

Interview with Robert Carroll

June 19, 1978

Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by Calvin Gower and John LeDoux

Gower: Okay, now we are interviewing let's see your name is--

Carroll: Robert Carroll.

Gower: Robert Carroll, that's C-A-R-R-O-L-L?

Carroll: That's right.

Gower: Who is a resident of rural Finlayson is that--

Carroll: Pine Lake Township.

Gower: Pine Lake Township. Today is June 19, 1978. This is Calvin Gower and John LeDoux interviewing Mr. Carroll. Now you've been a member of the United Methodist in Finlayson all of your life is that right?

Carroll: That's right.

Gower: Would you mind telling us what your birthdate is?

Carroll: May 24, 1918.

Gower: May 24, 1918.

Carroll: And I was born right across from the church.

Gower: Right across from the church?

Carroll: I was born.

Gower: In Finlayson there, okay. Now what we're especially interested in is trying to find out about the ethnic part of the churches. Now our impression from talking to Reverend Snader is that this church was made up of people from the United States essentially, rather than immigrant groups is that correct, would that be your impression too?

Carroll: I would say yes, but of course, Finlayson itself had quite a few immigrants.

Gower: Many Finnish people especially, is that right?

Carroll: Our church wasn't Finnish church. The Finnish background is Lutheran.

Gower: Right.

Carroll: And so they had two or three of their own churches.

Gower: Right.

Carroll: And the Nazareth Church was probably more of English Background or something like that.

Gower: That was our impression when talking to him. We had the impression that people came in here to engage in farming. Is that correct?

Carroll: Well logging was the first.

Gower: That was first then after the logging--

Carroll: Then there was farming.

Gower: Then people were enticed to come here to farm.

Carroll: Yes.

Gower: This would be like in the 1890s early 1900s.

Carroll: Yes.

Gower: Okay, and then that's when this church started too, in the 1890s and early 1900s?

Carroll: Ya, about, wasn't it about 1901 when the church was built or something like that?

Gower: 1902 or 1903, I think.

Carroll: Ya, 1902 it was in that bracket.

Gower: Right, and they were meeting in the Sunday School Activity in the 1890s in homes around here. And those people would be mostly people from other parts of the United States, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

Carroll: That's right.

Gower: Rather than from over in Finland, Sweden, or something like that.

Carroll: I would imagine that--

Gower: Okay, John.

LeDoux: What was the general process of settlement in this area, for example, do you recall back in your own family how your own family came to this area and settled.

Carroll: Well, my, ah, from my mother I learned that her folks came from Norway originally.

LeDoux: Oh.

Carroll: They landed in New York. They came to Minneapolis and her father was a stone cutter. And there was a lot of stone building in Minneapolis, so they came there then--

Gower: So this was about when do you know? 1870s? It doesn't matter I was just wondering.

Carroll: I imagine that would, that would be about that would probably--

Gower: Sure.

Carroll: Then they came to Sandstone because of the quarrying in Sandstone.

Gower: Because he was a stone cutter.

Carroll: Ya, and then they bought this piece of land and lived here and her brothers and her dad worked at Sandstone first as stone cutters.

Gower: They were living here, but going into Sandstone, every day they would go into there and work.

Carroll: Well, I don't know whether they stayed there or what, but at least this was their home. They homesteaded this.

Gower: Oh, sure.

Carroll: Well, then in the winter time, they logged because the quarries were closed down in the winter, I guess. So logging was a big deal. And then after the virgin timber was taken off then farming started. But they never ah, my relatives on my mother's side weren't farmers really, they were laborers, stone cutters and loggers.

Gower: Stone cutters right. They were immigrants though too.

Carroll: They came from Norway.

Gower: Sure, okay.

Carroll: And my father came from Canada, and married my mother in Finlayson.

Gower: Was his background from England?

Carroll: No.

Gower: I mean before that though.

Carroll: No, I think he was born in Canada.

Gower: What about his parents, did they come back from England?

Carroll: That, I couldn't tell you.

Gower: Oh, but where was he born in Canada?

