

An Interview with
Dr. Walter Kamphoefner

at the State Historical Society
Columbia, Missouri

3 August 2010

interviewed by Jeff D. Corrigan



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.

JC: This is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri, and I am here today, August 3, 2010, in the Society's conference room to interview Dr. Walter Kamphoefner—Is that pronounced correctly?

WK: Good.

5 JC: Okay. About his experience attending a one-room school house in Augusta, Missouri. Could you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

WK: Um, was born in a hospital in Saint Charles, Missouri, 1948. Uh, grew up in a farm, on a farm near Defiance, Missouri.

JC: Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

10 WK: Yeah, um, I'm the oldest child, oldest grandchild. So—got a lot of attention as a result. Uh, oldest of five. Um, learned to read on my own, well before I got to grade school. My mom claims I read a headline "International Bridge Washed Out" when I was five—in fact I should check that out in the *Globe Democrat* files here and see exactly when that was.

15 JC: Yeah, we have all those papers. (laughs) I think that newspaper ended in 1988, but everything before that we have. So you're one of five, um, what did your parents do for a living?

WK: Well, my dad is a farmer and my mom's a house wife. Uh, and much more of course on a farm.

20 JC: Was it just, uh, crops, or did you have animals too or?

WK: Uh, animals as well. Milked a few cows by hand when I was a kid. Uh, raised some hogs. Mom had some chickens. Uh, fairly general farm. Uh, corn, wheat, hay—not much soybeans yet back then.

JC: Um-hm. Now when and where, um, did you start school?

WK: Okay, started school when I was six years old, which what I guess would be '54, uh—at a one-room Lutheran grade school in Augusta, Missouri, Christ Lutheran School—

5 JC: Now could you, uh, describe the school both physically inside and outside, um, what did it look like, roughly how big it was?

WK: I should have brought a picture, but, uh, I didn't have one along, uh it was built in the 1920s. Uh, upstairs there was the school room, a little ole, maybe eight by ten library and a hall with a closet. Uh, downstairs in the basement, uh, was the cafeteria and we
10 played down there on rainy days some as well.

JC: How big of a building do you think it was?

WK: Uh, I would guess about, uh say twenty by twenty—that seems too small. Uh—more like, uh, thirty feet by twenty four I guess.

JC: Okay. Now was it, um, you said upstairs, now was it two floors or was there just one
15 main floor and then a basement?

WK: Um, it was a semi-basement and one main floor.

JC: Okay—Now does the school building still exist today?

WK: Uh, no it was torn down with school, or uh with the church expansion—

JC: So what's located there right now is just a larger portion of the church?

20 WK: Yeah, sort of a wing.

JC: Okay.

WK: They just had their 150th anniversary, uh, this last fall [2009]. I was there. I helped them transcribe some German records and things like that.

JC: Okay. And where in the town is this located at?

WK: Uh, it's right on the edge of town, just uh, where you can see it from Highway 94. See the cemetery where my grandparents and parents are buried as well right there from the highway and church and school.

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

WK: Uh, it varied, but maximum as I recall was twenty four minimum was eighteen. Uh, we were happy when we could field two ball teams with little kids and girls and all playing.

JC: Now how many kids would you say were roughly in the school, or it was eighteen to
10 twenty four in the school?

WK: Yeah.

JC: Okay, how many were in just your grade?

WK: Uh, we started out with just three boys and three girls, uh by the end of first grade we were down to just three boys and it stayed that way the whole rest of the eight years.

15 JC: Okay, so three for the most part.

[pause in recording]

WK: Yeah.

JC: Okay. Can you describe your teachers? Did you have more than one or was it, um, one predominantly throughout it or—

20 WK: Only one teacher at a time, uh started out with a fairly rookie, uh young woman teacher for my first year. Um, after she got married it looked like it might go under but they managed to call a pastor who also taught school on the side, so the other seven years the pastor also taught the school.

