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'Were We Hard on Teachers or What?': The Female Rural Schoolteacher
of Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie Counties, Kansas, 1908-1950

Immortalized in pioneer tales and rural history as an icon of early Kansas, the female one-room schoolteacher represents more than an instructor of readin', 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Sometimes called a "school mother," historians often note that she also served as nurse, janitor, fire builder, ash carrier, snow shoveler, program director, and coat buttoner.¹ Popular media and museum exhibits tend either to reference the longstanding cliché of the strict, prudish, old "schoolmarm" or paint a rosy portrait of a plucky yet feminine youth. Upon careful consideration of the evidence, a more nuanced profile emerges of a young, single woman, who labored in both geographical and psychological isolation, cut off from friends and family, burdened with sole responsibility for the physical and mental well-being of a classroom of up to thirty students—some of whom were scarcely younger than she, and certainly larger—and miles away from the nearest superior authority figure. "Every evening when it was time to go home," one teacher wrote, "I was sure that there was no way I could come back the next day."²



Figure 1. A photo of first-year teacher Wilma Teske ca. 1940, courtesy of former student Bernard Mayer. Teske and Mayer bonded over being new to the one-room school, and Teske kept in touch with Mayer for years after teaching him in first grade.

Present-day accounts of one-room schoolteachers memorialize the “winners”—those women who found fulfillment in teaching and spent years in one-room schoolhouses. Teachers like Helen Kemble, who taught for a total of twenty-four years, typify the model of the beloved former schoolteacher. Kemble overcame the challenges of rural teaching and found a home in the community. After a difficult first week, Kemble wrote, “nothing could have kept me from my schoolroom.”³ Others stayed only a few years but left their students with strong memories of caring, attentive teachers with a passion for their work. Students remembered Rebecca Kolterman, who organized a fundraiser to rent a small library for her students in 1941, as “really special” and “my most favorite of teachers.”⁴ Similarly, Wilma Teske taught Bernard Mayer for only one year, but they shared a special bond. “I was the first first-grader with her and in her first year,” Mayer said.⁵ They corresponded throughout their lives, and when Mayer graduated from eighth grade, he sent her an announcement and a photo. Although she could not attend, Teske replied with an affectionate letter, concluding, “thanks again for remembering me.”⁶ Elvira Burke, too, was remembered happily by a student who missed Halloween due to a bad case of poison ivy, so Miss Burke brought the entire class, costumes and all, to visit her.⁷ Perhaps the most touching recollection of a student's appreciation comes from Elvira Burke herself, who struggled throughout her first year:

I remember a fifth grade boy who had difficulty in keeping up in his classes. He had never been taught the basic skills in any subject. I tried to help him all I could. When he completed high school, I sent him a small gift. He wrote to thank me for the gift and said, 'You were the first teacher that ever paid attention to me. You were the best teacher I ever had, even though you were the crankiest.' Many pupils and their parents expressed their appreciation in many ways, somehow, his

seemed more unusual than most. These expressions of appreciation were some of the things that made teaching school worthwhile.⁸

Burke taught for a total of six years at Wabaunsee County school district no. 1.

But many more women in rural Kansas did not find teaching worthwhile. There is another side to the story: most women left their teaching positions after their first year, likely attracted by the prospect of marriage or a higher-paying assignment—or, as letters and oral testimony from Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie counties reveal, repelled by students who made a sport of hazing young teachers. These are the women whom history has forgotten. Their stories survive in the unpublished words of former students and teachers.

This regional case study uses two different yet complementary sources of local origin to reconstruct the reality of the Kansas one-room schoolteacher: a collection of letters from former students and teachers of Wabaunsee County, and an oral history interview with a group of twenty-five former students of Pottawatomie County. The documents capture the perspectives and memories of adults reflecting on their lives, frequently with pleasure, sometimes with regret. As former student Don Schmanke wrote, "Those were good times but I agonize now when I realize that kids could at times be really cruel to one another. I know because I was on both sides of such activity."⁹ Taken together, these two forms of memory reveal that female teachers contended not only with low salaries and a gender-specific ban on marriage, but also with the restrictive standards of communities and school boards, a lack of authority in the classroom, and the flagrant misbehavior of their students.

The Wabaunsee County collection referenced in this study consists of thirty letters written by former students and teachers of Wabaunsee County. Amateur historian Dawn Fulton, who lived her entire adult life in Wabaunsee County, began soliciting letters from former

students and teachers of one-room schools in 1980.¹⁰ This collection of letters currently resides in twelve binders in the Wabaunsee County Historical Society and Museum in Alma, Kansas. These binders contain a variety of materials related to Wabaunsee County schools: photos; newspaper articles; typed descriptions of schools; rosters of students and teachers; lists of teachers' monthly pay; and the letters addressed to Fulton.

Before the state began efforts to consolidate rural Kansas schools in the late 1940s, Wabaunsee County

had a total of ninety-one school districts, eighty-four of which were one-room schools.¹¹ The schools were not all in operation at the same time, but almost all were active from 1908 to 1950, a period that represents the pinnacle of the Kansas one-room school. All thirty letters included in this study pertain to one-room schools in Wabaunsee County; twenty-two were written by former students and eight by former teachers.¹² The second source is a group interview organized by the author and Dr. Morgan J. Morgan with twenty-five elderly Pottawatomie County residents who attended one-room schools in the 1940s. The hour-long interview took place November 5, 2011, at the Rock Creek Historical Society and covered such topics as teachers' illnesses and emotional

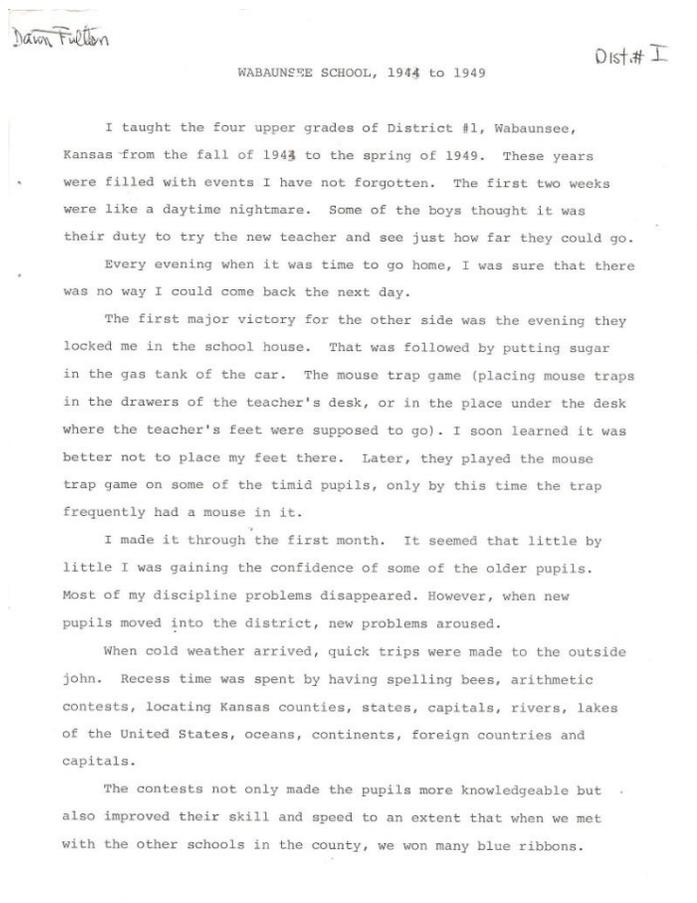


Figure 2. This letter describes Wabaunsee County schoolteacher Elvira Burke's struggles with disciplinary problems. All thirty letters in the collection are typewritten except two, which were penned by hand. Courtesy of Wabaunsee County Historical Society and Museum.

outbursts, students' misbehavior, accepted disciplinary measures, community standards for teachers, and the overall effectiveness of one-room schools.¹³

Historians and contemporary commentators alike have noted the strict standards of conduct to which school boards and communities held the female schoolteacher, but the forces within the classroom that burdened her remain obscure.¹⁴ As one scholar observed of teachers' personal diaries and correspondence, "Surprisingly little is written of teachers' encounters with children."¹⁵ Researchers have repeatedly concluded that generally low salaries for rural teachers and hiring policies that prevented married women from teaching well into the 1940s resulted in a high turnover rate of one-room schoolteachers.¹⁶ Yet the memories of former teachers and students from Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie counties, Kansas, reveal that another factor interfered with women's employment: a lack of authority, especially in the eyes of male students. A female teacher's employment in a one-room school depended on her capacity to maintain discipline in the classroom, a task that itself depended upon the teacher's ability to exert her authority and her students' willingness to behave. However, gender norms placed her in a double bind: society extolled the patient, calm, nurturing "schoolmother," whose virtues marked her membership in the cult of domesticity yet detracted from her perceived authority, but derided the strict and straight-laced "schoolmarm," who rejected femininity with her perpetual spinsterhood.¹⁷ The collection of letters addressed to Dawn Fulton and the group interview yield numerous examples of women who were driven away by the behavior of their male pupils. Several of these women were replaced by male teachers solely to restore discipline in the classroom. Such cases shed light on the emotional reality of Kansas's female teachers.

