

Title: Interview with Mrs. John Frisk

Date: April, 16th 1981

Location: Marquette, Michigan

Teaching

START OF INTERVIEW

Howard Brown (HB): This is an interview with Mrs. John Frisk, of Magnetic Street, Marquette, Michigan by Howard Brown of Marquette Michigan on her recollections of her early days of teaching in the early 1900s. How long did you have to go to school to become a teacher in those days?

Mrs. John Frisk (JF): Well, I was graduated high school in 1911. And in other states, you could go to summer school and write a state examination that would issue a one-year certificate to teach. One year, if you passed. So I passed the one year and I went back the next summer and then I was given the privilege of going to college of taking the state examination as it was or adding two extra subjects. And if I got through those, I would be issued a three-year certificate, renewable and I did that, and I only taught nine years old together.

HB: Where did you teach?

JF: Well, I taught in two country schools before I taught in Michigamme, last four years of my teaching was in Michigamme high school.

HB: And where the two country schools?

JF: One was in Ely Township, one was, where was the other one?

HB: About where was it located?

JF: By the lumber camp. Bruce Township

HB: How many grades or what grades did you teach in that two years?

JF: I started it out of with, from one to six. One student in one class, three in one or five in one or, only one teacher.

HB: What was the greatest total number of students you had in those one through six grades? Do you remember?

JF: Perhaps thirty.

HB: Did you teach them all the subjects or how would that work?

JF: Oh, the basis mostly, I mean reading, writing, arithmetic, penmanship, history, physiology, were required.

HB: Then when you moved out to the high school Michigamme, what did you teach there?

JF: History, English, English Grammar it was really English Grammar, the same thing.

Physiology I taught, _____.

HB: It's interesting at that time. Could you tell how the students in the high school were at that time? That is to say, their behavior, their reliability for doing homework, and things like that that would be interested in.

JF: It's hard for teachers today to believe what I'm going to say because the teacher was like a god to them. And they had the utmost respect for their teacher. There was never any so-called violence, never heard of such a thing in the classroom. The discipline was so much easier than it is today, unbelievably.

HB: Could you give an example perhaps of a discipline problem in your time or what you would have considered?

JF: Well, what they considered a problem at those days, I thought at that time, it was on a part of teacher because I had a so-called incorrigible fifth grader one time. Nobody could do anything with him. But I figured out during my term, that he wasn't treated right or something. And I killed him with kindness I guess, I won him over, he passed his examinations, he went on through, I had two examples like this.

HB: What was kind of thing that he was doing that was considered...?

JF: Well, they considers him the town tough or something like that you know, but when he was in my room, he obeyed me.

HB: What was the cooperation of parents in those days?

JF: Well, when child would go home, if he was reprimanded in school, we were not allowed of course to use force or anything, we never had to, but we would punish them some way and he'd go home and the parents would say, "Why didn't you obey," or something like that. And he would be given, a good spanking or maybe punished at home accordingly. Which is entirely opposite, today the teachers aren't allowed to spank __ their students, I don't think, not to that extend anyway.

HB: Did you have any organizations like a PTA in those days?

JF: No, nothing. The parents were very cooperative but there was very cooperative but they left it up to the teacher and the children would go home and say, "Well I was _____ by the teacher," those, you know.

HB: Did you have any contact at all with the parents, did the parents come in?

JF: I had one. And he was one of our affluent if you could use that word in Michigamme. Better educated. One of the best educated men in town. I had one of his pupils and he wrote me a note and he asked me, "Would I, would I, could this boy wait for me? And walk home with me cause girls would bother him on the way home." I wrote back, I said, "I'm awfully sorry Mr. Carpenter, but I just simply cannot do that." I said, "It's time he learned to defend himself." You know. Now that's just a little silly thing compared to what they go through today. You know.

HB: Yes, it is. Was there a school board?

JF: Oh yeah.

HB: Did you have much contact with them as a teacher?

JF: They were very cooperative because really, let's face it. Not many of them had much education. You know what I mean, and they did the best they could but I think they thought maybe the teacher ___ knew better. I always got along with my _____. I never had a problem.

HB: Can remember any interesting or maybe humorous or other interesting incidents that may have taken place in any of your classes that you've mentioned?

JF: No, I don't, I might say this. I had one of students the eighth grade, in those days you have to write a state examination in order to get into high school. And we had a dentist in Michigan called Dr. Thomas and he had a very bright, today they would have said she was hyperkinetic. You know what I mean. Unmanageable as far as discipline would go. Well, she happened to be in my class... it had to be eighth grade because they had to write this state examination and she came out of that state examination more A up on top of the whole county. You know, she was that bright. But her father wrote me a note and said, "Mrs. Monroe, You must certainly know," How'd he say it? "You have a way of knowing or understanding human nature," something to that had effect anyway. "I am so pleased at the way my daughter and you get along." Something to that affect you know, because up to that time, well, she was just, today they wouldn't have her in the room because it'd ___ the other students, you know. So I thought that was a kind of nice, I was appreciate _____. And she did do it, she was just too bright for the grade! Let's face it. But we couldn't do anything about it. She would be in what they call today, the gifted. You know what I mean?

HB: Yeah. What were teacher salaries like in those days?

JF: My first contract, I have it yet. It's in purple velvet, and I'm keeping it. My first salary was 600 dollars a year.

HB: What did it go up to in the 9 years?

JF: In 9 years, oh six or seven...6 or 7000 I think for the semester.

HB: Sometimes.

JF: I think so. Maybe that's too high. It wasn't much at time.

HB: Was there much effect on the schools in World War I. Was there much effect on teaching or any change or changes of attitude that you remember?

JF: You mean, all the children as far as the, we studied of course and, oh I can remember the day of the Armistice and all that, but I don't know what you really mean.

HB: What was any change in the classes that were taught through the way, they were taught or, for example of World War 2 more emphasizes with put on mathematics and such ...

JF: Oh, that was when I taught. You knew your grammar, you knew your math, your arithmetic and you knew how to write.

HB: You say you remember the Armistice Day. Could you, want to tell us about that?

JF: Well, that would be in what

HB: 1918 was the _____

JF: 1918 _____. The day of the Armistice, the town went crazy. The teachers thought they were celebrating. We didn't have a car, a car was something for somebody else, you don't have, Michigamme didn't have any. I think our judge had one but we walked to Champion with ordinary shoes because those days you didn't have three pair shoes. With ordinary shoes, they walked the tracks to Champion. Back and forth, 14 miles to celebrate it and then the town went crazy. We did celebrate it.

HB: Did you close the school then?

JF: Oh, yes. Definitely, was closed that day.

HB: Did the children there, did many them go on to colleges or universities from your group.

JF: But proportionately, I must say for small school, I would like to have a survey because there was five of my own, one who became doctors, lawyers, there was one that had in Milwaykee have a...orthonology? What do they call it?

HB: Orthodontist. Dentistry?

JF: Yeah. And he is another one was an MD, there were ___ and while I was there but since. They've gone of the little school and they've done real well.

HB: Were many of the teachers, did they have degrees?

JF: Well, there were great many, not a great many because we only had twelve grades was, I had two grades. I think we had a superintendent, we didn't have a principal and then we had, oh I'd say about eight or ten teachers maybe. But I was the least qualified, really, I mean. My

commissioner in those days you had a, like we called it commissioner schools and he would visit the schools. This was some might be ___. [unclear] He came in when I was teaching in Clarksburg in Ely Township and I could, we were having lesson and, I think was technical grammar, you know. We had to study particulates, _____ives and things that they don't do much anymore. And he watched and he said, I never understood that before I saw it on the blackboard _____. I thought, well, he was very nice to me because I'm just a country teacher, you know. But ___ he went Michigamme, it's also over the Michigamme School and he told them that I should be in their school and they had a teacher there was a life-certificate which meant two years. You couldn't get anything else but a two year certificate. That was called a life-certificate in those days. There were no degrees. And I felt that was not exactly fair, maybe. I didn't feel that I was qualified for the job and apparently he thought that I was. And that's how I got in there.

HB: With the county commissioner, then was that part of his job to observe the teachers?

JF: Yes, yes. They visited us. Periodically, see how we were doing. And we were two teachers in the Ely Township and I had half of the grades and she had other half but I had the upper-level courses. Teaching was a pleasure in those days. I enjoyed every minute of it. Of course I only taught 9 years that's not long at all compared to today's rule of 25. But you couldn't help enjoy it in those days which was not struggle like it is today.

HB: The county commissioner's observing, if he found you unsatisfactory, what would happen?

JF: He could fire you.

HB: Oh, he could fire you then?

JF: Definitely. He was instead of a superintendent, which we didn't have until I got to Michigamme, we had a superintendent there. But Ms. Cronnen then had the, I felt was much better qualified than I. It must have been that he, I suppose that goes to show you that we can use grading as an example for instance, an A-student student is not always the best teacher, you know. But I thought she was very good teacher, I don't know. I got the job.

HB: Well is there any other thoughts on your teaching or training that you'd like to share with us?

JF: There wasn't the, there wasn't interference either by the parents or the school board. Everything seemed to run smoothly, really. I suppose that's hard to believe, but you know that's about 65 years ago.

HB: Yeah.

JF: It's unbelievable today, but that could be. I think most of the teachers of my time enjoyed it. Of course we stayed after school at night, and helped them _____ of buses. If a child had a problem we stayed with them after school. If they were naughty, we'd just keep them after school, you know, you know, things like that that you can't do today. I'd be called to a home for instance, to help a youngster with his math or something. A lot different.

HB: Well, thank you very much.

JF: Ok.

END OF INTERVIEW