

An Interview with  
**Kenneth Higgins**

at his home in  
Fulton, Missouri

**10 July 2012**

interviewed by Jeff Corrigan



**Oral History Program**  
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One-room Schoolhouse

CD 31



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## PREFACE

Born in Wainwright, Missouri, on December 24, 1939, Kenneth Higgins began attendance at his local one-room school house in 1945. While attending Muir School, Higgins had the same teacher for all eight years, which he believes was to the students' advantage. He recounts the multiple seasonal events that were held at the school for the community. He also touches on a government program that occasionally provided warm lunches for the school. He graduated from the one-room schoolhouse in 1953 and went on to Fulton High School from which he graduated in 1957. He credits the one-room schoolhouse for his quality education and for instilling the importance of community and compassion. Higgins still attends Otterbein United Methodist Church, which he and most of his classmates attended as children when it was United Brethren.

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, Sean Rost.



Narrator: Kenneth Higgins  
Interviewers: Jeff Corrigan  
Date: July 10, 2012  
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

**[Begin Track One. Begin Interview.]**

Corrigan: This is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri. I'm here today, July 10, 21012, in Fulton, Missouri, at the home of Kenneth Higgins to interview him on his experience attending a one-room schoolhouse. Ken, can you start by telling me when and where you were born?

Higgins: I was born on December 24, 1939 at home near Wainwright, Missouri. That's down in the river bottom of Callaway County.

Corrigan: Could you tell me a little bit about your family? How many siblings you had?

Higgins: I have five sisters, one now deceased, and two brothers. So there were eight total of us.

Corrigan: And what were your parents' names?

Higgins: My father's name was Otto, O-t-t-o, Philip Higgins. And my mother was Bertha Emma Maier, M-a-i-e-r, Higgins.

Corrigan: How do you spell Maier again?

Higgins: M-a-i-e-r. It's a little unusual spelling.

Corrigan: And what did they do for a living?

Higgins: Primarily we lived on the farm.

Corrigan: What kind of farm was it?

Higgins: Just small acreage. Had livestock, cattle, and hogs. And a big garden, of course, to feed a tribe, as I call us.

Corrigan: What kind of crops did you grow? Or was it mostly pasture?

Higgins: It was mostly pasture, but we did have wheat and oats.

Corrigan: And did you have to work around the farm, then?

Higgins: Well, we always had chores of some sort. Obviously it was my job to see that either the wood got carried in, put in the wood box. Or sometimes we burned coal, and so I had to carry that in. And I got to take out the ashes as well and carry in the water.

Corrigan: Where do you fall in in the eight of you?

Higgins: I'm number four. I had three sisters older than I.

Corrigan: Okay. So when and where did you start school?

Higgins: Actually, here in Callaway. Of course I've lived my whole live in Callaway County. But it was about five miles south of town here at a school called Muir, M-u-i-r School. And I started in August of 1945. School always started early in August and let out early in April.

Corrigan: April, okay. Is the—it doesn't exist anymore today, right? The school's gone?

Higgins: The school is gone itself, but the building is still there.

Corrigan: Oh, it is?

Higgins: It is.

Corrigan: The building's there.

Higgins: Uh huh.

Corrigan: So you said five miles south of Fulton. Do you know what road it's on?

Higgins: Well now it's on County Road 405. Then it was just Route 6, I think, is what they referred to it as.

Corrigan: Was it a dirt road? Or gravel?

Higgins: It was gravel. The school was on a gravel road.

Corrigan: Now could you describe the building for me? Could you both inside and out, what you remember? Everything from the color, the size, the—

Higgins: Well I can't exactly tell you the size. I thought it was huge when I went there. (laughs) I would suspect it's probably twenty by forty or something like that. But that's only a guess from, it was very tall, because I know we used to play Annie Over. You know that that is. And it was pretty hard to get the ball over the roof sometimes. It was just one room. And it had a front porch on it. Just a concrete slab with a roof over it. And the well was outside. It was about an acre of land there, so we had plenty of room to play during recess and whatever.

Corrigan: Was it white?



Higgins: White, yes.

Corrigan: And was it—were there windows on both sides?

Higgins: There were.

Corrigan: Were they the tall windows?

Higgins: Yes. Yes. Well I—the ceiling was very tall. I would suspect it was 18 foot, maybe. I don't know.

Corrigan: Did it kind of look like one of the white country churches?

Higgins: It did.

Corrigan: You said there was the porch on the front. Were there two entrances?

Higgins: No.

Corrigan: Just one.

Higgins: Just one.

Corrigan: Was there another entrance off the back at all?

Higgins: There was not.

Corrigan: Okay.

**[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]**

Higgins: We could always get out the window if we had to.

Corrigan: Okay. So they weren't, the windows weren't too high up.

Higgins: No.

Corrigan: Okay. You said there was a well outside.

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: So somebody had to bring in the water.

Higgins: Well, it had a pump.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: I don't know what you call those kinds of pumps, but you had to pump the water up. Yeah. So we didn't, we usually just went to the well and pumped water at recess or at lunch time for whoever wanted to get a glass of water.

Corrigan: Did you have those individual dippers? Or did you all share like a cup?

Higgins: Oh, most everybody had their own cup.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Was there an outhouse?

Higgins: There were two.

Corrigan: Two.

Higgins: One for the boys, one for the girls.

Corrigan: Were they on opposite ends of the, behind the schoolhouse?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Was there any other type of building? A coal shed?

Higgins: There was a coal shed. And it was pretty good-sized for that type of structure. But other than that, there wasn't anything.

Corrigan: So there was no equipment outside, like recess equipment?

Higgins: Well we did have, when I first remember going, we had a tire swing. And then later, we were able to raise enough money and so we had, I'm thinking there were four swings on a metal stand of some sort. I believe we also had, I guess you call it a teeter totter. That was about the extent of it.

Corrigan: Now you said you had a tire swing. Were there large trees, then?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Do you remember, did you have the individual desks? Or did you have those shared desks?

Higgins: When I first started, we shared. There were two people at a desk. And then we got individual size, individual size desks. Smaller for the smaller students, and then the bigger ones as you moved up. Seemed to me there were probably three different sizes of desk.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you have a chalkboard at the front? Or did you have the individual slates?

Higgins: A chalkboard. There was a stage at the front of the building. And then you went up on the stage, and then, it was just one step up, as best I remember. And then the chalkboard was clear across the whole thing.

Corrigan: Do you remember anything else about the interior? Was there any, was there a flag? Was there any type of pictures hanging?

Higgins: There was a picture of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. And then there was this picture, oh goodness, it's a famous painting of the old couple standing, and I've seen it in many places, but I cannot tell you what it was named.

Corrigan: You mean the farm couple?

Higgins: Uh huh.

Corrigan: The *American Gothic* by Grant Wood?

Higgins: That's probably who it was, yes.

Corrigan: He's holding the pitchfork?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's *American Gothic* by Grant Wood.

Higgins: Okay.

Corrigan: That was done in Iowa, actually.

Higgins: Okay.

Corrigan: So that was hanging?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: And then we did have, on the sides of the walls, between the windows, were some sort of boards like that you could pin stuff on and whatever. And we would bring pictures from calendars, once the calendar was, we were through with the calendar, we would put those on those things. Pictures of, like the US Capitol and the White House and those kinds of things. And then later we got really sophisticated when we got electricity. Because we had kerosene lamps to start with, and they were on a little swing-like thing by each window. And then when we got electricity, we had the florescent lights. And we had some sort of ultraviolet ray things that were supposed to help control germs.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: One on each side. I remember that.

Corrigan: Okay. Were there any maps, or any pull-down maps in the room?

Higgins: Yes, there was. One of the whole United States is the only, there might have been more in that map case, but that's the only one I ever remember.

Corrigan: Okay. Did the teacher sit up front in front of the stage?

Higgins: She sat up front, but not on the stage.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: And she had a desk. And we had a library table, we called it, that you could go and work at if your desk wasn't big enough to do whatever. And I remember a globe. And we had one of the huge dictionaries, unabridged dictionaries.

Corrigan: Okay. Was there a library section in the school?

Higgins: We had shelves in the back of the school. But then later, they put—

**[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]**

Higgins: —a partition up to make it, so they could have more space back there. And they did have library books back there.

Corrigan: Were these books that you could check out and take home?

Higgins: Most of, oh, yeah. It wasn't any big deal. We just went and got it off the shelf and took it home. We didn't do the checkout thing as such. And you'd read the same books every year, pretty much. I mean, they did get, there were some new ones we got along the way.

Corrigan: But generally they were, was it just—are we talking 50 books or 100 books?

Higgins: Oh, there were probably more than 100. Some of them were very small. And some of them had been given to us by—(telephone rings)

Corrigan: I'm going to pause this. [pause] We took just a brief break. Okay. We took a brief break there. We were still talking about the inside of the school. You had mentioned, I had mentioned if there was 100 books or more, and you had said yeah, there were definitely more than that. That you could just freely take them home. And that's kind of where we left off at. Approximately, was there, well was there a place for, when you came in, was there a place to hang up your coats? Was there a coat rack in the back? Was that where you kept your lunches?

Higgins: Yes. In the very back, there was. On one side was where we kept the books. On the other side was where the stove was. When I first went, we had a coal stove. And then later we got a fuel oil stove. But that's where it was always at there. And there was plenty of room to do, many times we got to keep our coats at our desk because it was cold in the building in the winter time. (Corrigan laughs) But we did have a place to keep our lunch and whatever else back there.

Corrigan: Now where was the stove in the room?

Higgins: As you go in the door, which obviously was at the back of the school, and as you went in, it was just over here to the right. Very short distance.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: There was some space between there and that's where we usually kept our lunchboxes.

Corrigan: Okay. Now you said the school building itself still exists today.

Higgins: It does. Yes.

Corrigan: Is it just abandoned? Or does it serve another purpose or function?

Higgins: Well after we left the school, then the adjoining property owner bought it. It seemed like there was some sort of a clause in the lease that when it was no longer a school, that portion of the land reverted back to the original farm. But then he bought the stuff that was there. And then I think, we used it as a church for a while. Because the church building, the roof blew off. And so we moved down to the church. I mean, the church moved down to the schoolhouse. And then after that, I think, people lived there. They divided it up into rooms and made it a living quarters. Now—

Corrigan: Like a single family home?

Higgins: Yes. Yes. Now they have moved in a mobile home or something at the moment, so they don't use it. But it's not in very good shape, obviously.

Corrigan: Now you said, when did the school actually close? Do you know?