The one-room schoolteacher lived essentially the same life, in the same facilities, from 1900 to 1950, although one-room schools were still prevalent in the state until the 1960s, when

widespread unification spelled the end for many school districts.¹⁸ A teacher might have commuted anywhere from a few blocks to fifteen miles and often boarded with local families who lived near the schoolhouse, sometimes with the very students she taught, paying for room and board with her monthly earnings.¹⁹ Beulah Zwanziger Weaver, who taught in Wabaunsee County school district no. 73 in the 1918-19 term, spent \$15 of her monthly \$70 salary on room and board with the Senne family, who lived only about a quarter-mile from the school.²⁰ The shorter commute was undoubtedly worth the price, as the schoolteacher's day all too often began with a freezing walk to school long before students arrived. Kansas winters are harsh, and many children, even those as young as five or six, had to walk miles through the snow, so it was important to warm the school before the students traipsed in, extremities numb from the sometimes subzero temperatures. As one student recalled, "The teacher was responsible for starting the fire each morning. On extremely cold, windy days, it was hard to heat the building, so we all sat around the stove with coats and gloves on."²¹ Teachers and students frequently carried soup or cocoa to school to heat slowly on the potbellied stove in the center of the classroom, its aroma filling the room as hands and toes thawed.²²

Because the schools lacked electricity, running water, and the funds to hire assistants, manual labor played an important role in the one-room school experience, on the part of both the teacher and the students. The teacher arrived early not only to warm the school, but also to sweep the floor, carry out ashes, haul drinking water, and carry in wood or coal.²³ She was able to delegate many chores to older students: cleaning the blackboards; beating erasers; shoveling snow; putting up the flag; and helping younger students, both with their boots and with their lessons.²⁴ But these chores were arguably the easiest part of the schoolteacher's day and certainly the simplest. The greatest challenge was in maintaining authority over a classroom full of rowdy

children—a challenge with which young, untrained female teachers especially struggled.

Teaching became something of a rite of passage for many young women at the turn of the century, a brief period of independence before marriage.²⁵ By 1928, female teachers outnumbered male teachers nearly nine to one in the United States.²⁶ Most, like Helen Kemble, expected only a brief trial of the profession. "School teaching was not my chosen profession in the beginning," Kemble wrote. "I really wanted to be a nurse, but my mother was very much opposed to the idea. I intended to teach two or three years and enter nurse's training after that."²⁷ The one-room schoolteacher might have been educated in a large city in another state and moved West, lured by teachers' agencies that promised her a position in return for a registration fee and a small commission.²⁸ More often, however, she was the young daughter of a local family, freshly returned from a two-year normal school with her teaching certificate to supervise pupils hardly younger than she.²⁹ In Pottawatomie and Wabaunsee counties, as in most Kansas counties, she was almost certainly white. Prospective one-room schoolteachers often found themselves perched on "fence rails, stones, wagon tongues, or stood in barn yards or stables as often as they sat on porches, on sofas, or at kitchen tables" when interviewing with members of the school board, which was likely to be all male.³⁰

The experience of Gwen Abbott Adamson, who lived in Alma and began teaching in 1938, is typical of many teachers who took advantage of Kansas's sixty-hour teaching certificate.

My first job of teaching was in the primary building, one through fourth grades, in Wabaunsee, Kansas, in 1938. I remember the school board members were named Gustafson, Perkins, and Taylor, and they came to my house to have me sign my contract at a salary of \$75.00 a month for nine months. That seemed a lot of money in those days. I had finished two years of college at Kansas State

University and started teaching on a sixty hour teaching certificate. I had taken student teaching at the Manhattan Public Schools in the third grade. I also remember the day I signed that contract. It was on April 22, my twenty first birthday.³¹

In fact, most teachers in Kansas were even less qualified to teach grades one through eight than twenty-one-year-old Adamson, who had completed two years of college when she became a one-room schoolteacher. A 1938 research bulletin issued by the State Board of Education found that in the rural schools of Kansas in the 1937-38 academic year, 65.1 percent of teachers were certified through institutions that did not require any college education.³² In Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie counties, teachers' professional training was even more "woefully inadequate."³³ Of the eighty-three one-room teachers employed in Wabaunsee County at that time, 83.1 percent held certificates that required only a high school degree or, without that, a satisfactory examination by the county. In Pottawatomie County, that figure reached 86.4 percent, and 45.5 percent of the county's eighty-eight teachers held a certificate that required no high school education at all.³⁴

Unsurprisingly, these rural teachers were not always well prepared for the vocation, as Helen Kemble recalled in a letter about her first job at the one-room school in district 36. "My first day of school seemed like a disaster for me," she wrote. "I was fresh out of high school, where I had studied business and I had not taken normal training. I took a teacher's examination to get my certificate and how I ever managed to pass it, I'll never know. I had not even studied some of the subjects over which I was examined."³⁵ During the group interview, one Pottawatomie County resident recalled a teacher named Myrtle Burgess who started teaching immediately after graduating from eighth grade at Roland Perry School: "She got out of eighth

grade, and the next year she taught, my dad was going to school there. Wasn't that much difference in age, and then she taught me—me, my sister and my brother."³⁶ Such a lack of formal preparation put both young female teachers and their students at a disadvantage in the classroom. The author of the 1938 bulletin reported that rural students were "severely handicapped in educational opportunities" by ill-prepared teachers and observed that "successful candidates for rural teaching positions have taken advantage of the shortest and quickest legal channels to the teaching license."³⁷ So why did rural school districts so often hire such young, untested teachers?

The answer is simple: Kansas one-room schools struggled with a turnover rate nearly twice that of elementary schools in small towns and six times that of urban schools in the state, according to a 1942 study by John E. Jacobs.³⁸ A high turnover rate has long been noted in historical studies of schoolteachers, but specific figures are difficult to find, especially in the published history of the one-room school. Jacobs's study found that in the 1941-42 term, 43.8 percent of Kansas teachers were new to the rural schools in which they taught.³⁹ Some researchers suggest that one-room schoolteachers' average tenure at a given school was only two or three years.⁴⁰ Wabaunsee County teachers, however, appear to have been especially mobile. Records collected at the Wabaunsee County Historical Society and Museum offer insight into the year-to-year operation of the county's ninety-one school districts, of which eighty-four were one-room schools. An analysis of the records of sixteen school districts reveals that from 1908 to 1950, Wabaunsee County teachers remained at one-room schools for an average of only 1.4 years. That average represents the aggregate of Wabaunsee County teachers in those schools, but a closer examination of the data is even more revealing: of the 371 teachers included in the 1908-1950 analysis, 70.4 percent taught at a given school for one year or less. Just 20.5 percent

remained at the same school for two years, and only 9.2 percent taught for three years or more at one school. The analysis shows that, for whatever reason, a significant majority of Wabaunsee County teachers were motivated to leave their assigned schools after their first year there.⁴¹ One education expert writing on the topic in 1928 commented that the turnover rate of one-room teachers "is so huge that it should be regarded with alarm by every one interested in American education" and called the teachers' mass departure a "hegira"—that is, a journey to flee from an undesirable situation.⁴²

