

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. AGNES CUNNINGHAM
August 21, 1973
Wheaton, Minnesota
Joni Kennedy

Q. The date is August 21st, 1973. I am Research Associate Joni Kennedy and I am in Mrs. Agnes Cunningham's home in Wheaton, Minnesota. Mrs. Cunningham is going to tell me of her personal life, her life as a teacher and other things that happened around in Traverse County and Big Stone County. Mrs. Cunningham, what was your full name, your maiden name, and when and where were you born?

Agnes O'Leary, born in Beardseley in Big Stone County, October fifth, 1907.

Q. Could you tell me briefly about your family history?

My father's family came to that same farm in 1879 from New York - from St. Paul but had been originally from New York state. And my mother's family came in 1880. My grandmother always talked about the blizzard of 1880. They arrived at her husband's brother's home, there were about ten of them in the original shanty, through this three-day blizzard. October 1880.

Q. How did they survive?

I don't know how they had, well I suppose they had to have provisions enough to last them for a long time because the railroad came only to Morris at that time. So they would have to have quite a bit of groceries on hand. That would be about close to forty miles so you see they'd have to be pretty well stocked for the winter. They did use a lot of wild geese, ducks and so forth and put them down in crock jars with salt on them was the way they preserved them. My mother used to just hate wild fowl because she had to get so much of it ready to use for their living when she was child and a young girl. So I suppose they were well-stocked. Then they had come in 1879, my dad's father with, well they must have had oxen, because we had a yoke in our grainery that he had had, and horses, and come across from St. Paul, and then the railroad came to Morris in 1880 so my mother's folks came that far by train. And my dad lived on the same farm where his father had homesteaded. And had a tree claim of 160 acres across the road just for planting trees on, so he got the half section, one as a homestead one quarter, and one as the tree claim. And my mother's dad as far as I, yeah he had a tree claim too; he must have gotten a half-section the same way. Because he had one adjoining the home place too.

Q. How many trees do you have to plant on a tree claim? Do you know?

Well I know that ours were half the length of the quarter. I don't know how many acres, and not too wide. Maybe like a fourth of the width of it or less than that. I just can't say how many acres.

Q. Could you give me your father's and mother's names?

My father was John William O'Leary. My mother was Lucy Hanratty. And this was Big Stone County where we were.

Q. Where did you go to school?

I went to the elementary school in a one-room school in Big Stone County. About two and a half miles east and a half mile north of Beardsley and it was called Ohio. Why I don't know but everybody knew where the Ohio school was. And it was one of the, it was the original building there. And then later on my children went to the very same type of building all through, up until 1954. Conservative people in that District 6 of Traverse County never built a second building. They still had the original building.

Q. The same original schoolhouse?

Same original schoolhouse. My husband's uncle and my children went to the same building. One of the old type with three windows on each side and a cloakroom and coal shed on one end of it. And when I went to school we carried the water about a quarter of a mile. Two children would go down with a pail the first recess in the morning carry one pail of water back for about, never less than twenty pupils, to use for everything. Washing our hands, drinking, if it was real hot weather we might go for another pail at noon. I don't know how we got along with such a little bit of water. Sanitary conditons weren't as they are now, I suppose we all washed in the same water.

(065--5 minutes)

Q. And that went for drinking water too?

That was everything. When my children went to school there was a well right by the school and they just pumped the water and had as much as they needed but still they had the old drinking fountain and wash basin where you're washing your hands although they poured water over each one's hands by that time but when I went to school they didn't.

Q. Can you describe your teacher?

My first teacher was my aunt, that's why I started when I was five years old. My mother's sister was teaching the school so I went to school to her. And then she came back and was my fourth grade teacher. And she, when she started to teach must have been right out of high school. Her first year of teaching.

Q. Did they allow that then?

Mm hm. And then she went back to school, she just taught one year and then went back to school, and had one year training at Moorhead. And came back, taught again. And I think most of the teachers that I had in elementary did not have one full year above high school when they started. In fact at that time some places, they were having Normal training as their fourth year of high school. And then later on they had Normal training as a fifth year. Wheaton had a Normal training department until about in the nineteen forties, before it was closed. I don't know what date.

