

## Meyer-Sacred Heart-Oral History-1987

With much joy, we present this oral history interview of the Sacred Heart parish to you the Archdiocese of Dubuque. We are taping on March 26th, 1987 from the living room of our parish rectory. The coordinators of this interview are Barb Brum, contact person for the Sacred Heart parish, Kathy Koenig, co-chairperson of the oral history project, and Sister Dorothy Adams, director of religious education. Our invited guests are Lawrence and Salina Brum, Art and Louise Durban, Elizabeth Loescher, Joe and Julia Koenig, Henry Koenig, Art and Rose Klaperack, and Anna Retorack. Before we begin this interview and the introductions of our invited guests, they will lead us in prayer with the German Our Father and Hail Mary.

[German not transcribed]

I'm Art Durban, and I'm 90 years old and I have lived Meyer Iowa all my life. I'm Mrs. Arty Durban and I've lived in Meyer since 1900, belonged to this parish ever since. And I'm L.P. Brum and I've lived in Meyer all my life and I was born in 1902. I'm Julia Koenig, I was born in Meyer, 1907 and I lived here, married here, and moved to Adams, Minnesota in 1979. My name is Salina Brum and I got married in 1928 and I've lived here ever since. I'm Anna Retorack I was born north of Stacyville, I lived in Meyer, I'm 84 years old and I've lived here since 1929 till 1975 when we moved to Adams. I'm Rose Klaperack, and I'm the historian in the parish. I moved to Meyer when we were married over 50 years ago and we still live in Meyer and I'm the wife of Art, our custodian. I'm Elizabeth Loescher, I was born in 1901, 85 years old. And I lived in Stacyville the first 20 years and after that we moved out here to Meyer and then I moved to Meyer town in 1958. And after that I moved to the apartment and now I'm living in the nursing home at Stacyville since 1983. Art Klaperack, 79 years old, lived around Meyer all my life. Live in Meyer now. I'm Henry Koenig, I'm 82 years old, lived in Meyer for 70 years, I left 12 years ago and live in Stacyville, Iowa. I am Joseph Koenig, I was born in 1904 and I lived here until 1979 and then I moved to Adams.

I am Sister Dorothy Adams, I'm 64 years old, I was born right next door to the church practically, and I am presently director of religious ed in Meyer at the request of the parishioners. OK, now we'll begin a little history of the Meyer parish and Louis Durban has a few notes and she'll sort of lead the group and then any of you that have anything to add, just go right ahead. Breaking the ground of our church in 1908 the people worked with a scraper and shovels, the scraper was pulled by a team of horses and men had to guide it in the ground, haul it out and dump it, this was very hard work and all the men worked with their shoulders. The stones were hauled in from the Meyer farmers with horse and wagons, some people were so busy with their farm work that they hauled the stones by moonlight. The brick for the church were hauled by horse and wagon from the freight station in David a railroad station 6 miles southeast of Meyer. The 7 and 8th graders had to pile the brick at recess time. Sometime, one time, Fr. Wirtz, our