Table 1. Analysis of teacher turnover in 16 one-room schools in Wabaunsee County, KS, 1908-1950

| <i>District*</i> | <i>Years sampled†</i> | <i>No. of Teachers</i> | <i>No. who taught for 1 year or less</i> | <i>No. who taught for 2 years</i> | <i>No. who taught for 3 years or more</i> | <i>Years of average tenure‡</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| #3 | 1908-1942 | 26 | 18 | 7 | 1 | 1.2 |
| #4 | 1908-1946 | 26 | 19 | 5 | 2 | 1.5 |
| #6 | 1908-1950 | 32 | 26 | 4 | 2 | 1.2 |
| #11 | 1908-1950 | 24 | 12 | 6 | 6 | 1.8 |
| #24 | 1908-1941 | 17 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 1.9 |
| #26 | 1908-1950 | 26 | 15 | 7 | 4 | 1.6 |
| #32 | 1908-1945 | 27 | 19 | 5 | 3 | 1.4 |
| #33 | 1908-1950 | 22 | 16 | 3 | 3 | 1.4 |
| #42 | 1908-1946 | 25 | 17 | 5 | 3 | 1.4 |
| #49 | 1908-1950 | 30 | 23 | 5 | 2 | 1.4 |
| #55 | 1908-1930 | 21 | 18 | 3 | 0 | 1.0 |
| #58 | 1908-1943 | 21 | 14 | 4 | 3 | 1.7 |
| #61 | 1908-1950 | 23 | 14 | 9 | 0 | 1.8 |
| #70 | 1908-1916 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0.8 |
| #78 | 1908-1925 | 15 | 13 | 2 | 0 | 1.1 |
| #90 | 1912-1950 | 26 | 17 | 7 | 2 | 1.5 |
| <i>Total</i> | 528 | 371 | 260 | 76 | 34 | 1.4 |
| <i>% of total</i> | --- | --- | 70.4 | 20.5 | 9.2 | --- |

Source: Registers of teachers and teachers' pay located at the Wabaunsee County Historical Society in Alma, KS.

Note: All figures are rounded to 1 decimal point.

* This data concerns sixteen of Wabaunsee County's eighty-four one-room school districts.

† Some information is unavailable for districts #3 (three years are missing), #6 (four years), #33 (twelve years), #42 (four years), and #61 (one year). These years are omitted from the years sampled.

‡ Calculated by dividing the years sampled by the number of teachers.

These staggering numbers beg the question: Why did so many teachers long to leave one-room schools after only a year? What made their situation so undesirable that more than two-

thirds of Wabaunsee County schoolteachers left their positions after their first year? The high turnover rate of rural teachers is usually attributed to the great numbers of women who married shortly after they had entered the profession and to the higher pay offered by larger elementary schools. Indeed, Jacobs found that, of elementary school teachers who had left their positions in the 1939-40 academic year, 11 percent returned to college, 30 percent quit the profession to marry, and 50 percent sought a teaching post elsewhere; Jacobs does not account for the remaining 9 percent.⁴³ However, those numbers include teachers in all elementary schools, and Jacobs' study shows that one-room schoolteachers were at least twice as mobile as other elementary school teachers. So what factors led one-room schoolteachers to leave their positions in droves, while most of their counterparts remained content in larger elementary schools? Most researchers accept the explanation that women were driven away by the low pay offered by rural schools and the widespread policy of excluding married women from teaching positions. Wabaunsee County's unusually high turnover rate and the oral and epistolary evidence suggest that there is more to the story: as the only authority figures in their one-room schools, some female teachers left their jobs because disrespectful students drove them away.

Certainly low pay was an important consideration to rural teachers. As a rule, one-room schoolteachers in the United States were paid less than teachers in urban elementary schools.⁴⁴ Kansas school districts obtained more than 90 percent of their funds from local property taxes until 1937, when the state began to increase financial aid to schools.⁴⁵ Naturally, urban districts could allocate more money to their personnel than could rural districts. Elementary schoolteachers, both urban and rural, earned less money than teachers in secondary or postsecondary education. In the 1947-48 term, the state's one-room schoolteachers were paid \$1,402, equivalent to roughly \$14,600 in buying power in 2013. Meanwhile, in the largest cities,

elementary school teachers earned \$2,571—equivalent to \$26,800 in 2013, almost twice the value of the rural teacher's wages. Junior high and high school teachers collected a slightly larger paycheck, while junior college teachers topped the list with an annual salary of \$3,032, or \$31,600 in 2013.⁴⁶ This general pattern of pay holds true for teachers who taught in Kansas schools during the entire period between 1908 and 1950: secondary and postsecondary educators consistently earned most, followed by elementary school teachers in large cities, then teachers in small towns, and invariably at the bottom of the list, the one-room schoolteachers received the smallest checks. The trend is clear: for many one-room teachers, the work was not worth the salary.

A number of factors exacerbated the problem of generally low pay. First, most Kansas schools between 1908 and 1950 operated on a seven- or eight-month term.⁴⁷ Teachers, who were paid monthly and often spent a portion of their salary boarding with a local family, could not support themselves from May to September unless they had saved money throughout the term, sought additional employment, or returned home to live with their families. To complicate matters, teachers' salaries varied from one district to another and were vulnerable both to small changes in local finances and to larger fluctuations in the national economy, such as the Great Depression. As Chart 1 illustrates, in 1932, teachers' pay in rural schools began to plummet from the generally stable level of the previous decade as the national economy collapsed.⁴⁸ For example, in Wabaunsee County district no. 32 in the 1930-31 term, Violet Eberhart received \$80 monthly, equivalent to \$1,100 in 2013.⁴⁹ Two years later in the same district, Mary Harvey earned half that—the monthly \$40 paycheck she received in the 1932-33 academic year is worth only \$670 in buying power in 2013. Yet simultaneously, local variations in pay from district to district also affected Wabaunsee County teachers. For example, in the same year that district no.

32 paid Mary Harvey just \$40 monthly, Rita Dill of district no. 4 earned a \$65 paycheck, while George Schutter in district no. 3 took home \$100 each month.⁵⁰ Chart 1 illustrates just how fortunate Schutter was compared to other teachers in the county, who were predominantly female.

Using information from six Wabaunsee County school districts, Chart 1 depicts the overall decline in teachers' salaries during the Great Depression using both nominal and real figures (revised from the nominal figures to adjust for price change after 1920). In the 1920s, teachers' pay remained stable, varying from year to year by less than \$10 in real figures. Teachers in these six districts earned a monthly average of \$92.92 in nominal pay from 1920 to 1929 and \$105.75 in real pay.⁵¹ As the chart shows, more than a decade passed before these school districts could afford to pay teachers the level of salary they enjoyed throughout the 1920s, a trend that is clear from both the nominal and real figures for monthly pay. Furthermore, as in the case of George Schutter, male teachers overall were paid more than female teachers, reflecting both the likelihood that the men who applied were better educated than women and the opinion shared by many school boards that male teachers required a higher salary than unmarried women.⁵² Researcher Frank P. Bachman summarized the situation in plain terms in 1933: "With salaries for elementary teaching providing in most cases not even a 'subsistence wage' for single women boarding, to say nothing of married men with families, it should come as no surprise that elementary teachers as a class are not only women but young, poorly prepared for their work, migratory, and after a few years of service drop out of teaching altogether."⁵³

