

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland Methodist Church History Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1011

EDITH M. BILLINGS

Interviewed

by

Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr.

on

August 16, 1981

EDITH M. BILLINGS

Mrs. Edith Billings was born on August 26, 1914 in Struthers, Ohio to Alexander and Helen Morrow. She was raised in Poland and graduated from Poland Seminary High School in 1931. She was married to Benjamin Billings in 1935 and has two children, Donald and Carol. she has worked with her husband in his floor covering and now antique shops since 1952. She has been a member of Poland United Methodist church since childhood.

-- Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr.

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INTERVIEWEE: EDITH M. BILLINGS

INTERVIEWER: Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr.

SUBJECT: Church History, pastors, fire and  
reconstruction, Sunday School classes

DATE: August 16, 1981

B: This is an interview with Edith M. Billings for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Poland methodist Church History project, by Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr. in connection with Dr. Veemeyer, on August 16, 1981, at 7496 Pittsburgh Road, Poland, Ohio

Alright, you want to ask me questions?

R: Well, maybe we can begin if you just tell us a little bit about yourself.

B: Well, I joined the church in, I would imagine, 1928. I think that would be about the right age. [I was] thirteen or fourteen years old when I joined the church, and I've gone there ever since.

R: How long have you lived in Poland?

B: We moved to Poland in 1927. I was a freshman high school, and we've lived here ever since.

R: What schools have you attended?

B: Well, I graduated from Poland High School in 1931. This is our 50th anniversary year.

R: Oh really?

B: Unfortunately, it was during the Depression, and that

was the end of my formal education.

R: Did you want to go on?

B: Oh yes. I went prepared through high school, and in 1931, there just was no chance to go.

R: When did you get married?

B: We were married in 1935, and we've lived in Poland ever since. And also, we lived in Poland before, so we've lived steady since. He moved in 1928.

R: Just about the same time you did.

B: He wasn't originally a Methodist. I would tell him to join the Methodist Church. He was Presbyterian.

R: Well, how did you come to be a member of the church?

B: Well, we came out here from Struthers, but my grandfather was born in Pennsylvania. He had come here as a very small child. He was born in 1857, so he came to Poland probably about 1860. My grandmother was a blacksmith in Struthers. We of course, had heard the talk of Poland from the very earliest. So in 1927, we built a home and moved to Poland. I've been here ever since.

R: What were your grandmother's and grandfather's names?

B: They had gone to the church. They were Presbyterian, I think, because they were married in the Presbyterian Mass. Their name was Stevens.

R: Stevens.

B: Yes. But, we had always wanted to come to Poland, and at that time, we did.

R: So then, you were a Presbyterian?

B: No.

R: No?

B: My husband was Presbyterian. But no, they were married in a Presbyterian Mass; but I don't know. I presume they went to a Presbyterian Church at that time. I don't know about that, because we don't have any record of that.

R: Then, how did you come to become a Methodist and join the Poland United Methodist Church?

B: Well, my mother had been Methodist, not only here in Poland, but she had gone to the Struthers Methodist Church. Since she was going there, we joined the Methodist Church.

R: Let's see, you were how old when you first came to the Poland United Methodist Church?

B: Thirteen years old.

R: What do you recall about coming here, your first day here?

B: The very first thing I can remember was when we went to school. Of course, we had gone to Struthers, which was considerably larger. Study hall, when I went to Poland High School, they were all in one room. The whole high school was in one room. [There was] less than seventy-five students. That's the first thing that I can remember of high school that amazed me. They had four years of high school in one room. This would have been in 1927.

R: Now, this was the public school?

B: Oh, yes.

R: The church, what was it first like when you started as far as impressions?

B: It's just an old fashioned country church. Well, I wouldn't call it a country church really. We had a lot of dedicated Sunday School teachers, and they really worked hard at it, as I'm sure they do today. But at that time. . . .

R: Do any of them come to mind?

B: Oh yes, Mrs. Gherton Little was the first Sunday School teacher I had. And, as I got a little bit older, Anna Pover took over, who had taught the older girls. Of course, there weren't that many things to do in those days that you were, therefore, active in church. We had Queen Esther Society for the young gals. It was like a young ladies' society. Things like that, they had. It was something to do.

R: Well, could you tell us a little bit of what there was to do?

B: I really can't tell you too much, but I know what we always enjoyed going; and everybody went. We had Sunday School Class, and I would meet once a month in somebody's home. We'd have a little party and things like that. It was very rich.

R: Do you still meet with any of those people?

B: Oh yes, they're quite a few of them in our church; and I presume, perhaps, you've talked with some of them. Lisa Withers, have you talked to her?

R: No.

