of the pieces or the topics that came up at literary? [7:58]

G.B.: No, I can't remember. I wish I could. But they'd – sometimes have some just funny ones, you know, or stupid ones. Well I remember one was – was – is the most useful – what is the most useful in your kitchen? The dishrag or your wife? And, of course, that would just be for fun. But some of them are quite serious on political subjects or something like that.

S.S.: You remember any hot political arguments at the time you were a student?

G.B.: Well – no, I don't. See, the First World War, I remember, was going on when I was about a 7th grader or a 6th grader, and – that brought up a lot of patriotism. And I can remember most of our programs that – for those - that year or two were along the patriotic line. And –

S.S.: What kind of things would go on at a patriotic program? [9:02]

G.B.: Well, they might have – oh – poetry along that line, you know, or songs. And then they had drives to raise money – for the war bonds. And that would be taken care of at the community meetings like that. I can remember the day the armistice was signed, we could hear the bells, even in Gering the church bells were ringing. Even out here, we could hear the bells.

S.S.: How far out are we?

G.B.: About 10 miles from Gering.

S.S.: What was the curriculum like when you were a student?

G.B.: Well, I don't know how the teacher managed – well, I do know, too, because I had to do the same thing when I started teaching. But you had 8 grades, And – as I said before, those – these 8th graders had to pass these tests and I think in about 13 subjects. She could only allow about 15 minutes for each class – in each subject. And, then later when I got to teaching, they combined some of the grades, and all their [can't understand] the curriculum for every other year. The 5th and 6th grades would be combined, and the 5th grade – then one year you would teach certain things, and the next year certain things to this combined group of children. Which made it even a little bit easier – it made for fewer classes. But, I think the advantages of that whole way of teaching, having to teach in one room schools, was that the other children learned from the older children, if they listened. And you'd be surprised what they – they would remember, while the other children were reciting their recitations. And that was an advantage, and then you could also teach the older ones to help the little ones and I think that's a good lesson for any children to learn. So, it had its advantages, too.

S.S.: Mm-hmm. What was your favorite subject in school? [11:22]

G.B.: History.

S.S.: Any particular thing about History that appealed to you?

G.B.: Oh, just – anything in History, I loved, and I – I still like historical novels. And I majored in History when I went to Chadron - College.

S.S.: What kinds of materials were available to you when you were a student to study history?

G.B.: Just about the textbook and that was it. And newspapers, of course, we'd – especially when the war was going on. No, our textbooks were just about the only source we had of learning. The children today have so many more advantages that way. T.V., radio –

S.S.: Were there any subjects that you weren't terribly fond of?

G.B.: Well, let's see, I was a pretty good speller, but I'm not anymore. But – well, some subjects that we had to take was agriculture – of course, I knew everything about agriculture, my father did, anyway. And that was a subject we had – we had to have a subject called Physalogy[?] and we call it Health today. And Arthography[?] was spelling. We've got different names for them, even. [chuckles] And –

S.S.: Can you spell Arthography? You had to spell it, right? [both chuckles] What kinds of things were you taught in Physiology, for instance?

G.B.: Well, the parts of the body, and the bones, and – just – general, mostly about the body. And hygiene, some hygiene.

S.S.: Agriculture is something that you're the first person I've talked to that's mentioned that. Was that unique in this school?

G.B.: I – it – a – no, all the 8th graders had to take it. And – for half a year, and then we had to pass the test, and it was mostly about the breeds of [can't understand], I remember that, the breeds of horses and pigs and cattle, and like that.

S.S.: I suppose, based upon the assumption that most of you would live in an agricultural community – [13:33]

G.B.: Uh-Huh, I would imagine. But it ought to have been a high school subject, I always thought, instead of 8th grade.

S.S.: Talking about preparing for those 8th grade exams, what was the format of the exam when you went to take it? Writing or multiple choice?

G.B.: Well, there were about 10 questions in each subject. It took 2 days to take the test. We went to the county court house in Gering to take the test. And – it was about 10 questions in each section and – well, we had to pass in drawing, too, they'd tell you to draw this or that, maybe a bowl of fruit or a house. So, that was another subject, was drawing.

S.S.: Did you get any training in drawing?

G.B.: Yes, we'd have it – we had a - what we called art every Friday afternoon. We'd draw sometimes or construct things. I carried that through, too, when I started teaching – one room school.

S.S.: Mm-hmmm.

G.B.: Kids looked forward to Friday afternoon.