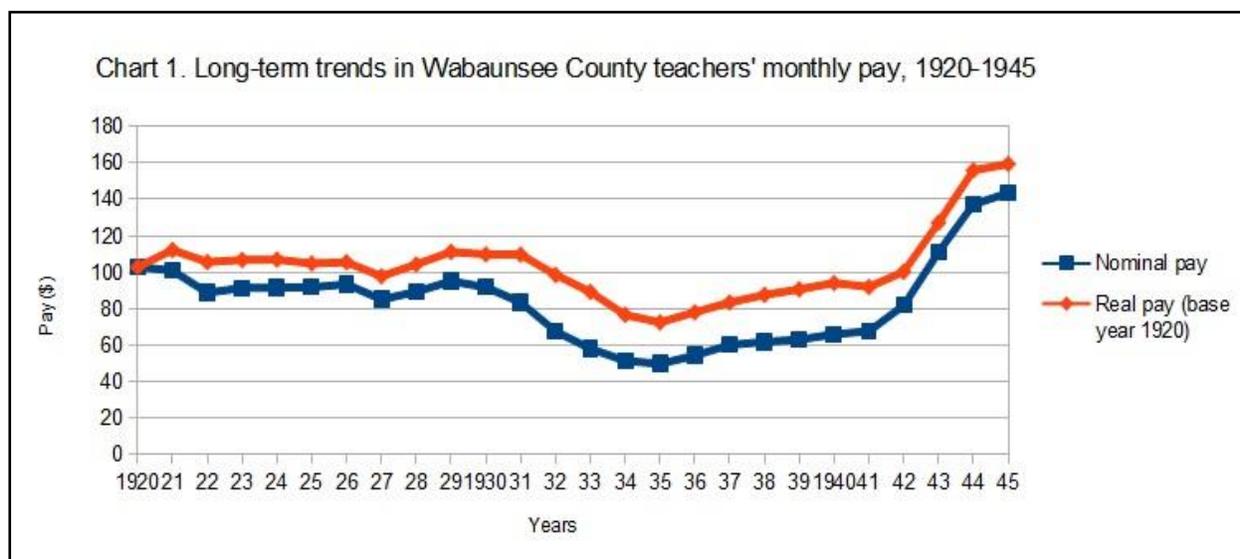


Chart 1. Graph of the average monthly nominal pay of teachers in six Wabaunsee County one-room schools (district nos. 3, 4, 6, 11, 26, and 90) and their real pay, expressed in 1920 dollars. This graph shows that in these Wabaunsee County schools, the Great Depression began to affect teachers' pay in 1932, and more than a decade passed before teachers' salaries returned to the level of the 1920s.
 Source: See note 47.

As Bachman's words suggest, the issue of teachers' pay was closely entwined with an ongoing debate in the profession about marriage. Although married women were called upon to teach in times of need, as when World Wars I and II drained school districts of male teachers, rural school districts had an unwritten policy of hiring only unmarried female teachers, a policy that did not apply to men.⁵⁴ The attitude can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, when Catharine Beecher, among other education reformers, called for the acceptance of women into the profession. "It is woman who is the natural and appropriate guardian of childhood," Beecher wrote in 1845. "It is woman who has those tender sympathies which can most readily feel for the wants and sufferings of the young."⁵⁵ Beecher envisioned the elementary school teacher as a motherly figure who ought to view her students as though they were her children, a conception that was still widely held by American educators a century later. A 1940 article in *Review of Educational Research* summarized the two prevailing views of educators. Critics of married women in the classroom argued that they were more interested in the operation of their husbands'

estates than in teaching or extracurricular activities; that a married female teacher might use her local connections to interfere with school authorities; that "only an exceptional individual can handle both a home and a career"; and that hiring married women would deprive men and single women of a means of support.⁵⁶ Advocates for married female teachers countered that women who spent the resources to obtain a teaching certificate should not be prevented from using it and that married women were as capable of competent teaching as single women. The article quotes one commentator who identified a contradiction in critics' logic: "The matter is almost axiomatic: if a woman is not inferior, she should be a wife and mother. If she is inferior, she should not be teaching."

Across the United States, school boards that dismissed women from teaching positions for marrying stood on unsteady legal ground. While a few states specifically recognized and protected the right of married women to teach, in cases outside those states, teachers' fates were left to the discretion of the court. The 1940 *Review of Educational Research* article notes that courts "as a rule, have upheld the right of the married woman to teach. . . . [R]estraint of marriage is against public policy and is so generally accepted in law that contracts violating this principle are incapable of enforcement."⁵⁷ However, as the authors pointed out, only Kentucky, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia specifically protected women teachers from discriminatory dismissal in 1940. Furthermore, a 1934 pamphlet issued by the U.S. Office of Education reviewed a number of cases that went to court from 1902 to 1932 and concluded that, in states without such protective statutes, courts "as a rule are disinclined to interfere with the exercise of discretionary authority vested in school boards, unless abuse of such authority is clearly shown."⁵⁸ Thus, even though the courts generally found it unreasonable for school boards to dismiss teachers on the basis of marriage, they were unwilling to curtail the freedom of school

boards to enforce local social norms in teachers' contracts. As a result, the 1940 study suggested that in all but the largest cities, discrimination against married women teachers was on the rise; married women represented less than 20 percent of employed teachers in 1938, down from almost one-third a decade earlier.⁵⁹ In the September 1941 issue of *Kansas Teacher*, University of Wichita instructor Earl K. Hillbrand expressed the prevalent sexist attitude shared by Kansas educators toward unmarried female teachers: "It is the judgment of the writer that these girls do a remarkably good job considering the cost of their training and meagerness of their salaries. It is also greatly to the credit of these young women that they do get married. What else would we want them to do? Surely we could not expect all of them to teach a life-time."⁶⁰

Only months before *Kansas Teacher* printed Hillbrand's words, the monthly periodical published a lengthy piece by an anonymous author entitled "I Am a Disinherited Schoolma'am."⁶¹ "In our mid-western city school system a man who got married got a raise in salary; a woman got fired," the author begins. After marrying, she writes, she saw her teaching prospects disappear. Friends asked, "Why on earth did you get married if you wanted to teach?" She describes an endless process of inquiry: writing to countless employment agencies, interviewing with dozens of school boards, only to find a temporary position at a college that paid "approximately the same wage the local ditch diggers under the WPA received," according to the author. After dedicating herself to the position and receiving a recommendation for a teaching fellowship, the president of the college dismissed her. "It's just that you're a married woman!" he said. Concluding the article, the anonymous woman writes, "So at long last I have given up."

I have nothing to hope for in teaching—at least not under the present set-up.

Perhaps in time I shall forget my ambition—perhaps I shall lapse gracefully into

the parasitic bridge-playing, club-chasing regime approved by public sentiment for married women. I might, of course, go on to school. I might even get a doctor's degree, but it is doubtful whether that would help much. The case against me is too strong: I am a married woman.⁶²

The views of school boards on marriage undoubtedly prevented thousands of similar young women from pursuing a career in teaching. However, as standards relaxed in the late 1940s, some newly married women, like Wabaunsee County schoolteacher Sylvia M. Simmons, returned to the profession.⁶³

School boards' policies against married female teachers are just one example of the many limitations placed on women by the local community. Rural communities nationwide had high social expectations for teachers, whose reputations suffered when they failed to measure up, and Kansas communities like those in Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie Counties were no exception. Female schoolteachers were encouraged to be active in the community, attend church regularly, and teach piano lessons and Sunday school. As the "guardian of childhood," the ideal female one-room schoolteacher was expected to embody the morals of the community.⁶⁴ As such, her behavior was closely monitored by the community: no dancing, no card-playing, and no skipping church—and of course, no fraternization with men, or else the school board would step in.⁶⁵ Generally, men were not held to the same standards: "living in an apartment, playing cards and billiards, smoking, and not attending church are male prerogatives even in teaching," an education researcher observed in 1940.⁶⁶ New teachers walked on thin ice, especially those who were new to the area; outsiders had to earn the confidence of the community that they could control the school. A rural teacher's success or failure "depended more on interpersonal relationships than on scholarly credentials," summarized the author of a dissertation about

schools in Saline County, Kansas.⁶⁷ The female rural teacher had to be especially careful: as the only teacher in the classroom, she was alone in maintaining discipline, and with greater pressure placed on her than on male teachers to adhere to community standards of conduct, she had less room for error. She also had to face what was almost certainly an all-male school board comprised of well-known, taxpaying community members.⁶⁸

The community's special interest in the conduct of female teachers explains why male teacher Carl "Carly" Geisler found his own behavior scrutinized when he began boarding with the Herneisen household, where a female teacher was also staying. "Mrs. Herneisen made it loud and clear that I was to sleep upstairs and spend my time there and the lower grade teacher would have a downstairs room next to hers," Geisler wrote. "The reason being that the lower grade teacher was Helen Irene Carpenter, just out of high school, pretty as a picture and she wanted all forms of gossip nipped in the bud."⁶⁹ For young Helen, in her first year of teaching, even gossip about a potential scandal could have spelled the end of her teaching career. In most rural communities, when a female teacher left the house at which she was boarding, her behavior, dress, and company were the subject of scrutiny. "All outward appearances were up for review or gossip," education researcher Andrea Wyman writes. "Who she saw, what she did, and where she went became a part of her job description twenty-four hours a day."⁷⁰

