

An Interview with

Imogene Bennett

at the Greene County Extension Center in
Springfield, Missouri

23 April 2012

interviewed by Dr. Virginia Laas



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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Collection C4051

One-room Schoolhouse

CD 28

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PREFACE

Born in 1933, in Laclede County, Mo, Imogene Bennett attended two one-room schoolhouses. For first grade, she attended Edgewood school in Greene County. When her family moved to just outside Republic, MO, she began attending Beulah school. Throughout her one-room schoolhouse education, she had five teachers, the last of which was her mother. She recounts her experiences at these schools including; going to school barefoot, ciphering matches, and softball games with other schools. Imogene believes the education she received in both schoolhouses compared well with the quality of urban schools, a fact compounded by her smooth transition to Republic High School. Also included are humorous stories of growing up in a rural area.

The interview was taped on a 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.

Narrator: Imogene Bennett
Interviewer: Virginia Laas
Date: March 23, 2012
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

[Begin Track One. Begin Interview.]

Laas: Okay. This is Virginia Laas. I'm a trustee for the State Historical Society of Missouri. And I'm here today on March 23, 2012, in Springfield, Missouri at the Greene County Extension Center to interview Imogene Bennett for her experience in attending a one-room schoolhouse. Did you teach, too?

Bennett: No.

Laas: Okay. [You] were [a] student of [a] one-room schoolhouse then. Let's start by—Why don't you tell me when and where you were born, [and] a little bit about your family.

Bennett: Okay. I was born July 16, 1933. I was born in Laclede County at a small, on a farm around Phillipsburg, Missouri. My mother was a schoolteacher. My father was a farmer. And—

Laas: Did you have siblings?

Bennett: I had my oldest sister, the one who is ninety-five, almost, now. She was the oldest in the family. And then there was another sister, Elizabeth, who was ten years older than I, she was born ten years earlier than I was born. And there were just the three of us. There was a big gap between me and my next sister.

Laas: What was your oldest sister's name?

Bennett: Virginia.

Laas: Oh. Right. (laughs)

Bennett: And my second sister is Elizabeth. She's been deceased quite a long time. And then we moved when I was a year old. This was during the Depression years. My father, they lost their farm in Laclede County. And my father had come from a family of, he never, I never heard him say this, because they didn't, the children didn't admit it, but there were sixteen in their family.

Laas: Oh, my.

Bennett: He came from a family of sixteen. Twelve that lived to maturity. When I was about a year old, we moved to Greene County, Missouri. My father was born in Greene County. Had been, in 1889. And my mother was born in Texas County in 1897. But we moved back here to Greene County, when I was a year old, I believe it was. And we lived on a farm west of

Springfield, just west of the Springfield regional airport now. Or just west of where it was before it has moved recently.

Laas: Oh, yes, yes. Okay.

Bennett: Kearney Street went straight through west. And then the airport was built and you couldn't go through. But that's where my early years were. I started to school at a country school called Edgewood School.

Laas: Edgewood?

Bennett: Edgewood. And it was, my first grade teacher was Howard Wilson. And Mr. Wilson left the teaching some time later, I don't know how much later, and worked at the post office. His wife has just recently died. She was well over 100 years old. So.

Laas: Were you, how old were you when you started?

Bennett: I was, I started school in 1939. My oldest sister had already completed college and was out teaching by the time I started to school in 1939.

Laas: I see.

Bennett: Then I finished high school in 1950. I missed a grade. I skipped a grade. And then when I was about midway through, or three-quarters through the third grade, we moved to a community near Republic, Missouri. And we lived out on Highway M. It was M then. It's Republic Road now. And I went to a school called Beulah School. B-e-u-l-a-h.

Laas: And was that one room, also?

Bennett: It was a one-room school, also.

Laas: From third grade?

Bennett: From third grade through the eighth grade. My next teacher there, when we first moved over there, the teacher was Miss Reba. Reba Bombarker. Berger. Baumberger.

