

An Interview with  
**Mildred Davis**

at the Daniel Boone Regional Library  
Columbia, Missouri

**19 September 2008**

interviewed by William Stolz



Oral History Program  
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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.



WS: Today is September 19, 2008 and this is William Stolz with the Western Historical Manuscript Collection. We're here at the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Columbia, Missouri doing interviews of individuals who attended one-room schoolhouses and right now I have Mildred Davis with us and Miss Davis, if you  
5 could just tell me when and where you were born?

MD: Uh—Edwards, Missouri, 7-3-25.

WS: Alright then, describe your home situation, um. What your parents did for a living, how many siblings you had—

MD: My father was a farmer, but he died when he just twenty-nine years old and I had two  
10 older sisters and then my mother married my uncle and they had one boy.

WS: All right, um, and when and where did you start school?

MD: It was called Nickel Hill School in Camden County, near the Lake—what's the Lake of the Ozarks now. And I started when I was five years old.

WS: Okay, and could you describe the school. Um, was it—

MD: It was a one-room schoolhouse and the original—the original schoolhouse burned and  
15 they built a concrete one-room school and, uh— it just had two rows of seats—desks and all, and kind of a little podium built up for the teacher's desk.

WS: Um, did you have electricity in the school?

MD: Oh no, there wasn't any electricity then.

WS: And did you have a stove for heat?  
20

MD: A wood stove.

WS: Okay, and—so it was just concrete. Did they paint it or was it just a concrete structure?

MD: It was a concrete structure and it was painted on the inside, but not on the outside.

WS: Okay, great, and how many kids were in your class?

MS: Well, it varied. By the time I graduated from the eighth grade, there was, uh, only two of us, another girl and I.

5 WS: And it was, uh, first grade through eighth —

MD: uh-huh—

WS: —grade school?

MD: —yes.

WS: And how many students in all were in the building?

10 MD: Well, I can't tell you. *[Davis pulls out her school records]*

WS: Oh wow, so this is the school record.

MD: Uh-huh, when I first started out there were a lot like this.

WS: Okay, so we're looking at the planner and it looks like there were seventeen students, and you said there was just you and another young woman in the same grade. So it

15 looks like about seventeen or eighteen every year.

MD: Uh-huh, but it went down.

WS: And did you go to school nine months out of the year? Was it—

MD: —eight.

WS: Eight months out of the year?

20 MD: Uh-huh, and near the end of my eight years, uh, we started havin' thirty minutes at noon time and we got out thirty minutes early because when I first started I walked two and a half miles.

WS: Every day? So it was two and a half miles one way just to get to school?



MD: Right.

WS: Did you walk by yourself every day?

MD: No, I had two older sisters.

WS: Okay, so you have the three of you walk together. And you walked regardless of  
5 weather, snow, rain—

MD: Right.

WS: Did they ever cancel school because of the weather?

MD: No. (laughs) There wasn't any way, we didn't even have telephones so you couldn't  
let anybody know if we weren't gonna have school.

10 WS: So you walked home in the dark probably then in the winter time?

MD: Yep.

WS: And you mentioned you didn't have electricity in the school, so it was heated by the  
stove?

MD: Right, and the last few years I went my sister and I did the janitor work and we had to  
15 carry in the wood and kindling to build a fire with, and sweep the floors and dust.

WS: Were those tasks assigned to you by the teacher?

MD: No, uh, the school board hired us.

WS: Oh, so you were paid then?

MD: Very little.

20 WS: What did they pay you then to do all those chores?

MD: I think we got, uh, ten dollars a month and we had to split that.

WS: So you each received five dollars?

MD: And then my sister and I would do it one month, and then this other couple of girls that were sisters would do it the next month.

WS: Okay, so then it was even split more and did you have to go into school early then or stay late to—

5 MD: We did.

WS: And what time did you usually go to school in the mornings?

MD: It was eight o' clock.

WS: And what time did they let you go?

MD: Uh, four.

10 WS: Okay, and um, do you remember your teachers—

MD: Oh yes—

WS: —or your teacher?

MD: I started out with a Zela Murray and then I had Gerald Sutton and then I had Jill Nichols and then I had Joyce Webster and then I had, um, Marion Reneau and, uh—

15 Clifton Kiltner, Ina Buell—

WS: So almost every year you had a new teacher then?

MD: Uh-huh.

WS: And—

MD: —once in a while, the one would teach two years.