JC: So, out of the eight years you had one teacher for seven years—

WK: —Yes.

JC: —So pretty consistent.

WK: Yeah.

5 JC: Um, so you said the first teacher was a rookie, uh, new—how would you describe the teaching style of the pastor?

WK: Uh, he's not one of my favorite people, let's put it that way, um. He tended to bullying, and uh actually, uh, ended up being fired as a child molester, uh, much later, but I was uh not someone who let myself be intimidated and those kind of people he
10 didn't pick on but, uh, if you were one of those you were not to be envied.

JC: Now, did you learn a lot from listening to what was going on in the other grades?

WK: Uh, an awful lot. I mean, I would say that is the great advantage of a one-room school, you know, particularly for a kid who is fairly bright, you know you don't have to (laughs) wait 'til you get through all of the easy stuff. You can pick up on what the
15 upper classes are doing, in fact, there was seventh and eighth grade readers called *Worlds of People* and *Worlds of Adventure*, uh that were really good, I mean I never realized it at the time but a lot of the authors who were included in there, uh were recognized authors.

TK: I have a couple of those that he gave me.

20 WK: Yeah, uh we got 'em off of the Internet and we liked them so well, that you know, when the Internet came along I ordered copies of, uh, those two. They were seventh and eighth grade, uh, books, and—

TK: —We have a couple of originals.

WK: A lot of the stories just really stuck in my mind very much from hearing. By the time I had gotten to seventh and eighth grade they had changed readers and didn't use them anymore, but they were really good and really stuck in my mind.

JC: So is that the subject you would say that you enjoyed the most or that you paid
5 attention to most with what the others kids were doing was reading or—

WK: Um, what the older kids were doing for sure. Uh, reading in my own grade, you know, some of these kids were not real swift and as they were struggling along I'd always read ahead and often got in trouble for not knowing where the kid (laughs) was at who was supposed to be reading. So, uh, but listening to the upper class kids,
10 that was advantageous. Religious instruction we also had—pretty much all the classes together. So that was another instance in which, uh, in which, uh, yeah you could, uh, go according to speed rather than according to grade. In fact, uh, I won't mention any names, but, uh, there's this one girl who was in the eighth grade when I was in the third grade—the pastor gave the older kids a test and just for fun he gave it
15 to me too and I got a better grade on it than she did. (laughs)

JC: Now, besides the religious classes, were there any other classes that were combined like, that was everybody, music or, um—

WK: Music and art were combined. We had them occasionally on Fridays, I forget the exact schedule. Uh, maybe two weeks art and two weeks music per month,
20 alternating or something like that.

JC: Okay. Now how did you get to school each day?

WK: Started out riding the public school bus, uh, it went right by our school, but then, um, at some point I guess the Baptists got up on their high horse in the state legislature

and outlawed that. So from that point on we car pooled, it was about eight miles from home.

JC: Now what year, do you remember what year it was that it transitioned from the public bussing to—

5 [pause in recording]

JC: private cars? Was it—

WK: Must have been around '55, '56. Cause I think I only rode one year on the public bus.

JC: Okay. Now, what activities do you remember doing at the school, and uh, I am going
10 to ask you about recess and that later, but I wondered about, um, was it a multi-purpose building, I mean were there programs held there, social events, um, cause I know it was tied into the church, but I didn't know if, if that was like, uh, a central meeting place or was that separate that was in the church?

WK: Uh, church did not meet in it, it met in a different building. Uh, they did hold some
15 Sunday schools classes in there on Sunday. Uh, choir practice was held in there because they did have a little pump organ. Uh, and probably some other like youth meetings and things as well.