Higgins: I'm thinking probably the mid '60s.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: They consolidated with the South Callaway School District here in the county.

Corrigan: So South Callaway School District.

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. Now how many students were in your class?

Higgins: Now when I started first grade, I was the only one. In the second grade, there were two others had moved in. And by the time I got to the eighth grade, there were five of us in the eighth grade. But only three of us finished up. One had gotten to be 16, so he could quit. And the other one, a horse fell on him and broke his leg and he never came back after that. So there were three of us who graduated from the eighth grade.

Corrigan: Now approximately how many kids were in the school at any given time?

Higgins: I'm thinking probably the most we had was about 22, 24. It never varied very much. Because you know, there was usually one that would graduate and there would be another one that starts. So the number of students remained pretty consistent.

Corrigan: Okay. So that was from, because you went first through eighth grade, right?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. Now how many teachers did you have during that time period?

Higgins: Had the same teacher the whole eight years.

Corrigan: You did. What was her name?

Higgins: Gladys Beyersdorff. B-e-y-e-r-s-d-o-r-f-f.

Corrigan: She was your teacher the entire time?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Could you describe her or talk about her a little? What you remember of her?

Higgins: Well, of course she was just the greatest person we've ever known, really. She really was. She was a very—

**[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]**

Higgins: —caring person. She was not, she was probably five-five, I don't know. She was just the teacher. She was bigger than we were, most of us anyway. But she always, even in the cold weather, she always dressed in a dress. Sometimes her husband could bring her to school in the car. But other times she had to walk from home, which was probably a mile and a half for her. So then she would wear some sort of slacks or blue jeans or whatever they wore during those times. And when she got there, she would take those off and whatever.

Corrigan: And she was married.

Higgins: Yes. Uh huh.

Corrigan: So occasionally she was brought in a car. Now you said she was about a mile and a half from the school. How far were you from the school?

Higgins: About two miles.

Corrigan: Two miles. And did you walk that regularly?

Higgins: Yes. Rarely did we ever get a ride.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: When we first moved there, the roads were mud roads. We had no gravel. I think we had a car. But more times than not, we had a neighbor who had a car. His son had went to the war and came home and then he bought a new car. And then he committed suicide. And so the father was left with the car, but he didn't know how to drive. He was seventy-five, probably. And so many times he would come in horse and wagon if the road was not so he could get the car out. And we would ride into town with them to buy groceries and do whatever. To do our trading. That's a term they used to use for whatever you were going to do. (laughs)

Corrigan: Okay. So you lived about two miles in what direction? Closer to town or further away?

Higgins: Closer to town. It was more, actually I was about four miles from town. But you had to go west a ways and then come north. And occasionally we could cut through a field and cut off some—

Corrigan: So you didn't have to just walk around the road. You could cut through a pasture?

Higgins: Yes. We did. We had to watch out because they had cattle. And we were not sure what they were going to do. So we hovered pretty close to the fence.

Corrigan: Okay. And now obviously you were walking with your siblings. And you said you were fourth. So you had three older sisters that would take you. How far apart are you all? Was there a time period where you were all in the school?

Higgins: No. No. I think my two older sisters were in the same grade, because my older sister had been ill. Then because they started at another school, and there was a limited small amount of students. And so they could take two grades in one year. So my second sister, she graduated high school when she was 15. So she would take two years at one time in grade school. So they both went, I think they started together about the third grade. I think the older sister went maybe first and second grade by herself. And then from then on, there were always two, three or four of us.

Corrigan: Now did you learn a lot from listening to the older kids? Do you remember that at all?

Higgins: Oh, yes, I do. I think we did. Because by the time we got to their level, we already knew what we were going to talk about and what the answers were, usually. So we did.

Corrigan: Did you ever, did the teacher ever have the older kids work with the younger kids? Do you remember that?

Higgins: Yes, they did. I specifically remember when I was in the first grade, someone in the seventh or eighth grade would usually, if the weather was nice, they would take me out on the porch and we would read or whatever it was. And I actually remember there was this large box of words stamped on cards. And we used those a lot. And so we would learn—

Corrigan: So almost like large flashcards?

Higgins: Yes, uh huh. I think they're using those back again. Sometimes I've seen them—it's nothing new for me. I had them 70 years ago. (laughter)

Corrigan: Were they math or were they words? Or what were they?

Higgins: It was a combination.

Corrigan: Okay. So you were paired off a little bit. Do you think that was to your advantage, to be able to hear what the older kids were learning and pay attention to them?

Higgins: I did. We could do our own thing at our own desk. But it was sometimes very interesting to hear them discuss whatever was going on.

Corrigan: Now did the teacher—

**[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]**

Corrigan: —did she split it up where maybe today she worked with the seventh graders and tomorrow the fifth graders and the next day the first graders? Or did she try to get a little bit of time each day with the kids? Do you remember?

Higgins: I believe everybody got attention every day. Now when we, like I remember specifically when we had reading, you know, everybody had to take their turn at reading in their group. And I think the morning started out with reading. And then I believe we went into arithmetic after that, and spelling. Those were all things done before lunchtime. And then we always had an hour out for lunch. School started at 8:30 and then we dismissed at 3:30. And we couldn't go much later than 3:30, because those that had a good walk, in the winter it would be dark by the time they got home if it was, so whatever. It seems like we all got attention every day, that I remember.



