

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland United Methodist Church Project

Poland United Methodist Church

O.H. 173

EUNICE ROSELLA COTTERMAN

Interviewed

by\_

Paul Rohrbaugh

on

July 6, 1981

EUNICE ROSELLA COTTERMAN

Eunice Rosella Cotterman was born on September 1, 1907 in Perry County, Ohio to Porter and Ethel Slatzer. She attended elementary and high school, graduating from high school in New Straitsville, Ohio.

Rose married in 1926 and has been a member of Poland United Methodist Church most of her married life. She is the mother of two children, Ethel and Kenneth.

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INTERVIEWEE: EUNICE ROSELLA COTTERMAN

INTERVIEWER: Paul Rohrbaugh

SUBJECT: Poland United Methodist Church; Womens' Club; personal involvement; church fire; reconstruction.

DATE: July 6, 1981

R: This is an Oral History interview with Mrs. Rose Cotterman at her home on 2964 Spitler Road in Poland on July 6, 1981 with Paul Rohrbaugh as the interviewer. This is for the Poland United Methodist Church History Project held in conjunction with Dr. Veemeyer for the Oral History Program.

Mrs. Cotterman, maybe we could begin perhaps you could tell us a little bit about yourself.

C: Well, I was born and raised in Perry County, Ohio. I'm one of ten children. I have one brother and four sisters living. We were married in 1926. We celebrated our fiftieth anniversary five years ago, (1976). On May 18, (1981) it was 55 years. My daughter had a reception for us. I think we both still are in pretty good health.

R: When did you come to live in Poland?

C: Shortly after we were married my husband was out of work and some of his relatives here from Lowellville were there visiting. They said, "Why don't you come up here," and they'd get him a job. So, that's how we landed up here. We came up here and he got a job. His cousin, Charlotte Meyers, her husband worked over to the limestone quarry. They got him a job and he worked over there for a number of years. Then he left there and went to the Sheet and Tube. He sort of got tired of that and went back to the other work, and then still landed back in the Sheet and Tube. He was there for 33 years. He retired

about . . . it'll be three years in January, from the Sheet and Tube.

R: How did you become a member of the Poland United Methodist Church?

C: Well, I was born and raised a Baptist. My father's people were all Lutheran. I can't remember going to church with my grandmother Slatzer--that was my maiden name--but I do remember going with my grandmother Rush and she was a Baptist. Of course, my mother, the First Christian Church she belonged to. But that was the only church that was in this little town. That was down south of Columbus.

We went to church all of the time, Sunday School on Sunday. In those days we had meetings on Wednesday night; we went there. Well actually, I was just born and raised up in a church.

R: So, when you came here you were looking for a church?

C: When we came here, his aunt, Elizabeth Jayne, she was president of the Women's Society of the Methodist Church in Struthers. So, we went with her to the Methodist Church. Then in later years, we had children and we moved out here in Poland. That's forty some odd years. We went to the Presbyterian Church then, here in Poland, because the people down the street here, well, they belong to the Methodist Church where we belong now. They said, "Well, we go to the Presbyterian Church." So, we went with them. Of course, when the children got into school they kept saying all their friends were Methodist. So, I said, "I don't care where you go to church, just as long as you go." They said, "Well, could we go to the Methodist Church?" I said, "Sure."

So, then my Uncle John at that time, he was on the Board and took care of all those things at our church down home. So, he wrote out a letter for me to join the Methodist Church here. My children were raised in the Methodist Church and baptized.

Just two weeks ago on June 14th my last granddaughter was confirmed in the Methodist Church. Of course, I wasn't here to see her taken in. I saw the other two. We were on our vacation to Nova Scotia. We didn't get to see her taken in church.

R: So, in the Poland Church?

C: In Poland Church, Reverend Santomen took her in.

She thought at first she wouldn't be there for the confirmation class, but he was going to take her in when the adults went in. They went to Florida. His parents were having their fiftieth anniversary and they wanted him to come. He was the one, as I told you, was awfully sick. Since I talked to you, we buried him.

R: I'm sorry to hear that.

C: Thursday he was buried. He belonged to the church with my daughter. He was taken in the church. He was raised a Catholic and he was taken into our church three months before they were married. And they both were great workers in the church. Of course, my daughter had to slow down. They, just in the last three months, were kind of taking care of him.