B: Eddie Mangensen. Let's see who else I can think of. I should be able to remember more than I can think of right off hand, but they've been there all through the years, too.

R: How was that Sunday School organized? Myself, I'm, Catholic, and I'm from a different background. Ours is more like a public school type of arrangement, so the impression I get is sort of different.

B: We were divided into classes, and each Sunday morning you went directly to your class and had your Sunday School lesson. Then, you would have an assembly. At that time, it was held in the sanctuary, because there was no Fellowship Hall or anything in the old church. We would do it in the sanctuary. You would sing a few hymns, and they would read the results of how many people were there and how much money and all that; and [they had] questions and so forth. Then, we had some closing words, and that would be it. Then, we would come to church. I mean, church would begin.

R: So, how long would this take?

B: Oh, probably fifteen minutes or twenty minutes. You'd be in Sunday School, which was usually about an hour. Sunday School was, I suppose, by habit, was three fourths of an hour; and then the assembly would be about that long. Then, church would be about an hour.

R: So, it was a whole Sunday morning, then?

B: Well naturally, I suppose from about ten to twelve.

R: Did any of your brothers and sisters go?

B: Yes, I had an older sister that belonged to the Methodist Church also. She had been going to U.C.C. Church. I forget what church that. . . . I can't even think of what U.C.C. stands for. Oh, United Church of Christ.

B: What other family members went to that church?

B: My mother was organist at the church from the time that we came to Poland. Of course, while she lived. She died in 1944. She had been the pianist first, and

then, when they got the organ, she was the organist. She played all those years. Our children both belonged. Neither one of them belong, now. They are far away from here. We have a son who lives in Colorado and a daughter who lives in the southern part of Ohio. So, they don't belong anymore.

We organized the Marko Class.

R: What's that?

B: This is a Sunday School class of young married couples. That's what Marko stands for. This was in about 1942 or 1943. It just was a good place for young couples to meet. They had had ladies' class and men's, but they didn't have a group class. And, we organized the Marko Class. It hasn't been active in the last few years. But, we still have parties occasionally, and we're together. It got to be a pretty good size. Oh I suppose, at one time, it would be up to, like thirty people, maybe, that were going. It was just very nice.

R: Was that the only type of coed?

B: At that time, it was. I think they have a young couple's class now; but of course, they're for the younger people. It was during the war, and we had girls whose husbands were in the service. They came, of course. It was just very nice. It was another special thing.

R: You were of age, really, during the 100th anniversary.

B: In 1934?

R: Right.

B: Yes.

R: Do you remember any of the things about that?

B: You know, I just don't. I got that book out and looked at it. I read through the program and all, but I just don't know much about it.

They had a pageant, I think, in this book. I just got this out this morning and looked at it. I just don't remember very much about it. I remember the activities, but I just don't remember any of the details of it.

R: So, what were some of the activities?

B: They had a homecoming and a banquet. They had the pageant and, then, the special service on Sunday. I think that was it. But, I don't think this was all on

one day. I think it was divided. The banquet was on Saturday and then on Sunday--the 23rd and 24th of June. It was interesting. But, at that time, I guess I was too much interested in other things.

They used to have Epworth League, and that met every Sunday afternoon at six-thirty.

R: What did they do?

B: Oh, it would go down there and have a little worship service; and then, you'd have activities, games and things. You see, there weren't too many places for entertainment. At that time in Poland, there wasn't anything, anyplace to go. Well, there isn't yet; but then, you always have a ride somewhere, now. But at that time, you entertained yourself more. Folks would get together a lot of times.

R: Do you remember how many types of activities you went to in your church for enjoyment? Some of the more fun types?

B: Well, I suppose Epworth League and any of these class meetings were fun things and your Epworth League was really a fun thing. Although, they did different things too. [They did] good things that you help with to bring money in. Yes, it was lots of fun.

R: [Does] the church have a system where they change religious groups?

B: Yes.

R: So, you must have know quite a few?

B: Yes.

R: Could you tell us about some of them?

B: I think Reverend Car was the minister when we came to Poland. He was minister when we came to Poland, and he also substituted teaching at the high school, which was interesting. If there were any teacher not there, why, Reverend Parr would take over. He'd come in, and he'd substitute. We had a minister for a year who retired . . . , up in years; and he was only here one year though. Then Reverend Branchen was here. I think he was here six years. I think it was when he was minister that I joined the church.

R: What do you mean? Do you mean you hadn't been in the church before?

B: You go to your classes and took lessons, and you joined



the church when you're around twelve or fourteen years old.

R: Oh, so the little children, then, are not actually part of the church.

B: Well, they're members of the church, but--I don't know how I want to say this--you actually join church when you're about thirteen.

R: When you're a young adult?

