

An Interview with
Yvonne Leach Skouby

at the Daniel Boone Regional Library in
Columbia, Missouri

19 September 2008

interviewed by Jeff D. Corrigan



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PREFACE

Yvonne Leach Skouby was born in her grandparent's home in Osage County, Missouri, on January 18, 1937. She attended first through eighth grade in a one-room schoolhouse in Cooper Hill, a small village of twenty homes in Osage County, Missouri. Skouby describes the physical school building and discusses teachers, recess, and other activities held at the school. Her mother had taught before marriage, but returned to teaching during World War II when many men went off to serve in the war and many women went to work in other occupations. Skouby's mother served as her teacher from first through fourth grade. After graduating from eighth grade in April, 1950, Skouby attended Belle consolidated high school, and then went on to obtain a bachelor's and graduate degree.

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, when indicating a court case title, or when it's the proper title of a publication. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. 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 with the State Historical Society of Missouri and I am here today at the Daniel Boone Public Library in Columbia, Missouri and today we are going to be talking about people who attended one-room schoolhouses. Today's date is September 19, 2008 and we are going to begin with Yvonne Leach Skouby.

5 Yvonne, could you tell me when and where you were born?

YS: I was born January 18, 1937 in Osage County, Missouri, at the home of my grandparents on a farm.

JC: Did you grow up on a farm?

YS: No, we lived in a small village of Cooper Hill with twenty homes in Osage County.

10 JC: Cooper Hill?

YS: Cooper Hill.

JC: Cooper Hill. Could you tell me what your parents did for a living?

YS: Yes, my father [Irvin Leach] taught all his life; [6 years] in one-room rural schools and [then he taught high school math and science in St. Louis County for 36 years]

15 most of it in Webster Groves, Missouri, and University City, Missouri, but we always lived at Cooper Hill, [Osage County, Missouri].

JC: Did you have any siblings?

YS: Yes, I had two younger sisters.

JC: When and where did you start school?

20 YS: I began school when I was five and a half in September of 1942. This was in Cooper Hill and I attended that one-room school for all eight grades.

JC: Could you describe what the school looked like?

YS: Obviously it was a one-room schoolhouse, painted white. It had two outbuildings for girls and boys and you know the purpose. It had a wood shed because the indoor heating system depended on wood. There was a cistern for our water which came from the waterfall off the roof of the building. There was a bell for— on top of the roof and there was a bank of windows on one side, the west side of the school.

JC: Could you tell me about how big it was? Do you remember about the size roughly?

YS: Fifty feet by fifty feet.

JC: Okay. How many kids were in your class?

YS: It varied. When I was in first grade, I know exactly, there were two [with ten total students in the school]. When two districts consolidated when I was in fifth and sixth grade, other students came in and we had fifteen [total students in grades one through eight, but still two in my class]. That was the largest we ever had in this one-room school.

JC: Okay. Can you describe your teacher?

YS: My teacher for the first four years was my mother. She had taught before her marriage but due to World War II, when the men were in the service and the women in the other occupations, she returned to teaching. Although, I was not, at five and a half, quite ready for school, I was in first grade and my four year old sister always, always went too. She was preschool, but there was no Kindergarten. Then, in fifth and sixth I had a man for a teacher, an elderly man, and in seventh and eighth grade I had a young, single woman for a teacher. So I had three teachers.

JC: Okay, and this was from the beginning until eighth grade?

YS: First through eighth grade.

JC: First grade through eighth grade, great. Can you tell me more where the location of the school was?

YS: Yes I can. It was at the edge of the village of twenty homes and my home was at the opposite end of this village. It took only ten minutes to walk from one edge to the
5 other.

JC: And is that how you got to school every day?

YS: Walking every day. We did not go home for lunch even though we had, I think, an hour for lunch. We played lots of games and we took our lunch pail with us.

JC: So you would walk to school every morning with your mother and your sister and—

10 YS: Yes, and other children in the area.

JC: Would you kind of pick them up along the way or—

YS: Oh yes.