Laas: B-a-u-m—

Bennett: u-m-b-e-r-g-e-r. And she went to another school the following year. So my next teacher, in the beginning of the fourth grade, was E.B. Ferguson. Ernest B. Ferguson. And of course I call him E.B. because his wife was a first cousin of my husband's mother, and my mother-in-law. (laughter) Everybody's related to everybody, you know. But anyway, E.B. was one of the finest teachers that I had. He was a good teacher.

Laas: What made him so good?

Bennett: Oh, he had a good singing voice. And he liked for everybody to sing. And we'd sing. And he was so competitive with the, you know, other schools. Softball. And I just, I just learned a lot from him. I'll say this on the, you can cut this out, I guess. I learned more from him in the fifth grade in the way of math and algebra, you know, the beginnings of algebra--

Laas: Mm-hm. Those things. Right.

Bennett. --all that, than I learned in my sophomore year and high school from his son, who was my algebra teacher. (laughter)

Laas: I think that's—

Bennett: Really. He was a good teacher. He was a good teacher. And I'll always remember him saying that he and Edna were married on the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh of November, 1911. Why has that stuck in my mind?

Laas: It's a pretty clever thing to say, much less to have done.

Bennett: It stuck. It did what was intended, I guess, for memory purpose. And my next—

Laas: And he was your fourth and fifth grade—

Bennett: Yeah. He was for my fourth grade, and he put me up into the fifth grade.

Laas: So that's where the skip came?

Bennett: That's where the skip came. The fourth and fifth in there. Maybe it's fifth and sixth. Let me think back on this again. For a while, a short while, I had a woman. And she didn't last the whole year. Maybe that's, maybe her, I should have thought this through better. A woman named Elizabeth Moore was a teacher at one point in there. Somewhere between the fourth grade, I think maybe I skipped the fifth. I don't know. But in there was Mr. Ferguson, E.B. Ferguson. And then Elizabeth Moore, which was just for a short while. And then the seventh and eighth grades (laughs), my teacher was my mother.

Laas: Oh. And what was her name?

Bennett: Edith True. Edith Clara.

Laas: True?

Bennett: True. T-r-u-e. You'd be surprised how many people ask how you spell that. (Laas laughs) I'll always say, "Opposite of false." (laughter)

Laas: How was that to have your mother as your teacher?

Bennett: Well, I guess I shouldn't tell some of these things.

Laas: I think that you probably should.

Bennett: But, well, it was hard in one way in that she didn't discipline. My mother was a very low-key individual. She didn't make a big deal out of anything. For example, we had one young first or second grader who came into our school who wouldn't salute, couldn't say pledge to the flag. Couldn't stand up for the salute. And I don't think anybody ever paid any attention to that. Recently someone told me that they had gone to school, to my sister. They thought they were talking about, this neighbor that was telling me this, this little—

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

Bennett: --boy that was in school had told her that my sister was the best teacher he ever had. I said, "No, it wasn't my sister. It was my mother." And I wonder if that had anything to do with maybe in other schools he had been made—

Laas: To feel different.

Bennett: To feel different. Do you suppose? I don't know. I'm just guessing. But she was very low-key. And we had one girl in my class who suffered from convulsions. She'd have seizures.

Laas: Convulsions?

Bennett: Seizures. Uh-huh. And my mother always handled that with, I don't think anybody ever paid any attention. It was no big deal.

Laas: How did she treat you in class?

Bennett: I guess just the same as everybody else. She'd get onto me occasionally at home. If I hadn't—

Laas: Did you have homework?

Bennett: Not a great lot, I don't think. I don't recall having homework. You learned from the older kids. And one of my favorite things to do were the ciphering matches.

Laas: Tell me about the ciphering matches.

Bennett: Well, as I recall, you started with the young kids. And kept progressing up through, of course the older kids were going to beat the younger ones. But it was just a fun thing to do. That was our Friday afternoon project. I don't really remember spelling bees so much. But the ciphering matches I always enjoyed. I liked to do that.

Laas: And they chose, the sides that were chosen up were everybody, all ages?

Bennett: All ages, as I recall. I think you, boy, if you were a fourth grader and you could beat one of those seventh graders, why—

Laas: That's right.