Q. So they actually had a teacher training program here in Wheaton?

In Wheaton. I think maybe almost every county seat, I know Ortonville had one too.

Q. What were the stipulations on getting a teacher's certificate for teaching throughout the years?

Well I know that at that time, when I started school, some of them started right out of high school, but by the time I started to teach in 1925 teachers were beginning to be alarmed at, at sometime they might have to have two years' training. They could go out and teach in the, the rural schools didn't require as much qualification. One year, they were ready for a rural school. Two years they could teach in the elementary or high school and, no not high school I don't think, elementary, I'd better stick to elementary. In the town. But there was no talk about having to have a degree to teach elementary at that time. And I don't know just when they... They had what they called first and second grade certificates when I was going to school, not when I started to teach. There was no such thing as a second grade certificate. And the first grade certificate was one who had one full year training above high school. And I think they must have been--they could get these teacher's certificates by just taking a teacher's examination. And if they could qualify out of high school, pass the exams, they got a second grade certificate.

Q. But usually to get a first or second grade certificate they went one year?

No, not for second. They took the examinations, they took teacher's examinations. If they could pass them out of high school they started to teach.

Q. But for the other grades and for the high school it was....

Well now this doesn't mean the grade they taught, this was the, what they called the certificate. First grade certificate was a higher certificate than a second grade certificate.

Q. Oh.

It wasn't the grade they were teaching. But this qualified them to teach at least in rural schools. I didn't know much about what they needed for a town school when I was a youngster because we always went to the country school and my dad was always on the school board and I'd hear them talking about these things. And they didn't have nine months for a term at the time I started to school. Our school always did as long as I could remember but there were many schools in Big Stone County that had as little as eight months at that time. And when my mother went to school first she went to school three months in the spring and three in the fall. When they first started having schools around Big Stone County. Because getting back and forth to school was hard in the winter so they went in the spring and fall. Six months a year.

(123--10 minutes)

Q. Mmm. Can you describe some of the classes when you went to school?

Well the older people like the seventh and eighth grade and the older ones would help the little ones. I can remember my daughter saying she did the same thing though. She went to a country school. And our reading consisted entirely of reading aloud. We had no workbooks. I never was taught phonics in the elementary school.

Q. How did you learn them then?

I didn't, until I went to teachers' training. I knew what the sounds were but to know the correct terms for blends or anything like that, I never heard of such a thing. But I was the world's worst speller, that probably had something to do with it.

Q. When did you graduate?

From high school? 1923.

Q. And you graduated in that same school house?

No, see that was out in the country and then I went to the first two years of high school to Graceville and stayed at St. Marys' Academy in the boarding school there. There were over seventy girls there at that time from quite an area clear down as far as DeGraff and out into South Dakota. They'd come there and board because for rural people, they weren't all rural people that went to school there either but, well, there were some came from Minneapolis and St. Paul. But for rural people to get to high school was quite an effort in those days; you didn't have a school bus so I went in there and boarded at the convent, and went to school. Went home every Friday night. And then the last two years I rode horseback to Beardsley. We were three miles and a half from Beardsley.

Q. Beardsley only had a high school for two years?

No, they had the whole thing but I didn't go into Graceville the last two years, I went to Beardsley. They had four years of high school. But you see it was getting me to school. I started to high school when I was eleven and to turn me loose to go three miles and a half to Beardsley, there wasn't any way for me to go you see.

Q. You started when you were eleven?

Well I was twelve that fall but I wasn't twelve when school started. And they didn't want to turn me loose, send me off to school by myself at that age so they sent me to Graceville to board the first two years. Then money got kinda hard to get, what would happen then, about 1921? I don't think we had any depression or anything then but they couldn't afford to send me to Graceville so I went on horseback to Beardsley.

Q. Did you skip any grades?

Yes, I started young because my aunt was teaching and when she came back and taught me in the fourth grade she skipped me into the sixth grade. Which I would never do to anybody. The social part of it you know, when I graduated at fifteen I couldn't do the things the other kids were doing so that was the part that I disliked most about it.

Q. After you graduated at age fifteen, what did you do?

I went to Moorhead planning to take one year's training and teach in a rural school but nobody would hire a sixteen-year-old so I--it was lucky for me, I went back and took two years. Then I still taught in a rural school because at seventeen people weren't very anxious for me either, for some reason. And then I taught in a rural school for two years in Big Stone County. Then I went out and taught in a two-room school in Peerless, Montana.

(174--15 minutes)

Q. What year was that, that you went to Montana?

Went out there in '27. And came back and taught in a two-room school in Collis for five years from '29 to '34. Then that spring there was no tenure law and the school board decided that five years was enough for the two teachers to have stayed there so they asked us to move on and by that time it was hard to get a job.

Q. That was during the age of the Depression?

That was '34. Mmm hmm. During those real dry years. So I was fortunate enough to get back in in Montana again and taught there that year and was married the next fall.

Q. Mmm hmm. Did you notice a lot of other teachers being fired or let go because of the Depression?

Oh I don't know whether it was because of the Depression. I mean in those days if you stayed more than two years at a school you kind of expected it was time to move on. Nobody ever thought of staying in a school any length of time or of becoming a member of the community if you didn't actually live there. I don't think they were asked to move because of the Depression but anybody that didn't have a job, it was awfully hard to find something at that time. There was no tenure law and up until that year any time I had changed jobs, the first year I changed because I was so lonesome that far away from home, the second year I changed because I wanted to go out to Montana and I just moved one year after another. But by '34 it was awfully hard to get a job and salaries were very low. That last year I taught for seventy-five dollars in Minnesota and when I went out to Montana I went out there for seventy dollars, that last year.

Q. In 1934?

'34. In 1925 when I started I got eighty, the next year a hundred, the next year a hundred-twenty. I bettered myself you see by moving each time. Then when I came back to Minnesota after two years in Montana I came back

for a hundred-five and in the same school went down from a hundred-five to eighty dollars. I believe I said I taught for seventy but seventy-five was least I taught for. Eighty dollars in Collis the last year and then I went out to Montana for seventy-five. Then in the first year I was married I substituted a week for a young man that was getting forty-four dollars a month in Traverse County.

Q. That was in 1935?

Yes. The spring of '36 was when it was. '35-'36 school year.

Q. Did you find out he was getting paid that before you substituted or afterwards?

Oh I knew what his salary was. In fact they gave me twelve dollars so I got paid better than the teacher which is unusual for a substitute. Well I guess they thought eleven sounded quite a small amount so they gave me twelve.

Q. What kind of problems did you run into while teaching?

Well, not any very serious ones I don't think. The second year I taught I had some sixteen-year old boys in the sixth grade who could-weren't necessarily there because at that time if they went to sixteen they didn't have to go any more. I believe the law now is sixteen or ninth grade. Well of course they were sixteen, they could have quit anyway. But they were getting a little bit unruly so I told the youngsters-there was some fighting done-that if there was any fighting they hadda go home and their parents hadda come and tell me that they didn't approve of the fighting and it was gonna quit. So these two sixteen-year-old boys-some argument started on the playground at recess and by the time we got in and I got in the building, they were in the cloakroom going at each other with brooms. Oh just gonna break broomsticks on each other so I said, "Ok, walk home and don't come back without your parents coming back and talk to me." They never came back. That solved that problem. I felt bad about it, I mean I went to both homes but neither of the boys ever came back to school again.

(234--20 minutes)

Q. Did you ever have any administrative problems with people that hired you?

Well you see, before I was married I never taught under a superintendent. I taught in, they were really classified as rural schools. Some of 'em were two rooms and they were in small towns but they were under the county superintendent. And the county superintendent was always a big help. She'd come out twice a year, oftener if anybody had a problem, but she made a routine call twice a year and was...I taught both Big Stone and in where I taught in Montana, in this two-room school, it also was under the county superintendent. So out there in Daniels County in Montana and in Traverse County the county superintendent was a very big help. Always.