The risk of censure existed for activities both in the public sphere and within the classroom. The community had a vested interest in what went on in the often isolated schoolhouse, although only the school board and the superintendent could intervene directly to dismiss a teacher—and in rural communities, gossip traveled fast. Depending on local norms, female schoolteachers in rural communities could be fired for such minor offenses as fraternizing with men or not teaching Sunday school.⁷¹ In Kansas, the typical school district prescribed strict

rules for women specifically, prohibiting female teachers from wearing makeup, dying their hair, or keeping company with "any male who is not her blood kin." Some Kansas schools also felt it necessary to forbid women to "be away from their domicile between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless attending a school function," to "leave the district without the permission of the president of the board of trustees of the district," or even to "loiter in town ice cream stores."⁷²

When parents learned of a teacher's unsavory behavior, the "notoriously male dominated" school board was usually not far behind, as one teacher learned to her humiliation.⁷³ "One of our teachers who came in the middle of the year really liked music," a former Wabaunsee, Kansas, student recalled in a letter. "She was very good in music and apparently wanted all of us to dance well. This dancing every day was great fun and I thought enjoyed by all, however one of the boys didn't think it was such fun and told his father that we danced all day. His father was on the school board and saw to it that the dancing stopped."⁷⁴ That a student wrote about this incident decades after the fact bespeaks the power of small communities like Wabaunsee, Kansas, to enforce moral standards and gender norms through what essentially amounted to gossip. Female rural schoolteachers lived their lives in the watchful eyes of the community, both in and out of the classroom.

Societal expectations of primness and modesty from female teachers sometimes conflicted with the very real need for a firm disciplinary hand in the rural school. Across the United States, tens of thousands of young women cleaved to the idea that as schoolteachers, their duty was to serve as loving mentors to a classroom of docile young students. But in the one-room schoolhouse, many new teachers found that the gendered ideal of the "schoolmother" stood at odds with the reality of her position. Fresh out of normal school, young teachers were often woefully unprepared to stand alone before a roomful of children ranging in age from five to

eighteen years old, some of whom delighted in making her life miserable.

Primary sources from Pottawatomie and Wabaunsee County, Kansas, shed light on the motivations of some of these unruly students. The trouble such students made was often innocent—as one former Pottawatomie County student said, students would do "anything to be contrary. . . making noise, talking to each other, giggling, you know, just anything to be mischievous."⁷⁵ In some classrooms, this mischief was a regular feature of the school day, and teachers often struggled to curb the mischief-makers, who appeared to be almost exclusively boys. As Don Schmanke recounted amusingly in a letter about his time in Pottawatomie School no. 23, "I don't know what the girls did but the boys spent a lot of time tunneling into the road embankment and/or playing with fire. It was great fun to get a fire going in the boys' toilet pit."⁷⁶ One former student testified that some teachers preferred their female students to the boys, perhaps as a result of such

antics. "I think [my teachers] liked girls the best. They treated me better than they did my brothers," said one Pottawatomie County woman in the group interview. When asked why, she quipped, "Well, I was probably a nicer student, don't you suppose?"⁷⁷

One-room schoolteachers were all but



Figure 3. Students from Wabaunsee County school district no. 1 and their teacher, Bertha Tenbrink Treu, pose for a solemn class photo ca. the 1920s. This undated photo probably shows the one-room primary school class, which contained first through fourth grades. Fourth-grade boys could have been as old as thirteen. Courtesy of Wabaunsee County Historical Society and Museum.

alone in handling this kind of mischief, which both male and female students experienced as an interruption of the daily routine. In one letter, Juanita Gronquist Teneyck described a trick that two of her fellow students played on the teacher. "One day two second graders (one was my brother) threw a lot of dry grass down the boy's outhouse and set the grass on fire. The smoke rolled out the vents and they told the teacher the toilet was on fire! She ran with a bucket of water to put the fire out."⁷⁸ This was only one of "several amusing things that happened during those years." In the same letter, Teneyck also described how her class colluded not to wake a napping teacher when she fell asleep at her desk at noon, instead spending the day playing out of her sight, and how her troublesome brother and a friend stuffed snowballs in the exhaust pipe of the teacher's car in the winter: "It was fun watching from the road as she started the car and out popped a snowball."⁷⁹ Male teachers were not exempt from students' pranks. A former student of Jenkins School in Pottawatomie County recounted how the older boys once put a black snake in their male teacher's desk; when he sat down after lunch, "there that snake was, staring him in the face."⁸⁰ Toilet-related antics seem to have been quite popular; boys also "delighted in throwing rocks at the girl's outhouse when occupied."⁸¹ Japes like these served to entertain the students at the expense of the schoolteacher (and the school's equipment) but did little harm except to disrupt classroom instruction. Indeed, Teneyck wrote in a different letter that the class clown, Deanie Gardenhire, "kept things from becoming too boring. I really think he was the teacher's pet."⁸²

But these shenanigans sometimes crossed the line. Troublemakers, many of them male students who were eager to impress their peers, seem to have been especially hard on first-year teachers. In the early 1940s, when many rural schools were still heated by large stoves, a young teacher in Wabaunsee County school district no. 1 found herself trapped in the coal room. "I

remember one day after school, my neighbor boy, Toad Nelson, locked Miss [Elvira] Burke in the coal bin," wrote Gailyn Hinson. "She had to climb out through a window to free herself. I don't remember her being too happy about this."⁸³ Humiliated and angry, Miss Burke, who is remembered fondly by another student as a "strict but a very warm person,"⁸⁴ likely punished the boy in one of the usual ways. As the Mertz sisters recalled in a letter, "You might be sent to stand in the cloakroom or perhaps you were told to go stand in the corner with your back towards your classmates. The most severe and no doubt the most humiliating was having the teacher draw a circle on the blackboard—then you were instructed to press your nose inside the circle and stand there for a certain length of time!!"⁸⁵ With no formal procedures for discipline, teachers had a certain amount of creative control over punishments; one female teacher from Pottawatomie County required troublesome students to stay after school, line up, and swallow a teaspoon of castor oil.⁸⁶

However, these methods could not address the full spectrum of students' misbehavior. When students' mischief ranged from such annoyances as talking too much, dropping their pencils, or shirking their lessons to greater offenses like locking the teacher in the coal room or tipping over the outhouses, schoolteachers had to choose their battles wisely. Many troublemakers provoked their teachers even further than Toad Nelson, and not every teacher was as "warm" as Miss Burke. A bleak letter written by Elvira Burke herself attests to the torment that she went through courtesy of pupils like Toad Nelson. "The first two weeks were like a daytime nightmare," Burke wrote about her first term teaching the upper grades at Wabaunsee school district no. 1 in 1943. Like many other first-year rural teachers, she was a prime target for older boys who had a reputation for stirring up trouble at school, and locking the untested schoolteacher in the coal room was only the first of "pranks" they played on Miss

Burke.

Some of the boys thought it was their duty to try the new teacher and see just how far they could go. Every evening when it was time to go home, I was sure that there was no way I could come back the next day. The first major victory for the other side was the evening they locked me in the school house. That was followed by putting sugar in the gas tank of the car. The mouse trap game (placing mouse traps in the drawers of the teacher's desk, or in the place under the desk where the teacher's feet were supposed to go). I soon learned it was better not to place my feet there. . . .I made it through the first month. It seemed that little by little I was gaining the confidence of some of the older pupils. Most of my discipline problems disappeared.⁸⁷

The frustrated woman endured her first year of teaching to remain at the school for five more. But winning over the classroom once was not enough: "when new pupils moved into the district," Burke wrote, "new problems arose."