Bennett: Yeah. No, it was all ages. I don't know how, really, the little kids. Well, they had different methods. The smaller children would, so many marks. How many marks you could put on a chalkboard, maybe. I've forgotten. But they didn't, of course, have a big hard question like the older [kids]. The problems got harder the longer they went. And I think the first graders probably just made marks on the chalkboard. How many they could make. If they could beat the guy over here making his marks. I don't know. I don't remember for sure.

Laas: Well let's back up just a little bit. Could you describe each of these schools to me? Let's just say the inside of them.

Bennett: The inside of them were just both alike. The desks were the same. You know, and you had your, where you—

Laas: Were they desks that, were they bolted to the floor? Or—

Bennett: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. Maybe so. But I don't think so. The furnace was in the back. I don't remember at Edgewood just exactly how it was because I was too young. But I do remember, because we'd have to go down when my mother, you know, would have to go fire up the—

Laas: Was it like a potbellied stove? Or was it—

Bennett: Oh, I just don't remember. I really don't remember. My first grade, now, when I went to the first grade, can you believe that any parent would let their kid go to school barefooted? Barefooted!

Laas: (laughs) You did?

Bennett: You bet I did. And the neighborhood boy, he was in eighth grade and I was in first grade. They built a bicycle seat on his handlebar, in the front of his handlebars, and he toted me to school. (Laas laughs) And I stuck my toe on the—

Laas: Oh. Ouch.

Bennett: Ouch. You better believe it.

Laas: Did he take you every day that way?

Bennett: I think so. Yeah. Except maybe the weather was bad. I don't know how we got there when it rained. We just got there. I don't know. Maybe my dad took us.

Laas: How far did you live from the school?

Bennett: Well that first school, oh at least a mile. A mile, maybe a mile and a half, maybe. The second school was three-quarters of a mile. Not far. And we walked or rode our bicycle. I finally, I think I even graduated to a bicycle over at Edgewood, by third grade. I think I was able to—of course Marion Dean, the one that toted me in the first grade, he'd graduated. He'd moved on. But there's just a lot about the physical part of the building that I just don't remember. I think they both had a stage up in front.

Laas: And the teacher's desk was on that?

Bennett: And the teacher's desk up in front. You had to—

Laas: Blackboard?

Bennett: The blackboard behind.

Laas: Blackboard behind her?

Bennett: Mm-hm. Behind the teacher.

Laas: Okay.

Bennett: As I recall.

Laas: Where did you put your coats and keep your lunch?

Bennett: Oh, we had a cloakroom. I don't remember about lunch. Maybe we put it in our desk. I don't remember. Now when I was in the fifth grade, as a matter of fact, my mother, she had taught school early on in Laclede County rural school. And then she quit. And then we moved back up to Greene County. And she'd go to school every summer. Every summer. I'd have to cook, you know, for the thrashing. All the guys in the neighborhood. But anyway, she went to school. And she was going to school all the time. And at that point in time, teachers could have a, they had a Missouri teaching certificate, even though they might not have finished, she didn't graduate from SMS [Southwest Missouri State College, now Missouri State University] until I was married, after I was married. I remember well going to her—

Laas: Graduation?

Bennett: Graduation. Yeah. But I was already married at that point. But all those years she went to school in between. All through, in the summertime. Every summer. Every summer. Every summer. But I don't, what was the question? I got switched off.

Laas: Well, I was just thinking about the inside of the building.

Bennett: Oh, the inside of the building.

Laas: Where you kept your things. Windows on both sides?

Bennett: Oh, the lunch, we were talking about our lunch. That's what got me carried away. The lunch, apparently there must have been some kind of a government program, say, about 1944, '45, somewhere in there. Was there?

Laas: Could have been.

Bennett: A lunch room, lunch—

Laas: Yeah. A lunch program.

Bennett: The lunch programs began. And our school at Beulah built, that they had a building either already or, and it was outside. And it was our kitchen. And my mother was a cook. And that was, I was in the sixth grade then when that began. And then she became the teacher.

Laas: The next year.

Bennett: The next year. Oh, my. Oh, my.

Laas: Well, let's talk about the, oh, one more thing. The heating system. Was it a wood fire or coal or—

Bennett: Well, I think it was coal. Probably it was coal.

Laas: Did the boys carry the coal?

Bennett: Well, yeah, they did that.

Laas: What about outside? Did you have any playground equipment?

Bennett: Oh, yeah. We had, I think there was a basketball goal. And we'd play hide and seek and we'd play, you know, those standard games that kids play. We never did, that I recall, have any net. You know, like for tennis or anything like that.

Laas: Did you have ball bats and bats and balls?

Bennett: Yeah. Oh, yeah. E.B. Ferguson was a big, he was a big competitor with all the other schools. With—

Laas: Now did you travel to the other schools to play games?

Bennett: Oh, we'd travel, yeah. And they'd come to our school.

Laas: How often would they do that?

Bennett: Oh, I think it was pretty often in the spring. Maybe once a week. About once a week. I don't know who made the arrangements for them. He was big on that. We went to schools. We traveled all over. I was a pitcher.

Laas: And everybody played? You were a pitcher? (laughter)

Bennett: Softball.

Laas: So girls and boys played.

Bennett: Softball. Yeah. Yeah. No, it wasn't a girls' softball, boys' softball. It was mixed.

Laas: One team.

Bennett: And we had, but going back to the furnace—

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Bennett: It was off in another room. And Mama would take Norma Jean when she'd have her seizures. They'd wind up back there in the back some way.

Laas: Uh-huh. Um—Toilets.

Bennett: Oh, boy, yeah. We had them. I'll tell you another one, too, on that one.

Laas: Okay. (laughter)

Bennett: In my eighth grade graduation class, when I was in the eighth grade, we had four girls and one boy. And of course Mama was the teacher. And the state was, they sent the tests out. So you'd have your test to pass, to be able to graduate and go on. So you know what Imogene did was swipe the answer sheet. (Laas laughs) And shared it with all the others out in the outdoor privy.

Laas: Did Mama find out?

Bennett: I don't know whether she ever did or not. I don't think so.

Laas: You never told her.

Bennett: Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. I never told her.

Laas: She was very proud of that class?

Bennett: I guess so, maybe. (laughs) Do you suppose we remembered any of the answers? Who knows? (Laas laughs) I have no idea. But it was unfair to Billy.

Laas: Who was Billy?

Bennett: He was the one boy. I couldn't share the outdoor privy with him.

Laas: Oh, well, of course. Of course. But he passed, too?

Bennett: Oh, yeah. He passed, too. (laughter) Oh, mercy. I shouldn't tell that, should I? That shouldn't be part of my history.

Laas: I think that's great.

Bennett: No, I don't know whether Mama knew it or not. I don't know. I doubt it. I don't think so. I think she would have reprimanded me if she had.

Laas: But the privies were, were they on opposite ends of the—

Bennett: They were on each side of the school.

Laas: Mm-hm. Away from the school building?

Bennett: Away from the school building. Oh, yeah. Away from the school building. Now the ones as I recall at Edgewood did not have the outside, you know, you've got your building, then you get the outside cover.

Laas: Yeah. Okay.

Bennett: But we stood out in the—

Laas: Corn husks. Sears Roebuck?

Bennett: No. I don't remember anything about that. I never—

Laas: Toilet paper?

Bennett: I guess we did. Because I don't ever remember using—

Laas: Anything but?

Bennett: Anything but that. That I don't really know for sure. We did at home, I guess we did. I don't know. I was raised at home with an outhouse.

Laas: Yeah. Well, most everybody—

Bennett: My age was. Uh-huh.

Laas: Yeah. Yeah. Tell me how your teachers organized the day. How did they—well, about how many students were there, anyway, in each of these schools? Do you have any idea?

Bennett: Oh, I don't know. I would say eight times three. Maybe twenty, twenty-five. Twenty.

Laas: How did this teacher manage—

Bennett: There were only three in my first grade class.

Laas: Yeah. Yeah.

