

An Interview with
Charles Sievert

at the Daniel Boone Regional Library in
Columbia, Missouri

19 September 2008

interviewed by Jeff D. Corrigan



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One-room Schoolhouse Project

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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. I'm with Charles Sievert. Today's date is 9-19-2008. And we're going to talk about his experience at a one-room schoolhouse. Charles can you tell me when and where you were born?

5 CS: Well, I was born in 1935 in, uh, Hardin County, Iowa. My parents moved to Missouri, Boone County, when I was approximately four or five months old. I've lived in Boone County all the rest of my life.

JC: Could you describe your home situation? Where you lived?

10 CS: Okay, we lived in—I think it was a two-room house in the river bottoms by Hartsburg, and it was on an 80 acre farm and dad was the renter of this farm and they—we lived there for eight years and during that eight years we suffered five floods—

JC: Five floods—

15 CS: —and we—I had started school while living down in that area. This got too much for dad and mom and they moved about three miles up in the river hills.

JC: Did you have any siblings?

CS: No, I'm the only child—

JC: Only child—when and where did you start school?

20 CS: Started school at 1941, six years old and—Crenshaw School—little one-room school that was a very small school, and I had to walk 1.7 miles. I just—uh, did this this week to check it out. School was located at the corner of Soft Pit Hill and Coonce Lane, uh, I think the address is probably still Hartsburg.

JC: Could you describe the school? What did it look like?

CS: Uh, it was a white school. Uh, I think it was pretty much square and it was very small school, it was approximately I think 18 by 18 or 18 by 20, uh, it was not—it had a tin roof and the school has been converted into a residential home now and as far as I can tell, um—I just saw it Wednesday and I still think it has that original tin roof on it.

5 JC: Really? Was there an outhouse for everybody or were there two outhouses—

CS: As best I can remember there was two outhouses, um—

JC: One for the boys and one for the girls—

CS: One for the boys and one for the girls.

JC: Did you have individual desks or was it—

10 CS: Ah, if I remember rightly we had the desks for two people because I can remember that one time me and, uh, the other person at the desk was having a sword fight with our pencils and we didn't realize the teacher had seen us and all of a sudden it was whack, whack—she hit one of us hard enough and it bounced back and got the other one.

15 JC: (laughs) Do you remember how many kids were in your class?

CS: In the school there was probably no more than eight or nine students that I can remember, I can—there was three approximately from the Woods' family and maybe three from the uh Martin family and there was myself and I really can't remember whether there were any more or not.

20 JC: Do you remember any of your teachers?

CS: *Oh yes*, I will never forget my first teacher. Her name was Mrs. Emil Klenne—

JC: Emil Klenne—

CS: Emil Klenne—uh, Klenne—

JC: Klenne—

CS: K-l-e-n-n-e I think, she lived in Hartsburg—I never knew her first name, it was always—it was always Mrs. Klenne. You wouldn't have ever thought of calling her by her first name, even if I'd known it. She was a wonderful, wonderful teacher and
5 I owe an awful lot to her. I think probably the most I owe to her is—she taught me the love of reading. I read I think every book in there library and I think there was only about ten, fifteen, but—

JC: That was about—the school had about ten or fifteen books—

CS: That's about it, they didn't have a whole lot of books, but I think I read everything,
10 including books supposedly way beyond my age.

JC: No, that's great. And did she, uh—how long did you have her?

CS: I had her for four years—uh

[pause in recording]

CS: Three years at Crenshaw and after my third year, uh—during the summer after my
15 third year I contracted pneumonic fever and I spent six months pretty much laying in bed. And then was on a very restricted, uh, exercise type thing. They allowed me to go back to school but there was only two months left in the school year and they decided that, uh, it probably wasn't worth it to uh, to, to continue to go there. But that was the last year of Crenshaw school, so the next year when I started the fourth
20 grade I went to a two-room schoolhouse in Hartsburg and Mrs. Emil Klenne was my teacher there. Next year course I moved into the fifth to the eighth grade and it was Mrs. Junge—

JC: Junge—

CS: Junge, J-u-n-g-e I think. Uh, I know I can find that because they did something that you don't—you'd be in court so fast that uh, she taught bible study.

JC: Mm—

CS: And I have a very cherished possession at home I have a bible presented from her to
5 me for doing the bible study. And you know now a days that would be a no, no.

JC: So was that a daily act—was that one of the main sub or—a daily activity that you covered—

CS: Yes, uh, well, maybe not daily, it was covered at least once a week—

JC: Regularly then—

10 CS: Yes, it was regularly yes, very regularly.

JC: Um, could you tell me about the rest of your day, the structure, do you remember, did you have—

CS: We had recesses, we had two recesses a day and then we had lunch. Um, you took your lunch.

15 JC: You always brought your lunch?

CS: I always brought my lunch.