Corrigan: Okay. I wasn't sure. Did she, when it was your class' turn, did you go up to the front? Were you at her desk? Or were you just at your desk?

Higgins: No, we went to the front. There was—when we got the, I don't remember exactly what they'd done in the first, when I was in first grade. I think I went up front to her desk. But later, when we got these individual desks, she did keep some of those where two people sit at a desk over on one side. And that's where she would, everybody would, like if it was the sixth grade, the sixth graders all came and sat at those couple of desks, and she was in front.

Corrigan: Okay. Now what activities do you remember doing at the school? And I'm thinking, did you have a Christmas program? Pie suppers? Any other social events there?

Higgins: Well we always, I believe, always had what we called a pie and box supper, okay?

Corrigan: Could you describe that?

Higgins: Well it was just everybody in the community came, practically. And the girls were all supposed to bring either a box with a pie in it or some sort of something that, sandwiches, whatever, I can't tell you what. I usually didn't have enough money to buy anything, so I couldn't do that. And then people would, an auctioneer would come and auction them off. And the highest bidder, of course, got them. And then afterwards, you sat down with whoever you bought their box or pie, and ate.

Corrigan: Now were these boxes, were they decorated?

Higgins: Yes. Usually some sort of crepe paper, best I remember.

Corrigan: And then, do you remember what time of year this was? Fall? Spring?

Higgins: It was fall. It was probably, if we started early August, it was probably early September.

Corrigan: Okay. Early on.

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: And was this held at night?

Higgins: Yes. Probably seven o'clock, but I don't specifically remember that.

Corrigan: Okay. And do you remember, what were they raising money for?

Higgins: Well, that's how we bought some of the playground equipment. That's basically what it was. Or books for the library. One year we got a whole new set of encyclopedias. And I think that's where the money came from to get those.

Corrigan: Okay. Do you remember at all, by any chance, how much were people paying for these things? A pie or box supper? What was the going rate?

Higgins: Oh, it would be a guess. Probably two dollars was high.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Do you remember doing, did you have a Christmas program?

Higgins: We did. We also had a Halloween, always usually always had a Halloween party.

Corrigan: Okay. And is that one where you guys dressed up?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Was that during the day? Or was that an evening event, too?

Higgins: No, it was in the evening.

Corrigan: Is that one where the community came, too?

Higgins: Mm hmm. And the students would all be either outside or in the back of the room. And then they would all march in in a circle and they would guess who was who. Of course, that wasn't a very difficult task. (laughter) But whoever got to stay up the longest ended up with, I don't know, a candy bar or something out of the ordinary.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. But everybody would come dressed. And you would make your own costume.

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: And would you, so basically, were you playing games? Was this where you would, would you bob for apples? Or would you—

Higgins: It seems that we did that. I don't remember me doing it specifically. But I think there was something going on there, yes.

Corrigan: Okay. And then you had a Christmas program, you said.

Higgins: We did.

Corrigan: Is that one, could you, do you remember anything about them?

Higgins: Yes. We would take, where the stage is up front, and the teacher would put, there were curtains that she could put clear—

**[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]**

Higgins: —across the whole front of the building. It was, I guess just wire that she put those on. And then she could make it like a middle setting. And so the props or whatever could be back behind these, on the side. And then we would do, we sometimes did speeches, or we did little plays of whatever. Sang. And if we had quite a bit of changing to do on the stage, she had a phonograph. And I presume you know what that is.

Corrigan: Okay. Mm hmm.

Higgins: She would play some sort of a Christmas record while we were—

Corrigan: So it was a combination of things. Singing—

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: Skits. Would you guys practice this all the way up—

Higgins: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

Corrigan: So it was kind of an elaborate production.

Higgins: Well we thought it was the biggest thing in the world, you know. But it wasn't like the Academy Award. But I mean, it was big to us at the time.

Corrigan: Okay. And then, so you sang. Was there by any chance, was there a piano in the school?

Higgins: There was. But there was nobody that could play it.

Corrigan: Really? Okay. So there was, but she had a phonograph, though.

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. Was there any other, can you remember anything else? Did you have any other functions there? Was there any, did you have a spring event or end of the school?

Higgins: Well, the spring event was the teacher's birthday. That was March 29<sup>th</sup>. (laughs) And so we would have a special—well, we did, we had a Valentine party as well. And we would elect a king and queen of Valentine's, who got to hand out the valentines. We'd all bring them and put them in a, oh, I don't know, we had a box of some sort and it had been decorated with something. Or we probably just drew on it, maybe, I don't remember exactly. And then we'd hand out the valentines. And most everybody brought a valentine for everybody, you know. Because you could probably get 20 in a bag for 10 cents, or something like that. And then in the spring we had the teacher's birthday party. And some of the parents came for that. And we usually collected small amounts of money to buy maybe her a rose bush or some sort of a flower or something of that nature.

Corrigan: But you remember that it was March 29<sup>th</sup>.

Higgins: Yes. I still remember that today when March 29<sup>th</sup> comes around. I always say, well today would have been Miss Gladys's, we always called her Miss Gladys, Miss Gladys' birthday. (laughs)

Corrigan: Okay. So it must have been a fun time, then.

Higgins: And then the last day of school was usually, we had a basket dinner.

Corrigan: And what's that?