Carroll: New Brunswick.

Gower: New Brunswick. So I bet that is an English background.

Carroll: Well, at any rate he was a business man too, he ran the delivery Stable in Finlayson.

Gower: This is your father?

Carroll: Ya, he did that until he died; he got sick with some illness and couldn't carry on his business.

Gower: What was the religious background of your mother, than as a Norwegian, was it the Lutheran church?

Carroll: I don't know.

Gower: Oh, but she did not go to the Lutheran church that you know of.

Carroll: No.

Gower: What about your father?

Carroll: He didn't have a background in religion that I know of.

Gower: Oh, Okay.

Carroll: But his sister or maybe more than one were Catholic.

Gower: Oh, several of his sisters.

Carroll: Well at least two that I know.

Gower: Were Catholic, oh.

Carroll: But I don't know that ever had any religious--

Gower: He had never, I don't know what they say in the Catholic Church, and it isn't confirmed is it? Anyway he had not been a member of the Catholic Church. You don't know for sure?

Carroll: He died when I was 2 years old, I don't know--

Gower: Oh, sure.

Carroll: I don't even remember him so--

Mrs. Carroll: They say their parents were the first ones married in the Church.

Gower: Oh your parents were the first one married in the Methodist Church in Finlayson. Oh, so at that point they had become Methodist.

Carroll: Ya.

Gower: They wanted to be married there.

Carroll: I would assume my father from that time was a member of the church, but I couldn't prove it.

Gower: How about your mother?

Carroll: She was a member.

Gower: She definitely was a member of the--

Carroll: Ah, we, ah, us kids went to the Methodist Sunday School, we went to church and ah, I remember that.

Gower: Now, do you remember any kind of, what were relations like between the Methodists and these Lutherans, the Finnish Lutherans?

Carroll: Well--

Gower: Were they good relations there?

Carroll: Between the individuals there was good relations. I don't know that the churches ever, it seemed like there wasn't really a relationships between the churches.

Gower: There was no ill will or anything between the churches?

Carroll: But there was no ill will that I know of.

Gower: Oh, sort of live and let live.

Carroll: Ya, that's what I would assume. Ah, I mean they have certain things about different churches that shouldn't be, you know, and they kind of tried to separate. You know.

Gower: Sure, right.

Carroll: But, at least the people grew up and there was no ill will and I had a lot of friends and school chums you know, we didn't, because somebody was Catholic we never thought of it or Lutheran or whatever.

Gower: And the same way if they were Finnish, Swedish there was no.

Carroll: It didn't matter, I mean we had chums.

Gower: Sure, right.

Carroll: As far as, we never even thought about it, I mean--

Gower: Okay, fine.

LeDoux: There wasn't one definite ethnic group that cancelled out all others, it was just a conglomeration of various groups.

Carroll: It was pretty much that way. Although the Lutherans did predominant because there was, there was about three branches of Finnish Lutheran in three different churches. I didn't know that there, what are their whatever--

Gower: Which particular part they were there?

Carroll: Ya, then there was a German Lutheran which is now Missouri Synod.

Gower: Is that in Finlayson?

Carroll: Ya, that is in Finlayson.

Gower: Oh.

Carroll: That itself is sort of special. They don't, they're sorts by themselves you know they don't, the other Finnish Lutheran. Our branch did go together a few years back whether this Finnish Lutheran was Missouri, I don't know.

Gower: No, I would doubt that very much.

Carroll: You, that happened, but--

Gower: What was the church like back when you were growing up? Was it pretty small church membership?

Carroll: It has always been quite small. This one person that Reverend Snader tried to call, Mrs. Schultz. She us older than I am. She and her group were active in Ethworth League, young people.

Gower: Eth--

Carroll: Ethworth League.

Gower: How do you spell that? E-T-H-W-O-R-T-H.

Carroll: I imagine that.

Gower: I think that that's the way you spell it, Ethworth.

Carroll: Besides that the group that they had were young people, these were pre-married young adults.

Gower: This is back in the teens or 1920s?

Carroll: We that would be in the '20s.

Gower: Okay.

Carroll: Because I can remember it so it would be in the 20-25s it was a very active group at that , I remember because they did have meetings in the homes too, I'd imagine, because we got acquainted with other young people who lived, like, west of Robertson, took in quite a territory to get these people enough to come.

Gower: Sure, now we had the impression that there was a point there where the church membership was very small of about 12 or so in 1925-29 or something like that.

Carroll: There was a period where I didn't go to church for quite a while.

Gower: Was this because of disagreements about the minister and so on?

Carroll: No, I didn't know that. I just sort of turned it down. There was no interest and, ah, probably if there would be services it would be probably every other week or something like that. There wasn't a regular service and there wasn't any activity.

Gower: When would you say that it started to revive and started to grow and get stronger again?

Carroll: Oh, in the late 30s.

Gower: In the 30s. Now has it been pretty strong in all the period now?

Carroll: It seemed from then on it's been very active.

Gower: And we got the impression from Reverend Snader that the church is doing quite well with the number of members and financially and so on.

Carroll: It is, I would say, you know. As good as I can remember.

Gower: Is the now, the people you know that are in the church are they pretty much from, ah, not so much an immigrant background then, presently even--

Carroll: No.

Gower: Is that right?

Carroll: That's right. There's more from English.

Gower: --or American background.

Carroll: That's right, we had one elderly number who probably was born in Germany and he passed away now. But ah, most of the people were Americans.

Gower: Very few of these Finns joined the church?

Carroll: Very few. They are like I say, predominant by Lutherans, they come to some of our special things and there is no--

Gower: Right, it's just that they have that background.

Carroll: They have that background.

Gower: Okay, sure.

LeDoux: I was wondering, I noticed a lot of homes look relatively brand new in talking to Reverend Snader, he said there are quite a number of people who live in Finlayson, but work in other towns and commute to other places. Now, do you have those type of people in the church too? Or do they more or less go to other churches?

Carroll: Well, our membership um, I would say it's about ½ of retired people.

Gower: Oh, half retired people?

Carroll: I would roughly say it's about ½ of retired people, and of the balance, well there's one man that works in the city, who lives up here, and myself and another man and wife work at Moose Lake.

Gower: Do you work at Moose Lake?

Carroll: Yes.

Gower: Oh, I see.

Carroll: There's two other, there's two other families beside myself that work up there. And um, my wife commutes to Sandstone.

Gower: She works there?

Carroll: She teaches.

Gower: Oh.

Carroll: As far as farming I don't really think there are there's one person that makes their living farming.

Gower: Oh, that's almost all faded away.

Carroll: In our membership.

Gower: Sure.

Carroll: We had a couple of people that you know were good farmers or big farmers that passed away or else retired.

Gower: Sure, moved away maybe or—

Carroll: Well—

Gower: Oh, they retired from farming.

Carroll: Ya.

Gower: Sure, sure.

Carroll: But now I can't recall anybody that makes their living farming. There are all neighbors or like I said at least half retired.

Gower: Sure.

LeDoux: I take it at one time though there was a real effort to try to farm this land around here.

Carroll: Ya, almost everybody was farming, I used to farm, try to farm myself.

Gower: But it's just not very good farming is that it?

Carroll: Well, it's too small, there's not enough open land, we didn't have enough open land and um--

Gower: What's the soil like?

Carroll: Well, it's not that good on the average, there are a few good places, spot by, but we couldn't make enough to live on farming. I had to start working and just went to working all the time.

Gower: Sure.

Carroll: Can't do both, and of course with modern inflation we both have to work.

Gower: Ya, right.

Carroll: And that's about the size and background of the people that are going to church.

Gower: Okay, now how is your church, has it felt quite comfortable with a minister who is not a Methodist minister, first say.

Carroll: I personally, it doesn't make any difference to me.

Gower: We were talking with him and that was quite unusual arrangement it sounded like to us, and it sounded very interesting, that he could do both those churches that were not really exactly the same.

Carroll: Well see, it depends on the person if he was to preach the United Church of Christ, you know may be we wouldn't go for that. He preaches Jesus, you know.

Gower: And the Methodist--

Carroll: And the Methodist, I mean there isn't a lot of emphasis on Methodism.

Gower: Oh, I see.

Carroll: As Methodist, or church of Christ to us.

Gower: Or, over there either, I suppose.

Carroll: Well, I don't know really, that's not my concern.

Gower: Sure, right.

Carroll: But we're interested in the message he brings to us and if you had just preached Methodism or something else to us I wouldn't like that.

Gower: I see.

Carroll: Fundamentals of the Bible is what he preaches.

Gower: You've had a number of times though where you had the minister who was there and over here both.

Carroll: Well this has been going on quite a while, the first man I think that served us we weren't that satisfied, wasn't a fundamentalist.

Gower: But was he both in the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church?

Carroll: Ya, this is the third minister.

Gower: Third minister. Oh, sometimes you had where the man was a Methodist until training in the Methodist Ministry but did both, oh, I see, and this man Reverend Snader had training at the, what was it Church of the Brethren?

Carroll: Right.

Gower: It was quite an interesting thing that it would work out for all parties here.

Carroll: His real basic thing was set up there, their messages.

Gower: It doesn't matter what the training of them was.

Carroll: Oh, sure okay.

LeDoux: Were there any misgivings among members initially, ah, remember back, do you remember any misgivings among members whether this would work out or not?

Carroll: Possibly mostly to see what that person's basic beliefs are. I can't speak for the rest of the people, maybe there was some apprehension or something, but we can't support a minister ourselves, and for many years we had a minister, who was a Methodist, who served Moose Lake, Barnum, Wyndemere, and I think one other church besides Finlayson.

Gower: Gosh.

Carroll: And he couldn't do that; he at first he did because he was younger and I think he came every other week.

Gower: Was he serving 5 churches?

Carroll: Ya, and so he finally had to drop us, that's when we went, well at that time we went to student pastors, or whoever we could get. At one time we had a person from, that was in the Air Force at Duluth, and he was a minister and I imagine he was a chaplain up there or something like that. He came down here for quite a while. Then we had students who were going, studying to be ministers going to the University of Duluth. We had about three of them. These were young fellows from four or five places. And see they weren't ordained ministers and they couldn't do all the things that a minister can.

Gower: Sure.

Carroll: And so when we had a chance to get an ordained minister even though it was in this other church. I for one thought that was very nice. Not that these young people weren't doing a good job, but it was availability of them too, because usually during the summer you couldn't get them, or it was too hard.

Gower: I would assume that during the week they wouldn't be too available either if they were up in Duluth.

Carroll: And they couldn't fill the needs either, they weren't qualified. So we had to depend on the pastor in Moose Lake, Reverend Reed. He's retired now but he still has a little church in Rutledge which he serves. He does visitation and he's an active retired person and but he can't commit himself to serving the pulpit. So that's the story until we got the Pastor in Sandstone United Church. And ah, as I say one minister didn't work out too good. For us as individuals, my wife and I. But the rest was very good. But they would struggle a while and move on you know, or one person would retire. Then Reverend Snader came and we've been very happy. I think our church as a whole, because the attendance and the interest seems to be up

Gower: Sure, okay. John do you have any other questions?

LeDoux: Ah, over all did your impression of the church change much since you were a boy, either in doctrine or membership or in any other way.

Carroll: I think the membership has increased and we've always been a church to welcome anybody in, more than any of the other denominations. We've, there's been no such thing that

you have to be a member of our church to be buried in the church or something like that. It's been that way all the since I can remember and it still is.

Gower: And you stress the fundamentals.

Carroll: That's right.

Gower: And that hasn't changed at all.

Carroll: That's hasn't changed though at least through most of the members anyhow, maybe some of the ministers weren't to our liking because of that.

Gower: Okay, John do you have any other questions there?

LeDoux: No.

Gower: Okay, is there anything else you want to add that you can think of? Okay, very good. I think that we got at what we wanted to hear. In addition to what Reverend Snader said. Okay, that concludes this interview.