JC: What about, like Christmas programs or—

WK: Uh, the Christmas program was held in the church but we had a Christmas party in
20 the school as well. The school room would be decorated and, uh, you know parents would be invited and younger siblings that weren't in school and—

JC: Now did you have any fundraisers or anything? Um, I know some people that—one popular event that happened in one-room school house that I've heard from people in

Missouri was a fundraiser called a pie social or a pie supper, or something along those lines, where people, parents would bring in items that they'd make and then they would kind of auction them off or raffle them off, and it was kind of a fundraiser to buy things for the school. Now do you have anything like that?

5 WK: Uh, not in the school, no pie social, what we did have, the whole parish actually put it on, uh, was the picnic that was held at the Legion Hall, like uh, shortly after school was out, uh, you know serving home style dinners and that was used as a fundraiser for the school I guess.

JC: Now, did you have recess?

10 WK: Oh yeah.

JC: Do you remember how many times a day you had it and how long it was?

WK: Yeah, we had fifteen minutes of recess in the morning, fifteen in the afternoon, um, and at lunch time I think we got a whole hour, which, um, meant that you know you eat pretty fast at that age that you had (laughs) a half an hour or more to play then at
15 noon.

JC: Now, do you remember what games you played?

WK: Oh yeah. Uh played various games. Uh, as I said uh, with baseball we were happy if we could field two teams, including everybody, and we had an odd situation, uh we played with a baseball rather than a softball, but pitched underhand for safety sake.

20 And uh, you know at least when we had enough kids we just played regular baseball, uh if we didn't we just played sometimes Six Up or batting around or stuff like that. Uh, we played other games as well, uh, one tag game called Rabbit where you had two sidewalks and you had, you know like about perhaps fifty feet apart and you had

to make from one sidewalk to the other without getting tagged. You start out with one person being “it” and anybody gets tagged they go on the other side and try to catch the ones who are still not caught, so it was, uh, kind of an honor to be the last one there. Sometimes with the little kids we’d, uh, let the whole class be “it” to start out so they’d have a chance at catching somebody.

JC: I wondered if, um, was everybody included when it was possible, or—

WK: Usually yes, uh, another game we played a lot was called Gray Wolf. Where you start out with one kid, uh, being it, the gray wolf—and everybody goes in the church corner and covers their eyes, counts to a hundred, and gray wolf hides, and uh, they got to find him and run back to base and say “Gray Wolf Tommy” *or whoever*, uh, anybody he tags, um goes to the wolf side until the next round and that continues on until the last one is caught and the last one then becomes the gray wolf and uh—

JC: Okay. So you wanted to become the gray wolf after, you wanted to be the last one left so you were the next gray wolf?

15 WK: Right.

JC: Okay. Now what did you do if it was raining outside?

WK: Oh, played some dodge ball in the basement, uh—

[pause in recording]

TK: Best game ever.

20 WK: We played, uh—sometimes we also played, you won’t believe this, but we played Pinochle, like even in the—

JC: —Really?

WK: (laughs) in the fourth grade or something like that. Uh, you know, this is a, I guess a pretty traditional German game and all of our parents played it so we played it too.

Uh, those are the main things. I mean if it was snow on the ground we went out we played Fox and Goose in the snow or we went sledding. The cemetery hill, if you
5 dodge the tombstones, was pretty good for sledding as well.

JC: Now what's Fox and Goose?

WK: Uh you make some trails in the snow and one person is the fox and the rest are the geese and you try to avoid 'em or try to, try to catch them as the case may be.

TK: Did ya'll know wall ball?

10 WK: Nope.

TK: Oh—How about four square? Mark Twain played four square.

WK: Nope.

TK: Oh.

WK: But we did play one other game that uh, in fact that might be my favorite one, one I
15 associate most with school, it's called Dare Base, uh, I think—some cultures it's called Prisoner's Base. You divide up into two teams, um, each has a home base, um, each has a stink base that you have to go on if you're tagged by an opponent—

JC: Okay.