S.S.: You mentioned earlier about having one man teacher and the rest were women teachers. Is it possible to generalize at all about your teachers, or say anything about them?

G.B.: Well – they were all, let’s see, I believe they were all unmarried except this lady who lived in the community, our next neighbor up the road here, Mrs. Hampton. And outside of that, I believe they were all unmarried. The man was, too, he came from - in Lincoln, I believe. But, they were young girls usually, young women in their early twenties. But – one lady we had who came out from the east, she – we could – as pupils we would watch her, and she would seem so sad, and finally one day we caught her crying, and – of course, you didn’t ask questions or anything, but she went back to her home for Thanksgiving and she never came back. So I guess she was just plain homesick [chuckles].

S.S.: Did it take a certain type of person, you think, to stick with it out here and make a successful teacher?

G.B.: I think so, especially if they came from a more populated area, you know – there wasn’t any place to go in the evening, and no way to go, as far as that goes. And I can’t remember very many of these young teachers getting dates. We kept 2 or 3 teachers in our home, boarded them, but there were no young – didn’t seem to be any young men around at that time, we were all just in school. And there, it would get real lonesome, I think, for them. [15:56]

S.S.: What about the job itself, was I pretty demanding? Other than having all those students to teach, all those grades?

G.B.: Ah, well, yes – and the janitor work, we had to do all our own janitor work, you know, wash the curtains and scrub the floor, and do all that. And carry in our wood or coal, whichever it was, for the old pot-bellied stove.

S.S.: Anything else – far as responsibilities? As if there weren’t enough.

G.B.: They were expected to put on programs, you know, for Christmas and Easter, and then help with this literary society, that you would train the children to be in a play or something like that.

S.S.: Mm-hmm. Do you remember anything that you did for the literary society?

G.B.: Oh, I always spoke pieces. [chuckles]

S.S.: Can you remember the pieces? [17:08]

G.B.: Oh, I’d say – no, I don’t believe I can remember any in particular. I think I know the first one I ever spoke – oh, I can’t recall it right now. It was something about spring time and it was our last day of school. And I actually [can’t understand] springtime around. I’ve always liked to recite poetry and memorize it.

S.S.: You think you got that as part of your school experience?

G.B.: Oh, I think so – I really think so. And I tried to carry it over into my teaching. Most of my pupils, I demanded that they memorize something once in a while. It’s good for the mind, I think. Fun, too, I think it is.

S.S.: How many children did you go to school with?

G.B.: There were about 10 to 12, I think, in the school, here in this district, most of the time. Then when I started teaching in a one room school, I had as high as 23, I believe, the first year I taught.

S.S.: That must have been pretty demanding. [18:21]

G.B.: Oh, it was. And – but I was young, then. I wouldn't want to do it over again. But, they expect you – you need to be out on the playground, noon's recess with them, you know, and play with them – I enjoyed that, though, because I liked to have fun with the kids, we did have fun. Then when you got in the school room, you had to "settle down there, now."

S.S.: Did you have any trouble with that? Being - You were pretty close, I imagine, in age to some of these students.

G.B.: Yes, I had a pupil who was just a year younger than I. 16 years old. No, I never had any trouble like that, for some reason, I just started out right, I guess. Had to let them know who's boss.

S.S.: Are a lot – are a lot of the families that went to school out here when you did, and then when you taught, has the community pretty much stayed intact, or has the community changed some?

G.B.: This community doesn't change at all. Really. All the neighbors up and down this road had lived here since I was a little girl. They homestead this land, you see, so they all came here about 19 – we came here 1910. And – it's the same neighborhood with the 3rd generation, lots of times living on the same land, they just build a house and stay on the land. Same families are here.

S.S.: I know there's lots and lots of Ewings as I came up the hill.

G.B.: Yeah [19:49]

S.S.: What are the other family names out here?

G.B.: Well, Hamptons was – is next door up here, and she was the teacher we had was Mrs. Hampton. And the Ewings still live at the top of the hill, and these are my brothers down the road, and my daughter now has built her home across the road, and the children just stay on the land.

S.S.: Does that in any way affect the development of school? Does the school reflect the values of these people, pretty much? Or is it affected by the teacher that comes in? Or what?

G.B.: I think maybe more by the people who have lived here all these years. They started it and they watched it grow, and I think they have progressed, marvelously, for being the old type of people, you know, mostly. I forgot to mention that the school house, also, was the center for the religious part of the community and held Sunday school in the school house. And if there was a minister traveling around someplace that they could get, he would come preach. So it was also their church.

S.S.: Is there anymore you can tell me about the history of this Cedar Canyon district?

G.B.: The Cedar Canyon is around the - what is really the Cedar Canyon is around the point of the hill here, from about – this is Carter Canyon here.

S.S.: This is Carter Canyon?

G.B.: Uh-Huh, but they've been consolidated now, they call it Cedar Canyon School. Well I taught in that school for 10 years, with Cedar Canyon, but it was a two rural school, and we even had 3 teachers for a couple years there. But it's an old, old district – the first school here in Carter Canyon district was held in 1890 – where did I read that? – 96? I believe, in 1896. And the district down there had school before that. About 1892. So the schools are all old, they were all homesteaders. My grandfather homesteaded about 3 miles East of here. And my father went to the same school I went to school – in the same district, not the same building or anything. But my father went to it, and now his great grandchildren gone to the same school – in this district. So you see, it doesn't change very much [chuckles] The Hamptons and the Alekirks[?] are old-timers here.

S.S.: It seems like, then, it would be a pretty close-knit community.

G.B.: Oh, it is. [22:30]

S.S.: So, probably you didn't have any of the conflicts in your school that some of the other –

G.B.: No, I'm sure not.

S.S.: - communities did.

G.B.: Uh-huh.

S.S.: At least, you don't – you're not aware of any.

G.B.: No.

S.S.: Some might run into never could decide where to place the building from one year to the next [chuckles]

G.B.: Yes. [chuckles] No, never had any trouble. So many people moved away from this end of the district – the West end. And they built another schoolhouse a bit down here at the East side of the district. And – stopped using the one at the West, then this East one passed away when they consolidated and went down to the Cedar Canyon school.

S.S.: Mm-hmm. So, tell me how you got into teaching? How did you decide to pursue - ?

G.B.: Well, I think I loved my teachers, and I think I must have had some inspiring teachers. That's all I can figure, and I just always knew that I was going to be a school teacher. If we played house, we didn't play house very long before it turned into playing school [chuckles] and I was the teacher. And then I got into high school, and it was easy to get a certificate, of course, back in those days, I got my certificate in 1924, after passing state examinations and that – was good for a couple of years. Then I would go and earn a few hours at Chadron, and then Scottsbluff Junior College, and I went one year – well, two years, I guess – two summers, I mean, really. I never did go a full year of college – term, full term. Just the summer months, and night classes. And I didn't get my – degree until I was – what? – 54 years old, I guess.

S.S.: And then – you got a bachelor's degree from Chadron State?

G.B.: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yes. Finally made it [chuckles]

S.S.: When – when you first went into normal training in high school, what kinds of things did they teach you? In normal training?

G.B.: Well, you had to take about 6 weeks in each of these subjects which you were going to have to pass a test in, and those subjects, I was looking up the other day, compare almost exactly with the 8th grade subjects that I had to pass a test in. And – so, it was just really a review – of your earlier years in school. And what we would have to be teaching, then, when we teach.

S.S.: Mm-hmm. Did you get anything that would be com- comparable to what we call “methods?”

G.B.: Oh, yes, we had methods. [25:05]

S.S.: What kinds of things went on in methods class then?

G.B.: Well, how to make out your plans, and you know, what the curriculum would be like, things like that. But – [muffled voices in background] – I just enjoyed it.

S.S.: Anything else you remember about normal training? Did you have student teaching, for instance?

G.B.: Oh, yes. But not very long, I just – I can’t remember how long, but we taught – we went into a room in Gering with some of the teachers there and – taught a class a day, or something like that. My teacher was Mrs. McHenry, and she taught in Gering for years and years, and normal training [can’t understand] let out, and then she had library. I don’t know how long it’s been since they had normal training in high school. Quite a few years.

S.S.: I believe I had talked to one lady who had taken it in the 30s, but I may have been mistaken about that. Not sure I have my dates right the day I talked with her.

G.B.: It could’ve extended that long, I just really don’t know. Now, my sister took it and she graduated in ’28. So it could’ve extended into the ‘30s someplace. Till they began to demand more for – requirements of the teachers.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. As you compare teacher training then and teacher training now, sounds like you felt like you were pretty well prepared, you’d seen a country school and had gone through this – were there any things you would’ve changed or done differently?

