

An Interview with
Dr. Joseph Vandepopuliere

at the Daniel Boone Regional Library in
Columbia, Missouri

19 September 2008

interviewed by William Stolz



Oral History Program
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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a 1GB CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [/]. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [____] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [_____(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Jeff D. Corrigan.

WS: Today is September 19, 2008 and this is William Stolz with the Western Historical Manuscript Collection. We're at the Daniel Boone Regional Library doing interviews of one-room schoolhouses and we are with—if you want to give me your full name.

JV: Joe Vandepopuliere.

5 WS: All right, and if you want to tell me when and where you were born.

JV: I was born in Parkville, Missouri, June the 21st, 1929.

WS: All right, and if you could describe your home situation, your family life, the number of siblings, your parent's profession.

JV: My father worked for the Kansas City Power and Light Company in Kansas City,
10 Missouri, and there were three children. My older brother, Gus, and my older sister, the middle child, was Mary, and then me was last, least youngest child.

WS: All right, I think before you had mentioned that your mother had died when you were nine—

JV: —yes, my mother Amy died when I was nine.

15 WS: And so your father then raised you?

JV: Father tried to raise us. (laughs) We were kinda on our own most of the time because he worked away, of course, and so we had to make due with ourselves, taking care of the cows and the chickens and the hogs and cuttin' the wood and carryin' the railroad ties from the railroad track and cutting with a two man cross cut saw, my brother and
20 myself.

WS: That's amazing.

JV: Yeah.

WS: And you mentioned when he was away, did he come at night or were you often—

JV: No, he came home every evening after work.

WS: All right, when and where did you start school?

JV: Well, I went to Lakeside one-room schoolhouse at Lakeside and it was—of course I started there when I was about six and I did graduate from the eighth grade. (laughs)

5 And there was I think about—trying to think about how many people were in that graduation class. Here's a picture of us. Looks like about twenty, twenty students there.

WS: Well and that was Kindergarten through eighth grade.

JV: Yes sir. Well, there was no Kindergarten back in those days.

10 WS: Okay, so first grade.

JV: And I'm the tallest one in the group.

WS: Could you describe the schoolhouse itself? Was it white?

JV: Yeah it was a white, just a wooden structure, had windows on the east side only and inside it was, of course, just a wooden floor and had the pot bellied stove in the middle of it to heat with, and we used coal to heat the house and the schoolroom and the teacher had to get there early every morning in the wintertime 'cause she was responsible for haulin' in the coal and lighting the fire and warming up the school before we got there.

WS: Did you have electricity in the school?

20 JV: Yes, we did have electricity in the school because we had like—'bout only time we used it like at Christmas time, we had a Christmas program and it was at nighttime.

WS: And did you have an outhouse or was there plumbing?

JV: We had two outhouses. One for the men, one for the girls. (both laugh)

WS: And you mentioned before you thought there were about twenty students in your entire school. How many were in the same class with you?

JV: There were three of us in a class, two girls and myself.

WS: And did you go all the way through eighth grade together?

5 JV: Went all the way through eighth grade together. Then there was another girl that was in and out part of the time and she did finally graduate with us, but she was there only part of the time 'cause her father, family, travelled around different states quite a bit.

WS: Wow. Can you describe your teacher or teachers? Do you remember her name?

JV: Well, we had a number of teachers and most of the time, it was just one teacher. But
10 part of the time, it was two teachers and I don't remember all their names but Mrs. Patchett, or Ms. Patchett, I think they were all single, was one of the teachers and she was a beautiful lady, lady right there.

WS: Yes, yes.

JV: She was the teacher at that time and I don't remember her name, but yes I do too, it's
15 on this one, Rebecca Wright was—'cause that's the same lady there.

WS: So when you had the two teachers, did they teach different classes?

JV: Well, actually they had a partition in the building when they had two teachers and they had a teacher on, of course, on each side of the partition. And they did, yes, they did teach different classes. And there was like the first four grades and then the
20 second four grades.

WS: Okay.

JV: Other than that though when you were in a room by yourself, I mean with one teacher, you heard everything that went on and there was a lot of blackboard activity

in those days. So you went to the blackboard to do your English and your math, and of course you sat there, you were supposed to be doing your homework but I mean when you got done with that or didn't matter whether you were done or not you could listen and see what was going on so you could learn way ahead without any problem, if you could. (laughs)

WS: Yeah, and what about their teaching styles? Do you remember their teaching styles in any way?

JV: It was just handing out assignments and telling you to do it, and so you sat there and did it and you did, sometimes, take some homework home and do it at home, again by yourself.

WS: And was there discipline? Or was there any need for discipline with—

JV: —Oh of course, there was always discipline. It was a ruler, you know, and there was once in a while, a staying after school, or mostly staying in from recess or lunchtime if you were caught doing something you'd have to do something like that.

WS: And the teachers that you had, did they influence your life after you left eighth grade?

JV: Not that I knew about, they did perhaps, but not that I knew about. I had some teachers in high school that did influence me quite a bit, but not—you don't really know how they influence you—

WS: Yes, yeah. And how did you get to school every day, did you walk?

JV: Walked, didn't matter what the weather was like and the school was never—the weather was never a problem as far as school was concerned, you were expected to be there no matter what.

WS: And how far did you walk everyday one way from home to school?

JV: Well, we lived fairly close to school, probably about a half a mile as far as—some of them had to walk as far as a mile and a half.

WS: Wow.

JV: Two miles, I think was the limit back in those days, but no one had horses back then
5 to ride, so you had to walk.

WS: Everybody walked?

JV: Yeah, it didn't matter what the weather was like.

WS: What was the school year like, was it like now with the nine months?

JV: Yes, it was in our time. Earlier on at this same location, it was only about three
10 months. I know my grandmother, when she went to school it was only about three months out of the year that they went—

WS: That's amazing.

JV: —and the reason for that was they didn't have enough money to pay the teacher anymore than the three months.

15 WS: So your grandmother went to the same school, did your father and mother attend the same school, and then—

JV: No, they didn't attend the Lakeside school. They attended one north of Parkville. My parents who was one Brown School and one was Green School and one was Brinks and they attended those schools, 'cause my grandparents came, as well as my
20 dad came from Belgium, at least on one side and of course, I don't know what they attended in Belgium.

WS: Yeah.

JV: I mean, they had school there of course, but my dad when he came over in 1910, why he went into these one-room schoolhouses and of course, he didn't know any English and they didn't know any Flemish and so when the student would go to the board, didn't matter what grade it was, he went to the board 'cause he didn't know what was
5 going on. (both laugh)

WS: Did you speak Flemish in your house as well, or was it all—did you all speak English?

JV: No, we spoke English in the house because Mother never learned Flemish, but we children learned some Flemish because all—the whole neighborhood spoke Flemish
10 and just by associating with the neighborhood, we learned to speak Flemish, well, mostly we learned to hear it and understand it. We didn't learn to speak it too good because we spoke back to them in English and they spoke to us in Flemish.

WS: So then were most of your classmates of Belgian descent as well?

JV: A number of them were. No, not most of them, but there were a number of them and
15 one of them in my class was from the Belgian side, yes.

WS: That's pretty amazing to realize the Belgians settled in Missouri, you don't hear about that often, so it's—

JV: Yeah, that whole, that whole article on—I think I showed you, either had the copy, maybe I don't know if you still had that—

20 WS: —yes.

JV: —'cause that was on the Bottoms there and the entire Bottoms there, for all practical purposes, that Bottoms was all Belgians from Belgium, immigrated in from Belgium.

WS: That's really interesting—

JV: —at that time.

WS: What activities do you remember most about school?

JV: Well, activities that I remember mostly was, of course, the Christmas programs that was the nerve racking part. You had to get up and present something and that's hard
5 to do, then. Today, it's not so bad. And the, of course, fun that we had by playing at recess and during the lunch hour of course.

WS: If you want to describe a little bit about the Christmas programs, what did you do performances?

JV: Yeah, we did performances, songs and act out programs. The whole front of the
10 school, where the blackboard was, was curtained off with sheets. They just strung some wires across there and you had two dressing rooms on each side and then the stage was in the middle. It was very simple. (laughs)

WS: Did you decorate the schoolhouse for Christmas?

JV: There wasn't any Christmas decorations—oh maybe a little bit, something on the
15 windows, you know, chain, you know paper chain, or something like that, but not very much, very little.

WS: And did all the students participate in the Christmas—

JV: —oh yes, everybody had to participate in some part of it, and then of course, the audience was the parents and the grandparents, it was well attended, because there
20 wasn't much else to do back in those days. (laughs)

WS: Yeah and everybody—you did this for all the years?

JV: Oh yes, you did it every year, yes.

WS: And then you mentioned recess, so you did have recess every day?

JV: Yeah, morning and afternoon, you'd have a recess, you'd have ten minutes or fifteen minutes, you get outside when the weather was permissible, you get outside and play. Most of the time, you didn't care what the weather was like.

WS: What kind of activities did you do on the playground?

5 JV: It was baseball and you had a teeter totter, and some kind of a merry-go-round, and we played 'ante over' a lot, which may not mean much to you.

WS: Yeah, if you want to describe that.

JV: Well that's where you'd have a ball and you'd throw it over the house and then when they'd catch it on the other side, then they'd run around and they'd have to try to tag
10 somebody with the ball and then if they tagged 'em, well that person was on their team. And so it was just an interesting—

WS: It is, and did all the kids play together every day or did you break off into—

JV: Oh, they broke off into different groups. They didn't all play together.