Higgins: Well, the families came in and brought—

Corrigan: Like a picnic dinner?

Higgins: Picnic dinner. Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: We usually had it in the inside of the building and set up some sort of a, I guess we probably took a bench or some, I don't know what we did. We probably used that library table and maybe the teacher's desk for putting food on and whatever.

Corrigan: Okay. Now could you tell me a little bit about recess? Do you remember how long it was? How many you had per day? Some of the games you played?

Higgins: I'm thinking we had two a day. One in the morning, one in the afternoon. Probably 15 minutes or thereabouts. But she wasn't real strict about the time. If we were in the middle of a baseball, a softball game, we had to wait till the, we didn't know it as the inning, but until the three outs were made. You know, if that went over five minutes, she was lenient with us in that. Well that and in the wintertime, there were a couple of kids that came that had sleds. And there was a kind of a nice slope down in front of the road in front. And we would use sleds or we'd throw snowballs at each other. We played a lot of softball. We didn't play hardball. And that was our biggest, and the teacher was just as active. She would play in that as well with us.

Corrigan: So she was outside with you the whole time?

Higgins: Yeah. Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. You mentioned Annie Over earlier.

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: So you would play that. But you said it was quite hard to get over.

Higgins: Yeah. There weren't too many that could get the ball over the roof. It was a pretty tall building. But we would, then we always played, I guess you would call it tag, but we always called it rabbit and dog, you know. (laughs) You would run and then the dog, per se, was supposed to try to catch you. And then if you did, you were out. But if you could get back to home base by then—we took turns whoever left the base until everybody ran away.

Corrigan: Now did you have to adjust games because of the number of kids? Or you actually had enough to play softball?

Higgins: Oh, yeah, we just—

**[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]**

Higgins: I don't remember that as a first grader I played. But after that you just, everybody got out there and played together.

Corrigan: So everybody did play together?

Higgins: Yeah.

Corrigan: And you had mentioned eventually you had gotten swings, a teeter totter. Was there a sidewalk or anything? Were kids playing—

Higgins: Hopscotch?

Corrigan: Yeah.

Higgins: Yes. From the porch to the well, there was a concrete, I'm sure it was concrete slab, sidewalk, that went. When we started the day every day, we all lined up outside on the sidewalk and marched into the school. And you'd march to your desk. And there we would do the pledge of allegiance and the Lord's Prayer. And then after that, we had what was called a nine-point health program. And I can't remember whether we done this the whole time I was there. But someone, it would be your week to be in charge. So you got to see whether everybody came to school with clean fingernails, had supposedly brushed their teeth. And then if that was the case, there was a thing on the wall, a chart, like. And if you met all those, you got a gold star. And if you didn't, you got a blue star. And so, whatever.

Corrigan: You said nine points. Do you remember what some of the other ones were?

Higgins: I don't remember. That's what they always called it, the nine-point health thing. But I don't remember what the rest of them were.

Corrigan: There would be a board off to the side and somebody would mark it down? Okay. What did you do when there was bad weather outside for recess? Did you stay inside?

Higgins: We stayed inside.

Corrigan: And do you remember what you did then?

Higgins: Well, it seems, we played where we moved from desk to desk some way. Sort of like musical chair, I guess, but that wasn't exactly it because I don't know what we used for music unless somebody got up and sang. We used to play a game called clap in and clap out. (laughs) So if it wasn't too cold, the fellows would all, the boys would all go out on the porch and the girls would stay inside. And they would choose who was going to sit beside them. And then when it was your turn to come in, if you sat by the right person, you got to stay there. Otherwise you had to go back out again and wait your turn to come back in again. So it was just kind of a—

Corrigan: And what was the clapping part of that?

Higgins: Well, if you didn't sit at the right place, they would clap so you knew you had to get out.

Corrigan: Okay. So you would, okay, so there'd be all these seats next to the girls. And they determined that you were supposed to sit next to so and so.

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: And you would come in and sit down.

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: But if you sat, so they didn't say anything.

Higgins: No.

Corrigan: But if you sat at the right desk—

Higgins: You got to stay.

Corrigan: And they would not clap.

Higgins: That's right.

Corrigan: But if you sat at the wrong desk, they would start clapping. And then you'd have to leave?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: So the object was to get everybody sitting?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. So that could easily take a whole recess, then.

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. But it was called clap in and clap out?

Higgins: I don't know why we called it that, but we did. Just kind of like the rabbit and dog thing. Now kids, I think, would call it tag of some sort.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you ever play anything like red rover?

Higgins: Yes, we did do that. That was kind of a rough game, though. When you're talking like an eighth grade boy and a first grade student, girl or boy, it was kind of, a little rough game for them. So we didn't do much of that.

Corrigan: Okay. Is there any other games you can remember? Or that stick out?

Higgins: No. No. I really think that was the most part of it.

Corrigan: Did you have chores to perform at school? Such as cleaning the erasers, water, carrying in coal or—

Higgins: Usually whoever was the eighth grade boy took care of the stove. Okay? Until we got the fuel oiler burner, then that kind of took care of itself. We took turns cleaning the building. You could get, it seems like to me two dollars and fifty cents a month to clean. We had to sweep the building and clean it as such twice a day, at noontime and then at the end of that day. Whoever got that job would do that.

Corrigan: So the student actually got paid two dollars and fifty cents?