WK: Uh—and you, if you make a round, that is run around your opponent's home base,
20 and come on back untagged to your home base you have a round that you can store up and use to put somebody else on stink base whenever you call 'em out, uh, so it's a very dynamic game, also whoever leaves home base last is “good on” his opponent and can tag him “it,” so it's pretty comp—it's a wonder that you didn't always have

arguments because it was played without an umpire, but it was a fun game and had a lot of strategy—we played on corners of a school building or church buildings so you could run all the around the building, which, uh, put another **interesting** element in the game.

5 JC: Um-hm. Now you mentioned you had an hour for lunch. Did you—

WK: —Um-hm.

JC: Did they provide lunch or did you bring your lunch each day?

WK: Uh—mostly provided lunch. First grade we had a cook, uh, after that there were a number of mothers that switched off cooking once a week.

10 JC: So they would come each day for one week and they would prepare food and—

WK: One day of the week.

JC: One day of the week, okay.

WK: Um-hm.

JC: And would it be—would they make just whatever their specialty was or—

15 WK: Usually, yeah. Like one women made pizza, which we never knew pizza in that day and age, so that was a treat. Another woman made rice pudding that was quite good. Uh, again I won't mention any names, but some were more talented than others obviously. (laughs)

JC: Um, so, at the beginning you had a cook that was actually their job but then after that
20 the mothers just took it all over. Was that all the way through eighth grade then?

WK: Yeah, I think that continued all the way through eighth grade best I recall. I believe it was only one year, that uh, we had a cook.

JC: Um, before I forget to ask you, do you remember what year the school closed?

WK: Uh, it was when my youngest sister was I believe was in the fifth or sixth grade, and she was born in '57, so you can do the math.

JC: —So her fifth or sixth grade.

WK: Yeah. So around '68 I guess.

5 JC: Now did you have any chores to perform at the school?

WK: Uh, yeah, Friday afternoons we swept it, cleaned the blackboards, and stuff like that. Swept the basement. Uh, sometimes—maybe as punishment kids get assigned to bang the chalk out of the erasers, stuff like that.

TK: Classic.

10 JC: Did you—

WK: Not to mention eraser fights. You mention what you did during a rainy day sometimes.

JC: You had eraser fights?

WK: Yeah.

15 JC: Now what did that entail, was that just—

WK: Chalking them up. (laughs)

JC: And then hitting somebody with them to—

WK: Yeah—

JC: —to get on their clothing?

20 WK: Right.

TK: Sounds like the locker room fights that we have. Someone will take down the spray bottle of deodorant and toss it to the other side. (laughs)

JC: So things have evolved a little in school. I should mention, what's your son's name that's here?

WK: Thomas.

[pause in recording]

5 JC: Thomas. Okay. Now did you have to do anything—um, I'm curious as to how the school was heated. Was it updated or did somebody have to carry in wood or coal?

WK: It had a coal furnace when I started, and, uh, in the early days a couple of older kids had the task of shoveling coal. Uh, it got a furnace, uh, I guess a gas furnace or oil furnace, uh, fairly early on, at least shoveling coal was never one of my tasks—

10 JC: —Okay.

WK: So it must have been fairly early that they switched that out.

JC: That was usually an older boy's task to do?

WK: Right.

JC: Okay. Now you attended the same school until you graduated eighth grade, correct?

15 WK: Yeah.

JC: Now after the eighth grade did you go to um, was there a high school in Augusta?

WK: There was, a pretty dismal one. It, um, closed when I would have been—before my senior year, but I didn't go there, I went to a boarding Lutheran high school, sort of prep school. In fact, I'm not Catholic and yet graduate school is the first, uh, public
20 school I went to. So I guess I'm fairly unusual in that respect.

JC: Now where was the Lutheran boarding school, the prep school?

WK: That was in Concordia, Missouri. Uh—it was a high school and junior college at that time.

JC: Now how far away was that from Augusta?

WK: That was, uh—about a three hour drive.

JC: Three hour drive, okay. So you lived there—was it during the week or was it for—
did you come home on weekends or just for holidays or—

5 WK: Just got home Thanksgiving would be probably the first time I would get home in the
Fall.

JC: Now how big of a school was that?