R: You mentioned your Uncle John's letter. What was the letter for?

C: A letter of good standing at the church to send to this church.

R: Oh, I see.

C: The transfer from the Baptist to the Methodist Church.

R: Was that common? I mean, was that done ordinarily? Is that what you have to do?

C: Oh yes.

R: Oh, I see. Is that still today?

C: Oh yes. They give you a letter to go from one church to another. The Methodists have that too.

R: So, you've been there forty years then, in the church?

C: Yes.

R: You must have seen a lot of reverends come and go.

C: Oh yes I have.

R: Can you name some of them?

C: I was there when we had the church fire. I know how bad we all felt. We wanted to go in. We watched our church burning.

R: Did you see it burn?

C: Oh yes.

R: What happened that day? Can you describe that day to me?

C: I guess, they claim that it was one of the ladies, well she was of the church, but she went in to practice on the organ and our janitor at that time--you don't see many of them today--was a lady, Mrs. Lucy Wagner. And she had been there and she didn't see anything. And after she left somebody sounded that the church was on fire. And they say that it was a bad connection or something in the organ that caused it.

R: How did you learn that the church was on fire?

C: Well, the fire whistle blew and right away all the Methodists were all in their homes calling each other, "Our church is on fire." And I think practically everybody went in.

R: What did you feel like?

C: Well, we felt terrible, everybody standing around crying; their church burning. Of course, they didn't know whether it was all going to be gone or not at the time, but it was pretty well destroyed.

R: I understand there was some controversy or disagreement whether to rebuild the old structure or to build a completely new structure. Were you aware of any of that?

C: Oh yes, they built a new part on the back of the church and we went to Sunday School and church there a good many years before we built the new one.

R: So, why did they finally build a new structure rather than rebuild the old one?

C: Well, the congregation was getting too large. They couldn't take care of all of them there at the old church.

R: You said that it was so terrible. Most organizations, when something like that happens, say when a church burns down, that would almost mark the end. So, why wasn't it the end for the church?

C: Well, I guess they all had the faith that they wanted to go on. And like I say, they repaired what they could there and built a new part on the back, which is still there where the Union Bank is in Poland. And there's offices where we had our Sunday School. I just don't know

what all it was rented to there. I think a dentist, a couple doctors put different offices in there.

R: What did you do in the interim between the time that old structure was destroyed and the new one was built?

C: We went to the Schoolhouse for awhile in the school auditorium and had church. Our class, the Lady's Class, went to Mrs. Conklin, that was our Sunday School teacher. We went up the street in her living room and had Sunday School up there. And there was a lot of the others; they went here and there to different homes and had church, Sunday School.

R: Was that hard or fun? How was it?

C: No, it wasn't fun. It wasn't fun for me to go to these. I couldn't worship like I wanted to at the school. I knew it wasn't a church. It wasn't a place of worship.

R: How did you feel when they went to the new structure?

C: Well, it was wonderful. We watched it being built and we were there for everything that went on beforehand. It was wonderful. We had a tent out at the fair that our class-- we made pies. We furnished our own classroom, had it painted, woodwork, bought all of our furniture, our rugs. We had a good time furnishing it; baking these pies. We made thousands, and thousands of pies.

R: How long did this take place? All these pie baking things?

C: Oh, I'd say around five or six years. I don't know just exactly, maybe longer, maybe less.

R: You mentioned your Sunday School. What topics did you discuss in your Sunday School class?

C: Well, we used the Wesley Textbook, and the Ten Commandments.

R: Is it a regular class?

C: Regular class. Oh, time and time again they bring it up that they want us to go into a Bible study and some of the women, they don't want to do that. It's too much work for them. They say they have too much work at home they don't have time to study. So, with the Wesley Book, they like it better. And we never have gone into the Bible Class.

R: Has there always been a class like this to go to?

C: Oh yes.

R: You've always had Sunday School?

C: Yes, I've always gone to Sunday School. It just never seemed right just to go to church. But I think that's the way it's going to end up one of these days. Now, yesterday we had four in the class.

R: Four people?

C: Yes. And we have had a large class. And it's just, the people are getting older and passing away and it seems that we can't find anybody to go in and take their places.

R: Do you remember any of your teachers over the years?

C: Oh yes, we had Esther Rohrbaugh, Loise Flint, and Ida Sigle, Mable Conklin and she outstands as a teacher because she taught us for so many years; Mrs. Collier, and Mr. Conklin, Mr. Don Pachen; a good many teachers.

R: You had quite a few classes.

C: Yes, well see, the two classes merged. They had the Alpha Class and the Susanna Wesley Class. So, now it's all called the Susanna Wesley Class.

R: How did they pick their name?

C: Well, when we had a meeting they just asked someone what they wanted and they thought, well, since we were studying the book that we'd call it the Susanna Wesley Class.

R: This book was series?

C: It had been series for a good many years.

R: The reverends that tended the church, I understand, change quite often. So, you must have seen quite a few. Do any of them stand out in your mind over the years?

C: Oh yes, Dr. Parr. He married my daughter. He baptized my grandchildren. A lot of them stand out. But like I say, with Reverend Parr, he just stands out because he was there when they were married and baptizing the children.

R: Do you remember who the reverend was when you first came?

C: Dr. Riley.



- R: Who was reverend when the church burned down? Do you remember?
- C: Dr. Riley. I don't remember if it was Dr. Riley. It must have been because we were on the left side when the reverend baptized the children.
- R: The left side?
- C: The left side of the church. See, you went in straight and then the pulpit was on the right side after it was repaired, after the fire. Before, it was on the left side. And I remember the children were baptized on the left-hand side.
- R: You were saying that the Sunday School Classes were small because people are dying out. Is that, do you think, for the whole church, that there are not as many young people coming in?
- C: No, I don't think. Of course, you know how a lot of these younger people are. We think, well we'll invite this one to come to our class. Then they say, "We don't want to go in that old ladies' class." (laughter) We even had the minister to announce that anyone that feels that they want to come that doesn't have a class to go to and wants to come to our class is welcome. And I know that they don't have a men's class. See, it has broken up. Simply because they didn't have any members either. It was all men. Now, they had another class with the husbands and their wives. Then someone would say, "I don't want to go without my husband." So, how are you going to work it? We've invited those men to come to our class that are staying home because they only have two or three, but they don't want to go in with the women. Like the younger ones say, "Well, I'm not an old woman." I don't consider myself an old woman. And of course, there's several a little older than me, but we don't call ourselves old.
- R: Are there any "young" womens' classes?
- C: Oh yes.
- R: Oh, there are? Do they go to Sunday School?
- C: They have the Young Couples', and they're just now starting a new class. I don't know what they call it or anything; but they're just starting it.
- R: Have you done things besides Sunday School classes in the church?

C: We have the Womens' Society. I belong to that. I belong to the Dorcas Circle up in the Circle. I belong to the Dorcas Circle.

R: What does that do?

C: Oh, they work for the needy and they do most anything. They wrap the pads for Cancer (Society). And at Christmastime we make things that we take to the elderly women that are in these homes and around. We go out and try to help anyone we can.

R: The Womens' Society, what does that do?

C: Well it's practically the same. They have the big meeting that's called the general meeting. That's when the whole Womens' Society gets together.

R: The church of Poland, did you see it becoming more or less important over the years in Poland?

C: Well, I think it's more important.

R: Why?

C: I don't know. It seems though that the young people aren't as interested in it. It doesn't seem to be like we were when we were young. There's too many other things for them to get into, which really isn't good for them, I don't think. Of course, maybe somebody else would think differently.

R: So, why then, would the church become more important? Many of the people are becoming more distracted. Why do you feel that it's becoming more important?

C: Well, you have to have your church people, I think, to get along. And it's just like I say now with my daughters, they both were working in the church and it's your church people that come to you to help you when you're in need, when you need help.

R: That leads me to a question. What is "the church?" Define Poland's Church. What is Poland's Church to you. What has it been over these past forty years or so?

C: It has been my home.

R: It has been your home?

C: Yes.

R: Could you elaborate that a little?

C: Well, we go there and worship God. If you don't seem to have a God to worship, why go? And like I say, if you need help, your minister is there to help you or some of the other people of the church. And if you have faith, I think you can go along and get on by but you must have the faith.

R: So, the church then, is a source of faith.

C: Yes.

R: Is the church the same church that you were introduced to forty years ago?