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: And how often would you rotate?

Higgins: Well it seems to me, I think they said once a month. But I think it was probably every four weeks I mean, as such.

Corrigan: Okay. So that involved sweeping, cleaning. So that student would do that, and they would do that at noon and then at the end of the day?

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: So in winter, would the teacher show up early? Or would it be that eighth grade boy that would start the—

Higgins: You know, I think both. I think when the fire had to be built, the eighth grade boy did it. When we had the fuel—

**[End Track 7. Begin Track 8.]**

Higgins: —oil burner I think the teacher, she was usually the first one to get there most of the time anyway because her husband would bring her. I think he started to work at seven o'clock or something. So if he was going to be able to drive her by, she would be there to make sure that the building was heated.

Corrigan: Okay. I forgot to ask this earlier. You said when you lined up and marched in and did the pledge of allegiance and you said the Lord's Prayer, outside was there a flagpole?

Higgins: Yes, there was.

Corrigan: Did the students put up the flag each day and take it down?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Did everybody rotate that?

Higgins: I don't think so. I believe usually whoever was seventh or eighth grade did that.

Corrigan: Okay. So it was the older kids that did that.

Higgins: Yes. Uh huh.

Corrigan: And then the other thing outside, was there a school bell on top? Or was it—

Higgins: No. The teacher just had one that she rang.

Corrigan: A handheld—

Higgins: A hand bell, yes.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you take your lunch each day?

Higgins: Most of the time. However, sometime during those eight years that I was there, there was some sort of a government program. And I can't tell you much more than that. But they would provide like soups and whatever else. And those would be heated and we would have those at lunchtime. But I think we still always carried along something.

Corrigan: Do you remember what a typical lunch was for you that you'd bring?

Higgins: Just a, one sandwich and maybe an apple or an orange or perhaps a candy bar, some cookies. Occasionally Mother made cake and we took cake and those kind of things.



Corrigan: Was it seasonal? Like you said you had a big garden at your house. Did you have an orchard or apple trees?

Higgins: We had apple and pear, plum and cherry trees.

Corrigan: And then would your mom make preserves and that?

Higgins: Oh, yes.

Corrigan: Okay. So you would bring in, so it would be a variety of either sandwich, would it be leftovers from the night before? Or was this made each day?

Higgins: No, we usually had maybe Vienna sausage or potted meat or Spam, I don't know whether they called it Spam then or not, but those kinds of things.

Corrigan: Okay. So that, cold sandwich, you said. Sandwich, maybe an apple and cookies or cake or something.

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you bring a sack or a lunchbox?

Higgins: It depends. We had sacks. But if it was going to rain, we couldn't do that, because we had two miles to walk, so you wouldn't have any lunch when you got there. We occasionally, I don't know that we ever had a lunchbox as such. But we would take it in, we would buy syrup or molasses in tins. And after that was gone, we would use that as a lunchbox. And we weren't the only ones. There were very few that had real lunchboxes.

Corrigan: You said you attended, we got grades one through eight there.

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: And then after that, you went to Fulton High School? Is that correct?

Higgins: Mm hmm. That's right.

Corrigan: And you said you graduated there in 1953? Is that correct?

Higgins: From the grade school, yes.

Corrigan: '53 from the grade school. When did you graduate high school, then?

Higgins: '57.

Corrigan: Now did they have a bussing system once you went to high school, or no?

Higgins: No.

Corrigan: Okay. So how did you get to high school?

Higgins: Well, when I was, let's see. The first, when I was a freshman and maybe a sophomore, I stayed in town with my grandparents to go to school, as had my siblings before me. And then after that, when I was a freshman, my father died. And so that left my mother and four siblings still at home. And then I moved back home. And we would get up at four o'clock in the morning. And I would walk about a mile to a neighbor who went to work at 5:30 but they left home at five. So we'd have to be there. So they would let us ride into town. And we would stay at our grandparents' house till school started. And then in the evening we would come back, and there was another neighbor who worked in town and left town at four o'clock. And so she would pick us up and drop us back. And then we would get out and walk home.

Corrigan: Okay. Going back just a little bit, you graduated eighth grade. Did they have a graduation?

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: Could you tell me about that?

Higgins: Well it seems to me it was just kind of the general last day of school thing. We had a picnic or luncheon of some sort. Then we, those that were going to graduate—

**[End Track 8. Begin Track 9.]**

Higgins: —had to have on their best clothes. They were going to have to get up front. And we were supposed to give speeches. And I panicked on that. But the teacher never made me do it. The other two she asked to do it, but she didn't ask me to do it. (laughs) So I took advantage of that.

Corrigan: Were you shy?

Higgins: Yes. Very much so.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you actually have to, did they actually have, did they present you with a certificate? Or the actual diploma?

Higgins: A diploma, yes, uh huh.

Corrigan: Did you have a rope or anything you had to wear?

Higgins: Oh, no, no, no.

Corrigan: Just your best clothes.

Higgins: Just our best clothes.

Corrigan: Okay. Would the parents come, then, that last day?

Higgins: Generally, yes. Of course, it depended on what, sometimes if we had it in the evening, both could come. But usually the father worked. And maybe in town. So you can't get off of work, necessarily.