WK: Um, I had a class of forty that was the largest class that was ever there, so—probably
about a hundred and fifty all boys.

10 TK: Say goodbye to dating in high school.

JC: So when you, um—Now did other people—let me ask this, sorry, let me rephrase my
question. Did most people after they graduate the eighth grade was that the only
other option in town to go to the public high school? Or was there—

WK: —Right.

15 JC: Okay. Is that what most people did?

WK: Yeah. Uh, a couple might have gone to Washington High School, which is where
they ended up consolidating to when Augusta High School closed.

JC: Were you the only one that went to the boarding school?

WK: Yeah.

20 JC: Okay. Now um, do you keep in contact with anybody that you went to school with?

WK: Yeah, I mean, uh, a lot of them stayed in town and still go to the church where my
parents went. A few have moved back after, you know, careers in St. Louis mostly.
But uh, yeah I see quite a few of them fairly regularly.

JC: Now speaking of St. Louis, um, did you guys ever go on any field trips or anything?

WK: Yeah, uh. Went to the Daniel Boone home, went to Meramec Caverns, usually had at the end of the year a school picnic like that. Uh, St. Louis Art Museum one time.

Uh, trying to remember what else we did for school picnics, but those kinds of things.

5 JC: And was this for everyone in the school or just certain grades or—

WK: This was for everyone, this was once a year.

JC: Was this kind of like the celebration at the end, okay.

WK: Yes.

JC: And how did you, um, did they provide a bus or did everybody's parents take them?

10 WK: Usually got a bus, uh, you know loaned out a public school bus or something.

JC: Now do you feel that you got a quality education?

WK: I got a pretty good education I would have to say. Especially the first teacher, she would often let older kids teach younger ones and uh, I hear on public radio that, I forget one of the sponsors is—somebody learning initiative involving—

15 students and teach—uh, learning and older students and teaching, well we had that model in first grade. We learned carrying and borrowing in arithmetic long before

the book thought we should because the kids who were teaching us thought we needed to know it, and we thought so too, same with multiplication, got to that by

second grade just cause, uh, we wanted to and thought we ready for it and I already

20 mentioned reading, that part—

[pause in recording]

WK: —learning from the older kids, that was advantageous. Uh, the pastor did a lot of teaching with workbooks, and what you would do is, uh—work about six or ten pages

ahead in your workbook and then you were kind a free to pursue your own interests and uh—You know, start reading encyclopedias, just grab a World Book at random and just start paging through and anything that looked interesting, um, go to reading that. Exchanged a lot of books amongst one another as well. I was a member of the
5 Sears Young People’s Book Club, which is probably why I ended up being a historian. They had a lot of historical biographies as well as, um, this “We Were There” series where a couple of grade school kids end up in the midst of the Battle of Gettysburg or, uh, running the Pony Express station with their father, on the Oregon Trail, that kind of thing. And um, whatever books we didn’t have we would trade
10 with some of the other families that also got some of these books.

JC: Now did you mention earlier that the school had a library?

WK: Uh, sort of, but fairly dismal actually. I mean when I arrived at high school it was the first time that I was confronted with more books than I could ever hope to read.

JC: Was it um, just what people had given to the church or—

15 WK: —I think so, yeah.

JC: So it was a hodgepodge mix of just random books?

WK: Exactly, yes.

JC: And then anything else you wanted you would trade with other families?

WK: Yeah.

20 JC: Did your parents encourage reading?

WK: Yeah, I mean uh, I grew up without central heat or running water or indoor plumbing but yet my parents subscribed to a daily newspaper and also subscribed to Sears Young People’s Book Club, so that kind of tells you were their priorities were.

JC: Now, did you have a favorite subject?