G.B.: Oh, I don’t think so – of course, I haven’t gone to school for so many years – college, that I don’t know what the methods[? Chair moves at same time, can’t hear well] are now. But – I would think about the same.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. What about students who – remember any students in particular that - ? [27:05]

G.B.: Jean Lovus[?] is a lawyer, isn’t she?

S.S.: Yeah.

G.B.: [chuckles]

S.S.: She was one of your students?

G.B.: [people in background talking throughout this entire section] Yeah, she was one of my students, as far as I know she might be the only one, but I can’t keep track of all of them. When I got into town, the

school, of course – here you have 30 students for 1 year, and the next year 30 more. Where in the rural school I would have the same children as long as I went back to the school – [can't understand, people talking in background] had graduated. But, through the years, you really got to know them with your country children, a lot more than the city – children. But, I've had preachers and – lot - quite a few teachers, lot that have gone into the teaching profession – I like that, when they tell me they're gonna be a teacher. [chuckles]

S.S.: Ah, so, how many years did you teach, then, in a country school?

G.B.: In the country schools? Let's see...I taught – sixteen? – sixteen years in town, and I taught 36 years, so it must have been 30 years. A part of this was in Harrisburg, which is a little city in that county. [28:03]

S.S.: Uh-Huh.

G.B.: I taught 4 years there, you know, at Harrisburg schools.

S.S.: Was that a very big school when you taught there?

G.B.: Well – it was a two teacher school, and I had the first through the fourth grade. And I suppose I had about 15 to 20 students.

S.S.: So, essentially, that was a country school in a little town.

G.B.: Yes, just – yes, there's no difference at all between that -

S.S.: Uh-Huh.

G.B.: And any two teacher school I ever taught.

S.S.: Uh-Huh. How would you compare that school to the school here, that you taught in your home district?

G.B.: Oh, about the same. Neither of them had any foreign element.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm.

G.B.: So, they were about the same.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. [long pause] I understand that Harrisburg has converted a log cabin into a historical site.

G.B.: Yes.

S.S.: Have you seen that?

G.B.: Yes. It's really crude inside, bit it's really fixed exactly as it was, they say.

S.S.: Uh-Huh. Historically very accurate, then?

G.B.: Oh, I would feel sorry for all the light – if I remember, I think there was only one tiny little window in that place. And when I went to school in the – one room school, we had windows on both sides of the room, which was cross light, and that would make them scream today when –

S.S.: Yeah [chuckles]

G.B.: So that little log school house over there, it had very little lighting.

S.S.: The school you went to was a log school house? Or, you're talking about –

G.B.: No.

S.S.: The one in Harrisburg?

G.B.: The one in Harrisburg. No, no, ours was a frame building.

S.S.: Ah. Did you know of other schools around at the time you were a student, were there other schools around the area that you knew of?

G.B.: You mean, close enough to – no, not too close. The Cedar Valley school would have been down here at that time, but that would be the closest one.

S.S.: Probably not much opportunities there to go back and forth with other country schools.

G.B.: Oh, no, no. None of that.

S.S.: Did that change at all by the time you got into teaching?

G.B.: Not too much when I first started. Of course, in later years, now when I got down here in the Cedar Valley school, what – we played ball with the different schools around the community and – the county. Baseball, and basketball. [long pause]

S.S.: Are there other things that you recall about other uses that the school building has been put – been put to. I think we've covered that quite a bit, but are there – are there other things that the school building itself has been used for?

G.B.: I don't believe so, I was trying to think of maybe election days, now sometimes they would – vote at the school house. Not when I was a little girl, but when I taught at Cedar Valley, I know they voted at the school house.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm.

G.B.: But that's about it. Dances, and programs.

S.S.: Can you give me an idea of – let's talk about when you were a student again, can you give me an idea of generally how the day would progress. As you came to school in the morning, what would happen first? And then –

G.B.: Back in the one room school, you mean?

S.S.: Mm-Hmm.

G.B.: Well, let's see, the first thing in the morning would be – get there. Get [chuckles] – and put your lunch bucket back on the bench at the back of the room. That's where they lined up the lunch buckets. And we didn't have any well on the school grounds, so the big boys, they had to go about a quarter of a mile to my uncle's place to get a bucket of water. There was a wash basin on that bench –

[First side of tape ends at 32:11]

G.B.: - I think. Every Spring we expected to have a disease going around. And school would be dismissed for a couple – three weeks while we had the measles and the chicken pox and the small pox and even diphtheria. And perhaps that was the contributor to that factor – that – let's see, then we would play till the bell rang and the first [can't understand] happened and [can't understand] was open to exercises, and that's when they got to sing, or teacher might read a book to us one chapter at a time each morning. And – then she'd start out the classes. I remember the first classes were always arithmetic, she said you need clear minds when you do your math, so – so you better have it first. So we always had arithmetic classes first. And then they progressed and about 10:30 we'd have recess and we'd get to play for fifteen minutes, and go to the bathroom, which, you know, was at the end of two little paths out there.