Bennett: So.

Laas: How did she keep these other people busy while she was—

Bennett: I don't know. I would think that, in this day and age, it would probably be a difficult thing to do. And I don't recall that the teachers were ever, ever had to—well, I think in that day and age, you knew as a child if you got into it with a teacher, your parents are not going to take up for you. That teacher, that parent will side with the teacher whether they felt that way or not. Now that's not true.

Laas: Nobody got paddled or switched?

Bennett: No. I don't ever recall that happening. I do not recall that happen. We didn't have any, I don't, I just don't remember people getting reprimanded.

Laas: Uh-huh. What about special activities at school?

Bennett: Oh, we had pie suppers and, you know, the usual.

Laas: Tell me how they ran the pie supper.

Bennett: How they ran it?

Laas: Yeah.

Bennett: Oh, I don't remember. You took a pie and somebody bought it and you ate, you know, they ate with you. I mean, me as female, as a girl—

Laas: Did you put your—well, were the pies put in boxes? Or was the pie just out there to see? Some people have talked about decorating boxes.

Bennett: Oh, yeah. We did. Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I think those were. And I guess they knew when—because I had somebody call me here just, it's been not very long ago, a month or so ago, someone who was in school with me. And he told me on the phone that night that he had, that Edgar Greene loaned him money because he wanted to bid on my pie.

Laas: Your pie. (laughter)

Bennett: Pie! That, you know, I don't remember that. So I guess they knew, they knew who they were bidding on.

Laas: Somehow.

Bennett: They knew. I guess they told at the, the auctioneer. I guess told that.

Laas: What about your Christmas programs?

Bennett: Well, we had a Christmas program.

Laas: Did you have to memorize something? Did every child speak, or anything like that?

Bennett: I guess. I just don't remember. Sing. I think singing.

Laas: Lots of singing?

Bennett: More stuck in my mind, probably. And candy. You had to have candy canes. I don't remember more about that.

Laas: Do you remember having music class or singing a lot in school?

Bennett: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Particularly under E.B. Ferguson. He liked to sing. He had a good voice. And he'd take us to, he'd take us to, we'd go over to Wade Chapel in the spring and entertain over there.

Laas: So you gave some vocal performances.

Bennett: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah. We had, I don't remember any of the other teachers with all that, when you mention that. It was just Mr. Ferguson. He had a good voice himself. And he liked for everybody to sing. And sing loud.

Laas: And sing loud.

Bennett: And he'd pick out a group and take them to, we always went and performed at Wade Chapel. Which is a cemetery. You know, they always had a program every year.

Laas: Oh, okay. Okay.

Bennett: As a matter of fact, my husband's buried there.

Laas: And did all the children do chores around the school? Did you clean the blackboard or clean the erasers?

Bennett: I think so. I don't recall all that. I don't recall being assigned to that, but I guess we did. I think some of the boys probably had to sweep the floor. I just don't remember.

Laas: Did you feel you got a pretty good education?

Bennett: I do. I certainly do. I mean, it's not like the kids today get, of course. And they're so far advanced from what we were at the same level.

Laas: Do you think?

Bennett: As far as reading and writing, I'm not so sure on that. We're comparing this seventh grader to this seventh grader.

Laas: Do you think you stack up pretty well?

Bennett: I think they did. I think they did. To what they—I mean these kids today, they might spell “your” “ur.”

Laas: Mm-hm. Did you mostly concentrate on reading and writing and arithmetic? Did you do much—

Bennett: And Geography.

Laas: —did you do much geography.

Bennett: We did geography and history.

Laas: History.

Bennett: And—

Laas: Did you have library books?

Bennett: We had books. I don't remember where they came from or how they—I guess we took them home. We had work—

[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

Bennett: —books, you know, that we would use.

Laas: Did the bookmobile come?

Bennett: No.

Laas: No. Did you have access to—

Bennett: Not at our school. I think that was a little later. I think that was a little later, probably, that that system started.

Laas: Yeah. Maybe so. Did you go to a public library at all to get books to read?