WK: Oh—not really. I was interested in a lot of different things. When I got to college it was kind of hard to choose a major. I ended up, I think, choosing more on account of profs [professors] who I found particularly interesting than anything else.

5 JC: Now, um, do you remember was there tuition that had to be paid to the church or was, it, um, church members' kids could go. Do you remember how that worked?

WK: Best I recall it was paid out of church contributions. I mean, my dad made sure, you know, he contributed enough to cover his kids, but I don't believe there was any tuition charge except to outsiders.

10 JC: Okay, so there was no set price if you were a member of the church but you think—

WK: —Right.

JC: —people whose kids weren't members of church that went there they had to pay something?

WK: Yeah. Cause a girl somewhat older who rented a house from my grandparents, uh,
15 found out later my grandpa sponsored the daughter for grade school there at the Lutheran school. So there was tuition for outsiders.

JC: Okay. Now, um, I know you went on later to get masters and Ph.D. here at Mizzou [University of Missouri-Columbia], but where did you attend your undergraduate. Cause you said it was a private school since your first public school was your
20 master's.

WK: Right. I was actually on the pre-theological track you might call it and this prep school was intended for kids who were going to be Lutheran pastors or teachers. Uh, there was a junior college also in Concordia, Missouri, connected to it. Now my high

school was quite superior from your average high school I think, except that, well you didn't have like Physics II or Biology II but uh, Biology I and Physics I were quite solid. The junior college on the other hand, uh, was fairly light weight. It would not have been like going to a normal college or university. The last two years, uh, were at, what was in Concordia Senior College at Fort Wayne, Indiana, and uh, that was intended to give people a broad liberal arts education before they went into—

[pause in recording]

WK: the actual seminary. And that was a very good, good educational experience as well. That was when I really decided to become a historian and decided to go to graduate school in history.

JC: Now what was your undergraduate degree in? Was it just a general studies degree or—

WK: Um, it was—we didn't have majors but we did have concentrations, but I took an overload and got a concentration in both U.S. and European history so I ended up basically with a history major. And a lot of foreign languages, you know. For Lutherans—German is the language that God spoke, so started out with German already in high school, and I really took to that, and in fact—I got a year as a German T.A. [teaching assistant] in spite of being a history major here at Mizzou, so that, uh, you know contributed very much to my success in graduate school and as a historian.

JC: Now was there any German taught when you were younger in the—

WK: —Grade school—

JC: Was there any used in the church or no, just—

WK: I experienced German services until I was about two or three years old, but I don't remember it.

JC: Okay.

WK: But then when that pastor left in '51 that was the end of German services (chuckles)
5 finally in this congregation.

JC: Okay, so then you had started German in high school and then continued on after that?

WK: Right.

JC: Okay. Now, um, I was going to ask you what your major area of study is. What was
10 your focus for your masters and Ph.D. was it U.S.—

WK: It's U.S. history but, uh, focusing on German immigration with a strong transatlantic component, so—

JC: Now was, um, Augusta, Missouri, was that a German settlement, or heavily populated by German immigrants?

15 WK: Yes, this was sort of on the edge of, you know, it's the next county over from where Gottfried Duden settled, so, yeah it was heavily German. In fact I ended up studying those two counties in my dissertation as well.

JC: Now is that what, um—did you always have a fondness for that. I'm kind of wondering where—was that just from the beginning on, it was kind of a German
20 town, or are you a descendant of German ancestry?

WK: One hundred percent. (laughs)

JC: Okay. And then I just wonder if, uh, in general you mentioned U.S. and European history but you decided to focus in on the German immigration?

WK: Yeah, at least by the time I got to graduate school my German heritage and my language skills combined were really what got me into the subject—I could get at sources that most of the competition couldn't, you know, especially in that job market you were looking for anything that would set you apart from the crowd and that was certainly an advantage for me.

JC: You mention you had the T.A. position in the German department, that was probably unusual right, I mean, most, you would either be in language studies or you would be in—most T.A.s, you're always a T.A. in your own department.

WK: Correct. I didn't have a T.A. coming in, uh, and—I guess, trying to remember, second year I don't believe I had a T.A. either and just about ended up dropping out or at least, uh, running out of money. (laughs) A friend told me I might have a chance at getting a German T.A. and put in and got it, and this is about the time the history graduate market crashed and it ended up by that fall the history department was asking me if I wanted to T.A., so I had a whole T.A. in German and a half a T.A. in history. (laughs) Teaching five days a week one semester.

JC: That's some quite a load. Um, now, this is kind of general question, but what kind of influences do you think having that one-room school house education had on you? Um, you talked about it being a kind of a good foundation because you could learn beyond what your class was, but do you want to make any other general observations about—you kind of—we're talking about that structure that's no longer there where you learn in your class, you learned at your grade level, um, do you think there is something lost there now a days, or—

WK: Um, I think there is. Uh, you know, I realize it's hard for teachers to individualize their instruction but—

[pause in recording]

WK: —to the extent that they can, uh, it's really advantageous. That's one of the things
5 you had especially with peer teaching. Uh, I think probably the weaker students were
at a disadvantage because, uh, you know—I don't envy a teacher in that situation and
it's harder to give the weak students the kind of individual attention they needed, but
for someone that's bright you can learn at your own pace and probably learn a lot
more than you would in too structured of an environment. I know the kid in one class
10 behind me who went on to Double E [Electrical Engineering] at Mizzou and as I
recall had a four point [4.0 GPA] in it and is now doing quite well, thank you, in the
software industry, so uh—

JC: Do you think the community as a whole there—was there emphasis by the parents to
have a good education or was that just, um, individual by parents or do you think as
15 whole the community was really for a good quality education?

WK: Yeah, I think the homogeneity of this congregation and community, and you know
the fact that everybody knew everybody's parents and grandparents probably pushed
you a bit in that respect.

JC: Were uh, to your knowledge were there others that were in your class or around you
20 class that continued on after that, went to college and graduate school or was that kind
of more of an exception?

WK: Uh, two of the three in my class went on to higher education, the other guy went, uh,
into engineering at Rolla, uh, and the class there-after was just two kids. My brother

and the guy that got the four point at Mizzou. My brother got a degree in economics and sociology at Warrensburg, although he ended up coming back to the family farm after a couple of years of loan sharking in Kansas City, but uh—

JC: Now, um, you mention your sister, it was during your sister's fifth or sixth grade
5 that's when the school closed, where was she at in the lineup, did all of you attend the one-room school house at some point?

WK: Yeah, in fact there were four of us at once—

JC: Okay—

WK: —Not that sister but my other sister and two of my brothers, so—

10 JC: Okay. So you all at least attended at one point or another?

WK: Yeah.

JC: Not necessarily all at the same time, but you all attended it and she would have been the last one to attend it. Is she your youngest sibling I take it?

WK: Yes. And, uh, I guess she went one year with my next brother, so (laughs)—you
15 know there was at least one of us for—uh, from when I started until the school closed.

JC: Now when they paired off, um, to kind of teach you older and younger were you ever stuck with—now you were the oldest one, did you ever teach your younger siblings while you were there?

WK: Uh, not that much I don't believe. Uh—

20 JC: Now when you got home did you have to help with homework with your younger siblings, or—

WK: Yeah, I think we probably did. Yes. And we always had memory work like a Bible verse or hymn verse or something like that you had to learn every night, so that really kept you on your toes working on that.