JC: What did—do you remember what you did on recess?

CS: We played, we had teeter-totters. I don't remember if we had swings or not. But, um, if you look at that place it is in the Missouri River hills and it goes up and down.

20 There's a big ravine off to it—one of our things was run down it—see if we could run down it all the way without cracking up.

JC: (laughs) Without falling down—

CS: Without falling down, and, uh, I know there was a lot of big trees there, we had grape vines that we'd swing on them. Teeter-totters, it was usually war, the idea was to buck off the—your opponent—

JC: And did you all play together?

5 CS: Oh yes, we all played together. And a lot of wrestling took place between the boys.

JC: How did you get to school each day?

CS: I walked.

JC: And you—

10 CS: Most of the time I walked. In severe weather most of the time I would walk out to our mailbox and, uh, my teacher would pick me up and take me to school. I was the person that—the kid that lived the furthest away from school, and it was 1.7 miles and—back in the forties winters would get very severe, snow was a lot heavier than it is now.

JC: And she picked you up in what?

15 CS: Model-A I'm sure.

JC: Model-A car—

CS: Uh-huh. Her husband was a farmer.

JC: Okay, so she was married?

20 CS: She was married, and while she was—I think teaching at Hartsburg she had—she had her only child, and it was a fairly late in life child.

JC: Okay. Did you have any chores to perform at school?

CS: Not that I can remember, not particularly. I think they kind of rotated some of the things like, uh, getting the dust off the erasers and cleaning the chalkboard, things like that, but that was probably—probably a reward for good lessons.

JC: Did you have any, um—was there running water in the school?

5 CS: Oh no—

JC: Where did the water come from?

CS: Cistern—

JC: Okay. So did people have to bring it in then?

CS: Yeah, we'd bring it in. Uh, our cups—I don't know if—there collectibles now. They
10 were collapsible.

JC: Really?

CS: You'd fold them up and they had, uh, series of bands and, uh, it would collapse down to about like that [gestures with hands]—you'd pull 'em up and that's your cup.

JC: And you each had your own cup?

15 CS: We each had our own cups, yes.

JC: How was the school heated?

[pause in recording]

CS: **Big old stove** that had the big, huge, it was probably five or six foot diameter, huge metal around and then the stove on the inside. It was heated by coal—

20 JC: Coal—

CS: And, uh, the best I can remember, Perry Woods, who was a student there, I guess you could kind of call him a janitor, he was paid in the winter time to come in a little bit early and start the fire in it. I don't think they tried to bank the fire overnight, they,

think they—was lit every day, they didn't like the idea of a bank fire in an abandoned building.

JC: And how many years did you attend that school? Did you end up graduating from that school or a different school?

5 CS: I, uh, ended up graduating from actually a third school. I attended that school for two years—or three years. I attended then Hartsburg schools until I was in my eighth grade and dad and mom moved again, and when we moved in that time period you moved March 15th, and this time it was back to another one-room schoolhouse. But, we had some problems there because they were teaching—they weren't like the
10 Crenshaw [school] which would have taught all the eighth grades, this school was teaching odd, even, and they were odd when I got there so they were teaching seventh grade but I had to have eight grade classes to graduate.

JC: So they were teaching grades 1, 3, 5, and 7, and the next year they would teach the 2, 4, 6, and 8?

15 CS: That's right.

JC: You needed eight but they were only teaching seven that year.

CS: Right, I needed curriculum from the eighth grade because there was a very definite requirement in the Missouri Constitution at that time to teach certain things, and I think one of them of course was the Missouri Constitution and certain histories.

20 JC: So what happened, did they end up having to teach you?

CS: They taught me, they had—I took a lot of, uh, Math and English and things like that, I was taking what they were teaching, which was seventh grade over again, but then the other courses, I think there was maybe two of them, they had to teach me by myself.

JC: And what was the name of the school, the third one?

CS: I don't know, I was there for so short a time—

JC: Okay—

CS: But it was pretty much similar to Crenshaw school, it was maybe just a little bigger.

5 JC: Little bigger—cause the second one you went to you said was a two-room, right?

CS: It was a two-room.

JC: And then you went back to a one-room.

CS: Went back to a one-room, and—when we took our graduation test we actually took it
in Fulton, although this school was in Boone County. It was in the Callaway County
10 district.

JC: Okay.

CS: So we had to go to Fulton, which I think is the county seat of Callaway County, to
take the test. And it was an all-day test. It wasn't—it was a test that was scored
similar to a lot of the test that they give now you know, the percentile—

15 JC: Uh-hm.

CS: And, really I'm quite proud of my score, I scored 98.8 on that percentile.

JC: And they actually gave you that percentage back then too?

CS: Yes, mm-hm.

JC: Could you tell me, in any way that you'd like to, what do you think—um, what
20 influence did attending the one-room school have on your life?