What recourse did this unfortunate schoolteacher have? Even if Elvira Burke was otherwise the best teacher the district had ever seen, and even if her students were the worst, she could not keep her job if she could not manage the children. Every time a student reported home about the older boys' pranks of the day, her reputation dropped in the community. A one-room schoolteacher accepted an appointment that inherently made her the sole source of authority in the classroom; if she could not do the job on her own, she was deemed to be unfit for the position. Undoubtedly every teacher like Miss Burke felt pressured to meet the public's high expectations—pressured by the school board, by the community, by her students, and by herself. But even showing that she was under emotional duress might expose her weakness as a teacher

to both the children and their parents. Hassled day after day by remorseless boys (some of whom were closer to men), Elvira Burke and the many other young women who felt overwhelmed by the disobedience of their pupils had only two options: suffer through the harassment and hope for the best, or quit.

Numerous examples exist of teachers who could not cope with their students' antics and quit the job. In Miss Hunsinger's first year of teaching at Merrymount School in Pottawatomie County, former student Dale Webster and his classmates were so "ornery and rowdy" that the young teacher "couldn't stand it, she had to resign."⁸⁸ According to Webster, Miss Hunsinger never taught again, and she was not the only one. "I had a different teacher each of my eight years at No. 6 School, and one year had two teachers because one left in the middle of the year," writes a former Wabaunsee County student. "Were we hard on teachers or what?????"⁸⁹ The numbers suggest they were. As former student Juanita Gronquist Teneyck speculated, it was probably a combination of factors that led teachers overwhelmed by discipline problems to quit, but the evidence shows that at least some women were driven from the profession by the difficulty of their students and the lack of available resources and support. "It seems there was a big teacher turnover," Teneyck wrote about her time in Wabaunsee school district no. 51. "I don't know if the pay was low or because the kids were so mischievous. Maybe both."⁹⁰ Whether frustrated teachers like Miss Hunsinger left the profession because of the low pay or the emotional strain, it is clear that many young women found that teaching in a one-room school simply was not worth more than a year or two of employment.

Unable to maintain discipline through conventional methods, teachers sometimes lost control of their emotions. As one student related to Dawn Fulton, "My most vivid recollections [sic] of school are of an over-crowded classroom and big unmanageable boys that the teacher

had to be always scolding or beating."⁹¹ Tellingly, only one former teacher reported a physical confrontation in the classroom in a written reflection on his years in Wabaunsee. However, a former student recollected in a letter a particularly egregious instance of abuse by a schoolteacher, and at least three former students from the Pottawatomie County group interview recalled different occasions when a teacher struck a student.

Two of the incidents were amusing to the students at the time. One man told of an eighth-grade boy who enjoyed disrupting the class with his flatulence—"he could really make a boom," the former student said. "And the teacher would head back to beat him on the head and he'd put his hand over his head and laugh the whole time she was beating on him."⁹² A seasoned troublemaker by eighth grade, this older boy, who might have been as old as sixteen (male students often missed substantial periods of time because their families needed their labor at home), had no respect for his female teacher's authority even when she was beating him over the head. Another man described a first-year teacher who nearly lost her temper violently. "When we were in the seventh grade and we got in trouble, she'd stand at the desk and holler," he remembered. "One day I was doing something she didn't like, she came back and was going to slap me. I stuck a book up and she licked it across the room. Yeah, I put the book up to shield me. She really hit it."⁹³ Had she succeeded in hitting him, she might have lost her job.

Although one-room schoolteachers labored in relative isolation, with no external authority figure to monitor their day-to-day disciplinary strategies or their students' mischief, the word spread quickly when someone—teacher or student—exceeded the limits of acceptable behavior. As the interviewees agreed, inevitably "word got back to the parents" about misbehavior in the classroom, and unhappy parents were quick to inform the school board.⁹⁴ Corporal punishment was once commonly administered in many American schools, but sources

attest that in Kansas schools of the 1930s and 40s, it was limited to punishments like spanking or a sharp rap of a ruler on the knuckles, which were considered acceptable.⁹⁵ Striking a student out of anger or beating a student to the point of injury was a different matter, as another teacher found out after targeting young Harold Mertz. As family members recounted in a letter, "Harold did not complete his grade school education. So the story goes, one day the teacher hit him over the head with a rather thick geography book. Young Mr. Mertz promptly picked his books up and headed for home. He reported to his father [a school board member] what had happened and the teacher was dismissed. Unfortunately that did not settle the matter. Harold never returned to school and that was the end of his formal education."⁹⁶ We do not have the details of Harold's behavior that might have provoked his teacher, and Harold's teacher had the misfortune (or poor judgment) to strike the son of a well-established school board member. But family connections aside, the teacher's conduct was deemed unacceptable by community standards.

The last instance of corporal punishment gleaned from the group interview is unique in that the victim was a female student—in fact, the only female student in this study to have been targeted by her female teacher, a detail that makes Carolyn Myers's recollection all the more chilling. "When I was in first grade, I had a teacher that has never been high on my list to like," Myers said. "We had one student—I think she was a real pill from what I can remember, but I remember the teacher got really upset with her once and took her behind the piano and beat her. And then of course she came out and said, 'Don't go home and tell your parents'; well, you know, what was the first thing out of our mouths as soon as we hit the house."⁹⁷ This young teacher, in one of her first years of teaching, was well aware she had committed an unacceptable transgression. That she asked her students not to tell their parents about the incident indicates her fear—aware that she had lost control of her emotions, the teacher attempted to prevent

community censure by silencing her students. Indeed, she did not come back for a second year, Myers said. These ugly, emotional details, which are present in some older nineteenth-century accounts of schoolteachers, particularly in diaries, are by and large absent from more recent accounts.⁹⁸ Many more such tales must exist, but successful former teachers are undoubtedly reluctant to publicize their failures in memoirs, and the same is doubly true for teachers who quit or were fired.

Yet one teacher did write about a potentially controversial incident with a student: Mr. Carly Geisler, the upper-grade instructor at Wabaunsee school district no. 1, who was mentioned earlier in this article. As he wrote, "this next story never got home."

It was a rainy day and all the kids were restless and full of what kids get full of when they're cooped up all day so at afternoon recess we moved the desks aside and had an [indoor] roughhouse pile on (if you know what that means). It's not for the timid souls but in our school we had none so all the boys and the teacher were in this pile on the floor. Roger screamed bloody murder so we all jumped up and Roger at the bottom was the last up. He took a swing at me and said "You son of a bitch." Everything got deathly quiet. Everyone was scared—including Roger and [myself]. I told them all to sit down. In maybe a minute or maybe ten I said, "You all know Roger must be punished." All nodded (including Roger) because if I didn't punish him I would be fired for not having discipline. "You want me fired?" They all shook their heads. "So, I'll have to punish him to keep from getting fired. Unless—if no one ever finds out this happened how could they fire me?" They got the message and smiles started coming to their faces. I walked back and kissed Roger and I don't think any teacher was ever loved more that afternoon

than this one.⁹⁹

Geisler found himself in a difficult situation. Like Carolyn Myers's teacher, Geisler also asked his students to remain tight-lipped about what had happened in the classroom that day. He claimed that the school board would frown upon his lenience toward Roger. However, before Geisler's display of mercy, his own tolerance of schoolboy antics led one student to get hurt. Geisler's carefully flattering portrayal glosses over the fact that he not only tolerated, but also participated in roughhousing with his own pupils and, in the process, provoked one young man to strike Mr. Geisler personally. He then asked his students not to tell anyone what happened, threatening to punish Roger if they broke their silence. How would the school board have responded to that story? In Geisler's account, the children were happy to abide because they liked him, but they might also have been relieved to see a peaceful end to the conflict. It is possible that Mr. Geisler was indeed so popular among his pupils that they feared he would be fired, but his self-aggrandizing tone rings somewhat false, especially in light of another student who did not care for Mr. Geisler. "I thought he picked on us girls," Doris Dean Colson Kimble wrote. "If the kids made him mad he'd leave the room for awhile."¹⁰⁰ Geisler might have had another motive to quiet the class: as a male teacher, his reputation depended on his ability to maintain discipline.