JC: Good. Now were there any other—I mean I hit quite a different areas, but were there
5 any other stories from the one-room school house that you wanted to share, or any, uh, or anything else you'd like to add about that experience, or—

WK: Yeah, I mean the playground was largely unsupervised and largely run by the kids, which had its good and bad aspects. When I was in the first grade, um, I got bullied quite a bit because one, I didn't have any older brothers or cousins in school, which
10 uh, most everybody else it seemed like did, and secondly, you know, I was smart and pretty smart mouthed as well, so it was not a pretty good combination, and, you know, I got harassed a lot, although I guess it in the long run it taught me to keep my cool and play my cards close to my vest. But, uh, it was not my most fun experience in that respect. Um—but, I mean, uh—we brothers and sisters stuck together at
15 school—

[pause in recording]

WK: and uh—

JC: So it got easier for them as—

WK: Yeah—

20 JC: —as they came into the system they were the ones that had the older sibling and the, or cousins or whatever.

WK: Yeah, exactly. Uh, and my brother's a year younger and we were playing one of those games and I think this was, uh probably—maybe I was third grade and he was

second, or something like that. And there was this kid, who was, uh, three years older than me and four years older than my brother playing one of these tag games and my brother tagged this older kid and in the process of doing so, uh, inadvertently stepped on his foot and this kid stomps on my brother's foot with his number elevens, or
5 whatever, and a (laughs) at this point it escalated and we both lit into this kid (laughs) got him down and got the best of him to where he said "If you hurt me I'll sue you."

TK: That's a classic. He's told that one too many times, but it's still pretty funny.

JC: So there was really no, there wasn't—it wasn't like it was the parent's responsibility that was cooking or the pastor, it was really in general unsupervised recess—

10 WK: The first year the teacher actually played some games with us, so then we were supervised a fair amount, although apparently not before school which was when I got hassled the most. But, um, after that when the pastor was teaching we had really very little supervision on the playground at all.

JC: Okay. Well that's all the question I have if you want to add anything else you can,
15 but—do you want to add anything else about your experience?

WK: Uh, I guess I've covered quite a bit (laughs)—

JC: I mean we have—we've actually been going for, looks like forty five minutes now, so—well I just want to say thank you for coming in, thank you for driving into the Society today and thank you for sharing your story. I think it's very interesting. This
20 dynamic of one-room school houses just doesn't, you know, exist anymore and that's going to keep, you know, going on and on and were nobody will know these experiences so we're trying to gather them now since it's very different from what

kids' experience today. So, thank you again for coming in and then I'll take a look at your photos that you brought in.

WK: My pleasure; as a historian I figured that's the least I can do.

JC: No, I appreciate it, thank you very much.

5 [pause in recording]

JC: Okay, before we get goin', um, we're going to talk about a little something else here. We're looking at the grade reports right now. And, um, well one thing I noticed is that his first teacher was using definitely a numeric system that was very quantifiable as to the—his other teacher that was just using “E” for excellent, “S” for superior,
10 “M” for medium, “I” for inferior, and “F” for failure. But one of the things that Walter just mentioned was that there was discussion of—well you can go ahead and say what you were discussing.

WK: Yeah, I don't know exactly which grade this was but my second teacher, uh, suggested that I should skip a grade because I was, um, obviously ahead of the curve.
15 But my father had skipped a grade when he was in grade school and said he was always the youngest and the smallest in the class and considered to be a real disadvantage from that standpoint and he didn't think I should skip, and I'm sure glad that I didn't because my social skills were never up to my intellectual skills as it was and you know I would have been even more of a fish out of water if I had skipped a
20 grade I'm sure.

JC: So, that was—the teacher was requesting it but your father was—stood stern that, that's not what he wanted and—

WK: Exactly, yes. And, uh, that's one thing I have to say for my parents. If they disagreed with the teacher they were willing to stand up to him, even if he was the pastor.

JC: Okay. Another thing I wanted to note while we're back on the recording here is that that we've been looking through all the photos and it appears the class is pretty stable.

5 That the number of them it was between twenty and twenty five, so right on—mostly through your whole way through that was pretty consistent.

WK: Yeah, there was little variation in that respect—

JC: It was pretty solid or pretty um—pretty stable, the number of kids there. So, all right, thank you.

10 [end in recording]

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