pastor kept the boys after recess time, then the Sister Cornelia, their teacher came out and hollered at 'em, the boys to come to school. The boys said that Father told them to stay and keep on working. She said that Father has got nothing to say, at that moment Fr. Wirtz raised up from behind the brick pile and said "have I got nothing to say?" Then Sister made a quick dive back to school. Mister Stock was the contractor for the church and he wanted the work done properly. If the bricklayers didn't do their work just so he fired them. Their carpenters were Peter Adams with his small crew. Peter Adams was a great uncle to Sister Dorothy. The beautiful windows came from Germany through the Fry Company, St. Louis. Meyer celebrated the 4th of July each year. The ladies prepared dinner and supper. They roasted the beef in the ovens of two old wood and coal stoves. The coffee was made in wash boilers. Every lady had to bake buns at home and bring them because you could not buy bread. People furnished everything except the meat. Dishes they borrowed from the Meyers Store. The men took care of the big stand outside. They sold candy, oranges, bananas, peanuts, pop, lemonade, cigars, and homemade ice cream. The ice cream was made in the school basement. The young men had to turn their freezer by hand. At that time they couldn't buy any ice cream. They had no chairs in the dining room. They used planks propped up by blocks to sit on. Across the road from the church they made a nice dance floor. The young people would dance in the afternoon and all evening. Music was furnished by Herbert Meyer and his helpers. Everybody had fun on the 4th of July. On the 4th of July a suspicious man drove in with an old two-wheel car. He was told to move on but he didn't, so John Damont, our city mayor, took the horse by the bridle, led it out by the road, told him again to get out, and he did. We also had a big play at Christmas time. The sisters worked very hard in order to have a nice play. Then the Sunday collections.... every man gave a nickel....[inaudible]. OK, Louise now we'll talk about when our first priest came. Our first priest, Fr. Wirtz, arrived in 1901. He arrived sooner than the people expected. So, he boarded at the Joe Goerhartz, tell the small house was built. He then lived in there til the present rectory was built. The small house stood where the grotto is now. When the new church was built, Mr. Stark, being the contractor of our church lived with his family in the small house. And after the church was finished this house was used for school for about 2 years. And then sold to John Poynt and he used it for a greenery. Then the grotto was built by Peter Weber and Peter Meyer in 1911. Fr. Jungemann added the flower bed and also the starflower bed where the birdhouse in the center. The workers for the church ordered by Matt Freund and Amelia and Julia Durdin, cooked for the crew men. This was the house where Hubert and Mary Ann lived when they retired. Joe Goerhardt was Justice of the Peace, he married one couple. John DeMuth was the mayor of Meyer. For a number of years previous to 1900 the people of Meyer had began a movement to erect a church. The community had grown so large, and as time went on the want for a place of worship was continually felt more keenly, yet their means would not permit them to erect a massive and expensive structure. They too felt the need for a new school for they perceived that church in school should go hand in hand and that no parish is complete without its parochial school, hence they determined to build a school, the second floor of which was to be used as a chapel until their means would allow them to build a more suitable place of worship, of such architecture and beauty as their fervor deemed fitting. Are there any comments on the school? Where did the sisters stay? [inaudible, several talking at once]. Did you have sisters here before you had the school? No, I don't think.... There were no sisters here before you had the school? No. They had church in the upper part of the building and they had school in the lower part, and they had church until the new church was built. [inaudible, several talking at once]. But the sisters came when the school was built? You didn't have sisters here before the school? [inaudible]. Well, after the new church