20 [pause in recording]

WS: Wow, and so did they live in the schoolhouse or did they live nearby?

MD: Uh, they usually had to rent from somebody. They'd rent a room from some of the neighbors.

WS: And that's a pretty amazing turnover that every year or two they'd add a new face.

MD: Right.

WS: And do you remember any distinctive teaching styles or mannerisms of some of the teachers?

5 MD: Well, the man Gerald Sutton, was a male teacher of course, and he made us line up in front of—we had two doors into the school, he made us line up in front of the doors every morning and do calisthenics, and then we'd go in, we'd recite the Pledge of Allegiance and then certain days a week we had to have a Bible verse.

WS: Wow—so that's pretty amazing compared—

10 MD: He was a good teacher.

WS: Okay, so he was a good teacher?

MD: Yes.

WS: And so—sounds like he had a lot of discipline as well. Um, and as far as discipline, were there—did you need to have discipline in the schools? Were some of students  
15 rowdy?

MD: Oh yes. We stood with our nose in a ring at the blackboard or we stood in the corner and one of the women teachers, of course they were young, and they told my brother if he didn't behave he'd have to come up and stand by them, stand in front of the class. He said, "I don't care, I'll get to stand by you."

20 WS: (laughs) So he thought she was obviously an attractive person then, for him.

MD: (laughs) He was just that way.

WS: Um, do you remember any other teaching styles or—

MD: We went by the courses the teacher went with the course of study and our  
superintendent was in Camdenton, Missouri and that's about thirty miles away.

WS: And did they make appearances a couple times a year?

MD: Yes, every so often they would come and check on us.

5 WS: And as far as the class work goes since it was a first through eighth grade, what was it  
like every—what was daily class work like? Did you have homework?

MD: Yes, but you usually had time in between classes to do your assignment for the day  
and all. And you could listen to the other classes while they were reciting or  
whatever. We had a course—the superintendent sent out a course of study for the  
10 teacher to follow.

WS: And so she would teach one or two grades while the rest of you were supposed to be  
working on homework.

MD: They'd come to the front and sit on the two front rows and—

WS: —and I assume you had lots of black boards and—

15 MD: Clear across the end of the room and we had a little library but didn't have much in it.

CS: She was telling me out here that one year they had the wrong course of study and so  
none of them passed the finals.

WS: Really? So then you had to repeat the course of study the next year?

MD: No, we just got an 'F' on our grade point. (laughs) But I had to take the fifth grade  
20 twice because—there when the attendance got so low, um, they decided to, uh, have  
the fifth and the seventh grade one year, and the sixth and the eighth the next year.  
Well it was the year that I had finished the fifth grade, and then the next year they

were gonna have the fifth and the seventh again. So I either had to skip all of that you know, or take the fifth grade again. So they made me take the fifth grade again.

WS: So what was that like, taking the fifth grade again?

MD: Well, I wasn't too happy. (both laugh) I'd already passed it once.

5 CS: She's still not happy about it. (laughs)

MD: That wasn't fair.

WS: No—

MD: —there were so few of us, why couldn't they just go ahead and teach it, we're there.

WS: At that point, there were just two of you in the fifth grade—

10 MD: —right.

WS: —and so, did the other student also have to repeat fifth grade?

MD: Just she and I were the only ones there.

WS: And so you both took the exact same coursework for—

MD: Yes.

15 WS: Wow. That must have been an interesting second year in fifth grade.

MD: My mother said, "Oh it won't hurt her." (both laugh)

WS: Um, what kind of activities do you remember from school?

MD: Well we'd play games at recess, and uh—at uh—they wanted uh—this male teacher wouldn't let the girls play ball with the boys, so he fixed us a teeter totter behind the schoolhouse and we had to play there and then, he was the only one that separated us like that. The last couple of years I went, we had a male teacher and he was a very good sport and he had us playing softball and I was always on his team and he'd get the bases loaded and then he'd knock a homerun.

20

WS: Wow, so he actually participated in—(laughs)

MD: Yes, he played with us. (laughs)

WS: And he would hit the homerun to, uh, to win the game.

MD: To bring us all in.

5 WS: And uh, so you had recess every day. How many recesses did you have?

MD: We had one in the morning and one in the afternoon and then at first we had an hour at noon, and then we switched to thirty minutes so we'd get out earlier.

WS: And I assume you brought your own lunch—

[pause in recording]

10 WS: —every day then?

MD: Oh yes.