B: Yes, that's right, exactly. You take classes when you learn things.

Reverend Creneal was here when the Marko was organized. Then, Dr. Bruce Powler was here. May you know him? Well, he would have been Youngstown. I don't know how long he's been retired. He was head of their Theology Department. He was the peach of us all, really. I think he had an earned doctorate. We always liked him very much. Reverend Uphoff was here, and he was quite an organizer. He was very active in Boy Scouts especially.

And then, Reverend Parr was here, who just passed away here about a year or so ago. I think Reverend Marston was listed too. That's the last one listed in this book. This is in 1962. That's why.

It depended if you belonged to groups that they were active in you'd get acquainted with them. In those days though, ministers used to go call on people, which they don't do anymore. We, it isn't a necessary thing. You need a minister at times, but then I think it takes too much of their time to go call on people.

R: Well, is the church larger?

B: Oh yes, sure.

R: About how large do you think the parish was when some of those ministers were. . . ?

B: Oh, I wouldn't think anymore than maybe a hundred families at the most, if there were that many.

R: This would be about what?

B: This would be back in the 1920's. I'm just guessing at that. I don't know. But, you didn't have nearly the number of people that there are today. The ministers have lost more to do today than they did back in those days. There are a lot more activities going on.

R: Did any of those ministers stand out in your mind, one more so than another?

B: Oh, I guess not necessarily. I can't pinpoint anything that would. . . . Now, of course, we've come to other men. You know, the oldest group of the church.

R: Oh, you have groups, then?

B: Oh no, no. As you grow older, you become the older members of the church.

R: What does it feel like to be, as you said, the youngest member to the oldest member? What is the best? [What's the] best age, maybe, in the church.

B: Oh, I suppose, I'd say in the 1940's and the 1950's, when your kids were young and you were very active in church doing things. It's a very pleasurable time to belong to church.

R: Why is that?

B: There's some action going on. It keeps you busy. You keep going with them. Of course, I think that's true in anybody's going with them. Of course, I think that's true in anybody's life of moving when your kids are growing up. Now, you can just sit back and relax. And that's nice too, very nice.

R: Well, I imagine one time that you worked quite a bit was the fire.

B: Yes.

R: Well, let's talk about the fire.

B: It was in 1957. Well, of course, it was a disastrous thing. It's just hard to believe that the sanctuary was gone. I had gone downtown that day and came back. I had gone down on the bus and came back out . . . the bus was routed around the front--down Second Street. The bus driver said that the church had been on fire. Well, of course, it's our church because there was no other church there. It sure gave you a funny feeling. But, everybody rallied round and worked hard and, that's what it took.

R: Why do you think they rallied around? Most organizations, where their main structures are important and financially expensive to replace if the structure or church is destroyed, that's it. It gets called off.

B: Yes, but then, I think trouble will tie you together. That's the way it should be in life. When you have

problems, well, they should tie you together, not pull you apart. That's just the way the church rallied round, because everybody worked hard. There were groups in our church . . . I'm sure somebody has mentioned the pie bakers baking pies. Everybody remembers the pie bakers. They did an awful lot for replacing the church. They really worked hard. And so, things like that. Well, when they needed help, they called for it, and they got it--both men and women. It's an important part of an organization. It should be an important part of life, but it just isn't. I would imagine people would do the same thing now. Maybe not as much as they did then, because after all, people don't work quite as hard now I don't think. I don't mean that to be critical, but it's just the way of life that you don't work as hard as we did then.

R: What did you first think when you heard that the church had been burned down?

B: What could you do? This is what I meant In my mind, what could you do? What are they going to be able to do about it? But, they had added a new addition on the back. That was a [Godsend]. It was someplace to go. There was room there, and we had a church, because it was a pretty good size section that they had added on previous to that. So, they had to tear the front part down. That was when they decided that they would relocate and build a new church.

R: What did you do in between the time that the old structure burn down and . . . ?

B: Well, we met in the back of the church. I think that must have been after they sold that [property] that we went up to North Elementary School. I think it was. We went and had our church up there.

R: How long was that?

B: Oh, a couple years. I was reading about that in one of these books that tells about it. I think about two years maybe. There wasn't too much of a time lapse. I mean they got right going on it. It takes a while to build a building this size. Of course, it wasn't completely finished, but we started using it as soon as so much was fit to use. It has been a good group. There has been a lot of good people that have joined our church during the years, and that's what it takes.

R: Do you remember any of those people that helped out?

B: I just can't think. There were some many of them. Everybody did their part, though. There were very few people who weren't willing to work. When there was

work to be done, they were always willing to ask for help or some volunteers. They would always get them.

R: Were you involved at all in the Canfield Fair Dinners?

B: I used to work out there some, but not much. Now, I never did very much out there. We used to go out and help out if they needed it, but then not the way a lot of people did.

R: What was that like?

B: Out there at the fair?

R: Yes.

B: Well, it was just like a big restaurant, and they really had it down. They had everything to a system, and they could really serve people. Of course, they served real good meals. They did that for ten or twelve years, I think. I don't know, I'm just guessing. But it was quite an operation they had. Of course, they served a lot of good suppers at our church, too. They raised money that way.

R: Oh, they sold it at the church also?

B: They had served suppers to make money. Of course, that's hard work, but the women all worked hard and served.

B: The dedication of the church was May 20, 1973.

R: Wow, sixteen years later?

B: Oh, that was when the church was paid for. That's better. On April 1, 1962, the complete church was consecrated. So, that would have been a matter of five years.

R: Were you there when they finally consecrated the church?

B: Oh yes. The fire was April, 1957. In June 1958, the first service we worshiped in the present building was held at Fellowship Hall. That was in 1958. Then in 1962, the completed church was consecrated. So, that would have been four years, which wasn't bad.

R: Were you there for the 1958 service?

B: Yes.

R: What was that like?

B: As I say, I guess I have a poor memory. I just don't remember much about it except that it was just a building and the [that] floors were bare. The least amount was done in order to make it usable; and then, they just started working at it until they got it finished. It was a thrill when they finally got it all done.

R: Something you could be proud of.

B: Yes, that's right, because it's a beautiful church. Have you been in it?

R: Yes. It's beautiful.

B: It's a beautiful church. It really is.

R: Who was the minister at the time when it burned? Do you remember?

B: Reverend Marston was the minister when it burned. Reverend Marston was here from 1956 until 1964. So, he was here all during that period. Then, Reverend Hess came after Marston.

R: What was the cause of the fire? What happened?

B: Oh, I think it was an electrical short in the organ. I'm not sure. I think it was an electric short in the organ, because it started in the sanctuary.

R: Is there anything that remains of the church that's in the new one?

B: The "Rose" window up in the chapel is one thing. The clock that's in the minister's study was from the old church. I don't know of anything else. I don't think there were any windows saved.

R: The church means many things to many people, but you've been there almost your entire life. What does the church mean to you?

B: Well, your church is part of living, I guess. That would be my main way of expressing it. It's just part of your life. You have happy moments and sad moments, and you turn to your church.

R: Has that changed any from when you first started? Has the church changed any?

B: The church, I don't suppose has. I suppose we have. But, not really though, I don't think. The church is there when you need it. You know there's always help if you need help, and that's the main thing.

R: How is the church different or the same? Maybe that's what I'm asking, then. How is the church the same as it was back in 1928, when you first joined, as it is now in 1982?

B: The way of life is very different now. The church is very similar. I'm not even sure that they have a Sunday School assembly now. They have Sunday School classes, but I don't think there is an assembly. That was an important thing then, but I don't think they have that anymore. But again, they don't have the adult Sunday School classes, or as many as they used to. It used to be that everybody went to Sunday School and stayed for church, and they don't do that. A lot of people go to Sunday School--I won't say a lot--but some people go to Sunday School and go home. More people come just to church. So, I guess it's just a different way of living that they're doing now.

R: The church has had a 50th, a 100th, and is now coming up to the 150th anniversary. Do you see Poland Methodist Church have a 200th or 250th anniversary?

B: Oh yes, I don't see no reason why it shouldn't.

R: Why?

B: Well, after all, it's a strong church, and it has good leadership. It has lots of good young leadership coming on. I can see no reason why it shouldn't have a 200th really, or a 175th, as far as that goes; but I think there are some splinter type churches, perhaps, that are organized--that well, may be not strong enough to go on. But, there would be no reason why our church wouldn't. I'm sure that it will be around in 2034.,

R: That would be nice.

B: Yes, it would be.

R: I've got all my questions asked. Are there any questions that you had in your mind?

B: Not really. As I say, you think about these things but you don't. . . . Well, I guess you just kind of remember them as you go along, the different things that have happened.

R: That's what? Fifty-three years?

B: It would be fifty-three years I guess, wouldn't it?

R: That's a long period of time to remember. I want to thank you for chatting with us and remembering some of it.

B: Well, I hope that I've been a little bit of help.

R: Oh, you have you have, believe me.

B: Everybody remembers something different, I'm sure. Everyone you talk to would have some different memories. Some of these older people would remember back to the old church . . . back to the beginning, in maybe the 1920's. Some of them can tell you pretty clearly about those things. The church has always been so important to people, and this is why.

R: Thank you.

B: Okay. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW