

Garner-St. Boniface-Oral History-1987

On our St. Boniface church Garner Oral History tape the following were interviewed, Addie Smidt, St. Boniface Garner, 69 years old, Elmer Urich, St. Boniface Garner 70+ years old, Catherine Ross, St. Boniface Garner, 70+ years old, Gertrude Flood, St. Boniface Garner 75 years old, Francis ??? St. Boniface Garner, 86 years old, Joseph Kearn St. Boniface Garner, 58 years old, Helen Townsend, St. Boniface Garner 62 years old, Fr. Russell Bleich, formerly St. Bonifce Garner, 50 plus years old. The interviews were conducted by Mrs. Robert Mary Wait, St. Boniface Garner, 58 years old. The tape of Fr. Bleich was contributed by him with our thanks. We wish to thank all who participated in getting this tape together.

This is March 13, 1987, my first interview for today is with Catherine Ross. I've been a lifetime member of St. Boniface, I was born and raised right across from the old St. Boniface church and then in 1924 I think it was when the new rectory was being built, my father bought the old rectory and moved it about three blocks west of the church and I lived there for the rest of my life until we moved into a house right next door and my, most of my remembrances when I was a child were my mother singing in the choir...[inaudible]. And my sister and I and Margarite Halich who is the niece of Fran ???'s husband, sang, every Christmas Eve, Silent Night. And to this day every time I sing Silent Night I get tears in my eyes from remembering Christmases so long ago. And another thing I remember was when the sisters used to come for summer school. I think we had two weeks of that. And we would get our, we'd get to sing in the choir, feel like we were a real choir, and I don't remember if first communion classes were trained during that two weeks. And then I don't know, it seems like after the new church.... I wasn't here when the new church was built but it seems so different to me when the new church was built because of course it's a lot larger, brick, but the old church sort of seemed like it was sort of home. And my sister, I have one sister, and I have two children and six grandchildren and I'm afraid I'm the only one going to church anymore, of my immediate family. My father was a convert.... [inaudible]. I remember the sisters when they came and moved here, I think there were three, and Sr. Gerard was one of my favorites because she was the music teacher and it seems to me that I'd sung in the choir all my life and I'm still singing. I think that we are getting back to the community type religion in our town, you're not a Catholic, you're not a Methodist, you're not a Presbyterian, everybody gets together and they cooperate. I remember back years ago when they didn't. They didn't hire a Catholic teacher. So, I have very fond memories of her and she was a remarkable teacher, but she was the first Catholic, and from then on it wasn't too bad. So what are you doing today then? I am retired and I'm still singing in the choir and for a while, I was an extraordinary minister and then I had surgery and was on crutches for a while, so I kind of gave that up [inaudible]. And out of our choir, there are four members [inaudible].

My name is Gertrude Flood. I am 75 years old and I have, was born and raised in the St. Boniface parish. My parents/grandparents were all pioneer members of this parish. My grandfather and grandmother Tobin came to Garner in 1894 and my Grandfather and Grandmother Engsler came in 1895 and they were members of this parish all their lives. My mother was Catherine Engsler, and she married Michael Tobin April 24, 1900, by Father Nagle, of this parish. And I graduated from Garner High School in 1930 and started working in the courthouse that same fall. I worked in the Records Office, the County Recorder's Office until 1939 and I started to work for the Hancock County Abstract Company and I

worked there until I retired in 1975. In 1969 I married Dan Flood who incidentally was my boss and we continued to live in Garner. He passed away in 1983. And now I sold the home we lived in and moved into a new condominium that was being built in Garner. I remember when I was a teenager the sisters started to come here for a 2-week vacation school. And I was only eligible the last year and then I was too old and Sr. Isabella asked me if I would come back the next year and help them, so I helped the sisters the next two years that they came back for vacation school and I sang in the choir for years and years and years, and my mother was very active in the Court Isabella #642 of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas which was organized in 1921 and she joined the next year in 1922. She had more than a 30-year perfect attendance record for meetings. They held meeting twice a month sometimes and we lived at that time two and a half miles out in the country and she didn't miss a meeting for over 30 years. My mother, my father passed away, after they had been married for 61 years in 1961 he died and he was 91 years old, he never said he was 91, he always said he was 92 on his coming birthday, he was very proud of his age, and my mother was 96 when she passed away. And I can't remember anything special that I have been active in Catholic Daughters and also Rosary Circles, always have tried to do my part and.... What are you doing today then? I'm reading. Now Lent has started and if people ask me what I give up I say that I give up my sleep because I'm used to sleeping until 8 or 8:30 in the morning, now I have to get up at 6:30 in the morning to get to 7:00 mass. Otherwise, I live here alone, there are 4 units in this condominium and there's one other Catholic lady who lives in one of the other condominiums, and I can't think of anything else.

Today is the 24th of March and I'm chatting with Addie Smidt. I am a lifelong member of St. Boniface church here in Garner, having lived here all my life and received all my sacraments here at St. Boniface. The first priest that I have a recollection of is Fr. Woerdehoff although I was baptized by his predecessor, Fr. Bomholt. Now our present church building was completed in September of 1940, and Fr. Louis Schmitt was the director of the building committee at the time. And at that time we had 115 families and today we have 350. I can remember the first three sisters that came for vacation bible school for two weeks every summer and the young assistants that came. I can remember the big parish dinners we used to have and as I recall the facilities were not all that convenient to work with. I a member of the Rosary Society and I have been an officer for the Society and also a commission chairman for the Rosary Society. At present, I'm doing part-time volunteer work at the St. Boniface church office. And I take care of the sanctuary and sacristy, doing the altar linens, taking care of the flowers for the Sunday masses and other special days. Thank you.

We will tape with Fran Fritsch. This is Francis Fritsch, a native of West Union. I came to Garner January 1925 to teach junior high. It was the first year Garner school hired 2 Catholic teachers. 1930 I returned to West Union to care for my parents and to establish a public library there. I married Rudy Fritsch Oct. 23, 1933. I sang in St. Boniface choir along with Margarite Fritsch, organist, Rose Fritsch, Rudy Fritsch, [inaudible] and Florence Haley and Stanley Brugman. Mass and hymns were in Latin. In 1935 I accepted a position of Garner City Librarian, serving the public in that position for 46 years. My years with St. Boniface bring many recollections of special memories. One was the attendance at the bountiful dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. Kasper Kearns, serving 210 people at their farm home and all receipts were given toward our new church. I recall the Duncan tornado that destroyed the Catholic church in Duncan, St. Wenceslaus, and the parishioners attended

mass at St. Boniface while a new church was built. In 1934 a welcome addition was made when rubber padding was added to the kneelers. This same year, a Wurlitzer electric organ was donated. 1965 brought a new experience when congregational singing was used in the mass. In '67 monthly missalettes appeared and 1968 brought air conditioning. 1983 I lost my husband, I find solace in many years of happy memories. 33 years at Holy Name and 54 years at St. Boniface, has nurtured my faith, belonging, as well as belonging to the Rosary Society, being a Catholic Daughter of America for 65 years. One year of Genesis, two years of IRCA and a half-hour of prayers daily keep me in touch with God and the Holy Spirit.

Today is March 19th and we're going to be recording with Joe Kearns. OK, my name is Joseph Kearns, my father and mother's names were Mr. and Mrs. Kasper Kearns. I was born....I'm being interviewed today on March 19, '87 and it just so happens to be my birthday today. And it goes back to St. Joseph's Day and it goes back to when I was born my parents were going to take me up and baptize me and they had a different name picked out for me, but Fr. Manternach said "since he was born on St. Joseph's Day he should be St. Joseph", so that's how I got the name Joseph. My parents came from ????. Russia. All they knew of America was that it was the promised land. When dad and mother came over here in the late 1800's they went down to get on a boat and my mother and father never knew that there was a north and south America. They took the wrong boat and ended up in South America. They were there for 3 year before they accumulated enough money to come up to the United States. My oldest brother Adam was born in Argentina. When they came up to America then I'm sure that when they saw the Statue of Liberty, I wonder what went through his mind after all the hardships they went through. He talks about the gauchos and the cowboys of South America, rough they were. They played with knives. The ranchers would hire a man for a year and not pay him, just shoot him dead. So I had the privilege of seeing the Statue of Liberty.... and I wonder what went through my parent's minds after seeing all of the hardships. From there they went, after Ellis Island, they went to Akron, Ohio and dad worked for the tire, made tires. Then they moved to Ft. Dodge, Iowa and dad worked hard in the roundhouse, firing up the locomotives for 13 years. By then my oldest brother, Adam, was about 13 years old. My mother said we've got to move these boys out to the farm, she didn't want any bad boys. So they moved up here to Garner, Iowa and they farmed the rest of their lives until they moved into town. They had 4 boys Adam, Ambrose, Albert, and myself, Joe. One sister, Annie, and one adopted brother George. But now, when I talk about adopted, this goes back to years back when people really meant something. Both of George's mom and dad died within 6 months of one another, so mother told dad go over and bring one of those babies home, it's are duty to raise it, so that's the way my brother George was brought up, he was never legally adopted, he went by the name of Kearns and he was just like our brother. Ok, now we'll go to St. Boniface. I can remember the old wooden church on [inaudible]. I can remember going to a sister school at that time, we called it sister school, two weeks every spring. I can go back to Fr. Manternach teaching catechism, I can remember the Kearns family sitting in the front pew on the left-hand side and we sit up there with your parents until you got to be a teenage maybe you snuck back a couple of pews they'd let you move on back. The Smith family, the Adam Smith family was always in the front on the other side on the right side. The reason we were good friends is that Adam Smith came from Russia too. So when mother put up this dinner for St. Boniface church, we lived three miles south and three miles west of Garner. She put on a chicken dinner all by herself, donated all the food and donated all the proceeds for building the new church. Dad tells that they had so many drawings and raffles

and so forth that dad was going to donate another hog and Fr. Manternach "no, you've donated enough". My parents are very devout Catholics, for instance, I can remember out Lents, man no meat on Friday, we didn't dare go to a movie during Lent. Every night we knelt down on the supper table and prayed the rosary. I still have my mother's rosary and when I talk about a rosary showing wear, [inaudible]. Like I said, the old, as far as I can go back is the old wooden church and that was, you figure that, they started building that church in the late '30's and you can remember they tell about the depression in the early '30's so I'm sure that our forefathers really had to dig down into their pockets to help build this church. I can remember when the church was being built just a young kid running around on the scaffolding when they were laying brick, and I can remember the dedication of the church and even that day they took up a little bit more collection and put your name in the cornerstone and my father's name is in that cornerstone. What are you doing today in the church? I'm a member of the KC's, I was on the school board, I guess I'm an extraordinary minister, but I don't exercise it, because I might be a little old school yet maybe, I don't know. I just haven't exercised that right yet. I was brought up that them two fingers of the piece for consecrated and nobody else was supposed to hold that host. That's the only reason. Some of them old ways stick to my mind from our teaching, from our parent's teachings. They believed that they.... I can't say enough how devout they were. Alright, thank you..... You betcha Mary.

I'm Elmer Gary, live here in Garner, I come from Duncan and we started going to church here in 1930. I started ushering here in 1930 and I've been ushering since then. My folks and myself and my wife are from Duncan originally, and we moved up here, folks moved up here later on. I don't know, I've known all the priests that have been here and assistant priests, I've been quite well acquainted with each of them. I don't what else I can say that would help the community very much..... Ok.

End of side 1

My name is Helen Townsend. I was reared on a farm in the Duncan area. Growing up we attended Catechism on Saturday mornings. Then when we got to high school age we got to go to a study club in the evening. We had a youth choir, which I was a member of for 10 years. In the summer the nuns from Omaha came for 2 or 3 weeks to have catechism with us and this was the highlight of our religious education. After high school I worked for Northwestern Bell here in Garner where I met my husband to be, Robert Townsend, who was not a Catholic. He took his convert training under Fr. Gerleman, who was assistant pastor here at that time. So in September of 1950 we joined St. Boniface parish and have been in the parish ever since. In 1952 Duncan church was hit by a tornado and demolished. We at St. Boniface opened our church to them. We had 4 masses on Sunday here, there 2 and our 2. The church was very busy, people standing outside waiting for mass to be over so they could go in for the next one. In 1955 I was elected president of the Rosary Society. At that time we had a parish dinner which we worked very hard for. We even run out to the farms during sweet corn season, got our sweet corn, froze it to be used at our dinner so we didn't have to pay for it. We gathered vegetables from Lake Gardens to make our salads, so we made a pretty good profit at that time. At this particular dinner I was in charge of, we served a thousand people.

For several years we had nuns living here and our children got to have religious classes during the leased time from the public schools. This was wonderful for them. Then we built our present school. I taught CCD for five years which I enjoyed very much. One year I had 30 pupils in 3rd grade, which was quite a challenge. Here it is 1987 and I'm president of the Rosary Society again, with many changes taken place. We have 350 families in our parish now. I'm also on the church council which is a newer organization in many parishes, but ours has had one for several years. Our Men's Society is very active. My husband is a member of this, they have bingo every Sunday night in our church hall which helps make a good amount of money for our parish. We have a very active parish now, and I hope it keeps progressing on and on.