Corrigan: So this was during the day. This wasn't like an evening—

Higgins: Most of the time, yes. Most of the time it was during the day.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So it wasn't like one of the other evening events you had—

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: Okay. So you said they gave a speech. Okay. Was there any type of—because that last day, you said, was kind of like a picnic, too, where people would come. Your mom or whoever. And the other families that could make it.

Higgins: Right.

Corrigan: You said you've always lived in Callaway County and here. Did a lot of people that you went to school with, did they tend to stay in this area? Or did they go elsewhere? If you had to guess 50 one way or the other—

Higgins: I would say there were more stayed here than left.

Corrigan: Okay. So do you still run into people, then, that you went to school with here?

Higgins: Oh, yes. Yes. Actually, when I was in the first grade, I was the only student. But the next year, there were two that came in. And I still see them quite often.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: They live—

Corrigan: So they still live in town here?

Higgins: In the area, yeah.

Corrigan: In the area. Okay.

Higgins: I don't know that they live in the city limits, I'm sure they don't, but whatever. But even high school students, a lot of the high school students, and many of them left and how have come back for retirement here.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So you actually regularly see a lot of people you went to school with.

Higgins: Yeah. Right.

Corrigan: This is kind of a general question, but do you feel that you got a quality education at the one-room school and at the high school? And if so, or if not, why? But if so, why do you think that's the case?

Higgins: I feel very comfortable in saying yes to the grade school because, as compared to now, because I think teachers have to spend all their time trying to control the class. And that was not a problem. If you got in trouble at school, you didn't want to go home, because you were going to get in worse trouble there. And I don't know that that happens in today's world. So the teacher didn't have to spend all her time disciplining somebody. She could spend her time teaching. And so really, I think I probably knew more than many of the students that I met when I came into town to high school. I was—I don't want to say that I was a genius, but I knew more than a lot of them knew. And then high school, I think we got, that wasn't a big problem. You know, the big thing going on in high school was if they could catch somebody smoking back then. (laughs) That was about the biggest crime we had. And so—

Corrigan: Do you think, is part of this because of Miss Gladys herself? Was she a well-educated woman?

Higgins: I think she was. But I don't know that it was necessarily only her. Because I knew other teachers that taught that things turned out pretty good with their students as well.

Corrigan: Okay. Was education, do you think a lot of the parents, not only your parents, but the other parents in the area, did they value education?

Higgins: Oh, yes. Yes. In fact, my parents, neither one, got to finish elementary school. My mother had to quit I think when she was 10 years old because her mother had cancer. And they lived on a farm. Her dad had died when she was five. And so somebody had to sort of look after Mom. And she did that. But, you know, and even though she'd only be for what you might say formal education for five years, she could do most anything she wanted to, but in later years as well. And my father was very much, very well read. He spent—eight o'clock was bedtime. If we didn't get to bed by eight, we'd never get up the next morning to go to school. But he would sit up later than that and—

**[End Track 9. Begin Track 10.]**

Higgins: —read. And he had a neighbor not so far from us who was somewhat disabled. And so they always exchanged books. Once he read all the ones that he had found or got somewhere, then they would trade. So he would, was—

Corrigan: Well read.

Higgins: Well read.

Corrigan: Okay. What about, I didn't bring this up, but what about the school board? Was that primarily made up of just the parents in the area?

Higgins: No, there were three directors, best I remember, that were elected to run it. And they had what they called a school clerk. She wrote the checks. And I don't know what else. Paid the bills. Whatever bills there were. I presume, you know, the fuel bill. And then once we got electricity, obviously she had to pay for that and whatever else. And then at the first, I'm thinking it was the first Tuesday in April, we would dismiss school at noon and then they would have a meeting. And most of the parents that could would come for that, that meeting. And they would determine whether they were going to keep the teacher for another year and how much they were going to pay her. I don't know what all they determined. I never got to sit in on those reports.

Corrigan: Do you remember ever a superintendent coming by to—

Higgins: He came almost, Ben Frieberger was the county superintendent of schools.

Corrigan: Ben Frieberger?

Higgins: Ben Frieberger.

Corrigan: Okay.

Higgins: And he came, I'm thinking he probably came once a year.

Corrigan: And was that a big event?

Higgins: Well, you know, we have to be, we were alerted that when Ben Frieberger comes, we have to do our best, whatever. And then once he was gone, then of course we didn't have to be quite so particular, because we knew he wouldn't be back for another year usually. And I don't think he came any oftener than that. But I seriously doubt it. Because as many schools as there were in the county, other than, I don't think he was over the city schools. But all the rural schools, he was. Had an office in the courthouse downtown.

Corrigan: Okay. Do you by any chance remember how he spelled Frieberger?

Higgins: Uh, F-r-i-e-b-e-r-g-e-r, I think, something like that.

Corrigan: B-e-r-g-e-r. Okay. Do you remember having to take any state or county exams?

Higgins: When I graduated from the eighth grade, I did. I had to come into Fulton, into town. And I'm thinking I was at the high school, but I remember the day but I don't remember where it was at. And we had to take an exam. You could have made A's—well, we didn't use the A, we used the E, F—E, S, M, I, F grading system. Excellent, superior, medium, inferior or failure is the system they used. And you could have had all E's, but if you came into town and you got an F, you didn't graduate. You didn't get your diploma. So.

Corrigan: So you came in right before you graduated your eighth grade year—

Higgins: Yes, yes.

Corrigan: You came in and took that test.

