

COWLEY COUNTY'S RURAL SCHOOLS

By Beverly Bergdall Johnson

Cowley County's rural schools played a defining role in its history. For many years, there was a large rural population, so many of the county's citizens were served by these schools. Rural schools always inspire enthusiasm and nostalgia because they served as community centers also, and many memories are associated with them. While providing factual details is desirable in telling the story of Cowley County's rural schools, facts alone could never present the whole picture; memories are an essential part of the story as well. By combining the history of the schools and the memories of those who attended them, it is my hope that the story will be more complete.

My interest in the schools

I have always been interested in Cowley County's rural schools. Upon reflection, I realized my many connections with them. My husband attended Prairie Ridge School as did my mother, grandmother, aunts, and uncle. After attending Southwestern College for one year and earning a teacher's certificate in 1938, my mother taught at Cameron, Prairie Ridge, and Tisdale Schools. My father finished all eight grades at Victor Point or "Scratch Ridge" School in 1934. After my maternal grandmother finished Normal School at Southwestern College in 1910, she taught at Fairview (#49), Victor Point, and Prairie Ridge Schools. My paternal grandmother earned \$1 a week cleaning the Victor Point School during the Depression when every dollar counted. My maternal grandfather served on the school boards at both Prairie Ridge and Science Valley Schools. My uncle was on the school board at Science Valley and C-3 or Country View School after it opened in 1962. An aunt taught at Torrance, Richland, Wilmot, Upper Timber Creek, and South Walnut Schools, and a cousin taught at Hill View. Other cousins, aunts, and uncles attended Tisdale, Mt. Zion, Frog Hollow, Box, South Vernon, and Science Valley Schools. When I was in elementary school, I visited Frog Hollow and Tisdale Schools with my cousins, and those experiences left lasting impressions



Billy Bergdall (my father) and his classmates at Victor Point proudly display their birdhouses. Billy is at the left and the others from left to right are: Harold Firebaugh, Earl Cook, Sarah Jo Bergdall (my aunt), Fern Cook, Bruce Akers, and Emery Firebaugh.



Miss Montra is shown with her Prairie Ridge School students in 1941. The occasion was a train ride to Arkansas City. Gerald Johnson (my husband!) is on the left. Miss Montra (my mother), in the middle, is holding Charlene Robertson Harmes' hand.