JC: Okay.

YS: I remember specifically one time there was ice all over the road and skating to and
15 from school.

JC: What activities do you remember doing at the school?

YS: At recess time, both morning and mid-afternoon, we played when weather was good out of doors. We loved to play softball, “Work Up” we called it. Everybody played, even if you had nine students, you had three swings at the bat and whatever
20 happened, happened. Then you rotated the next person so it was called “Work Up.” Everybody got to play, youngest through oldest. Then there was “Stink Base” and “Dare Base,” “Fox and Geese,” “Andy Over,” where you threw the ball over the schoolhouse and you caught it on the other end. Then you ran around to tag the

person on the other side, good exercise. Then there was a huge jump rope in the winter in inclement weather we jumped rope inside the building. This rope was turned and one, two, or three people would be jumping rope at the same time.

JC: Do you remember how long recess was?

5 YS: Recess? Fifteen minutes.

JC: Both in the morning and afternoon?

YS: Yes.

JC: And how long was your lunch? You said roughly an hour?

YS: An hour. We went to school from nine until twelve, an hour for lunch, because some
10 did walk home and then one to four.

JC: Okay. Could you tell me did you have any chores to perform at school or any tasks that you were required to do?

YS: The erasers for the blackboard, erasing on the blackboard, everybody did that. My
15 mother when she taught for the four years, there was always an older boy, an eighth grade boy, that would come early and bring in the wood and prepare the fire ahead of time.

JC: So a student would come before even the teacher would be there?

YS: Yes. He had permission to be there and he would start the fire each day, and then
20 afterwards there was usually a student that would clean the floors. They had a special cleaning compound that was spread on the floor. It had oil and sawdust in it and another student volunteer, or perhaps the person that came early, was paid.

JC: Oh, they were paid to do that?

YS: I think so.

JC: Okay, and were there other tasks that other kids did? Did somebody have to carry in water or was there actual water in this schoolhouse?

YS: Water had to be carried in from the cistern and I'm not sure who did that.

JC: Okay, and you said you attended the same school the whole way through?

5 YS: Yes, grades one through eight. I graduated in April, 1950. The school year was eight months. There were sixteen weeks before Christmas, one week of a break at Christmas time, [and] only sixteen weeks afterwards so we finished about April 20th.

JC: Okay. Did your sister also go to the same school that whole time and did she graduate there too?

10 YS: She did too.

JC: Okay. What would you say going to a one-room schoolhouse, how did that influence your life?

YS: Made me very independent because I wasn't depending on someone to lead me all the time. I had to find ways whether I wanted to read or write or go to the library and
15 read a book. I could choose what I wanted to do.

JC: So did you enjoy it?

YS: Yes, very much.

JC: Are there any stories about going to the one-room schoolhouse or anything that stands out when someone asks you, you know, "You went to a one room schoolhouse?" Is
20 there anything that just, the first thing that comes to mind that you think of or—

YS: No, but there are a lot of stories in the book an aunt [Grace Bacon Ferrier] wrote about forty-three years of teaching in the one-room schools. She's from Osage County and the name is *Teacher, Teacher, I Done It, I Done It, I Done Done It*, so

that book has all kinds of stories. I don't remember a lot of stories. I remember pie
suppers. I remember end of school programs, the pie supper I suppose. I remember
this was the one event in the fall to raise money for projects of the school and you
took your pie and you wrapped it in a special box [that was] decorated, then it was
5 auctioned off. Everybody did that.

JC: And that was used to raise money for the school then, to purchase—

YS: To purchase extra supplies, library books or things the teacher thought were needed.

JC: Great. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

YS: The one-room school served me well. I went to a consolidated high school and then
10 went on to college and I always ranked at the top of my class and then I went to
graduate school in another state and so I was always very pleased that it served me
well.

JC: That's wonderful. Well we really appreciate you coming today. Thank you very
much.

15 YS: And thank you Jeff.

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