WS: And did the older kids sort of look out for the younger students?

15 JV: Well, don't know about lookin' out for them, but you know, they—the age groups of course tended to play with their own age group.

WS: And you mentioned there were two other girls in your class, did you get along with them?

JV: Oh yeah, yeah. We never had any problem, ever, had any problems. There was no—
20 there wasn't like today, it seems like they have a lot of problems in the school with— but we never had any problems, had some trouble with some of the boys once in a while, you'd get in a fight or two. Other than that, I remember some of those, but we certainly didn't have any trouble with the girls.

WS: And could you just describe what an average day was like as far as school work?
How much time did you spend—

JV: Well you just had to go through each of the areas that you were—geography, history,
math and English. And you'd have a certain section of the time of each day, allotted
5 to that and she'd make assignments and that's what you would work on and of course,
you sometimes had to prove it by going to the blackboard and reciting or writing your
English out or your math, working problems out and it was—she just kept the day
rolling by doing different things with different grades, so can you imagine having
about five subjects and eight different groups? That's forty different subjects each
10 day.

WS: That's amazing that she could teach that let alone—

JV: —oh yeah, it's unbelievable, teachin' and then review the work on it, and grade it,
and record all that stuff, that's just amazing.

WS: Did your teacher live in the schoolhouse or did she live nearby?

15 JV: No, she lived, I think she lived with some families most of the time 'cause they were
single people, but we never had a male teacher, although there is a male in one of
these pictures, but he wasn't the teacher, he was superintendant or something, just
happened to be there that day. And he was in the picture. (both laugh)

WS: When you were at school, did they have to give chores that were assigned? Were
20 people expected to bring in the coal or—

JV: At times, some of the boys got there early and brought in coal, but that was all. I
don't know who cleaned the schoolhouse. I think the teacher probably had to sweep
it out, but other than that, hauling the coal, I think the teacher did most everything.

WS: That's amazing, did anybody have to clean the chalkboards at night before—

JV: Sometimes during the day, you'd go out with the erasers and beat them on the concrete patio out there, outside, to get the dust out of the erasers. I remember doing that, it was a tickle to do something, to get out of something. (both laugh)

5 WS: Yeah, right.

JV: You get out of class work or whatever.

WS: Did you attend the same school 'til graduation?

JV: Yes, uh huh, we attended the same one-room schoolhouse 'til graduated eight years.

WS: Eight years, and then did you go on to high school after that?

10 JV: Yes, went on to North Kansas City High School, which is located about six miles away and they had a bus that took you back and forth to—you only had to walk to the highway to catch the bus.

WS: And how far was your house from the highway?

JV: Well, our house again was fairly close, it was less than a half a mile to the bus. You
15 could see the bus come, and it went on by and down and turned around, a mile or so down beyond, so you knew how long it was gonna' be before it got back so where you were you might sometimes have to run to get it. (both laugh)

WS: When—did you graduate from high school, from North Kansas City?

JV: No, I never graduated from high school.

20 WS: But you have an interesting story 'cause you did go on to attend college.

JV: Yes, when—I couldn't, I could see I wasn't gonna' finish high school in my four years was allotted to the high school at the time. I said, "Well, that's enough," and so I asked the principal if he would write a letter to Warrensburg, Central Missouri State

College at that time and see if I could get in. Well, they let me in on probation, so I had to take a couple extra courses there and when I passed those successfully, well then I was off probation and I finished up there in four years with a Bachelor's degree.

5 WS: And then you went on to graduate school?

JV: I came to University of Missouri here for a Master's degree in Agriculture Chemistry, and then went in industry and worked a while for Ralston-Purina. Then, I quit there and went to Florida, worked on a PhD and finished a PhD up in Animal Nutrition at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

10 WS: Do you feel that your education in the one-room schoolhouse really helped as you worked your way through college and graduate school?

JV: Well, the whole thing gives you a—I mean we had to do a lot of stuff on our own and so you learn how to work and do things on your own, and so that helps in graduate school, 'cause you have to do a lot of things on your own in graduate school. They
15 don't spoon feed ya' in graduate school.

WS: Right, right. Do you know if other classmates were as successful, if they moved on to—

JV: A few of 'em went on to high school and graduated from high school, but to my knowledge, no student out of Lakeside went on to college, that I know of.

20 WS: So you're the only one?

JV: Out of Lakeside, yes, far as I know.

WS: And you mentioned you had two siblings too, were they before or after?

JV: They were older than me and they never finished high school, either of them. They went on and managed quite well. (laughs)

WS: Well that's good. Another question, what influence did attending the one-room schoolhouse have on your life?

