

**Interview with Bertha M. Dzuik**

**May 12, 1978**

**Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection**

**St. Cloud State University Archives**

**Interviewed by John Simonett**

**Simonett:** The date is May 12, 1978. I'm John Simonett of the Benton County Historical Society Research staff. The interview is with Bertha M. Dzuik of Foley, Minnesota. Bertha is a registered pharmacist, and she served on the city council of Foley for 6 years in the 1950's. She is a former member of the Foley Library Board. The interview is in Bertha's home on Dewey Street in Foley, Minnesota. Now the interview.

**Simonett:** Where and when were you born?

**Dzuik:** I was born in Foley on June 22, 1905 in Benton County. In fact, my grandparents were living in this house at the time when my mother came home when I was born, and I was born in this house.

**Simonett:** What was the name of your mother, and where was she born?

**Dzuik:** She was born in Benton County in Gilmanton Township, and her father's name was Charles H. Latterell, and he owned a sawmill in Benton County. Mother grew up in the county, and she married her father, Frank Dzuik who was employed at my grandpa's sawmill. Isabelle was born in 1903. I think my parents were married in 1901 in Benton County.

**Simonett:** What was your father's name?

**Dzuik:** Frank Dzuik.

**Simonett:** And he was born in Benton County?

**Dzuik:** He was born, I think, in Benton County. His parents came from Poland – I don't know what year – but they settled around Duelm in St. George Township, and he worked at the mill for my grandfather.

**Simonett:** What nationality is Dzuik?

**Dzuik:** Polish.

**Simonett:** We might as well go into the first job you ever had, and what was it like.

**Dzuik:** I graduated from high school and I bought some pigs. I raised pigs, and earned enough money to go to Business College in St. Cloud. While I was going to high school, I worked at the telephone office. It was North-western Bell. Then I went to Business College for about nine months, and ran out of money. My first job was with Tressman & LaBlank who had a general store. They were going out of business, I don't remember how long I worked there, a couple years, when they went out of business, and then I went to work for the Foley Independent newspaper, and worked there for about two years. Then I worked at the Post Office, and I worked there for eleven years, I started to work at the drugstore in 1936. The man who owned the drugstore was Dan McNamara, and he wasn't a registered pharmacist. He had to depend in relief pharmacists to fill and work in the prescription department. So, I started at the University in 1938 to get my degree in pharmacy, and graduated in 1942. Then I went back to work at the store. Mr. McNamara died – well, I bought the store in 1946.

**Simonett:** What store was that?

**Dzuik:** The Foley Drug Company.

**Simonett:** And you bought it when?

**Dzuik:** 1946. I worked there until I retired in 1974. I had five brothers that served in the armed services during World War II, and Rodney was one of them. When he got out of the army, he went to the University and took up pharmacy. Rod graduated in 1952. Then he worked with me at the drugstore. When I retired, he bought the store.

**Simonett:** Did he get a degree in pharmacy, also?

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** And he served in World War II?

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** All five of your brothers did?

**Dzuik:** All five brothers, yes.

**Simonett:** Did they all come back?

**Dzuik:** Five of the eight brothers. I had eight brothers. They all came back.

**Simonett:** So there were nine kids in your family?

**Dzuik:** There were fourteen children in the family. I'm the second oldest, I had a sister older than I am. There are twelve of us still living. That's quite a tribe.

**Simonett:** It sure is. Well, now, this is something I have never experienced. I come from a family of six children. What was it like growing up with a family of fourteen?

**Dzuik:** Well, we lived across the tracks. There were four rooms downstairs and one big room upstairs. Then we moved up here. This is grandpa's house, and Mother got the house for her share of the inheritance. We moved up here while I was working for Tressman's. That was about – I started school in 1910, and I graduated in 1927 or '26. No, I didn't start school in 1910. I was born in 1905, so I started school about 1912.

**Simonett:** You're talking about grade school?

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** You started like about seven years old?

**Dzuik:** I graduated in 1927 from high school. We moved up here in this house about 1930.

**Simonett:** Just for the record, we'll get things a little straight. The high school was Foley High School.

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** In 1930, you moved off the farm into town?