Bennett: No. No. And I'm not a reader. But my sister had the same background and she's a reader. So it depends on—I'm interested in genealogical reading now. I read a lot of that.
(laughs)

Laas: Yeah. Yeah.

Bennett: But novels and stuff, no.

Laas: And tell me again, where you went to high school?

Bennett: I went to Republic to High School.

Laas: Into Republic.

Bennett: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Laas: And when you got out of these one-room schools and went to high school, did you feel you were—

Bennett: As I said, I felt like I was just as well, ready as the rest of them. I didn't—

Laas: You were just fine.

Bennett: Yeah. As I recall. Wouldn't I remember it if I had felt like I was an outcast or something? I would think you would.

Laas: I would think so. Or if you weren't quite up to speed.

Bennett: Up to speed. I guess, I think so, probably. Of course, the high school was made up of all these rural schools around.

Laas: Right.

Bennett: They were all, had all the same thing, except for the town of Republic. They had, my husband went all eight grades through the Republic school. Where they had one room per, you know, one room per grade, you see.

Laas: Per grade. Mm- hm.

Bennett: But I don't recall ever feeling like an outcast or just, everything just fit right in together. You just went from one to the other, just smooth transition. And I don't remember ever, any particular problems.

Laas: Yeah.

Bennett: I started in the, before I started as a freshman, I started playing a musical instrument. And took lessons from the band director. You know, private lessons. And then—

Laas: What did you play?

Bennett: Saxophone.

Laas: Oh, what fun.

Bennett: So maybe that helped with the transition. It could have.

Laas: How did you, you started that when you were in the one-room school, then.

Bennett: No, it was the summer after I finished eighth grade.

Laas: Okay. Did you have a piano in your one-room school?

Bennett: Yeah. Mm- hm.

Laas: Any other instruments around?

Bennett: No. But the piano was there.

Laas: Did they ever use those schools for other activities other than school? Community meetings or—

Bennett: Not the—I don't recall. I was too young over at, you know, my first school. And I don't recall any. They may have. But I don't, wasn't involved, I guess.

Laas: Yeah. Well do you have any special memories, other memories you'd like to share here? You've got some great stories. And children are children, after all.

Bennett: (laughs) Well, you're talking about strictly school stories.

Laas: Well, when you were going to a one-room school. So it doesn't have to be—

Bennett: While I was going. Oh, okay.

Laas: Yeah.

Bennett: Oh, I can't think right off hand. We used to go stay all night with each other. Everybody would, you know, spend a night.

Laas: Go back and forth.

Bennett: Go back and forth. And you knew their parents. And you knew, in my experience, with my mother, she let me, I started driving when I was eleven years old. I want you to know, I have never had to take a Missouri driving test. Ever.

Laas: Really?

Bennett: No, I have never had a Missouri driving test.

Laas: So you—how does that happen?

Bennett: When I first, okay, I started, Mama would take the car out on the street, you know, out on the highway. Gravel road then. And get it headed out. And I'd drive from the school, it was three-quarters of a mile then, to where we turned in to go into our lane. We called it back up off the road, it was a lane. So my very first time, when I was supposed to stop down there, so we could change drivers and she'd take it on. And my very first one, I used the clutch for the brake. It didn't work very good. (laughter) But then, so I learned to drive. That's the way I learned to drive. And then when I turned sixteen, I went and took, I gave them twenty-five cents.

Laas: And they gave you a license.

Bennett: They gave us a license. In my day and age, that's how you get—there were no driving tests. There were no driving tests. So in Missouri, all you have to do is renew and renew and renew. Just don't let it expire, or you'd have to take a driving test. I have always, all these years. I got my first driving license when I was sixteen years old and I have never had a driving test. Have you ever heard anybody say that before?

Laas: No, I haven't. No. What I want to know is what happened when you hit the clutch instead of the brake.

Bennett: Well, I don't know. Maybe mama went and reached over. I don't know. I remember being scared.

Laas: Yeah. And surprised that nothing happened.

Bennett: (laughs) Couldn't get stopped. Yeah.