Q. Would the superintendent come and watch your classes?

She'd come in the door, just open the door and come in, sit toward the back of the room and probably stay quarter of a day, half a day, and then after the children had gone or when they went out at noon she would talk over anything she thought should be changed or remark about what was good. Her visits were usually sort of a shot in the arm.

Q. Did you teach after you were married very much?

No, not until...I taught school for ten years, I raised a family for twenty years and then I went back teaching again.

Q. What year did you start again?

'55.

Q. Between that break did you see any significant changes in teaching methods, in the way children reacted to teachers or in other ways?

No. I've seen more difference in the eighteen years I've taught than in that twenty years between the two times I taught. When I went back...You mean like the children's attitude, the parents' attitude and so on? No. It has been more difference in the last years since I've been teaching now than there was between the two times I taught school. Because when I went back teaching oh I think the attitude of children and of the parents was just about exactly the same as it was. Now I don't know why there is a difference but teachers don't feel like they have the backing of parents like they used to have. If you discipline a child you don't get the same cooperation from- I always say from everybody but there are parents that whether they don't discipline their children at home or what I don't know but you know that the parents aren't going to back you as well as they used to. And even when I went back in '55 this was still true. But it's becoming increasingly different. Even the nine years I've been here in Wheaton there's not the same. Teachers aren't rated the same in a community. I've noticed that when I first came here to Wheaton. I asked one of the school board members why are teachers second-rate citizens. They weren't when I started to teach. And he's a man that's near my own age and he said, "You know, it's very true but I don't know why." And he was one of the school board members. But the people in the community don't have the same attitude toward a teacher as they used to have.

Q. Do you have any idea for the reasons behind this?

(290--25 minutes)

No, not really. I think they vary. I think one thing--no I shouldn't say that because...I was gonna say probably salary but teachers always were getting a salary even during Depression years, knew that cash was coming in where maybe the farming community didn't and so it isn't because they feel like they're getting-oh they tell you you're getting too much money, yes, but I don't know just what it is. Really. Be nice to be able to pinpoint what is the different reason for the difference, attitude toward teachers. But you knew that parents wanted their children to be disciplined and do what was right. And now you'd almost be afraid to discipline some children because the parents would be right there and taking the children's side. I don't know what it is. There's more of a permissiveness today than there used to be.

Q. Do you see any difference between teaching methods and how they have evolved? Could you make some comments about those?

Well as I said reading was when I was a child just oral reading. Get up and read. And I think the teachers and all of us thought that if a child could pronounce a word, he knew what he was reading about. I'm sure that was the attitude when I was going to school. When I started to teach, I can't remember it so much for reading, but I remember we'd reached the point where we'd put a list of questions on the board for social studies and so on. So they were supposed to get something out of the reading. But now I think we have a good variety of questions where they dig for what the author means; not just literally: "Today it's raining," you know, just literal things like this but we have a lot of thought questions. And still we have reading problems. I can't tell you why but maybe it's the TV, maybe children don't read at home as much and don't get the practice because we have more reading problems than we should have.

Q. How did you get interested in teaching your students local history?

Well I never taught Minnesota history until I came here because-oh I did but didn't have just sixth grade so I couldn't put the time on it that I did when I came here. I was teaching fifth grade before I came here. And when I was in the elementary before I was married, we didn't teach Minnesota history. So I just had a couple of years of it when I first went back teaching until I came here to Wheaton. And I took a course from Dr. Keesing who used to be at Moorhead State. When I took it from him he was over at the junior college in Fergus, oh that was about in nineteen-sixty-two or three. And he just knows Minnesota history from beginning to end. And I really think that's when I really became interested in it and then the Minnesota Historical Society had this contest for a few years, I think only about three years, where schools brought in some project on local history. And so we developed this unit on Traverse County. Lake Traverse and the surrounding territory and it was since I been here in Wheaton really I became interested in it and started teaching sixth grade.

