

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland United Methodist Church

Parishioner Experience

O. H. 567

HELEN CHAMBERS

Interviewed

by

Paul Rohrbaugh

on

June 14, 1981

HELEN CHAMBERS

Mrs. Helen Chambers was born on February 12, 1907, in Johnstown, Pennsylvania to Joseph and Teresa Szenesh. She was raised in Johnstown, Pennsylvania and Colebrook, Ohio and has been a member of Poland United Methodist Church since early adulthood. She was married to Mr. Guy Chambers on June 28, 1931 and has had three children: Alice Marie, Donald Vern, and Dora May, all of whom are married and residing with their own families. Mrs. Chambers has recently celebrated her fiftieth wedding anniversary. She is a member of the following church organizations: Women's Society, Rebecca Circle, Susannah Wesley Sunday school class, and was the secretary for the Circle, and Sunday school class. Mrs. Chambers was also involved extensively with the church reconstruction efforts, in particular the pie baking and Canfield Fair projects.

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INTERVIEWEE: HELEN CHAMBERS

INTERVIEWER: Paul Rohrbaugh

SUBJECT: Personal history, Women's Organization, Canfield Fair project, Church Reconstruction

DATE: June 14, 1981

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Helen Chambers for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the the United Methodist Church of Poland, Ohio, on June 14, 1981, at 7:00 p.m. Paul Rohrbaugh is the interviewer.

Perhaps, maybe you can give us a little background information about yourself, Mrs. Chambers.

C: We moved out here 39 years ago from the west side of Youngstown. We had two children before we moved here. The next year, we had an increase of a daughter. So we have two daughters and a son. We have ten grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. We will have celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary on the 28th of June, 1981.

We live on a three-acre place and quite a bit of it is garden and lawn. We have an acre of wooded lot for picnics. When we moved out here, the first thing that made us decide to buy was that we checked on the churches and schools. We belonged to a Methodist church before. So after a while we decided to attend the old Methodist church in Poland. It burned after a few years, on April 1, 1957.

I worked real hard, along with the other women of the church. We had the project of the Canfield Fair dinners. I made all the strawberry shortcake for years, almost all of the nine years that we had the project. This was after I couldn't work at the church; I made them at home. They were picked up from my home each day.

Members picked strawberries in the summer and froze them at the church. Men also came evenings and picked cherries from

our trees, took them into church, and they had crews to ready them for the freezer, for our cherry pies, for years. I have been involved in different capacities in the church. I've belonged to the Women's Society and the Rebecca Circle. I was president of our Susannah Wesley class for a term. For years I was also secretary for our circle, and secretary and sunshine secretary of our Sunday school class; that is for flowers for the deceased, and cards for the sick. We had public turkey dinners for Thanksgiving for years. I helped for years and years. I still belong to the same Sunday school class. We have lost many members by death and old age, from a count of forty members, down to active members of maybe ten to fifteen.

I have enjoyed it all. You don't make friends like you do in church. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I think you have to go to church to really learn Christian ways of living.

Another committee, I was on was the telephone committee, as chairman and also on the calling committee.

R: What is that?

C: When we have things coming up that are going on in the church, we call and remind the members and give special incentives to attend. In doing this, I got to converse with them and talk to them and know them better.

R: How did you come to be a member of the church?

C: When we were first married, we lived in the west part of Youngstown. There was no Methodist church there, so we went to a Christian church that was in the neighborhood. We wanted to move out in the country to raise our children.

My husband and I are from the same hometown of Colebrook, Ohio, Ashtabula County. He was brought up as a Methodist. I was baptized a Catholic as an infant in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

I was one of six children, and had an only brother. I was in the third grade when my parents moved to Colebrook in 1915. There was an only church there--Methodist. So every one that went to church went there. I attended their school from 3rd to high school graduate.

R: You were still a Catholic at the time?

C: Yes. That's where I started going to the Methodist church. I was married eight years after we were out of high school. We didn't join the Christian church in the west part of Youngstown, but attended for eleven years. When we moved

out here, we joined this church--all of our children, my husband Guy and I.

R: How did you learn about the Poland Methodist Church?

C: We just went around, attended different churches and talked to old-timers, questioning them about the schools, stores, people, you name it, not ever even driving in the community.

R: When did you join then?

C: We joined about 1945.

R: The church that exists now is not the same church?

C: No, the other was burned beyond repair.

R: Where was the other one located?

C: On Main Street, Poland. Now it is a bank building. The fire started in the organ. One of the members was practicing how to play on the organ. She went in there to practice. Word was that something happened in the process. Whether she left it running or what . . . Later with no one present, a fire had started.

C: What did you do between the time that the old structure was inserviceable and the new structure was built?

C: We went to Johnson's Place, Poland. There is a school there. We went to the school to have our church services and some of the Sunday school classes. We did everything to make money for our new church. We made pies by the hundreds, yes, thousands, and apple butter, and mincemeat which we sold at our fall bazaars, dinners and projects.

R: You mentioned a Canfield Fair project, what was that?

C: We rented a tent out there, our church. I am not sure, but I think they had to pay \$500 or \$600 to rent the tent. We took things out to the fair throughout the day and evening in electric roasters prepared in the church kitchen such as: chili, sloppy joes, mashed potatoes, gravy, coleslaw, and swiss steak--bought by the 100 pounds. Salads were also made, along with pies and our strawberry shortcakes, with the cherries and strawberries that were picked in season from the church freezer.

R: How long did this take place?

C: About nine years.

- R: From when, right after the church burned?
- C: Yes.
- R: The groups that you got involved in, can you describe some of those, how you became involved?
- C: I was elected and many times I just offered my assistance by volunteering, donating, et cetera.
- R: The church minister, I was told, is in a circuit tradition. How many ministers have you been acquainted with?
- C: When we moved here, my husband held our baby on his lap throughout the service. The other two sat beside us. Bruce T. Riley was the minister for a short while. Then Robert Uphoff--I think he stayed four to six years but I'm not sure. He was a wonderful speaker. He had a speaker's voice and such sermons. We couldn't wait for a Sunday to come. Norman Parr, John Knox Hess, Glenn Lockard, then finally Dean Marston, Alfred Hubler and Joe Santomen. They all stayed three to six years. Marston, I think, eight years. They were all good ministers.
- R: Who is the pastor now?
- C: Joe Santomen has been here a year.
- R: Who was the pastor when the church burned?
- C: Dean Marston.
- R: Was he still the pastor when the new structure was dedicated?
- C: Yes, he was; I forgot him.
- R: Are there any other people who come to mind that played key roles in the history of the church?
- C: There were many. Cecil Robins, she was chairman of the Canfield Fair project and committees under her. Ernie and Mary Withers donated the land that the church is on. Their many monies and services--Ernie's help and time with the plumbing--are too many to mention. Clarence McKormick was Sunday school teacher. The Swansons, just a few.
- R: Who physically built the church?
- C: I can't think of his name.
- R: How many people have been in the church over the years?
- C: They get up to the 1000's, 1100, and then go.

back down. In the last year or so I think there have been more new people coming into the church.

R: What were the best years of the church?

C: I think the best years of the church were when we were working to pay it off. Working people in a church are happy people.

R: What big projects have you had?

C: Helping the Canfield Fair project. We've had public turkey dinners, pie baking sales, served Men's Club monthly dinners, rummage sales, country fairs. It seemed like we were happier when working.

R: Do you think more people are working today?

C: No.

R: Why do you think that?

C: I think it's because there are more women members that are holding jobs to help maintain their homes.

R: There is one thing I've come across, it was an interfaith council. Were you involved in that?

C: No.

R: Is there anything else we didn't talk about that you would like to add?

C: No.

R: How many people are in the church presently?

C: It seems like 300 to 400, active. More at times.

R: Do you see the church becoming more or less important in the community?

C: I'm wondering about it.

R: Do you feel hopeful for the church?

C: Yes, because we sure need it. I don't think you learn anything bad in church no matter what it is. What scripture you're reading, what Sunday school lesson it is, there is a moral in it all. It brings it right up to today. I think the church is gaining, other than the Sunday school. Our Sunday school class has less active and unactive members than ever.

R: Are there any programs that have been dropped?

C: Nothing other than the men's club. They still have the club, but are not very active.

R: Do they still have the Canfield Fair project?

C: No. It was gone in nine years. It was an awfully hard project. That was the biggest project. Then they had the different men doing the many things to build the church, to help keep the building expenses down.

R: Was your husband involved in that?

C: No, he was working at the time. Since he has retired, he has gone in and done different things. Through the years, he has held several offices in the church: Official board, a trustee, memorial committee chairman, men's club president, usher, Sunday school member and more.

R: Thank you for the interview.

C: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW