

An Interview with

Mary Sue Robertson

at Greene County Extension Center in
Springfield, Missouri

22 March 2012

interviewed by Jeff Corrigan



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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Collection C4051

One-room Schoolhouse

CD 19

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PREFACE

Mary Sue Robertson attended the one-room schoolhouse Grandview 108, located northwest of Republic, Missouri. The youngest of three daughters in her family, Robertson was born in 1941 and started school in 1946. Robertson grew up on a dairy farm where her family pasteurized their own milk in the kitchen, and she lived about a mile from the school. Her parents drove her to school but she walked home on nice days. Robertson recalls the physical appearance of the school and talks about the playground equipment outside the school. Activities included math and map contests, pie suppers, Christmas programs, Hide the Thimble, and other children's games. Robertson talks about the transition from having two people in her grade in fifth grade to having fifty people in her grade after Grandview was consolidated and she started going to the city in sixth grade. Grandview 108 is especially important to Robertson because both her mother and grandmother also attended the school, as far back as 1892.

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: Mary Sue Robertson
Interviewer: Jeff Corrigan
Date: March 22, 2012
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

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[Begin Interview.]

[Begin Track One.]

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Corrigan: So this is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri. I'm here today, March 22, in Springfield, Missouri, at the Greene County Extension Center, at the Springfield botanical gardens, to interview Mary Sue Robertson about her experience attending a one-room school. Also in the room is her husband William, or Bill. Mary, could you start by telling me when and where you were born?

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Robertson: I was born March 11, 1941, about five miles northwest of Republic. And on Greene County Road 168, which is probably a mile from Grandview School, where it was located.

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Corrigan: So that was the name of your school. Grandview School.

Robertson: Grandview 108.

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Corrigan: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about your family? Could you tell me, did you have any siblings? What were their names?

Robertson: Okay. Of course my mother and dad were Sam and Dollie, D-o-l-l-i-e Foust. I had two older sisters. Foust is F-o-u-s-t. Two older sisters, Lora, L-o-r-a Lee and one's Joanne. Lora Lee was ten years older.

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Corrigan: Ten years older, okay.

Robertson: And Joanne's two and a half.

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Corrigan: So you're the youngest.

Robertson: I'm the baby, uh-huh.

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Corrigan: Okay. Now what did your parents do for a living?

Robertson: They were farmers.

Corrigan: Okay. What kind of farm was it?

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Robertson: Dairy farm.

Corrigan: Dairy farm. Okay.

Robertson: A hundred and eighty acres, I think.

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Corrigan: Did you, were any crops that you raised just to feed back to the cattle? Did you do silage and—

Robertson: Did silage and alfalfa and oats.

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Corrigan: Now how many head of cattle did you guys milk?

Robertson: Probably at the most 65.

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Corrigan: What kind were they? Were they—

Robertson: They were a mixture. But they were trying to build a herd of black Angus so they could go into the beef business. And this was later on when my dad had taken a nighttime job. So they were trying to stop the milking procedure.

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Corrigan: So what kind of milk cows were they, though? They were a mix, too?

Robertson: Well they were more, they were not Holstein.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: They were Jerseys and Guernseys and a mixture.

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Corrigan: Okay. I had to ask. My grandfather was a Holstein farmer. (laughter) Okay. So you lived on the dairy farm and that. So how far away from the farm was Grandview School?

Robertson: Probably about a mile.

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Corrigan: And you said, so it was a mile from—

Robertson: You could see it from our house very clearly through the field.

Corrigan: Did you walk through the field?

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Robertson: No. One time. And that was all. We were really chastised for walking through the field. Parents said no. But we walked home on pretty days. Just when the weather was nice, we got to walk home. There would be a group of us.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: Otherwise, we were picked up by a parent.

Corrigan: Okay. So there was no school bus?

Robertson: No. No. No.

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Corrigan: Okay. So it was about one mile from your house.

Robertson: Mm-hm.

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Corrigan: Was it on a country dirt road? Was—

Robertson: Country dirt road. Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay. Was your road dirt, too?

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Robertson: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. So it took you one mile to get there and back. Did you pick up kids along the way? Or did kids meet up with you along the way?

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Robertson: No. Everybody usually took their own kids to school. And then, and most everyone picked their own kids up. Because we were just like the first stop off. There were no houses between us and the school.

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Corrigan: Okay. Now could you describe the school for me, both in appearance, size, inside and out, whatever you can remember about its physical appearance.

Robertson: Okay. The school itself was one large room. And you walked into a cloak room where the boys would pump the water from the outside well. And we had a water bucket there. Each student brought their own glass for drinking water. We hung our coats there and we could put our lunches there that we brought.

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And then you walked into the room, on the left-hand side was a large furnace. Which at first was a coal furnace and then I think they changed it to a wood furnace. And on the right, across from the furnace—of course there was a big door from the cloakroom, open door—there was the library. Which probably, it was probably—

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[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

Robertson: —I want to say 20 foot across, but I'm not good with figures.

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Corrigan: The building was?

Robertson: The building. Uh huh. And so all the library shelves were there on the right as you walked in the door. And then you stepped up on the stage, which covered the entire south wall and had a blackboard all the way across. And the map was up over the blackboard, in the middle of the blackboard, for the United States and the world. And then at the far end

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of the stage, on the south wall, is where the piano set. And I think there was an exit door there that was used very seldom. And then the teacher's desk was in the middle of the stage facing the north end. And the desks were all there, starting with the older kids to the right, on the east end, and with larger desks. And then all the way down to the smaller desks for the first graders.

Corrigan: Were there windows on like the east and west side?

Robertson: Windows on the north and the east.

Corrigan: The north and the east, okay.

Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay. And were they, you said the, so the older kids kind of sat toward the back, then?

Robertson: No, they sat on the side.

Corrigan: Or off to the side.

Robertson: On the east side of the room. And then it graduated down to near the cloakroom, were the younger kids, closer to the furnace.

Corrigan: Okay. And were they the individual desks? Or the shared desks? Or—

Robertson: Individual desks for the young kids. And the older kids, of course we only had about twenty, twenty-three, while I was in school.

Corrigan: The whole school?

Robertson: Mm-hm. And so the older kids got a double desk but only for one person.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So there were twenty-three kids in the school. Do you remember how many kids were in your class?

Robertson: Two.

Corrigan: Oh. Two. Okay. Do you remember the other student in your class?

Robertson: Mary Margaret Yount. Y-o-u-n-t. We went from first grade until they were consolidated.

Corrigan: Okay. So getting back to inside the school you said, so you had your own individual cups, so you didn't share a dipper or anything.

Robertson: Right. And we usually had little cups that you bought and then you could squash them and they'd go down. I think you can buy those today. But ours were metal. And the boys had metal cups with the finger for you, just like a coffee cup, kind of, similar—

5 Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: —to drink out of.

Corrigan: And you said there was a chalkboard in the room, a big one.

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Robertson: Mm-hm.

Corrigan: So you didn't have the individual slates or anything.

15 Robertson: No. No.

Corrigan: Okay. Was that the only chalkboard in the room?

Robertson: Uh-huh.

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Corrigan: Was there anything else in the room? Was there a flag? Were there pictures up?

Robertson: We had the flag. We had the flag. And we had a picture of Washington. And there may have been one of Lincoln, I'm not certain. But I know there was one of

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Corrigan: Okay. And now in the library, were there a lot of books?

Robertson: A lot of, to me, you know, there were a lot of books. There were probably, it was probably, what? Ten foot wide?

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Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: And maybe six, eight shelves down? And was packed with books.

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Corrigan: Were you allowed to check them out, or—

Robertson: Uh huh. You could check them out. You could read them at school. And—

40 Corrigan: Could you take them home with you?

Robertson: Mm-hm. We could take them home. We could check them out, take them home. Which was great. We could, in the wintertime, when it was cold, if you had your schoolwork done, you could take a book and go sit behind the furnace where it was warm and read your

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book.

Corrigan: Okay. You said there was a piano.

Robertson: Mm-hm.

5 Corrigan: Okay. Was music regular in the school?

Robertson: We had a lady, Dorothy Blades, one of our students' mothers—

Corrigan: Dorothy Blades?

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Robertson: Blades. Uh-huh. Who later became a teacher and taught in the Springfield public school system, she had married quite young. I think she had married when she was fourteen. So at this time she was probably twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-eight. And she came over. Wonderful pianist. She played the piano for us. And she directed any plays that we had or

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needed any music. And she also came over and played softball with us, played games with us, when we'd have a, she'd work it out with the teacher. And we loved to have her come play.

Corrigan: How often would she come?

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Robertson: Oh, maybe once every two weeks.

Corrigan: Okay.

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Robertson: And on, if we had music to work up, she came more often until the program was taken care of.

Corrigan: Okay. Now what about—

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[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Corrigan: —You said there was a cloakroom. Did the school have electricity?

Robertson: We did later. And—

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Corrigan: But not when you started?

Robertson: When I started, we had electricity.

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Corrigan: Okay. You did. Okay.

Robertson: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Corrigan: What about indoor plumbing?

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Robertson: No.

Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: No. Bathrooms were outside.

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Corrigan: Was there two of them?

Robertson: Two of those.

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Corrigan: One for boys, one for girls?

Robertson: Uh-huh. And the boys' was on the far side, on the south side of the school. and the girls' was on the north side of the school. Out back. Both split. And then we had a coal shed that had held the coal.

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Corrigan: Okay. Did anybody ever have to ride a horse to school or anything? Was there any hitching posts or anything?

Robertson: Not during our time.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: There was no horses.

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Corrigan: Okay. What about the rest of the outside? Was there any type of playground equipment or—

Robertson: We had skinny cats, the low ones.

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Corrigan: Which is a what?

Robertson: (laughs) A long pole that you turn somersaults over.

Corrigan: Okay. And you called it a—

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Robertson: They called it a skinny cat.

Corrigan: A skinny cat.

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Robertson: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: I've not heard of that one. That's why I had to ask.

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Robertson: And then we had a tall one that the big girls had to lift you up to the tall skinny cat if you were small like I was.

Corrigan: So no ball diamond or anything.

Robertson: We had a ball diamond.

5 Corrigan: Oh, you did. Okay.

Robertson: We had teeter totters. And for a short time we had a merry go round that you'd push and jump on while it was going around. Wooden teeter totters. Homemade teeter totters.

10 Corrigan: So actually, it was quite a bit of equipment.

Robertson: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Okay.

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Robertson: For a rural school.

Corrigan: Okay. Where, if somebody was trying to find the school today, it probably doesn't exist. But specific location. You said it was one mile from your farm. But could you give me
20 some kind of location where that school is?

Robertson: And it does exist.

Corrigan: Oh, it does.

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Robertson: It's just not in the location. It's close, but not—

Corrigan: Okay. So where's the original location?

30 Robertson: Okay. If you leave Republic, at the four-way stop, at 174 and Main Street, go north on Main Street, which ends up being N. To Farm Road 168. Which there's a caution light there. Take 168 about five miles, I'm gonna say, about five miles. And you have the choice of curving to the right or going straight. So you curve to the right. Which would be north. And you would go down one hill and up another hill. And it's set on the right.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: And now it sets just down that hill and up another hill. And that's where it sets now. It was used as a hay barn.

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Corrigan: Okay. So the school does exist today.

Robertson: Mm-hm.

45 Corrigan: But its function today is a hay barn?

Robertson: Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay.

5 Robertson: I think so.

Corrigan: Storage, something, so it probably reverted back to the farmer whose land it was on.

10 Robertson: Yeah. And he sold. So I don't know who owns it now. And that was west on 168 at the caution light.

Corrigan: So Farm Road 168 and then go west.

15 Robertson: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Okay. So it did function later on but storage, basically. Gotcha. Now how long did you go there?

20 Robertson: I started school there when I was five years old. I cried because my sister was going. And I wanted to go. And the teacher said she would treat me as though it were kindergarten. So I was five in March and I started in September.

Corrigan: Okay.

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Robertson: And at the end of the year, I got a grade card promoting me to the second grade. So that was out the window. But that was in '46-'47 I started.

Corrigan: Okay. So you started '46-'47

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Robertson: School year.

Corrigan: Okay. And you went through how long?

35 Robertson: Well, in '50-'51, Republic consolidated. Which they left some of the rural schools. They combined us with Beulah, I think, with another country school.¹ And that's when we had bus transportation.

Corrigan: So then you went from—so how many grades is that? So you went—

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[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

Corrigan: —there for a couple of years.

45 Robertson: I went there one, two, three, four, five years as a rural school.

¹ The school was combined with Salem.

Corrigan: So five years as a rural school.

Robertson: Uh huh.

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Corrigan: And then it consolidated.

Robertson: And then it consolidated. And then they changed it to one through six.

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Corrigan: Okay. So grades one through six.

Robertson: Mm-hm. Seven and eight went into town.

Corrigan: And did that, was that still called Grandview School?

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Robertson: Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Oh, they did keep the same name.

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Robertson: Uh-huh. And we had bus transportation then.

Corrigan: Okay. So that was one through sixth.

Robertson: Mm-hm.

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Corrigan: And then where did you go from sixth through eighth?

Robertson: Grandview.

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Corrigan: Oh, okay.

Robertson: At Grandview. I stayed at Grandview until '52-'53. And then I went, that was my seventh grade year. And I went to Republic. I went from two people in a class to about fifty.

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Corrigan: Okay. Much bigger school.

Robertson: Oh, definitely. Scary.

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Corrigan: So going back to the one-room schoolhouse, can you tell me about some of your teachers? And can you describe them? Or did you have one? Did you have many? Whatever you can remember about some of your teachers.

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Robertson: Okay. Lois Day Laney was my first grade teacher. And she was very loving. In fact, I fell on the skinny cat one time and mashed my nose. And she held me on her lap the rest of the day. Now I was first grade. But she put mercurochrome on my nose and held me,

didn't send someone to get a parent. Of course, no telephone. No car. But anyway, she's the one that taught me to read. I love to read. And remember, I was five years old. First grade. But there were just two of us. She was wonderful. And then I had a Mrs. Emhoff for the second grade.

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Corrigan: Mrs. Emhoff?

Robertson: Emhoff. And I think it's E-m-h-o-f-f. And she was young and beautiful and single. And second grade she just worked with us on regular math, reading, writing and arithmetic. And third grade, we had Norma Choate.

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Corrigan: Norma Choate?

Robertson: Uh-huh. C-h-o-a-t-e. And I loved her. Now Mrs. Emhoff lived with a family in the district.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: So did Mrs. Choate. I mean, Miss Choate. They lived with one of the parents in the class. And she just taught us routine, you know. And we played at recess and everything. And then in fourth grade I had Hazel Wade. And she was wonderful. We had, she was really, she helped me with math. And we would have math contests for the whole school. And you'd go up on the blackboard, which the blackboard was really long, you know, covered the whole stage. And she'd give us a problem. And you could eliminate the ones in your class. And then you went on up. Everybody was eliminated till you might be next to a seventh grader. You know, competition. And that was fun and I loved it because I could always beat my sister who was two years old than me. (Corrigan laughs) But anyway, and then we had map contest, we'd do it with the map, finding the, and of course sometimes the older kids didn't participate in this. But getting to know the states.

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Corrigan: So like geography or—

Robertson: Mm-hm. And know the state capitals. Who could find them first. And of course we had spelling bees. And loved them. Love the competition. And that included, that's where I think you learn so much. It's like a split classroom. You listen to what the others learn.

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Corrigan: Well that was one of the questions I had for you is how much did you learn from listening and watching the older kids. And—

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Robertson: You learned a lot. And actually you don't even know you're learning it. But it's going on and you're listening to it. And then when it comes time for you to know this, you already know it.

Corrigan: And you were competing against them.

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Robertson: Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay.

5 Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. And then fifth and sixth grade, I had Earl Neal. And I think that's N-e-a-l. And first man teacher I'd had. But he was pleasant. And he was easy. Never had a, shall I say belligerent, or a person that has an explosive temper—

[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]

10 Robertson: —the whole time I was in school, at the country school.

Corrigan: So it sounds like you, although you had a lot of turnover, it seems like you still were pleased with each one of them.

15 Robertson: Pleased with each one of them.

Corrigan: Okay. Good.

20 Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Now I will say one thing strange happened to me. When I was in the fifth grade, the teacher said, "Fifth grade is so much harder than the sixth grade, I'm going to put you two girls" – my classmate – "in sixth grade this year. And then next year you'll go back to fifth grade. And then you'll go up to seventh." So I was just going to study. Well, sorry for him and me, they consolidated. And Republic said, "No, those girls cannot go back to fifth grade because they will have to take sixth over again. You won't skip them from
25 fifth to seven." So I had sixth grade twice. Same books. Same everything. Twice. (laughs)

Corrigan: In the country school or—

30 Robertson: In the country school. Mm-hm.

Corrigan: So instead of going—did they give a reason why sixth would have been easier than fifth? Or?

35 Robertson: They just thought, you know, you learn fractions and all of this in fifth grade. And you know, third and fifth grade, I think, are just regularly known as hard learning. You have a lot of difficult learning stages in those classes even today.

Corrigan: So you never had fifth grade.

40 Robertson: Fifth grade. Never had fifth grade.

Corrigan: But you had two sixth grades. You and the other—

45 Robertson: A girl.

Corrigan: You and Mary Margaret.

Robertson: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Okay. That's interesting.

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Robertson: I thought that was interesting, yes.

Corrigan: And then you went to, afterwards, when you went to Republic, you started in the seventh grade?

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Robertson: Uh-huh. Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay. Now you told me, I was going to ask how you got to school. And you said you were taken by your parents and most people. So there was no busing.

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Robertson: No, not until after we were consolidated. Not when we were just rural school.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Now you mentioned it briefly, but I want you to talk about it in more detail is, could you tell me about some of the things that went on at the school? For example, did you have Christmas programs? Was the school used for other community or social events? Did you have anything like a pie supper? Did you have anything, any other function that the school served as, both while you were in school for extra programs and curriculum, but also outside of the school?

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25 Robertson: Well, we had pie suppers, of course.

Corrigan: And can you describe your pie suppers?

Robertson: Okay. Our pie suppers, you, you know, you fixed a box. Regular box. And you got all fancied up. And with tissue paper of sort and bows and ribbons and everything. And you put your pie in it. Now, if you did not want a pie, you could do a box lunch. Make sandwiches and have potato chips or, you know, whatever. And you always decorated that box. Now if there was a boy that was kind of sweet on you, he always watched which box was yours. Or someone would tell him when it came in.

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Corrigan: Because was it anonymous, supposedly?

Robertson: Mm-hm.

40 Corrigan: Okay, so it was anonymous.

Robertson: Anonymous.

Corrigan: Did they know what was in the box? Or they bid on it by—

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Robertson: That didn't make any difference. It's who brought the pie, usually. Or who brought the cake.

5 Corrigan: Did people know that there was a pie inside or a lunch—

Robertson: Something to eat. Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Or was it covered that, it's whatever you brought.

10 Robertson: It's completely covered. But they knew there was food inside.

Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: Either a box lunch or a pie.

15

Corrigan: But you didn't know when you were bidding on it, per se.

20 Robertson: They knew like, say, these two guys both were sweet on my sister. So they both bid on her box. Well, they'd keep punching their dads, "Bid higher! Bid higher!" So sometimes they'd go for twenty-five or fifty dollars if they got the kids' dads in a bidding war, you know?

Corrigan: But it was the girls or the mothers that made the stuff, right?

25 Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay. So then, now was this an evening program during school? When was this?

30 Robertson: Evening program. And then when you got, won the bid, you got to eat it with that girl there at the school.

Corrigan: Okay. So this was a fundraiser.

Robertson: Mm-hm.

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Corrigan: Do you know what the money was used for?

Robertson: Oh, for basketballs, softballs.

40 Corrigan: So equipment, supplies.

Robertson: Or school supplies, you know, if we needed something inside.

Corrigan: Okay. And who would be the auctioneer?

45

Robertson: One of the guys. One of the dads.

Corrigan: One of the dads. Okay. So was that the main, when, what kind of year, what time of year are we talking about? Fall? Spring?

5 Robertson: We usually had one in the—

[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]

10 Robertson: —fall of the year, and sometimes in the spring. It depended, I think, if we needed money—

Corrigan: Okay.

15 Robertson: —you know. But we always had Christmas programs.

Corrigan: And what did those entail?

20 Robertson: Well, we would have a skit. Of course with the baby Christ and the angels, you know, and going to Bethlehem and all of this. Routine Christmas. And Dorothy Blades would come over and play. And we'd start practicing with her on the songs. And then we had patriotic, we'd have a patriotic program. Because we always learned great patriotic songs.

Corrigan: During Christmas? Or was this another program?

25 Robertson: No. Another time.

Corrigan: Another program.

30 Robertson: Another program. Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Were these programs at night?

Robertson: Uh-huh. Always at night.

35 Corrigan: During the week?

Robertson: Mm-hm. During the week.

40 Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: Usually on a Friday night.

45 Corrigan: Okay. So when all the—was it just for the parents? Or the whole community come out?

Robertson: Well everybody could come. Grandparents could come, you know. Parents. It was a fun time for everyone.

Corrigan: Okay.

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Robertson: But we sung patriotic songs like “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and a lot of those. And Easter, we always, if school was in session during Easter, which it usually was, we’d have Easter egg hunts. But that would be during the day, you know, in the afternoon. And some of the moms could come help. It wasn’t, you know. Valentine’s. You fixed your
10 Valentine box. And that was a big time to collect the Valentines from everybody. So we had lots of activity. And occasionally during the summer part of the school year, the warm part, we would have a ball game with another area school. And parents would come and take us to this school. Or they’d come to ours. And we’d have competition with a ball team.

15 Corrigan: Do you remember your school year? Did it start early August?

Robertson: September.

Corrigan: Oh, September. Okay.

20

Robertson: September. And we were out, I’m gonna say, in April sometime. We always got to go barefoot the last day of school. At home. That’s when we started going barefoot. Last day of school. At home. At home.

25 Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. So you wore shoes to school all the time.

Robertson: Mm-hm, Mm-hm. Last day of school we could go outside barefoot at home.

Corrigan: At home. Okay. And was that exciting?

30

Robertson: Oh, yes, that was exciting! Yes, yes, very exciting.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Was the school used as a—so outside of school, is that where people met in the community for anything? Was an election held there? Was community meetings
35 held there or—

Robertson: No, the election was always held over at Saint Elmo’s School. They had more of the business type. They, in fact, they still have the elections. There’s still a voting place at Saint Elmo’s School.

40

Corrigan: Okay. So this school wasn’t used for any other community center or anything.

Robertson: No.

45 Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Could you tell me about recess? Could you tell me about you know, how long it was, when it was and what games you played?

Robertson: Okay. I want to think it was probably fifteen minutes. But time didn't mean that much to me back then. And she would dismiss us. And we would play, oh, "Red Rover, Red Rover, send someone over." And you know, you'd try to run and break the lines where you were holding hands in a line. And Hide and Seek, of course. And Tag. We played Tag. And some would play catch. Some would just play on the skinny cats, the teeter totter. And someone would get to ring the bell. And we still have the school bell at the Historical Society of Republic. They'd ring the big bell to go back in. And that's what our recesses consisted of.

10 Corrigan: That was the morning and the afternoon?

Robertson: Mm-hm.

Corrigan: And then during lunch time?

15

Robertson: During lunch time, we had like thirty minutes, I'm sure.

Corrigan: Okay. Now what did you do when there was bad weather for recess?

20 Robertson: Well, we had to stay inside. And you could play Hide the Thimble.

Corrigan: Hide the Thimble?

25 Robertson: Hide the Thimble. Someone would, everyone closed their eyes. And you'd hide the thimble somewhere. And then you'd have to search for the thimble. And of course sometimes we just had math contests, you know, or just fun things, just for fun. I was trying to think of another fun game that we played—

[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]

30

Robertson: —And you just got to go sit in someone else's desk and have fun.

Corrigan: Okay. Outside, did the teacher supervise? Or was she inside?

35 Robertson: Teacher was usually around outside supervising.

Corrigan: Okay. Was there very many group games? Like baseball or anything like that?

40 Robertson: Mm-hm. There was baseball. And mainly that was for the older kids. First and second grade, you know, or so, didn't participate. We'd be in the way. But no, they loved to have their baseball games, the older kids did.

45 Corrigan: Okay. Did you have any chores to perform at the school? Did you have to, did people have to carry in water and wood and clean? Did you have to do any of those things?

Robertson: Boys always carried in the water. Every morning. As soon as we were tall enough, we got to take turns putting the flag up. That was exciting, to get to put the flag up. And always keep it from touching the ground.

5 Corrigan: That was every morning.

Robertson: Every morning. And take it down in the evening. Afternoon.

10 Corrigan: Did you say, I'm going to skip back a little bit, did you say the Pledge of Allegiance each day?

Robertson: Always said the Pledge of Allegiance.

15 Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: Always.

Corrigan: So then did you clap erasers or—

20 Robertson: Yeah. We had to dust the erasers. We could take those outside. And you could shake them on the board, too. Pat them on the board. But you could take them out on the steps when it was dry. And then the boys carried in, the older boys carried in the wood.

25 Corrigan: Remind me, did you say there was, was there a water pump outside?

Robertson: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: So somebody had to carry in water then, too.

30 Robertson: Uh-huh. The older boys carried in the water. And then every once in a while, probably every day, the teacher would say, "Let's tidy up." So all the papers were picked up. Everything was picked up. And then parents took care of the desks. They could sand them down and revarnish them if they were looking bad. And we had inkwells in our desks, which was neat. And you don't see those anymore. And I'm sure the teacher did the dust mop more than, but sometimes students would help with the dust mop.

35 Corrigan: Do you know in winter, when it would be cold, would the teacher go early? Or would it be like an older student that would go to—

40 Robertson: Parent.

Corrigan: A parent. Okay.

Robertson: A parent would go. Mm-hm.

45 Corrigan: And light the fire and get the school warm?

Robertson: Get the school warm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

5 Corrigan: Could you talk about lunch? What it was? How long it was? What you ate? What was a typical lunch? Who made that for you? Can you—

10 Robertson: Okay. Of course, parents always made the lunch. And a typical lunch would be a sandwich with some kind of lunch meat. You could have bologna. You could have anything, you know, like that. A sliced meat. Of course, bologna's a mainstay. And wrap it in wax paper. And then you can have cookies, a couple of cookies, probably. And occasionally an apple. If you could afford an apple. And you were very envious of the girls or the boys that had a cupcake, boughten cupcake, like Twinkies or those chocolate ones, you know. And you didn't get one, you know, because you couldn't afford them. And then you had milk in a thermos to drink. Or Kool-Aid. And that was good. And in the wintertime you could take soup in a thermos. Of course now we, time was so that we got to take soup. My sister told me that, she's ten years older, that she got to take soup in a fruit jar. And then they had a big pan on top of the stove that the water got hot in. And they could set those jars in that water and it would heat it. By noon, they'd have hot soup. But we usually kept a pan on the stove at school just for humidity. But not to use to heat. And then we'd go play.

20

Corrigan: Was this, is this bread that your mother would make? Or is it boughten bread or biscuits? Or what was it?

Robertson: Mine was boughten bread.

25

Corrigan: Okay. So it as like boughten sliced bread.

Robertson: Boughten sliced bread. Mm-hm. Yeah.

30

Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: And maybe meatloaf. You know, if she had meatloaf, we'd put meatloaf on the bread.

35

Corrigan: So it could have been occasionally what was from the night before, if you had meatloaf for dinner or—

Robertson: Mm-hm.

40

[End Track 7. Begin Track 8.]

Robertson: Right. Could be peanut butter and jelly.

45

Corrigan: Was everybody bringing milk? Or was it just that you had a dairy farm?

Robertson: No. We had a dairy farm and we had our own milk. We pasteurized our own milk.

5 Corrigan: You did pasteurize it, okay.

Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. So for the fear of polio.

Corrigan: For polio.

10 Robertson: Mm-hm. We pasteurized our own milk. Of course, that wasn't the cause of polio. But—

Corrigan: But that's interesting.

15 Robertson: My dad and mom took no chances, you know. We bought a pasteurizer and pasteurized it in the kitchen.

20 Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So that was a typical lunch. Okay. Did it, like sometimes in the winter, I've heard, teachers may have put on a pot of soup or something. Did that ever happen? Or it was always bring your own?

Robertson: Not at our school. It was always bring your own.

25 Corrigan: Okay. Now your siblings went there. But did you ever keep in contact later on in life with people you went to school with in the one-room school?

Robertson: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I know several of them today.

30 Corrigan: Okay. Did a lot of people stay in the same area?

Robertson: Oh, the ones I went to school with, I would say over fifty percent of them have stayed around Republic.

35 Corrigan: Okay. Okay. That's kind of what I was wondering if—

Robertson: Yeah. I'd say at least fifty percent have stayed around Republic.

Corrigan: Okay. And so you are still in communication with some of them?

40 Robertson: Yeah. I mean, yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. Do you feel you got a quality education?

45 Robertson: I feel that the quality of education—there's a double standard. It was more one-on-one. Of course, there were only two of us in our class. And she could sit right with you and explain it very thorough to you. But you didn't have all of the curriculum, it seems, that

5 you have in the public schools, especially today. But when I went into seventh grade in the city, it was a whole different type of teaching. Because I was used to one-on-one. And you go, you're just one of maybe fifty kids, and scared to death. And so it was very hard to adjust to that, very, lots of stomach aches. Real stomach aches. Because I loved school. But they seemed to dive more into diagramming the sentences and all of this, you know, were more strict with it. And maybe they just tried to scare you first, you know. But they really scared me. But I think you have a better curriculum in the larger schools. But I think I, myself, did quite well in the country schools.

10 Corrigan: Yeah. In the small setting.

Robertson: You can either learn. Or you can choose not to learn. And you had those two types of children. Some are eager to learn. Some are not.

15 Corrigan: Okay. So overall, though, you think you did have a quality education and you weren't displeased with it, or you weren't, you didn't feel like you got shortchanged or anything?

Robertson: No.

20

Corrigan: So now looking forward, what kind of influence do you think that attending the one-room school had on your life? What kind of influence do you think—and what I'm curious to know is, did it make you more independent, did it make you, well, one thing you mentioned earlier and I'd like you to expand on it a little bit is you said you found a love of reading from the one-room schoolhouse.

25

Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

30 Corrigan: And that continued on later. But I was wondering if you think you had any influences from then that came through still today from that experience.

35 Robertson: Well I think I learned my basic math from using the blackboard. And watching other students use the blackboard. Now I'm talking about basic math. I'm not talking about algebra, because we didn't have algebra and calc, or any of that. And I think that it helped me tremendously. But then I also think that just being two in a class and twenty in the district, in the building itself, let me be very shy. When I was in the eighth grade, I was one of the students the staff chose—

[End Track 8. Begin Track 9.]

40

Robertson: —to speak at our eighth grade graduation. And I thought I was being punished. I just thought, oh, my. I was bashful. I was shy. But evidently they thought—there were four guys and me. Three guys and me. And we spoke, and graduation was with the entire high school, senior graduation, too. And—

45

Corrigan: There was a combined graduation? Is that what you're saying?

Robertson: Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So you had eighth grade and high school together.

5

Robertson: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: And this is when you were in eighth grade.

10

Robertson: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: But there wasn't just the eighth grade families, there was—

Robertson: Yes. Yes.

15

Corrigan: Okay. Gotcha. A lot more people.

Robertson: Yes. So scary for this little girl that came from a rural school and had only spent two years in the district. In the city. But, no, I still think my education was fine. Fine.

20

Corrigan: Okay. Good. And you made it through the speech, then?

Robertson: Yes. Yes. Yes.

25

Corrigan: Okay. Now was there any—you know, we covered a lot of different things. But are there any stories or things that stick out in your mind today? Whether it be funny or something just humorous or something that when somebody talks about a one-room schoolhouse that you immediately think of that we didn't talk about? Or that you'd like to mention, or someone you'd like to mention? I mean, you have a lot of material there. I guess we should mention on the tape here that you have a lot of stuff related to your school and other rural schools in the area.

30

Robertson: Mm-hm.

35

Corrigan: You have a lot of photographs. I see there's a lot of identification of people and students and letters. So there must be some lasting effect to this. Because you have quite the binder there of information. So you must have a fondness for history? Or?

Robertson: Why, yes. And a fondness for every member of my family attended Grandview on my mother's side, you know. Like we have a picture I showed you when my grandmother was born in 1882, was probably ten years old, which would be 1892. And Grandview had probably fifty students in it. Or sixty. I counted sixty. And they attended the same school. My mother attended that school. Of course, they only got to go to the eighth grade. And then they had to work on the farm. And sometimes it took them longer to finish the eighth grade because they could not go during chore time when the harvest was due.

45

Corrigan: Yeah, I've heard sometimes where somebody might come back two or three years to finish the eighth grade.

5 Robertson: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah. And that's the way my mother was, you know. Because when her dad needed her, that was not important at that time.

Corrigan: Now did you and your siblings all graduate through high school, then?

10 Robertson: Yes. Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay.

15 Robertson: Yes, uh-huh. And I attended Draughon's Business College. And graduated from the business college.

Corrigan: Okay. And where's that at?

20 Robertson: Well, it's nonexistent today, but it was in Springfield. It was all over the United States. But I attended in Springfield.

Corrigan: And what was the name again?

Robertson: Draughon's. D-r-a-u-g-h-o-n-s. Business College.

25 Corrigan: And so you attended that after high school.

Robertson: After high school.

Corrigan: Okay.

30 Robertson: And then I ended up being secretary at Republic High School—

Corrigan: Oh, did you.

35 Robertson: —for thirteen years, as the principal's secretary. And then I was the superintendent's secretary for the next ten years. So I've been affiliated with the school district for a long time.

Corrigan: In that same area, too.

40 Robertson: Yes. Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Okay. So the Republic High School principal and superintendent's assistant or secretary.

45

Robertson: Uh-huh. Secretary to the superintendent. At Republic, yes. And that's where I graduated from.

5 Corrigan: Republic High School. So, how long, how long was business school? Was that—

Robertson: You know, you finished at your own rate. So it was probably a couple of years.

Corrigan: So from then on, basically, you were in that school system.

10 Robertson: Well, I worked, in fact, I was in an office of a garment factory in Springfield. And then my husband was in the Air Force. And we were in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan. And I worked at the office of a creamery. And then I came home, took care of my two children. And when they were freshman and sixth grade, I started work again—

15 Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: —at the school.

20 Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So you had a little bit of time away, but still—

Robertson: With my kids.

Corrigan: —a long time in the Republic School District.

25 Robertson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Corrigan: Okay. And then when did you retire, then?

30 Robertson: I retired in 2001.

Corrigan: Okay.

Robertson: And then I've been working at the Republic Historical Society since then. Volunteering.

35 Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Well, tell me about that. it's a small historical society—

[End Track 9. Begin Track 10.]

40 Corrigan: —in Republic. Is it in an old building or is it—

Robertson: It's in the old post office building. An old bank. It was a bank first, and then different things. And a post office before we—and then city hall. And now it's a historical society.

45

Corrigan: Okay. And now what, I'm just curious, did you like history in school? Or, did this—I mean, you're collecting history here with the school's history. You're doing this. You work, you're volunteering at the historical society. Or did this come later in life that you've kind of gained a fondness for history?

5

Robertson: It came later. But you see the love you had for rural schools when you were there. And there's nothing on paper anymore. It's all computerized. And I love computers, don't get me wrong. But we need paper on some of our history. And so we've tried to collect all the area schools that we can around, Republic school district. Country schools, all the pictures that we possibly can. Get them identified. And we've written a history book about Republic. And so we're very active in preserving history for tomorrow's youth, for today and tomorrow's youth.

10

Corrigan: And one-room schools don't really exist anymore.

15

Robertson: Right.

Corrigan: They do a little bit in west central Nebraska and Montana. But that concept and idea is pretty much gone. And with a few more decades, the people that attended them will be gone. But a lot of the schools, there's no real documentation of them because they just kind of dotted the landscape everywhere. And they went out and consolidated and consolidated. And so, again, that's what part of this project is doing is preserving these histories. But no, that's great that the historical society is doing that there, too.

20

25 Robertson: Yes.

Corrigan: And you're especially identifying pictures and things. So.

Robertson: Yes. And I find it very interesting that Republic has changed all of their elementary schools. At one time, we had Elementary One, which was first and second grade. Elementary Two was third and fourth grade. But now, every elementary has grades K through five, I think, in them. They're all in one building. Going back to what a one-room school had. And I find that very interesting.

30

35 Corrigan: Instead of the schools it used to be, it was always K through eight, or—

Robertson: Well, yeah. But now then, at one time it was kindergarten, first grade, was one. And then the next building was third and fourth grade only. So they never mixed with another age group.

40

Corrigan: Okay. I see what you're saying now.

Robertson: And now they're putting them all—

45

Corrigan: Grouping them back together again.

Robertson: Grouping them back together. Mm-hm. Mm-hm. And there was a rural school about every five miles where we were. From Grandview.

5 Corrigan: Yeah. Okay. Well it was basically as far as someone could walk in a reasonable amount of time. So, okay.

Robertson: Mm-hm.

10 Corrigan: Was there anything else we didn't cover that you'd like to? I know you have a list there. Did we not cover something?

15 Robertson: I can't think of anything. I mean, we could talk all day. But it's just a great memory in someone's life. It's kind of an honor to have attended a one-room school. And all my parents did. My grandparents did. And we all attended the same school.

Corrigan: That's nice.

20 Robertson: And that's nice. That's really nice. And to preserve the history that you're doing is wonderful.

Corrigan: Oh, thank you.

Robertson: And I thank you for that.

25 Corrigan: You're welcome. Well, I'm going to go ahead and shut the recorder off. But thank you again very much for sharing your story today.

[End Track 10. End Interview.]