CS: I think it uh, well between my home life and the school there I think it gave me my
directions. It gave me the—well the one thing it did teach me was from the first
teacher was, uh, a love of reading, also taught me to get along with other people and

work together. You know it's hard for me to say, but I'm not sure that I would be where I am at if it wasn't for—probably more not the one-room schoolhouse but the teachers that were in these one-room and two-room schoolhouses. They were absolutely marvelous.

5 JC: Did that love of reading continue—I mean do you still read—

CS: Oh yes. I read, uh—I read the paper of course every day, and, uh, I don't know how many books I read a year but I read a lot of them.

JC: And that all stems back from you found a love—

CS: That all comes back I think to—

10 JC: You read those first fifteen books—

CS: Uh-huh—

JC: —and you never stopped—

CS: I've never stopped.

[pause in recording]

15 CS: Of course I know it's not the one-room schoolhouse, but I think—I—my parents of course had a lot to do with what I'm—they were married for sixty-seven years. I did after high school—I graduated in '54 and was gonna try to go into farming with my dad, but I couldn't get a job. I was trying to get some money so I could—we could buy some more machinery and I couldn't do it. Finally I got disgusted and I joined

20 the army. And, uh, I took the test and they told me whatever you want, whatever field you want you, you're qualified for any field you want.

JC: So you think—you got a really quality education in those one-room schoolhouses.

CS: Yes I did. I got a quality education. And really what's interesting is that my high school was almost what you consider kind of a one-room schoolhouse too. My graduating class was nineteen.

JC: And what was the high school—where was that at?

5 CS: Hallsville.

JC: Hallsville?

CS: Hallsville High School. It now has close to a hundred students in a class.

JC: But your class was only nineteen then, so it wasn't that far of a transition from what you were—

10 CS: It wasn't, it wasn't much of a transition. And I think one of the things that probably—you look at a teacher setting there, she's teaching four grades—now they teach one grade, but—and they say they don't have time, but how did they teach four grades back then and still teach you? Well it's very simple, you listened. You're in the fifth grade you listen to what their teaching in the eighth grade, you're listening to what they're teaching in the seventh and the sixth. You're absorbing information without you realizing that you're learning. It's just kind of going through, but it's sticking.

15 JC: Did you, um—somebody else I interviewed said something about that. She's always picked up on—she was always listening to what was coming up in the next grade and the next, what book they were reading, what lessons they were doing, she said she always paid attention and she did absorb that.

20 CS: Mm-hm. I think that's one of the big advantages of—and its learning to get along with—you're in the fifth grade you're a lot smaller than the eighth graders, you learn

to get along with them. Because they sure can whip you. (both laugh) And rarely you know, you see now a days that if you even raise your hand to look like you're going to do something you're going to be kicked out of school. There wrestling was—was part of school.

5 JC: It was a regular recess activity.

CS: Yeah, it was pretty much. As long as—it was *never*—you were never mad each other, you were just having fun.

JC: Yeah. Are there any other stories about the one-room schoolhouse or something you remember about it that you wanted to share that we didn't talk about or—

10 CS: Well, I can remember one day, it was winter, very cold, it was probably down in the teens or lower, snow was on the ground and apparently I was a little late and I missed my ride, so I stood out there for, oh, fifteen [or] twenty minutes and realized okay, it's—she's not coming I've missed her, so I started walking to school and my feet were frozen by the time I got to school, and they actually had to take and put my feet in a pan of water, I was crying, I was hurting. That I remember. Another thing I remember was, uh, back then paper wasp were really prevalent back then. You would see a paper wasp nest 6 [or] 8 inches across, near the road. Well, we couldn't let that stay there so the kids we'd all get together we'd all get a whole bunch of nice rocks and we'd knock it out and then run like—(both laugh) Yeah, got stung quite a

15 few times, but that's kids—

JC: Oh yeah, that's good—

CS: You know, I think kids now a days they, they miss an awful lot—of things like that. They're so structured anymore.

JC: Well, no we, uh—I appreciate you coming out today. Um, I'm glad you shared your story. I really think it will really help people understand what it was like to a one-room schoolhouse. It's very different from what it is today—

CS: Oh yes—

5 [pause in recording]

CS: —it's totally different. And, you know I'm not so sure a lot of what we've got modern now a days is really worth it. You don't know your neighbor anymore. You knew your neighbors back then and you helped them out even before they asked.

10 JC: Well and you said you went—you knew them by the families that were going to the same school as you.

CS: Right. But you knew the—you knew the families you knew your next door neighbor and when it came time you knew the neighbor was going to put up hay, you didn't wait for him to ask, you went down there and you started helping him. That's just the way it was. Now you don't know your neighbor and you're probably afraid of him.

15 JC: So, things have definitely changed a little for—

CS: Yes they are, and they are not for the better.

JC: So, thank you again. We really appreciate it.

20