WS: And do you remember what you packed for lunch?

MD: Well, whatever we had—usually it was—we always had some kind of pork and we'd take biscuits and pork or we'd boil eggs and whatever.

15 WS: And that was pretty much the same thing every day?

MD: Yes.

WS: And you mentioned the recesses, you had also mentioned the chores before, so it was just you and your sister for those years that you were actually paid, did you have— were there other chores assigned throughout the school day that other students would  
20 have to—

MD: We had to go down the hill and carry water in our water bucket. And we had a cooler that it didn't have any ice in it, but kept water cool and we had to take something to drink out of so we wouldn't all drink out of the same—

WS: So everybody had their own cup?

MD: Yes.

WS: And would you dip the water out of the bucket?

MD: Well, in this uh—this container it had a little button you'd push and held your cup  
5 under it.

WS: Wow, so, okay, very similar to the coolers today with the spout.

MD: Uh-huh.

WS: And did you attend the same school all the way until eighth grade?

MD: Yes.

10 WS: And then you graduated—eighth grade, and did you go on to high school?

MD: No I didn't. I took my GED (General Education Diploma) the year before my son  
graduated from high school.

WS: Wow. That's great.

MD: He was so pleased with me. (laughs)

15 WS: That's fantastic, and how do you feel? Do you feel like you got a really good  
education in the one-room schoolhouse? Do you feel you were—

MD: —yes, I think it's much better and there weren't any fat kids when I went to school,  
you know, we all had to walk so far.

WS: Yeah, and you also mentioned calisthenics on the playground.

20 MD: Yes. Oh we played the Fox and the Hound, and Bullpen.

WS: Ooh, what was Fox and the Hound, could you describe what kind of game that was?

MD: You made a circle in the snow and a crisscross, and the fox tried to catch the goose,  
or the hound tried to catch—

WS: And you also mentioned bullpen, was that sort of a baseball type?

MD: No, you played it with a volleyball and you'd get in the center and someone had to be **it** and they were outside the ring and they tried to hit you with a ball. And then you had to be **it** if they hit you with the ball.

5 WS: Wow, and so did all the kids in the school play together on the playground every day?

MD: We played Steal the Sticks and uh—everything we could think of, and then when it was cold, we played marbles in the house.

WS: Did you play—did you have much time inside during the winter, or did you play out more often?

10 MD: There wasn't—we played out as much as we possibly could.

WS: And I should also ask too, what classes do you remember the most, geography, math—was there any subject that stood out more than another?

MD: I think probably science—I liked science.

WS: Since you had one teacher they were required to teach not only to all the different  
15 grades, but also all the different subjects—

MD: —right

WS: And that must have been pretty amazing to see—

MD: It was interesting.

WS: How do you feel the one-room school house influenced your life? Do you think it  
20 had a big impact?

MD: I didn't know anything different, so I don't know.

WS: It was just—everyone—you just assume everyone went to a one-room schoolhouse.

MD: You know my parents did and all my uncles and aunts—



WS: Did they go to the same schoolhouse that you did or did they go to a different—

MD: Um, my dad went to this one and it burned and then they built this concrete one.

WS: Okay, so yeah, you've brought some pictures today of the different schools—

MD: When I took pictures it was burned, and I took a picture of that—

5 WS: So is the structure still standing—

MD: Uh-huh—

WS: —today.

MD: The concrete part—and that's the year my sister graduated. That's all there was—

now this little girl was Nova Venskule, she was visiting, that's my brother and my

10 sister and this girl graduated that year.

WS: Wow, so in this picture there were—eight students total plus the teacher.

MD: And then it got smaller after that.

WS: Was it because people were moving—

MD: Uh-huh—

15 WS: —from the area.

MD: Uh-huh.

WS: So, when you graduate eight grade how many students were there total in school that

year?

MD: I think there were six.

20 WS: That's incredible, and how many more years should the school stay in existence?

MD: I don't know, but I remember my twin cousins went after I did. But it wasn't very

long—

WS: And your—you said your younger brother also—

MD: Um, he—we moved into another district and he went and finished at another school.

WS: Okay—wow, okay, um, is there anything else you'd like to add today? Do you have any other recollections or memories you want to share before we—

MD: No I don't think so.

5 WS: Okay, well I truly appreciate you coming in and bringing the photos, it's been a real pleasure.

MD: Thank you.

WS: Thank you.

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