C: Well, yes and no. It's not the same people. Every year you learn new people, with new members coming in. Now, just not too long ago we had about forty members come in. And it seems though it takes you awhile to get used to them. You're used to the old members. Maybe that's our fault. We don't make ourselves acquainted. There's a lot of people that come and you say, "Well, I didn't see them before." And here they've been coming for a long time. So, we have to make ourselves known. We're all worshipping in the same place.

R: So, the people have changed?

C: Yes. I think they have changed.

R: How hasn't it changed? How is it the same church that it was. When you said, "Yes and no," now why the "yes?"

C: Well, it will always be my church. That's like someone will say to you like the minister, and he'll say that it doesn't mean that if I didn't like him I shouldn't go. You have to learn to love him.

R: I'm going to ask you a two part question and maybe the answer is the same. The first part is: What is the most important event that the church has had during the forty years that you've been at their events? What is the most important event or thing that the church, overall has had?

C: Well, I think it all was pretty important when we were building the new church and having the ceremonies and everything. We were in it before the sanctuary was finished; all those things stand out to you.

R: Do you remember any of the ceremonies in particular? Some of the particular ceremonies and everything?

C: The laying of the cornerstone, I was there when they put that in. I'm trying to think of the Minister's name when they broke ground. I went to all of them.

R: Were there quite a few ceremonies?

C: Oh yes, oh yes. Just as things went along they would . . . And then down in the old church I can remember my Sunday School teacher, Mrs. Conklin, her daughter and son-in-law were commissioned to go to be missionaries in the Belgian Congo. That was an outstanding meeting.

R: That was in the old structure?

C: That was when we were in the old church. We'd always have a missionary that we keep them going. Now her daughter, we had collections that we'd take over to the hospital, third Sunday I think was the Sunday that we'd take a collection. And we kept them going. But now, it has been years ago. They're still in it and I think they're back and forth to California. They're still missionaries.

R: From Poland?

C: Yes.

R: How long, at a time, do they go at a stretch when they leave Poland?

C: How long a stretch?

R: Yes, you say they were back and forth.

C: Well, they go and stay so many years and then they come back for a visit. Then they go back.

R: Oh I see, they're really living there then they report here?

C: Yes, they really lived in the Belgian Congo. And to go from all these luxuries and everything she had at home and then to go to nothing, you wonder how. They have to have the faith to do something like that, to live the way she lived.

Her mother used to be in a club of ours and she would bring her letters and read to us about how she lived on a dirt floor and how she would wash her clothes. And she said she just couldn't see how she could do it after having all those luxuries at home. To go into something like that and then to worry about your life all the time.

R: How long has she been doing this?

C: Well, like I say, they commissioned her when we were in the old church.

R: The second part of that question is: What has been the most important experience or event to you in the church over the years?

C: Well, about the same, I think. I never saw anyone commissioned like that and I see her poor mother crying. She was happy for her in a way, but she knew what she was getting into, I think. And the younger ones didn't make it their whole life, some, but not as much as the mother, I don't think, but that bothered her.

R: So, that dialogue you had with her mother was very important to you?

C: Yes. She was a wonderful teacher. So now, the grandchildren, I don't know, there's a couple of them that want to do the same kind of work. Naturally, some of them will follow in their mother's and father's footsteps.

R: Anything that you wanted to bring up that I didn't cover with questions?

C: Well, like I say, we have a wonderful minister now, Reverend Santomen. He has been so wonderful. Of course, another minister probably would have been the same. And my son-in-law had gotten several letters from different ministers that were there while he was there after he had gotten sick. More than likely he had been talked about in a conference or something between the ministers that these other ministers would find out and write him letters. He's been very wonderful. He was wonderful with me when I had a heart attack a year ago. And he came right away and was there everyday to see me.

R: He gave a wonderful prayer yesterday for my son-in-law. Of course, my daughter couldn't be there because the in-laws were here from Florida and they had to take them to Pittsburgh to meet a plane. And she explained to the minister that she wouldn't be there. And he said, "Well, you're not going to let your church people down are you?" She said, "You know I'll never do that." So, well, he just teased her. He knew. He said, "She would be there if possible."

R: I want to thank you for taking time out this evening and doing the interview.

C: I hope I've been some good to you.

R: Oh, you have.

C: As far as you asking me, I'd have to look a lot of those things up.

R: Well, that's okay.

END OF INTERVIEW