Geisler's account of a playful schoolroom brawl gone wrong highlights the difference in authority between male and female teachers. School boards saw male teachers as authority figures whom students would automatically respect, and both board members and parents expected the men they hired to be able to maintain discipline with ease. In theory, male teachers could gain the compliance of unruly boys with more ease than women because they represented both a potential ally—a grown man who could relate to them as boys—and a physical threat.

This was true in Geisler's case: he got along well enough with his male students to roughhouse with them and he was reportedly more fond of the boys than the girls. Geisler was also their physical match. Despite his rapport with the boys, Geisler admitted to the class that he had failed to maintain discipline and attempted to cover up the incident. His handling of Roger's outburst suggests that, whatever his reason—the roughhousing, Roger's injury, or his lenience—Mr. Geisler felt he had failed the community's expectations. Perhaps coincidentally, it was Geisler's only year teaching the upper grades at Wabaunsee school district no. 1.

Male schoolteachers' authority over troublesome male students led school districts in two separate cases to hire a man when a female teacher proved to be unable to maintain discipline. In the 1908–09 term in Wabaunsee County school district no. 43, the school board brought in a male teacher named Mr. Beck. "He came to the school to straighten the kids out," Grace Miller Pettit wrote in a letter to Dawn Fulton. "There was a bunch of ruffians that drove one teacher away. The school ceiling was covered with mud balls that had been thrown, and I remember during recess the boys gathered up grasshoppers and threw them in the window when the bell rang."¹⁰¹ The school board evidently found the children's behavior unacceptable, although it is difficult to judge whether board members were motivated to take action because of the students' disobedience or because they were vandalizing the schoolhouse.

The motive is clearer in Miss Hunsinger's case. In the early 1940s, when Dale Webster and his classmates drove their first-year teacher away in the middle of the term, the school board replaced her with a man. As Webster said, "the first day he had law and order, we knew who was boss, and that ended the rowdiness."¹⁰² Miss Hunsinger's replacement did not teach a full term, and it is likely that Mr. Beck taught for no more than a year; male teachers were more expensive than women and rarely sought to make a career of teaching in a one-room school because of the

low pay and prestige of the position. For example, Kansas historian Bill Samuelson cites a school district in Greenwood County, Kansas, that determined in the 1880s that students were in need of "a firm disciplinary hand"; the school board hired a man for the fall term to restore order and then hired a woman at Christmas at half his salary.¹⁰³ That women like Miss Hunsinger were sometimes replaced by male teachers who could better maintain discipline over obstreperous boys illustrates the paradox of the schoolmother: although women were considered to be better teachers than men because of their nurturing, patient, and gentle nature, their authority was undermined by the gendered expectations of students, school boards, and local society.

Teaching in a rural school presented far more challenges for aspiring young women than simply attending normal school and receiving a teaching certificate. The job called for hard manual labor, like carrying wood or water, and often required long commutes on foot in harsh conditions. Beyond the physical challenges of teaching in a rural school, women faced many obstacles related to gender expectations. Female teachers lived and worked under the thumb of the community and were subject to more restrictions than men. They could not marry, dance, or fraternize freely with men. One-room schoolteachers were consistently paid much less than their elementary school colleagues, and women were paid less than men. Parents were quick to go to the school board when they objected to a teacher's methods, conduct, manners, or even dress, and students were eager to report any exciting classroom incidents to their parents. New teachers commonly left home for the first time to teach in a district miles away and board with a house full of strangers in a community where they were separated from their friends and family. In the classroom, women's authority was limited by the expectation that they behave like a proper woman should, while troublemakers took advantage of teachers who showed any sign of meekness. Female teachers' patience and ability to control a classroom were tested at every turn

by unruly students, sometimes to extreme degrees, and the wrong reaction could expose them to censure from the community. Although male and female teachers performed the same duties and taught the same children, women faced greater adversity in their work than men, and with lower pay. The reality of the female schoolteacher's experience was darker than most history has shown. Ultimately, the daily struggle was not worth it for most teachers, who quit within only one or two years.



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² Elvira Burke Harrington, "Wabaunsee School, 1943-1949," personal communication to Dawn Fulton, Wabaunsee County Historical Society and Museum, district no. 1 binder, n.d., ca. 1980. Hereafter these letters addressed to Fulton are referred to as the WCHS collection.

³ Helen Kemble, WCHS collection, district no. 36 binder, n.d., ca. 1980.

⁴ Doris Dean Colson Kimble, WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, n.d. ca. 1980;
Myrna Seilkopf Soelter, "My Years at Wabaunsee Grade School," WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, n.d., ca. 1980, 1-2.

⁵ Former students of Kansas one-room schools, interview by author and Morgan J. Morgan, November 5, 2011, recording, Chapman Center for Rural Studies, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS. Hereafter referred to as Pottawatomie interview.

⁶ Wilma Teske Roberts, personal communication to Bernard Mayer, n.d., ca. 1950. The document is Mayer's personal property and a copy is housed in the Chapman Center for Rural Studies.

⁷ Shirley Ann Smith Houser, "Wabaunsee School Memories," WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, n.d., 1.

⁸ Elvira Burke Harrington letter, "Wabaunsee School, 1943-1949," 2.

⁹ Don Schmanke, "School Dist #73," WCHS collection, district no. 73 binder, February 2006.

¹⁰ Fulton's original correspondence is not available, but many letters are titled "Memories of School Days," suggesting that she sent identical requests to students and teachers for a letter containing their recollections. The letters are all between one and six pages long; all are typed, except two that are handwritten.

¹¹ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 54-55; "Most Teachers Are Hired," *The Alma Enterprise*, July 20, 1934; "Teachers of Wabaunsee Co., 1910-11," register of teachers, WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder.

¹² District no. 1 was located in the town of Wabaunsee, less than a mile from the Kansas River separating Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie counties. It was technically a two-room school that employed two teachers, one for the primary school (first through fourth grades) and the other for the grammar school (fifth through eighth grades); however, the classrooms operated as two separate one-room schools. Nineteen letters come from district no. 1, five from teachers and fourteen from students. The remaining letters, three by teachers and eight by students, concern eleven of the other eighty-three one-room school districts. Twenty-two letters describe the experiences of students; five attended one-room schools between 1908 and 1920, and seventeen students attended schools between 1920 and 1950. Just eight letters were written by former schoolteachers, six of them women, whose rural teaching experience in one-room schools spanned the years 1918 to 1949.

¹³ The original recording, a transcript, and the signatures of sixteen participants are available upon request at the Chapman Center for Rural Studies at Kansas State University. Participants spoke one at a time but did not always introduce themselves before speaking; for this reason, it is not always possible to identify the speaker by name.

¹⁴ See, for example, H. L. Smith, "Social Status of the Teacher," *Review of Educational Research* 10 (1940): 258-265; Lloyd A. Cook and Ronald B. Almack, "Teacher and Community Relations," *American Sociological Review* 3 (1938): 167-174; Bill Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools of Kansas* (Emporia, KS: Chester Press, 2000), 77-79; Wyman, *Rural Women Teachers*, 29, 71.

¹⁵ Wyman, *Rural Women Teachers*, 56.

¹⁶ See, for example, John E. Jacobs, "Demand for and Supply of Teaching Personnel in the Schools of Kansas," *Kansas Studies in Education* 2, no. 8 (1942): 1-20; Linda Marie Gooley

McPheron, "A Historical Perspective of Career Patterns of Women in the Teaching Profession: 1900-1940" (PhD diss., Illinois State University, 1981); Myra Strober and David Tyack, "Why Do Women Teach and Men Manage? A Report on Research on Schools," *Signs* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 494-505.

¹⁷ A good example of such derision is found in a 1926 article entitled "Are Teachers Human?" The author draws a distinction between the "schoolmarms" who eschewed fun, slang, and makeup and well-liked, youthful teachers who engaged in leisure activities and maintained a feminine appearance, which "keep[s] us from the horrors of schoolmarmship and make[s] us the teacher (beautiful name with beautiful significance), guide, counselor, friend, and companion of little Junior and Junette." Jeanette M. Collins, "Are Teachers Human?" *The English Journal* 15, no. 8 (October 1926), 609-615.

¹⁸ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 57-58.

¹⁹ Mary L. Riley, WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, June 1981; Abbot Adamson, WCHS collection.