5 JV: Well we didn't know anything about school or any other school, you know, we just figured that was the life of education and so, again, we learned to get along with people. We learned that you had to deal with a lot of different types of people because we were all in the same one-room and all the grades and you have more than just that one group that you went through with because when you're a first grader,
10 you had eight grades ahead of you, or seven more, and then as you went through, you kept coming in with new ones below you, you see.

WS: Yes.

JV: So you really had about fifteen or sixteen years of people you were dealing with, one way or the other, older people at first and younger people at last.

15 WS: So yeah and you had to work closely with all them every day?

JV: Well you had to live with them in a sense, every day you see. You had to deal with them at noon, recess, work, play.

WS: And do you think when you got out into the workforce that it helped because you had those relationships?

20 JV: I think so, yes, because not only do you deal with 'em there, but you gotta deal with them mainly going home because coming to school you didn't walk with them but as a group going home, you had a whole group that you walked with. And of course they parted ways as they left school and got closer to home.

WS: Wow, and I also wanted to ask about lunch, did you pack your own lunch every day?
Was it provided?

JV: No, we packed our lunch every day, whatever we could find at home, we had to of
course make our own lunch and I think all we had was some kind of bread or biscuit
5 or something. Of course well when my mom was living, she packed it for us. After
that, well we had to pack our own lunch and we'd have a couple pieces of bread with
butter, jelly or egg or some kind of pork—mostly we had pork, and it was very
simple. (laughs)

WS: So very different than the lunches on the tray today?

10 JV: Yeah, very, very, very simple, very—and the sameness. There was no variety, you
know and very little, no fruit back in those days. It was a little different.

WS: Yeah, and did you have an hour for lunch? Did you eat at your desk?

JV: No, I think we probably had more like a half an hour at lunchtime, because all you
had to do was eat your sandwich and the rest of the time you played, you know. The
15 rest of the time you played.

WS: All right, well is there anything else you'd like to add this morning?

JV: Oh, we could hours of things (both laugh), but I think it's been very good talking with
you—

WS: Good.

20 JV: —and it's good that you're doing this because it's difficult to go back, we don't really
go back to the original schoolhouse because you'd have to go back to the 1840s,
1850s, and that house, those schoolhouses, most of them are gone today.

WS: Do you know if yours, the school you went to, is it still in existence or is the building—

JV: Yeah, it's torn down recently. Well, no, it was torn down some time back, but the original schoolhouse, the original Lakeside schoolhouse was the one I lived in, was
5 raised in—

WS: —oh, so your parents bought the original schoolhouse?

JV: Well, we rented it. And it was used up until, 1887, and then it was sold, at that time in 1887 for a hundred and twenty seven dollars; the house and one acre. And then this new schoolhouse was built about a half a mile away. But that house was then
10 rented. Whoever bought it, lived in it, and then later on somebody else bought it and then it was rented out.

WS: And then your family rented it?

JV: And we rented it from about 1928 until the 1951 flood. Dad moved out of it in 1951.

WS: Do you want to describe what your—the schoolhouse, your home looked like?

JV: Well it was basically—when we lived there, it was a two-room house, with an
15 upstairs, with an attic type upstairs with sloping roof. We had two bedrooms upstairs and one bedroom and a general room, kitchen, living room, whatever you want to call it downstairs where the stove was. And it was an interesting place to live because in the winter time, you'd wake up, there'd be snow on top of your bed, on your blankets
20 and you'd go down and you'd have to put the bucket of water on the stove with the dipper in it because it froze during the night—

WS: —wow.

JV: —before you could get water out of it to go prime the pump outside so you could pump water for the animals.

WS: Did you have plumbing in the house?

JV: Well, in a bucket.

5 WS: In a bucket? (both laugh)

JV: That was the plumbing.

WS: And did you have electricity?

JV: We did have electricity—had one light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and that was sort of rare back then because a lot of the neighbors didn't have electricity, but we did

10 have electricity.

WS: I assume then that you had an outhouse as well?

JV: Oh yes. We had a favorite outhouse that you'd go out in the wintertime and you'd brush snow off the seat before you sat down. (both laugh) Wintertime, you didn't spend much time out there—

15 WS: —I'm sure.

JV: — reading a book or the catalog that was there that you used for paper, we used Sears Roebuck catalog for paper back in those days.

WS: Really?

JV: Yeah, that was, that was the paper supply. (laughs)

20 WS: That's great. All right, if there's nothing else that'd you like to add this morning—

JV: —well I appreciate you doing this—

WS: —we do as well.

JV: —it's been great visiting with you on it—

WS: —yes, thank you so much—

JV: — we could spend hours, but we won't bother do that—we won't bother you with that now. (laughs)

WS: Yeah, all right well thank you so much.

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