was built, what was the upper part of the school of the old church, they put dividing doors in the center and had 2 school rooms upstairs, 2 school rooms downstairs. On September 9, 1901, the new school opened with an attendance of 76 pupils. Through the efforts of the pastor, Fr. J. Woertz, two sisters, Sr. Joanna and Isabella of the order of St. Francis from Dubuque, took charge of the school. The new school of the Sacred Heart, was dedicated by the Reverend McGrath of Charles City on November 13, 1901 and the bell to the school was donated by Peter Heman, and blessed by the Reverend Jay Neighbors. We have 3 bells and the biggest bell is dedicated for storm, for the protection from storm, and in case we had a big storm coming up, they'd ring that bell. I'd want to go back to the school. We went in this school as grade kids. Was it a Catholic school then? Well, this was a public school. We went to that school and when we were little kids, you the parents had to pay the sisters. There was a public school in Meyer before there was a Catholic school and that's where you people went to school. And then finally they got so that this public school, we had great children go to that school and it was kept up and the County paid our nuns, and then after several years, about 2 or 3 years this used to be only a school for grown-ups in wintertime started November the 1st until March the 1st. Henry will tell us what happened to the first school in Meyer. The first school in Meyer was moved to Stacyville and that's still a house yet there, somebody living in it. [inaudible]. Well, I wanted to tell about the sisters, where the sisters that came to Meyer. I read in this centennial thing that there were three Sisters of St. Francis coming from Dubuque to take charge of the school and they arrived by train in McIntyre. Where Peter T. Heman, my grandpa, met them at the station with horse and buggy. Not knowing how exactly to meet the sisters, Mr. Heman knelt reverently, in the presence of the religious. Meyer didn't do that when I came back [laughter]. Upon arriving at the school, they were met by the pastor holding a lighted candle mounted on a board and held in place by three nails. This was the welcome to the new mission. Now I think that was pretty nice. [inaudible]. The upper floor was the public school and bottom floor was Catholic, so you had to take those Catholic pictures out of the public section. And when we went for instruction, we had to go early, we had to have the instructions at church..... Ok, we're going to discuss going to confession in German. How come you had to go in German. Well, that's what we were taught. We were, we took German in school and we all..... We had Fr. Jungemann, he was a real German and we always had confession in German. And then when we were out of school, well then they told us after they started giving instruction in English, and even the nuns told us we should go in English sometime in order to get used to it, because when we got away from here we'd probably have to use it. So, I went to confession in English one time.... and Fr. Jungemann, said.... that I was so proud, that I didn't want to go in German anymore. I was getting so uppity, that's what he meant. So, I really got a calling down..... I had heard that from another Freshman that I visited with that he was old enough and I think he was 22 and he was going to leave the Meyer parish to look for work and he went to Fr. Jungemann and he said his confession in English and he got balled out because he should have said it in German and he thought that you were just too proud. [inaudible]. ..... Then after we left school, we had to do our own translating in English. When the war started in 1918 when they got in war with Germany, then all the German was taken out of school. That's why we had to turn to English. We used to have Fr. Goetzinger who used to come and give the homily or sermons for 40 hours and whoever stayed at home could still hear every word he said, he just talked that loud, and the windows were open..... [inaudible]. When Fr. Kuhlman was here you know he used to buy a hog and some beef and he would make bologna and take care of the meats, so one time he made real nice summer sausage. And then he had the Sacred Heart parish, he had several priests here and he felt so proud of that bologna, so he gave

them all a sample, well they sampled it, and the next morning when the priests left, some stayed overnight and he thought well I'm going to get some bologna, so he went up into the attic and took the whole [inaudible] and then Fr. Jungemann got mad and he never asked them over again. I don't know about whether we should tape this, but I remember the time when Father [inaudible] yeah, Bishop Keane, he come over here and they couldn't answer them questions, and they was studying in German, and then you know, he was English, and he told them right out, from now on I want you to study it in English and Fr. Jungemann just about cried. But you better not put that on. Don't put this on either, and when Fr. Wirtz was here he didn't get along with the bishop either, he was an Irish bishop. The kids had their instruction, and Father did real good and then he said, well if the Bishop asks questions you don't know, don't even get up. What do you remember about Corpus Christi processions? [inaudible] ... and they were decorated in white, altar cloths, or whatever they were and they'd decorate the altars with flowers and candles and they had a canopy that the priest walked under with the blessed sacrament and the altar boys would walk ahead of the canopy with them carrying the cross, and I think maybe the servers came then and then the priest and then the little girls threw flowers and at every chapel the had the blessed, or benediction. [inaudible]. What did you say for prayers at each chapel? We had the benediction and it was such that we prayed the Rosary during the processions. [inaudible.....] When the rosary was led, the ladies were the old women, first come the old ladies, and then the old men then came the mothers then came the dads the fathers, then if we got a little off track we'd listen to them, their voice carried through. What were these men with the good voices? [inaudible] Didn't you have the first communicants strew flowers as you walked? All the children, that was Corpus Christi. But were all the children dressed in white and strew flowers on Corpus Christi? And we used to have what they called emblems, they had one girl in the center carrying the emblem and two little girls walked on the side and they were all dressed in white, that was in with the passion inside. Whatever happened to the emblems? Probably up in the barn. And the one that was [inaudible] was too nice to throw in the barn, so it's by me in the attic if you want it. We should bring that for our sesquicentennial corner. Well, shall I bring it over? It's laying there, it's still sealed, just we didn't [inaudible] tin or metal ones they're laying in the barn and some [inaudible] they rotted with time they were not....[inaudible]. OK, now what about your baptism? [inaudible] Artie Klapac will tell us about the fire. Now this is about Corpus Christi. They had a box and they had a curtain hung up in the store and they light candles and we forgot to put the candles out and somebody looked back and the curtain was burning, so they run down and get flowers on the altars and took the water to put the fire out. Then after that they didn't have no altar by the store. No, they had it on the northeast and [inaudible]. Here Sunday morning as I carried the milk over to Father's house....[inaudible] and Father says "you ain't got the altar started" and I says, "which altar we didn't know a thing about it". So when Holman says, well we got to get an altar on there, so I tell him "we got busy" we even got all the tools from Lawrence's grandma and took some of those June flowers to put on our altar and we made an altar in a hurry. Then on we had that.... Should we go on to baptisms? Do you remember anything about baptisms in Meyer? Well my recollection about them is that it was the first sacrament that I received, that's all I know. And it used to be, well, they got baptized sooner too, almost the first Sunday after their birth unless they were born the later part of the week, otherwise they were baptized..... What about fasting during Lent? The way it was in our day or a little before our day? This is just a little bit, [inaudible] Art's mom, she told me one time that fasting was so, Lent was so strict, she said that for breakfast, it was weighed out, so many ounces was all we could have for breakfast, no lunch, we could have a full meal at noon, and our supper