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: And was it at the school in town?

Higgins: I'm thinking it was. Because the whole county, all the kids came at one time. All those that were going to graduate from the eighth grade came at one time.

Corrigan: Okay. And was that at the end of the year?

Higgins: Yes. Because school was going to be out early April, so it was probably late March.

Corrigan: Okay. And then, was there a long waiting period to find that out? Do you remember that? Or were you just mailed something?

Higgins: We were mailed a letter saying what your score was.

Corrigan: And that you'd completed it, you can move on to the high school?

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: Okay. Here's kind of a general question again. What kind of influence, if any, do you think attending a one-room schoolhouse has had on your life?

Higgins: Well, I think you're a little more concerned about people because we were concerned about everybody in the school, you know. If Mary was out sick, we'd try to see if there was something we could do. And I think that just carried over. Everybody cared about everybody else. I don't think, I don't remember that anybody was mean to anybody in the school, for one thing.

Corrigan: So it was really a community.

Higgins: It was. It was. And not only that. Most of those same kids that went to school, we also went to church together most of the time, too.

Corrigan: Was that a country church, or a church in town here?

Higgins: No—

**[End Track 10. Begin Track 11.]**

Higgins: —in the country, just half a mile up the road.

Corrigan: Okay. And what was the name of that church?

Higgins: Well then it was called the UB Church. United Brethren. Now it's a part of the Methodist. It's called the Otterbein United Methodist Church. Still go there. Gone there since I was four years old.

Corrigan: So it was the UB church.

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: Okay. And you said United Brethren?

Higgins: United Brethren was what UB stood for. But it, almost today if you talk about where you went to church, you have to say you went to UB. They know where it is. If you say, "I go to the Otterbein United Methodist," "Well, never heard of that," so. (laughter)

Corrigan: So now, but technically it's called the Otterbein Methodist Church today.

Higgins: United Methodist.

Corrigan: Okay. So you would see these kids basically Sunday through Friday.

Higgins: Pretty much so. One of the things we did at school was the teacher always wanted us to have perfect attendance. Now we rarely missed school. We'd have to be really sick to miss school. Or if the wind and the temperature was extremely cold, my mother wouldn't let us go to school. That's two miles. But we'd play school at home is what we did. But if you came, and I'm thinking if you came the whole month and I don't remember whether that was the calendar month or four weeks or whatever it was, but anyway you come this period of time, then you got on the last Friday of that time, you got to leave school that Friday at noon. You had a half-day holiday.

Corrigan: So there was an incentive to come, then.

Higgins: Yes, yes.

Corrigan: Okay. So you got—

Higgins: But most of us looked forward to going. I mean, you know, we had no, I don't want to say we had no home life, but it wasn't like you could stay home and watch TV. We couldn't even listen to the radio then, you know. So, whatever.

Corrigan: And this would be the last Friday of the month?

Higgins: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: Would almost everybody have that perfect attendance?

Higgins: No. Because somebody's bound to be sick. When you have 24, 25 students thereabouts, somebody's sick once a month, anyway. So the teacher always had to stay with however many. And of course if we missed, and there was usually four of us, so that would be enough to hold class. (laughter)

Corrigan: But it was an incentive program.

Higgins: Yes, it was.

Corrigan: To try to get people to come and keep that perfect attendance.

Higgins: Yes.

Corrigan: So you didn't have, like some people attend a one-room schoolhouses, they would say it would be very seasonal, the attendance. That you might get more kids to come in the fall, but really, when spring hit, if they really had to take care of the farm you would just never see them. And it would take them a lot longer to finish high school because they just weren't ever going in the spring. Particularly the boys. But that's not really the case you had.

Higgins: No. No. Because we got out early April. And we started after, I guess other than picking corn, most everything was—

Corrigan: Done.

Higgins: Done. And you didn't pick corn until after it frost. Now it's a different thing at the moment, but whatever. But that's what they did. You had to wait till we had a heavy frost before you could pick corn.

Corrigan: I think you actually got out a little earlier than some school districts.

Higgins: Oh, yes. Yes.

Corrigan: And that probably helped to your advantage to keep the kids in longer, versus having to get out to the fields and work.



Higgins: I only remember during the time that I went, one of the fellows that was in my grade dropped out his senior year when he got to be 16. But I think everybody else that I went with during that period of time graduated.

Corrigan: Okay. So overall, you had a quite positive experience of this one-room schoolhouse.

Higgins: I wouldn't trade it for anything. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Corrigan: Just kind of one final thing here, are there any stories or experiences that we didn't cover that I didn't ask you about that you were thinking about prior to me coming here? I don't know what was going through your mind before coming here, trying to think back. But I just want to make sure we've covered all our bases. If there wasn't any other event or anything that you remember that sticks out in your mind when somebody says, "What was it like attending that Muir School?"

Higgins: You know, I don't. I think we basically covered everything. Sometimes I interjected some things into it that probably didn't fall in that part of your question. But I think we've pretty much covered most of it.

Corrigan: Okay. I just wanted to ask to make sure.

Higgins: Okay, sure.

Corrigan: Because some people hold off, waiting for this one question that never comes.

Higgins: No, no.

Corrigan: Okay. Well, that sounds good. Well I'm going to go ahead and shut the recorder off here. Thank you again for this. I really appreciate it.

Higgins: Okay.

**[End Interview.]**