Laas: Were there other things that you did as kind of a country child that others would not do? Like driving? Did you live on a farm?

Bennett: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I still have the farm.

Laas: Oh, boy. That's nice.

Bennett: I live here in town, though.

Laas: Did you do chores on the farm?

Bennett: Well—No. My dad never did want anybody else—my middle sister learned how to milk. Because she insisted on it. My oldest sister didn't. And I didn't. Well I, as far as chores, you know, I wish I had a penny for every strawberry or gooseberry I picked. But I mean, you didn't feel like you were forced to or this was a job you had to do every day. You just wanted to please your parents. You didn't—and we, you know, worked out in the yard. And I, I had, when mom was in school, yes, I did chores. I had to cook for the thrashing crew!

Laas: How old were you then?

Bennett: Well, I would have been, well, I was sweet on Sammy. I never will forget my dad saying, I was sweet on Sammy Rader at that point in time. (laughs) We would write notes. So this must have been when I was in eighth grade. And my dad always sat down at the table. And we had iced tea. It was summertime. Thrashing. You know, they were thrashing.

Laas: And you were in what grade?

Bennett: Well, I must have been in the eighth grade.

Laas: Eighth grade?

Bennett: Or seventh, somewhere on the seventh or eighth grade.

Laas: Seventh or eighth grade.

Bennett: Because I know Mama was a teacher. And she'd gone to school. I must have just finished the seventh grade and was going into eighth. I don't know. Yeah, that's when my mom was—

Laas: And how many hands did you cook for?

Bennett: Oh, I don't know. There would be oh, four or five men. My dad. My dad usually would come in and help. He'd come in ahead of them to help me at the last minute.

Laas: At the last minute.

Bennett: Well, probably it was the laster minute than I think. But he, one time I know Sammy, he was in the crew, this boy that I was sweet on. And we were writing notes. (laughs) Daddy said, "Pretty weak tea, isn't it, Sam?" "Yeah." (laughter) Could have popped them both. So you know, I guess if you call them chores, that would be—

Laas: I would think so.

Bennett: That was a chore.

[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]

Laas: And that would be—

Bennett: You know, you weren't, it wasn't like you had this, I don't know, it was just sort of automatic.

Laas: Yeah. Yeah. Do you keep in contact with any of those people you went to the one-room schools?

Bennett: Patty Harper lives in Jeff[erson] City. She was a good friend. Her husband was with the state. Are you from Columbia? Or, I mean, Jeff City?

Laas: I'm from Joplin.

Bennett: Oh, you're from Joplin?

Laas: Mm-hm.

Bennett: Oh, okay. Okay. I'm into genealogy. Forty-four years of it. So, Jasper County.

Laas: Yeah.

Bennett: Yeah. Of the five of us that graduated together from the eighth grade, Patty and me, well, one of them, I went to her husband's funeral just about a month ago. He was in our class, too. Betty Sue Shook. Do you know, you're not from here, you wouldn't know Tom Shook was an auctioneer around here. Everybody would know that name. And Betty Sue was in my class. Oh, that's high school. Excuse me. High school. Eighth grade. Okay. Patty and me. And we've stayed, yeah, we've stayed in touch. We stay, we still do. I went to their golden anniversary. And she came to ours. And then Mary Lou Davis is deceased. She's gone. And so is Norma Jean, the girl that I was talking about, had the convulsions. Had those seizures. And Billy, I don't know. I know that this Melissa was his daughter-in-law. I don't know if whether he's alive or not. Haven't kept in touch. That was your question.

Laas: Well, are there any other stories you'd like to tell or memories you have that we ought to get on the tape?

Bennett: Oh, no.

Laas: Thank you very much.

Bennett: I don't think of anything. I think of something that doesn't pertain to rural schools, but—

Laas: Yeah, yeah.

Bennett: —so far as that.

Laas: Well, I really appreciate your doing this today.

Bennett: Okay.

Laas: It's been fun to talk with you. Thank you very much.

Bennett: Okay, well, I've enjoyed it, Virginia. (laughs)

[End Track 5. End Interview.]