was weighed out again, so many ounces, but a little more than we could have for breakfast. But when our days came..... Well, we couldn't have meat until I was about 9 or 10 years old if we'd eat meat, it was forbidden on Friday's, but if we had eggs and fish, we could not have both at one meal, if we had fish we couldn't have eggs, and if we had fish we couldn't have eggs. Henry, did you fast? Well, I tell you we couldn't drink from 12 o'clock on. Not even medication because Mrs. Warner was so sick and she happened to take some pills after 12 o'clock and Father could not give her communion in the morning because she had taken her medication, no nothing after 12 o'clock. You almost had to put a clock over the water pail, or put a dish towel of the water pail so nobody could take a drink. You probably don't remember nothing about that? I remember when I was younger I couldn't eat after 12 o'clock at night, and then I remember when it was an hour before, but I remember when I made my first communion, I was young and I couldn't eat before that and even for Confirmation we were all excited and hungry, and it was later, it was a 10 o'clock Mass and we still couldn't have anything. Here in Meyer we attended a 10:30 Mass and then they'd say the Rosary and then we'd have, what did they call it in the afternoon? Vespers. We used to have to go to confession then we'd have communion only four times and now they go months and months without going to confession, that don't work. You could go to communion only four times and then you'd have to go to confession again. Some people would only go once or twice. OK, now let's maybe go now to, what about I want to ask about wake services. Do you remember anything about wake services when we used to have them in the house? We'll go to that then. What about the wake services? Well, the wake service really started from shortly after Christ, if a Catholic would die those Catholic haters would come and steal the corpse, that's why they started the wake, and that's been kept up for many, many years. Until about 1946 was about the last one they had at home.... [inaudible] My mother, she died in '48 she had it at home. When dad died in '53 we had a wake at home. [inaudible] You know Paul [inaudible] was the first one they had down here. Yeah, but before they had some at Stacyville. I think the reason for having them in the home versus in the mortuary because people couldn't all get in the home anymore, so many came to the wakes you know. Two men would stay up all night....[inaudible] What kind of novenas did you have in the parish? Did you have any novenas in the parish? Just Pentecost as far as I know. What about Rogation Days? What's a Rogation Day? Three days before Ascension we'd walk around the church property, pray the Rosary and sing. Did you do that all three days? Yes. What kind of May devotions did you have? Did you have any May devotions? [inaudible] I wanted to ask about Vespers, that was the Sunday afternoon service, was that the first Sunday of every month, or every Sunday? Every Sunday. [inaudible] They'd pray the rosary and the Stations and then they'd sing that song as the casket goes out of church and the bells would toll at that time. At Vespers? Not at Vespers? This was this other devotion. [German expression about tolling of the bells for the dead, unable to transcribe] well, that's what they called it, and.... The [bell was tolled] when the body came in and also when it was carried out of church. And they used to do it whenever anybody in the parish died. They used to ring the, toll the church bell as often as the age that they were, they used to do that. Another question was when somebody died the first thing you'd ask the next fella you meet, "oh did he get the priest." And you'd know how old they were....[based on the number of bells]. I know when Joe Wagoner died and I counted it, I don't know what age he was, he was Martha's dad. I remember when I was a little girl at home, you never knew who died, but if you could start counting you'd maybe, it was always sad if it was a lower age, and you could maybe sort of guess who was ill and figure out the age. And if there was feast day like the 15th of August, holy day, at 7 o'clock at night they'd ring all three bells. They'd ring all three bells at 7