²⁰ Beulah Zwanziger Weaver, WCHS collection, district no. 73 binder, March 20, 1981.

²¹ Shirley Sage Jepson, "School Days District No. 6, Wabaunsee County," WCHS collection, district no. 6 binder, n.d., 1.

²² Shirley Sage Jepson, Juanita Gronquist Teneyck, Iva Olsen Thompson, Junia Elaine Leonard Kinman, WCHS collection.

²³ Carl Geisler, contribution to Berroth et al., eds., *Stories of the Past*, 323.

²⁴ Abbot Adamson letter, WCHS collection.

²⁵ Strober and Tyack, "Why Do Women Teach?," 494-505.

²⁶ Frank P. Bachman, "Present Status of Elementary School Teaching," *Peabody Journal*

of Education 10 (1933): 282.

²⁷ Kemble letter, WCHS collection.

²⁸ "A National Employment Service for Teachers," *N.E.A. Bulletin* 6, No. 2 (December, 1917): 17.

²⁹ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 63. A "normal school" was an institution intended to train and certify high school graduates to teach in public schools, traditionally through a two-year curriculum of study.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Wyman, *Rural Women Teachers*, 135.

³¹ Gwen Abbott Adamson, WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, May 1980. See note 11 above for more details about district no. 1 and why this study considers it to be a one-room school.

³² Ray C. Maul, *The Certification of Teachers in Kansas: A Research Bulletin of the State Department of Education* (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1938), 20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Table VIII: "Certificates Held by Rural Teachers, Grouped by Counties, and Pupil Enrollment by Certificate Groups," 21-24.

³⁵ Kemble letter, WCHS collection.

³⁶ Pottawatomie interview.

³⁷ Maul, *The Certification of Teachers in Kansas*, 20, 25.

³⁸ Jacobs, "Demand for and Supply of Teaching Personnel," 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Table III: "Mobility of Teaching Personnel as Indicated by Per Cent of New Teachers Employed at Each Grade Level, Kansas Elementary Schools, 1940-41," 7. Jacobs defines "new" teachers as "persons who, in 1940-41, held teaching positions which they did not

have in 1939-40."

⁴⁰ Strober and Tyack, "Why Do Women Teach?" 495; Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 67.

⁴¹ A statistical analysis conducted by Kansas State University PhD candidate in mathematics Lee Goerl concluded with 95 percent confidence that 65.6 to 75 percent of Wabaunsee County teachers taught for no more than one year, according to a z-test and Pearson's Chi-squared test.

⁴² Eston V. Tubbs, "The Selection of Teachers," *Peabody Journal of Education* 5 (May 1928): 323.

⁴³ Jacobs, "Demand for and Supply of Teaching Personnel," 18.

⁴⁴ Bachman, "Present Status of Elementary School Teaching," 283.

⁴⁵ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 26-29.

⁴⁶ Minter Brown, "Teacher Pay in Kansas," *Kansas Teacher* 57 (February 1948): 18 (Brown gives no figures for college or university professors); CPI Inflation Calculator, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

⁴⁷ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 48.

⁴⁸ Nominal pay is based on records from school districts nos. 3, 4, 6, 11, 26, and 90, which reside in the WCHS collection in their respective binders. Real pay is based on 1920 dollars and derived from the CPI Inflation Calculator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁴⁹ "Teachers at District No. 32 – Lower Snokomo," record of Wabaunsee County school district no. 32 teachers' pay 1879-1945, WCHS collection, district no. 32 binder; CPI Inflation Calculator, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁵⁰ "Register of Teachers Employed in District No. 4," record of Wabaunsee County school district no. 4 teachers' pay 1885-1946, WCHS collection, district no. 4 binder; "District #3 School Annual Report," record of Wabaunsee County school district no. 3 teachers' pay 1893-1942, WCHS collection, district no. 3 binder.

⁵¹ Average is calculated from annual salary figures for six one-room school districts over 10 years for a total of 40 different teachers.

⁵² Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 68; Wyman, *Rural Women Teachers*, 26-27.

⁵³ Bachman, "Present Status of Elementary School Teaching," 284.

⁵⁴ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 64; Jacobs, "Demand for and Supply of Teaching Personnel," 13.

⁵⁵ Catharine Beecher, *The Duty of American Women to Their Country* (New York: Harper, 1845), 65.

⁵⁶ Dennis H. Cooke and C.W. Simms, "Local Residents and Married Women as Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 10 (1940): 207-208.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵⁸ Ward W. Keesecker, *Pamphlet No. 47: The Legal Status of Married Women Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1934), 5.

⁵⁹ Cooke and Simms, "Local Residents and Married Women," 209.

⁶⁰ Earl K. Hillbrand, "Unto the Last a Teacher," *Kansas Teacher* 49 (September 1941): 10.

⁶¹ Anonymous, "I Am a Disinherited Schoolma'am," *Kansas Teacher* 49 (March 1941): 17-18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

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- ⁶³ Sylvia M. Simmons, "Highlights of my Teaching Experience," WCHS collection, district no. 39 binder, ca. 1980.
- ⁶⁴ Beecher, *Duty of American Women*, 65.
- ⁶⁵ Simmons letter, "Highlights of my Teaching Experience," WCHS collection, 2.
- ⁶⁶ Smith, "Social Status of the Teacher," 265.
- ⁶⁷ Etta Allender, "A History of One-Room Public Schools of Saline County, Kansas" (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 1992), 70.
- ⁶⁸ Samuelson, *One-Room Country Schools*, 134.
- ⁶⁹ Carl Geisler, "Wabaunsee School District #1," WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, ca. 1980, 1.
- ⁷⁰ Wyman, *Rural Women Teachers*, 135.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 134.
- ⁷² Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 78-79.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 134.
- ⁷⁴ Jeanne Burrell Sparing, WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, 1980, 2.
- ⁷⁵ Pottawatomie interview.
- ⁷⁶ Schmanke letter, "School Dist #73."
- ⁷⁷ Pottawatomie interview.
- ⁷⁸ Juanita Gronquist Teneyck, WCHS collection, district no. 51 binder, n.d., 1.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁸⁰ Pottawatomie interview.
- ⁸¹ Sage Jepson letter, "School Days at District No. 6," 1.

⁸² Juanita Gronquist Teneyck, "School Memories," WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, n.d.

⁸³ Gailyn Hinson, WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, Nov. 10, 1983, 1.

⁸⁴ Smith Houser letter, WCHS collection.

⁸⁵ Jeanne Mertz, writing for Inez Mertz Palmatier and Helen Mertz Murphy, "Mertz Family Recollections of District 1," WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, n.d.

⁸⁶ Pottawatomie interview.

⁸⁷ "Wabaunsee School, 1943-1949," WCHS collection.

⁸⁸ Pottawatomie interview.

⁸⁹ Sage Jepson letter, "School Days at District No. 6," 1.

⁹⁰ Gronquist Teneyck letter, WCHS collection, 1.

⁹¹ Frances Conrow Pye, "Memories of School Days at Wabaunsee District #1 School," WCHS collection, district no. 1 binder, August 1980. This letter appears to be a transcript of an interview of Conrow Pye conducted and mailed to Dawn Fulton by Roberta Smith Cagle.

⁹² Pottawatomie interview.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Berroth et al., *Stories of the Past*, 326; Pottawatomie interview.

⁹⁶ Mertz letter, "Mertz Family Recollections."

⁹⁷ Carolyn Myers, Pottawatomie interview. This incident likely took place in the late 1940s.

⁹⁸ For example, Lila G. Scrimsher's "The Diary of Anna Webber: Early Day Teacher of Mitchell County," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (autumn 1972), 320-337. In this

revealing 1881 diary, Anna Webber describes being troubled by disciplinary problems, noting at one point, "We had a little trouble among the scholars to [sic]. I was provoked enough to cry."

She also writes about her feelings of loneliness and isolation.

⁹⁹ Geisler letter, "Wabaunsee School District #1," 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ Colson Kimble letter, WCHS collection.

¹⁰¹ Grace Miller Pettit, WCHS collection, district no. 43 binder, May 1980, 1.

¹⁰² Pottawatomie interview.

¹⁰³ Samuelson, *One Room Country Schools*, 69.