

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Poland United Methodist Church

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1103

ETHEL NICOLLS

Interviewed on

June 20, 1981

By

Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr.

Mrs. Ethel Nicolls was born on May 31, 1902 in Poland, Ohio to Smith and Minnie McCoy. She was raised in Poland and graduated from Poland High School in three rather than four years. She was married to Carl Nicolls on February 20, 1920 and has six children; Betty, Robert, David, Eugene, Donald, and Ruth Anne. She has been a member of Poland United Methodist Church all of her adult life and was involved in the church reconstruction efforts. Her hobbies, besides caring for her numerous grandchildren, include photography.

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Interviewee: ETHEL NICOLLS  
Interviewer: Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr.  
Subject: Poland United Methodist Church  
Date: June 20, 1981

PR: This is an interview with Mrs. Ethel Nicolls [at] 26 Delaware on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1981 on the Poland United Methodist Church History project, held in conjunction Dr. Viehmeyer. The interviewer is Paul H. Rohrbaugh, Jr.

OK, Mrs. Nicolls, would you like to tell us first a little bit about yourself?

EN: Well, I'm 79 years old. Led life, been around a while. I don't mind telling my age because... You should feel good you've been around this long and made so many friends. I was married when I was 19. I had six children. And I had 17 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. So that's my big joy all the time. I love to take pictures so I have pictures all over the place. As you can see, I have a whole pile here to put in my album and I have sixty albums.

PR: Oh, really? That'd be neat.

EN: I take that back- I think there's about fifty-five or so. And I enjoy the outdoors. I enjoy my church most of all. They're a real family to me. Of course, I've been there ever since... I think I joined in- I have the notes up here- when I was baptized. Do you want all this information?

PR: Well as we come it to.

EN: I was baptized in 1906, which would make 19-. I was four years old. I joined the church at 15 years old. What else is there?

PR: So you were raised in this area?

EN: Oh, yes, I was born in Poland. I said “When I go, I’ll go in Poland.” But my children are scattered around now: Houston, Chicago, Toledo, Virginia. So, we get together every once in a while. I enjoy that.

PR: You said you that were baptized when you were four and you joined when you were 15. You mean you’re not a member as soon as you’re baptized?

EN: No.

PR: How is that?

EN: In those days, that long ago... no, I’m wrong. My mother, when she joined church, they went on probation first. I don’t know how long that lasted. I have the information here. They would take communion when you joined church. It wasn’t that way when I...I think they just got someone to ?? Then they didn’t have classes like they do now. To learn all about the church before you join- know what you’re doing. So I was about 13. I think they’re still doing it that way today. You’re baptized when you’re a baby, and join church when you’re of an age that you know what you’re doing.

PR: What did you do in between the time, when you were small? Do you remember going to church?

EN: Yes, I remember going to church. I was telling someone the other day- I remember sitting in church beside my mother, and I would... when the minister was talking real loud, he was starting out. And then he would quiet down and he’d talk normal for a while. Then he’d start shouting again. And I thought well that’s being ? Then I remember another time, we would have an evangelist come every so often to the church. And I remember- I can just see the chap- he was preaching about the end of the world. That’s what I thought. He said it’s coming down the track

like a steam engine. I was scared. I didn't sleep that night. I thought, well tomorrow what if it's the end of the world? They're still predicting that. It hasn't happened yet.

PR: Do you remember when that was?

EN: I couldn't have been old enough to... You know, I didn't know what they were talking about except the big train. I suppose I was four or five maybe. In Sunday School we had primary heads... I can't think. Anyway, then when I got to be teenager, I got to be a Sunday School teacher. They didn't require so much then. Whoever would say they would do it, would do it. So I had a bunch of young girls that were not that much older than me. I enjoyed that. They were like my girls. Even years after, I always remember them.

PR: How long did you teach Sunday School?

EN: Oh, I don't know. I went to the Primary- Superintendent of the Primary Department for a while. I don't know how many years.

PR: What is Sunday School like? From talking with other people, they said they were going to classes, even as adults. I've never known anything even like that. What is your Sunday School like?

EN: Well, its mostly studying of the Bible. Getting to know God more of course. Getting knowledgeable about the Bible. And as I said about going to church, same thing with Sunday School, getting to know the Lord and I go to church to hear something that helps me to live a good life. Of course, Sunday School, you had the treasurer would come around and collect our money from us every Sunday. My buddy said to me one time, "My, she must have a lot of money at home. She takes ours every Sunday!"

And there was Children's Day. I don't think they have that anymore. All the children in Sunday school perform some way. They would have speeches. Some of them wanted to speak and others didn't speak. I had a lot of fun with that. Some of the men now were in my class. I know the one sings in the choir- Emmett Offison. He was one of the ones who was always willing to. Then

there was another one, he had the loudest voice. And someone said they could hear him through their glasses ?. And that was kinda fun, Children Day. They have it now, but I haven't been able to go. They have it in the evening, I think.

Another thing we did is have "socials" we called them. Get together on certain nights, you know? Oh, I don't know how often. I know I could have them anytime. Dress up party. Another time, something about they had a big train made, and we would dress according to some person who as like a king or queen or something. They'd have some kind of entertainment every time. It was a fun night out.

PR: You mentioned that you remembered the one sermon when you were little. How many ministers do you remember? I understand they don't stay very long...

EN: No, I can go back to Reverend Nickels. Same name as mine but spelled differently. She was my first Sunday School teacher.

PR: A woman minister?

EN: Somewhere here I have all the ministers. That was the first one. That would be in 1902 or 1904? I can't find it here now. Well, I go back about 70 some years.

PR: You've got quite the collection of papers here.

EN: Do you have any of these? Did they give them to you?

PR: No, none at all.

EN: These are the- when they dedicated the new church and when they built. That's all the history of the church that probably somebody ought to have. I'm sure there's a list. When I was able to do things at the church, it kinda happened that I trained the first acolyte when they began having them. We didn't have acolytes back when I was small. We used a teenager. It was about 1964 I think they started having an acolyte and I got to train the first two.

PR: Now what's an acolyte?

EN: You don't know an acolyte. It's young boys, but now the girls do it to. The girls didn't want to at first. They wear robes and they light the candles on the alter. It's kinda fun. The one little fella, they said his brother was teasing him. He said "you're gonna set fire to the church." We used to have them go down the middle isle and go up and chant. He had him scared to death and he was afraid to do it after that. Afraid he'd burn the church down. But they've been real good and now the girls are doing it. So, I always feel happy about that, that I got time for that.

PR: Do you remember any of the first group of boys' names' who became acolytes?

EN: Well, I suppose I can't name them. I'm not very good at names. Right off, I can't tell you. One of them just got married the other day. I remember them like that. He was living on the next street. He's been to college and everything.

I'll have a look in back here. Nickels was in 1912. One, two, three, four, five... Seventeen, So eighteen ministers. Reverend Sandman, 1978. Oh my...

PR: Do you have a favorite?

EN: Well. Yes, I don't like to say favorites but I did like Reverend Bryant. He was a wonderful man. I always said he was as near to God as anybody ever would be. He was wonderful. He was a sincere person. He was very particular about his appearance. We stopped for visiting him one time after he left. He was down in southern Ohio somewhere. We stopped to see him. And we saw him go real quickly cross before he came to the door. All the doors in the house. When he came back, he had his jacket on. He wouldn't answer to the door unless he had his jacket on because he felt it was insulting. He was a dear man. He lived to be, I think he was almost 90 if I remember right. We used to go visit him. Anyway, about 50 miles from here in Ohio was his last pasture. We used to go to visit him every so often but not so much lately. But I've liked them all. Reverend Hess was with me when my husband died. When I came home from the hospital, he was sitting in the driveway. And Reverend Marstin, I liked him. He preached such a good

sermon. I told him one time, I said “I want you to come back and do one when I go.” And he laughed at me. But I said, now I’ve liked the ones we’ve had since so you won’t need to I guess. I liked Reverend Sandman very much too. But I don’t do activities at the church like I used to.

PR: What activities?

EN: I was on the Alter Guild for a while, took care of the alter. The dinners, I always helped with the dinners with Angela Perry until she hurt her back. And Sonia. We worked together. One time I was the head of the dinner, in the old church, years ago. The Missionary Society was putting on a dinner and we ran out of food! There was people still coming. I don’t remember what I did. But I remember one of the girls starting crying. She just sat down and cried. I don’t remember whether- I guess we just had to turn them back. So that always stands out in my mind. I see them having dinners now and I think “I wonder if they have enough or if they’re going to run out.” And of course, I sang in the choir. I talked to one of my friends last night, I said “Remember if they needed altos we went to the alto section? And if they needed sopranos, we went in the soprano section? Because there weren’t too many. There were about six or eight probably. No, more than that. Ten or twelve at the time. Especially in the evening. We had a Sunday evening service then. And there was always- we weren’t sure how many they had. So they just put us wherever. Just so it wasn’t bass or tenor! We all sang in the choir until I started having my children. I got kinda busy then. I had a lot of experience in the church. And then we had- of course, we had Circles then. I’ve always been in the Circles, used to be. I can’t remember...

PR: What did you do at the Circles?

EN: We studied the Bible or studied someplace where our missionaries would be, you know, studied the country. Read about that. You had to give a talk on it. I had to talk, had a program for one meeting. I went to this lady’s house and she looked at me kinda funny. I said “Aren’t you having Circle today?” And she said “No, that’s tomorrow.” I was kinda embarrassed about that. I think I was talking on Esther that day- the book of Esther.

Well, I think I’ve said enough, haven’t I? Do you have some questions?



PR: Oh yes. We should keep going. You said the “old church.” I know it was destroyed in a fire. When was that?

*[about 20:00]*

EN: That was in '57 I think. I can't tell you exactly.

PR: What did you do when you found out the church was destroyed?

EN: I was very unhappy. That's where I started. The older church was built when I was two years old. So I was never in.. I mean it changed from the “old church” to the second church we built. That the one that was down where the bank building is. I was two years old then so that was the first church I knew.

PR: You mean there was a church before the “old church?”

EN: -before the one we're in now.

PR: I mean before-

EN: They started out they had circuit riders and they would come around. Of course that was only when somebody'd come riding in. And then they had services in the school house for a while. And then they built the first church. Then of course it was remodeled and then it burned. And then rebuilt.

PR: What did you do in between time? Where did you meet for church after the old one was destroyed?

EN: For a while we had church up in the school building up on North, where North Elementary school is. We went there for a while. I think right after the fire we had services in the brick addition. It was automatic which is where the bank building is now. I think that's where we had them. My memory goes sometimes. I can't remember some of those things.

PR: Why did they build a new building and not rebuilt the old one?

EN: Well, I think they thought they needed a bigger church. They had added on to the building before. So they built this one which is big and we're still adding members. It's pretty well used all the time.

PR: You mentioned that you worked out at the Fair. What was that like? To pay for it?

EN: It was hard. I don't know how much the tent cost or the space you know, it was plenty. So we had to work hard. We had a group at the church working- you know, cooking. We had trucks back and forth, taking it out. Then we had places to keep it in out there for a while... But some of them worked all night. One girl said she was making pies and she left two or three of them in the oven and went home and got up I don't know what time in the morning, she said she forgot to turn the off the oven. They were burnt by the time she got back.

And then we had a snack bar. I started out at the snack bar. And it was so busy I couldn't keep up. I had mostly teenagers helping. We had one of the bosses I'll call her came around and said "You better clean up this place." And I said "I don't have time. We're selling stuff too fast!" We had sloppy joes and wieners and things like that. And the men would come in for pie early in the morning. They'd eat their breakfast and then live on pie. It was pretty busy.

PR: Um,.. oh keep going. I'm sorry.

EN: I was just going to tell another story. One lady was taking a big pan of steak out of where we kept it and she spilled it in the sawdust. So that was a bad day! But things like that happened all the time. I know one day I spent the whole day making soft ground beef. The students stirred that in and I kept making it. And one of our dear older members, Mr. Barton, he would come at 5 o'clock in the morning and make pancakes for the breakfast.

PR: You had quite a menu it sounds like!

EN: Oh, we had different things. Steaks mostly. I think we were in concession for 11 years I believe. Maybe longer, I'm sure longer.

PR: Did you work every year?

EN: Yes, I think I did.

PR: How many people are in the church compared to when you first started when you became a member until today?

EN: I don't know what the membership is today but it's over a thousand, I think. At that time, there were probably I guess 100 or so probably at the first church. I just couldn't say. When you've grown up in the same place all those years, its just like a family. I've said that all along. My husband was sick, they were so good to me. They came and helped, anything I needed. I just feel like they're my family, my church family. I had a birthday a short time ago and someone heard about it. So I got 52- well some was family cards- but I got 52 cards all together for my birthday! I really appreciate that. I get out to church on Sunday morning and that's about all the activity I can do now. That's why when you asked me to do this, I said there's so little I can do now, I'd be glad to do it.

PR: You have here the 100-year anniversary program. What was that like?

EN: Well, I can't tell you too much about it now. The program had all the ministers that we could get to come back that had been here for years. Of course, I have a program. That was when Reverend Bryant was here, I believe. You know how I said he was such a wonderful person. That's a pageant.

PR: Did you sing in that?

EN: I don't remember. That doesn't stand out too much in my mind. It's what we did then. I like history anyway- to go back and see how things started. So, I enjoy reading that's why I have all these extra books and things.

PR: You've seen quite a few changes. What have been the biggest changes?

EN: Well, I think the building. Some people said "I hate to give up the old church." It just seemed like your home is to you- your church home. It was awfully hard to leave that. Going to the new place, I said its still my church. It's the people. I remember one lady used to say it isn't the church it's you. When somebody'd complain about the church, she'd say "It isn't the church, it's you." It's the people in the church. As long as they were there, why it feels home there now. I would be 55 when it happened. So I've been there long enough to really believe it. In fact, I have a brick that Reverend Marston was there then. He gave me a brick from the old foundation. He said, "Do you want this as a souvenir?" I said "I sure do."

PR: Really?

EN: Then he gave me- I've never been able to ask anyone who would know (I don't think there's anybody at the church now that would know)- they had homemade stools. At least the one. Reverend Marston found that somewhere up on the shelf when we moved out of the old building. It was just about this big and it had this piece of carpet tacked on top. And they said it wasn't a kneeling bench because I don't think we kneeled even before I was there. I don't think they ever kneeled. They thought folks put their feet on it. A footstool in church! I can't imagine that. I have it. I just want to look it up. It's in the basement somewhere. That's the two things from the old church I have.

PR: Are there any other changes you can think of?

EN: Not really. In the old church we used to make apple butter. I didn't because I couldn't stir it well enough to suit the ones that worked. We had this dear 98-year-old woman. She was always the boss. I remember I tried to stir it one time and she said "No, you don't do it that way." And she took the handle away from me.

And also there was quilting. They had quilting and I wasn't any good at that. I sat down one day and started making stitches and the lady next to me said "you have to make smaller stitches."

And I said "I can't do it." I tell the girls now- they're still making quilts over at the church- I can't help you because I was told once that I make too big of stitches. It didn't- I mean I wasn't provoked. I just made a joke of it. Because I knew I couldn't sew. They have so many sewers in the church.

PR: To so many organizations or other churches, if the church burned down, that would have been it. Why did they happen to call it United Methodist Church? Why didn't they just-

EN: I don't know. It made us work harder I guess for a new place.

PR: Do you think people would work as hard today if this church-

EN: I think they would. I feel that the young people in our church now are just as ambitious. We don't have dinners- they have maybe one or two a year. We used to have dinners- well that was up the minister. I know one minister wanted to have a dinner once every month. We thought that was a little too often with all the work. But there's always a certain group that can head it up and really work hard at it. And I feel the young people in our church are just as busy as we were. And then in other ways too.

PR: Do you see the church being as important an organization in Poland as it was when you were young?

EN: I think so. Of course, when I was young there was only the Presbyterian Church on the other side of town and ours on this side. Now we have I think five churches. As long as they're all going well, I think that's good. I know one of my sons, one time he and his friend at the Presbyterian Church, they went to their youth group. And a friend of mine thought that was terrible because he was a Methodist and he shouldn't be going over to the Presbyterian Church. And I said just as long as he goes to church. That's the main thing. So we've always been friends back and forth. Presbyterians. I have some very good friends. I don't feel that it's that important. We all get along there. As one lady said, "we're all going different roads but our destination is the same." I thought that was good.

PR: You mentioned some of the societies that you were a member of. Do you remember any of the people in them with you?

EN: You mean in the groups? Some of the best workers?

PR: or whatever... some of your best friends?

EN: Mrs. Augden was one of them. She and Grace Kerns was a good lady who lived to 99 years old. And her sister Mrs. Augden. And Mrs. Anderson, my Sunday School teacher. I always loved her because she was my first Sunday School teacher. And there's so many. They were some of the older ones in the church. They've been friends and when they moved away somewhere and you try to see them. You don't want to give them up. I know some of the ministers that have gone. There's one Reverend Altherton. I think he's still up in- not Sandusky, Ashtabula. He has a church there. We went to visit him and the church was so much like the old church we thought we were back in our old church again. That was just a few years ago we went to visit. So that was almost like going back to the old church.

PR: Have you ever been to the bank building that's where the church was? Is it anything like it?

EN: No, you forget all about the church except the back part is pretty much the same. They have offices in there. But I don't think of it now when I'm around there. We've been over here long enough that its home.

PR: How is that referred to? Is it the "old church"?

EN: Yes, I think so. For some of us anyway.

PR: Is there any favorite days in the church? Any days in particular? That are especially meaningful to you at the church....

EN: Right off I can't think of any. There were many of them probably. I can't tell you. I can't think of any now. Whenever I could go to church, I was happy.

PR: Did you think of anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to say?

EN: Probably after you go I'll think of several things. Right at the moment I can't think of anything. I made a few notes, but I've mentioned all of them.

PR: Were you married in the church?

EN: No, I was married in the Parsonage.

PR: The Parsonage? Where is that at?

EN: Well it was over on the next street- Massachusetts. Van at that time. First, they were down on Water Street when I was a young kid. Then they moved up there. Then they moved over next to the church. Now they're over on Sawview. Yeah, the parsonage has moved around a bit.

PR: Is there classrooms in the building? In the church? Your Sunday School classes. Do they meet in the church?

EN: You mean this church, now?

PR: Right.

EN: Yes. They have- I don't know how many. Several.

PR: What about the old church? What did you do for Sunday School?

EN: Well, we the older class would sit in the church corner part. And our Sunday School, there was sliding door. I know when I had the teenage girls, we'd sit in one corner and somebody else

in the other corner of the room. And then the Primary would show off. The primary was in a little room. It wouldn't be as big as this I don't think. And then the other part was where the choir went in to go in the choir. We didn't have robes then, but there was a special room for them. They were all small. That's why the new church seemed so big. I couldn't get used to it.

PR: In comparison, yeah. How long was your church day? How long would you spend at church?

EN: It all depends on what you're doing. I'd go for Sunday School until just 10, 20 years ago maybe. I gave that up. It's too early in the morning for me. My husband, he didn't like to go to Sunday School. He'd go to church with me so I left to go to Sunday school and he'd go to church with me.

PR: When would Sunday School start?

EN: 9:30 I think. And then 10:30 was the service. Of course, we were always doing something: a social or choir practice and all those things. It took time. I could work real fast then and get a lot done! And then we made cookies. I made cookies a lot. So I have a lot of memories. They come up every once in a while. Something will come up that I'll think of, and remember. I think I've talked too long now.

PR: Oh, no. Thank you for our interview.

EN: Glad to do it.

PR: It was pretty good. I really appreciate your taking the time out.

EN: As I say, it's something little I can do for the church and it makes me happy.