o'clock in the evening. That's a long time ago. And on the 15th of August they'd used to bring flowers or weeds to church and then Father would bless them. [inaudible] I think Fr. Jungemann started later on and then he said Easter they're be no vespers, no devotions after noon, they can go, the children can go to see their families, they can have company. And then later on he had one Sunday off when we didn't have any devotion in the afternoon. Now weren't your Lenten services longer, like Good Friday, wasn't it 3 hours? I remember when I was little we'd have to go to church on Good Friday..... it would start at 7 in the morning and go to around 11. The Passion was longer then than it is now, that took a whole hour. The priest was the only one that read the Passion and he read it in Latin. No one else knew what it was about. [end of side 1]

[Inaudible] Like I say you'd have your prayer book there it was in Latin on one side and English on the other side, so they still knew they could pray along, they could still know what was said, but it's easier if it's all in English [inaudible]. I could see how the people went to school in German and then go to Mass in Latin [inaudible]..... But I asked the priest one time if there was any prayer book, we had a convert in the family, where everything was more simple to go along with the Mass, well he said, "here's it's in Latin, and here's it's in English, what more do you want?" It never bothered me, I always said the English prayer.

I visited with another older parishioner and he said something about that you could hardly associate with the Protestants back then..... [inaudible] and when someone married outside of the church you couldn't go to their wedding. You could go to the funeral, because in those days parishioners said that those people are just as good as we are, and they were, but they just couldn't associate with them.... [inaudible] I think that Louise, because I think that's interesting of how people felt towards each other's religions back then. [inaudible]. Now Meyer had church at the Wapsie church for a while didn't they? Yeah, yeah. [inaudible].

How come this grotto was built? Why, is the dedication to someone? I don't think..... all I've got are just a few things on there when it was built in 1911. Did Father dedicate it to Mary or someone special. Well, Fr. Wirtz always loved the Blessed Virgin so much, so that's why he built it and he built it according to what it looked like in Lourdes. He saw that, he'd been there, and that's why it's built with those rough stones. Now some say there's no cement in there, there is no cement, it's what in my days they called it a mortar mix [inaudible]. And what about that little St. Joseph statue there, do you know anything about that? Fr. Jungemann took care of that... [inaudible]. How many years, did you Louise, take care of the flower beds? Since I took care of the flower beds, but I did some of Father's albs and altar washing about 25 years ago when the nuns were still here they asked me to do it, and so I did, and then they left and Susie and I took over the whole works. And I did the laundry and ordering the candles. And Susie Kleinrich also helped with the.... she helped out some, yeah Susie helped. Susie died and then Rosie..... [inaudible]. And Julia did you used to be the historian here for the parish? The Diocese they wanted every parish to put out a history of their parish, that's how I got into it. [inaudible]

[Indistinct talk about weddings and dances. One of the interviewee's indicated that if they were going to have a dance then Fr. Jungemann would not perform a high mass as part of the wedding ceremony.]

Say, the Meyer parish had Boy Scouts at one time? We want to hear you tell us about it. I didn't belong to that. Did Father Vollmecke still have the Boy Scouts? No Father Schmitz.

This concludes our afternoon interview with our elder parishioners and Henry Koenigs and Joe Koenigs will now lead us in our final prayer. [German not transcribed]

Our group now would like to sing Silent Night in German as a final farewell [song not transcribed]