[1:10] And summer, why it was fall and spring and it was warm well it was kind of fun to go to the bathroom. But in winter it was a hurry-up job. [chuckles] You got there and you got back. And then at noon, we had an hour noon, and – in the winter time I can remember we had a few hot lunches, even. Some children would bring some milk and some other children would bring potatoes or an onion or something, we'd have to take a soup. It could be cooking on that pot-bellied stove while we were giving our recitations. And then if it was real cold weather, we all wanted to sit around the stove for about an hour or two, you know. We'd want to be real close to the stove, you know, because we'd be cold –

S.S.: It was cold out around the –

G.B.: Yes. And we would be cold.

S.S.: Uh-Huh.

G.B.: Because the fire couldn't be kept all night. The teacher was supposed to get there by 8 o'clock to [can't understand] and get the fire going, get the place warmed up as much as she could. But it was pretty cold in the winter-time, anyplace [can't understand] and – and we never got out of school until 4 o'clock. [can't understand] I see children on the streets most times after 2 or 3 o'clock –

S.S.: Mm-Hmmm.

G.B.: But – then the teacher wasn't allowed to leave until 4:30.

S.S.: Did that – was that pretty much the same when you taught, then? The –

G.B.: Yes, when I started teaching –

S.S.: What about the daily routine? Did it change at all? [2:45]

G.B.: Not too much, no, it was just much the same thing. [long pause] We were a little bit more mobile, I think, by the time I started teaching, of course. I had boyfriends who had automobiles, and it wasn't so boring, I could go places. We could even go into Scottsbluff or Gering for a picture show. But the teachers out here in that early day they just were st- they stayed, there was no way to get away. Automobiles were just coming into use about 1914 in this community. One or two people had an automobile, before that it was just all horses and buggies or horse and wagon. And my father never took me to school a day in my life, and we had to walk about a mile or a mile and a quarter. You know, I get to thinking about these cool winter mornings, how we used to do it, but I guess we did.

S.S.: So – you never stayed home for bad weather?

G.B.: Well, probably, I imagine we would've if there was a bad blizzard, because it would've been dangerous to have gone that far in a – if a blizzard was on. [3:51]

S.S.: Mm-Hmm.

G.B.: Now, later, my brother, he was my – my younger brother got to ride a horse to school, he was going to school on the hill. The rest of us older ones were already going to high school. My little brother, he got to ride a horse to school. And when I began teaching over in Banner County, a few of the children rode horses to school. There was a shed where they could tie them. That caused another problem for the teacher, of course. The boys wanted to play around the horses – but we had to have a rule that they couldn't take them out of the barn.

S.S.: Did the teacher ride a horse? To school?

G.B.: One of our teachers did from about three miles down here in the valley, rode to the school – the west school on the hill. And – she must've had a pretty rough time, I think back a while, one morning I think her horse threw her, and her head hit a rock, and we found her lying in the middle of the road, just unconscious. So, we came back home and got our fathers – my father and the neighbor went up and got her in a wagon and took her home. So we had a little vacation until she got the bump on her head healed up. [chuckles]

S.S.: Did you board out when you taught in – [5:22]

G.B.: Yes. Yes, I boarded with a family [can't understand] over there.

S.S.: Uh-Huh. What was that like?

G.B.: Oh, it was a real nice home, I remember she was a real good cook, and the nicest part of that was that the little girl that attended the school would run home, it was only a quarter of a mile, she would go home and eat her lunch real quickly, and then the lady would put the hot food in a bucket and send it back with her, and oh, she spent – she brought nice dinners back [can't understand] that were hot. That was real nice. And we'd play cards in the evening and they were a real jolly couple.

S.S.: As you look back now on your experiences in a country school, generally how would you evaluate the quality of education in a country school?

G.B.: Then? [6:16]

S.S.: Mm-Hmm.