(353--30 minutes)

Q. How did you get your students interested in it?

Well I think the most interested ones were the year we did that unit because we went out to Traverse Lake and we looked at these foundations, the old elevators that were used when Traverse Lake was a highway for freight, and where Maudada used to be. And actually of course any teaching where a child gets out and does something, he's more interested, and that class was by far the most interested class I've ever had. Then another thing we did was correspond with schools in different parts of Minnesota and sometimes we had very interesting letters describing their geography and history and the youngsters were always motivated by this I think too. But I think really what started my interest in it was Dr. Keesing. He's so much interested in Minnesota history.

Q. Can you tell me how you thought of the idea and went about making the tapes?

Well I knew that Mrs. Burfeind had material from her father because I had always sent students over there to interview her, just to talk with her about Traverse County history, every year. So I knew she had this information although I'd never gone over myself to get any of it until we started this unit. Then when I was over talking to her and found out how much she really knew about it and how interested she was I asked her if she'd come to school and talk to the children. And she wasn't crazy about getting up and giving a talk and I said how about them interviewing you, just asking you questions. So we had talked about it in school and picked out some things that they thought they'd like to hear about. And then I think it was Mr. Murray who had been teaching sixth grade, he had retired at that time, who knew about this Mr. Jenson. Or at least during the process of working on this unit we heard about him and went over and talked to him. I had never heard about him before. I had never known a great deal about this using of Traverse Lake for hauling freight until we were working on that unit. I don't know just why we picked that unit to work on. I can't remember that. But I learned a lot while we were doing it. It's too bad that the basements and the little that was left of foundations of Maudada had just been plowed up about two years before that so all we could find was where the site was. It should be marked. Even today people could know where it was. I would never have known anything about where it had been except my husband in previous years had pointed it out to me and told me about it because living up that close to it he'd always heard about it.

Q. Could you tell me what you know about Maudada?

(406--35 minutes)

I should've looked up a little. I don't know anything about Maudada much except what I read about, from this material of Mr. Allanson's, really. But it was laid out in streets. It, the name came from the daughters of the two men who founded the town: Maud and Ada. And it was all laid out, it had the streets where they were gonna be and the names were on the streets and there were some homes. There was, I think there was a paper printed out there. And they were trying to have a railroad come from Tintah, the main line had come through there as we said in 1880, gone from Morris up through Tintah and up on to Breckinridge up that way and they were trying to get a branch line from Tintah out through Maudada down through, well to between the two lakes and down on the South Dakota side. And I think the man's name was Washburn, I just can't remember those two men's names. But he was the one evidently who had the money, and the railroad was started out from Tintah. And he died and that was really part of why Maudada didn't survive. It was the first county seat in Minnesota-er-Traverse County, I'm sorry, and the railroad came out to Browns Valley so they wanted to have the county seat down there and...So the judge came out to hold his first session of court, they really entertained him the first night he was there and gave him the best hotel room and then took him up on the worst possible roads, there weren't roads, they took him in a wagon up through the worst, roughest country to Maudada. When he got there there was no courtroom, not much of anything except a few homes and he didn't hold court. He went back to Browns Valley and had court out there. First session of court. And then during a long process Wheaton became the county seat and there's been some rivalry Between Browns Valley and Wheaton ever since. Pretty much died down at the present time. Maudada would have been a beautiful-it had a beautiful view because when I took the children out there to show them where it had

been I really had never driven up there and just stopped there and walked around before. And the view across Traverse Lake is just beautiful from there. And then there was to have been an elevator down on the lake from Maudada too. But that was never built. There would have been three on each side of the lake had that one been done. As it was there were two on the Minnesota side and three on the South Dakota side. And then of course to get the lake to the railroad there was a spur of the Great Northern Railroad from Browns Valley to the elevator down, what they call the terminal elevator not too far from Browns Valley down near the end of the lake.

Q. Changing the subject a little bit, did you think that the world wars affected teaching in any way?

(465--40 minutes)

World War I, I can't tell you anything about, as far as it affecting teaching. World War II I was married and not teaching at the time, and there was a scarcity of teachers. Why I don't know. Because I know of some people who went back teaching that hadn't taught for oh twenty years, without even taking a refresher course. They just then had probably had had less than a year's training past high school. And went back teaching at that time. Taught for just a few years while there was a scarcity of teachers and then they quit again. They didn't go on and make a career of it. They were older people at the time. So for some reason, I suppose oh probably the war plants you know where they were making things, war supplies and so forth, attracted young people. I don't know what the reason was but there was a scarcity of teachers there for a while during the war years. And teachers' salaries got a little bit higher then. I don't really know what they were but I know that when I had quit teaching in 1934 the best I, I was getting seventy dollars a month. Seventy-five. I keep saying seventy. I'm not sure if it was seventy or seventy-five. And then the next year when I substituted I got a twelve dollars for one week's work. So they were very low back in '34, '35 and in that area. It started to go up during the war years. Up to where when I went back teaching in 1955 I got twenty-seven hundred for the nine months. And that was quite a bit higher than I'd had when I quit twenty years before.

Q. Can you tell me about what a shivaree is?

Well I don't think I ever had any real personal experience with a shivaree but I remember them telling about one. I think they just came and - oh I guess they had one for my son here not too many years ago. They made a lot of noise and then they were expected to be treated. And I remember hearing my dad tell about one when he was a little fellow. You see the Indian uprising down in the Minnesota Valley down around New Ulm and so forth was in 1862, and it was settled up here less than twenty years later. And shortly after Graceville was started there weren't very many building in there, there was a terrible noise north of town one night so the neighbors around, hearing this clatter and bang, went in to Graceville and stayed overnight in a church. It was the best place they figured they could have to be fortified, and come to find out it had been banging on dish pans and so forth at a, a Harvey, one of the Harveys had gotten married and it was a shivaree. But I think the idea of 'em was to just make a lot of noise, have the bride and groom come out and, and treat them. And I suppose they had an

evening of old time dancing. My dad and also my father-in-law were very good "fiddlers" as they called them in those days. My dad and one of his brothers used to play for dances.

(528--45 minutes)

And my father-in-law played for dances when they were young men. My dad--oh my kids can even remember when he'd come to our house and play the fiddle and we used to chord on the, when I was a kid it was the organ we chorded on for him and then later on we had a piano. And one of us would chord and he would play the fiddle. His brother used to play with him, play the organ when they played for dances. And I think these parties were just in the homes, like I suppose this shivaree probably turned into a house-party.

Q. Speaking of dances and bands, you mentioned that there used to be quite famous orchestras playing in Browns Valley.

There was what they called Rambles Coliseum in Browns Valley. And it was still there at the time I got married and sometime, I don't know just when, maybe in the forties, it was moved out along the lake someplace. But when Rambles Coliseum was at its best Wayne King played there one night. I remember we were at a dance when he played. Lawrence Welk played out here. Ben Bernie played out here in Browns Valley. They had some very good name orchestras and played out there. One night I can remember they had two orchestras, it wasn't any of these that were quite so well-known but they had two so they played continuously one on the side of the hall and one at the end of the hall. So they did have very good music at the dances in Browns Valley. Every Friday night they played. Have a dance.

Q. Was it in a building or was it on the lake?

No, you see the lakes, neither lake comes right to Browns Valley. There are a few miles between the lakes there. And it was out at the fairgrounds. They used to have a county fair in, I guess the county fair was always in Wheaton but they had a fair in the summertime too and this Coliseum, there's a quonset type building right in the same place today. Same size I imagine on the ground. But this was a wooden building at that time. And just dancing. Now there are booths and so on in that building that's there today. But it was all a dance floor, the original building.

Q. Did you ever go to any dances there?

I went when all three of those orchestras I mentioned played there. Mmm hum.

Q. Changing the subject again, what was the most dreaded disease that you remember around this area?

Well for children polio was. During the summer months I can remember oh my brother was about thirteen I suppose and I'm sure he had it. Now that would be about in nineteen, oh around early nineteen twenties, and he was quite sick. The doctors used to come out in those days and he came out every day for a while. And I remember he used to tell my mother that such and such child about the same age had polio and that one arm was paralyzed and finally he quit coming to see my brother and he got well but I'm quite sure he had a slight case of polio. He never was real strong after that. But he had no paralysis.

(598--50 minutes)

It seemed like some years there were more cases of polio; there would be cases and some years there wouldn't. I remember when my daughter had her tonsils out the doctor wouldn't take 'em out until winter time. He took 'em out during Christmas vacation because he said he was afraid of polio. And that was in nineteen forty-fifty-two. No wait a minute. Yeah, she had surgery in '52. She had had her tonsils taken out before but she had a growth taken out behind her nose and so even as late as 1952 they wouldn't operate on children, tonsils, adenoids and so on in the summer time unless they could help it because they figured they'd open it up for infection.

Q. Do you remember when they started giving shots and sugar cubes?

I remember that the first grade in the schools got it. The first year it was...How did they give it first, it wasn't the sugar cube the first time.

Q. I believe it was shots.

I think it was. And I said now well she was operated on in '52 and they didn't have it then and it was before I went back teaching in '55 so it was someplace in there. Must have been. Because she needed this surgery and the doctor kept her on penicillin until Christmas vacation rather than risk surgery. She had been having trouble with this growth but he was afraid to operate before that so it must have been between '52 and '55 sometime.

Q. And they gave it right in the school house? The shots?

Yes, I think so. There were still rural schools at that time and I think all the second grade children, maybe not in every rural school and everything, but I think they all maybe came into Wheaton for example the ones in Traverse County or something like that. I just don't recall. None of mine were affected. I didn't have any second graders. I remember my nephew being in that group. And I think that he came to Wheaton to get it. And he was going to a country school at that time.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to comment on about the differences between schools in the previous years and now or pupils in the previous years and now?

Well of course they have a lot more advantages now. We, there was no opportunity for youngsters in the country to be in band or athletics or anything like that. Well when I first taught they had all eight grades in the country. Then gradually it got down to where there were only six grades for a few years before they came into town. Before they were all consolidated into the town schools. So they do have these advantages that they didn't have at that time. Well naturally a teacher that had

(660--55 minutes)

from six to eight grades couldn't give each individual the attention if she had a large school. Of course if she had a small school, I remember the first year I went back teaching I think the extras probably had the best chance of any school I ever was in. I had six pupils in five grades. And it was just about like having a private tutor. But where they had big rural

schools you know, why, well I won't say that they suffered any more than they do today. I think that a too large a room, I don't care how many grades they have, the pupil that's a little timid or gets a slower start is gonna suffer. We have so many pupils that have trouble with reading and I think you find it where when they're down in the first and second grade there are too many pupils in the room probably. The teacher doesn't have a chance to do justice to everybody. And I suppose this happened in the rural schools too.

Q. Are pupils any different?

Yes. I don't know just what it is but there just doesn't seem to be the desire...Not everybody but there are an awful lot of them now that don't seem to care whether they learn or not. Maybe it was always this way. Maybe I've become more aware of it. I think maybe that's true too, that as I had more experience and had had children of my own that I realized that some weren't doing as well in school as they could be. Because some of them aren't. Well I had a mother call me today to ask me if I'd tutor her seventh-grade son in reading because he's having reading difficulties, and maybe everybody is becoming a little more conscious of the fact that it's important to be able to read.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Not that I can think of. Did I mention that that when my youngsters quit going to the country school they were going in the old original building? Yes I think I told you that. Although there had been a different type of rural school building, they started building them like oh back probably in the twenties, maybe even earlier than that. And so there'd be a furnace in this building instead of just this little stove in the corner of the room you know and lavatories inside. I mean they didn't always just have to run outside to the bathroom and so forth. And this had started in the early twenties or even before that. And most of the buildings in both Big Stone and Traverse County were replaced by this new-type building about that time.

(730--60 minutes)

Q. But your children's school building wasn't?

But the school we had was the old original school. Conservative farmers I guess didn't want to spend the money on a newer building. And my husband's family were half a mile from that school from the time it was first there too.

Q. Thank you so much Mrs. Cunningham.

Mmm hmm.

(739--62 minutes)