G.B.: Well – I think it was good. It seemed to be sufficient. Since, you know, what a good job those students have done of making a living, I think those early students would've all turned out to be ranchers or mostly ranchers and farmers. Not many of them went on for a college education, and they just expected that that was what they were going to do anyway. And many of them dropped out of the 8th grade, didn't even continue through high school. But, surely, it must've done a pretty good job, it gave them the necessities for life, wouldn't you say?

S.S.: Mm-Hmm.

G.B.: And –

S.S.: How do you – go ahead.

G.B.: And, maybe today we're giving them a lot of nonessential – or giving priority to nonessential, rather than essential. Since we find out, you know, that we are having problems with – reading, spelling, and writing. It seems like we had a class in penmanship, you know, every day for 15 minutes. We made our circles and our push-pulls, the old palmer method, but people used to pride themselves on being good writers and now they just don't care.

S.S.: Of course, you always taught at the elementary levels – [7:49]

G.B.: Yes, yes.

S.S.: - so maybe this isn't a fair question, but did you ever have an opportunity to compare how well the students did as they came into the city schools – after completing 8th grade in the rural schools? Was there any problem with keeping up academically?

G.B.: Well, I – I don't – I didn't have any problems. See, I had to fit in with the 9th – after the 9th grade. In fact, I was a top student all the way through high school. I was looking through my grades the other day, and a 98, of course they graded with numbers, 98's. I never got below a 98 in Algebra. So, you see, they must've done - definitely good job.

S.S.: So the rural school students were perhaps even a stronger student than the –

G.B.: I think that you'll find that true even now. Because the students that go from this district into town are top students almost every time. So I think they're still doing a good job in the rural schools.

S.S.: What, if any, influence do you think going to a rural school had on your life other than that? [8:50]

G.B.: Well – I don't know of anything, really. You'd think it might be a social problem, and it could be, I suppose, for some students, don't you suppose? Going from a rural school to a high school in town? But it wasn't with me, I don't remember having any problem along the social line, either.

S.S.: Well, that may depend more on the individual than[?], rather than the school.

G.B.: I – I – I think so, I suppose.

S.S.: Are there any other things about rural schools that – you see different today than they were when you were either going or –

G.B.: Well, first, the pupils have – have lots more opportunities – in athletics, especially – see, we had nothing along that line. And now the rural schools have their tournaments and – it's not – they're not the center of the community like they were, of course, since people have – have their automobiles and can move around more – and you can't tell the country people from the city people, really.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. [10:10]

G.B.: For their social life.

S.S.: Now this new building that I passed as I came up to your home today doesn't meet the stereotype of a country school at all –

G.B.: No, no.

S.S.: It's very modern, very building – large building. How long has that one been there?

G.B.: About 12 years.

S.S.: And how many students did you – did you say go to that school?

G.B.: I'd say there're about – around 80.

S.S.: Uh-Huh.

G.B.: There are about 20 in a room down there and they – combine 2 grades. And – and four teachers. Then they hire an extra kindergarten teacher for a half-year.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. So that's a – that's a very modern looking school, and as you said, probably doesn't play the role in the community, then, that the school did.

G.B.: No.

S.S.: The facilities look to be just marvelous.

G.B.: Oh, they are. It's a very nice school. Now, course Banner County now is one school. They consolidated all the districts [someone coughs loudly in background] into the one.

S.S.: Are there other counties around here that have done that? [11:20]

G.B.: I – I don't know of a one. I really don't know of another, if maybe there are others in Nebraska, but I doubt it, I think I read one time that it is the only county school – it is the only school county.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. How do –

G.B.: And it seems to work out.

S.S.: No problems connected with that?

G.B.: Uh – blizzardy weather once in a while, they'll have to close the school. But outside of that, there's no problems.

S.S.: Mm-Hmm. Some of these schools that have been consolidated here in Scottsbluff County, was that a controversial issue when it happened? [11:50]

G.B.: Oh, yes. They, of course – everybody wants to hang on to their little community. But – I think after a few years they get over that and they see that it is better for the students. That's real bad if there's only 1 or 2 pupils in a grade, I don't think that's very good. That was one of the drawbacks to the old country school, because once in a while you'd only have one or two pupils in a grade, and sometimes no pupil in a grade at all.

S.S.: Okay, is there anything else we should talk about here about country schools? I don't have any more questions, unless you have things about them [?].

G.B.: I think I'm about - [chuckles] I'm talked out.

S.S.: Talked out? [chuckles] Okay, thank you.

[Second side of tape ends at 12:40]