**Dzuik:** Right. Into this house.

**Simonett:** Did you want to say more about the move?

**Dzuik:** No, except that my grandmother died with tuberculosis. I remember before we moved in, we cut all the trees from around the house to expose it to sunlight. We went over every room, scrubbed it with Lysol water. But anyway, we moved in then. There were fourteen of us living there. My oldest brother was gone most of the time by that time, so there were thirteen of us lived here.

**Simonett:** In this house?

**Dzuik:** In this house.

**Simonett:** Did that help when you cut the trees?

**Dzuik:** Yes. Dr. Holdridge, our family doctor, advised us to cut the trees and let in the sunlight, and go over the house with Lysol water to fumigate it. The Dr. and Mrs. Holdridge were married on the same day that my parents were married. He and his wife came from the east, and he practiced medicine here – he died while I was in college – but he practiced medicine here all that time. He was our family doctor. The park out by the swimming pool is named after Dr. Holdridge.

**Simonett:** Did you say he came from the east?

**Dzuik:** Yes, from New York.

**Simonett:** I suppose it was difficult to treat TB in those days.

**Dzuik:** Yes, it was. I remember in those days, Grandma didn't go to a sanitarium, but she had it. This open deck here was all a screened-in porch at that time. This room wasn't on, and I built that on, the front hall. This was all screened-in porch. The treatment then was rest and batten exposure to fresh air. Grandma slept out on that porch, and she coughed at night. She slept out there until late fall. It would get quite cold before she came in. That was the treatment at that time – rest in bed and fresh air.

**Simonett:** How old was she when she died?

**Dzuik:** I really don't remember. I can give you an idea. Grandma was born on December 21, 1865.

**Simonett:** Here in Foley?

**Dzuik:** In Hennepin County.

**Simonett:** Do you know what town?

**Dzuik:** No I don't. Let's see now, Grandpa was born in Keysville, New York. He came out to Minnesota at the age of four years, and settled on a homestead in Benton County. He married Lucinda B. Allen on July 4, 1882. She was born on December 21, 1865 in Hennepin County. I could call Aunt Bell and find out the year that she died, if you like. Grandpa died in 1925. My mother was the oldest child in the family. Would you like to have me call and find out when Grandma died?

**Simonett:** Yes. Can you remember how much Northwestern Bell was paying you?

**Dzuik:** Oh, I don't remember. I worked after school. I was going to high school at the time. I worked after school and weekends, but I don't remember how much they paid me.

**Simonett:** Then you mentioned that you worked for Tressman & LaBlanc?

**Dzuik:** Tressman & LaBlanc.

**Simonett:** What type of a business was that?

**Dzuik:** It was a general store.

**Simonett:** In--?

**Dzuik:** Foley.

**Simonett:** Why did they go out of business?

**Dzuik:** They were both getting a little old, I guess. I don't know. They dissolved partnership and went out of business.

**Simonett:** And then, it's interesting, you worked for the Foley Independent.

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** Were you a reporter?

**Dzuik:** Yes, I was a reporter. George Graham was the editor, and Emery Swenson, an attorney in town, was the owner.

**Simonett:** Emery, is that a man's name?

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** Do you remember any particularly interesting stories that you reported?

**Dzuik:** Now that I remember, a play. I think the American Legion put on, and I remember I wrote a story on the play – a front page story – and my boss was very pleased with it. I got local news, and the stock market reports, and lined up advertising, and helped around the press.

**Simonett:** Was this before you started pharmacy at the University of Minnesota?

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** So that would make it approximately--?

**Dzuik:** Well, I graduated in 127, around 1930.

**Simonett:** Okay. Then at the post office for eleven years. What did you do at the post office?

**Dzuik:** I was a postal clerk.

**Simonett:** Was that Civil Service?

**Dzuik:** Well, no. It was a third-class post office when I started to work, and then it became a second-class post office. If I had taken the Civil Service examination, I would have been under Civil Service. But on the postmaster's recommendation, I didn't have to take the examination. So, I wasn't under Civil Service, and consequently, when there was a change in administration, I lost my job because the Democrats came in and bounced me.

**Simonett:** Kind of just on technicality.

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** That must have been a little bit frustrating.

**Dzuik:** It was. I was quite disappointed at the time, but the way it worked out, I got a college education and had a career in pharmacy, so it wasn't altogether bad. It was probably a good thing.

**Simonett:** What's the difference between a second and third-class post office?

**Dzuik:** Strictly the receipts. The postal receipts. Stamps sold and the only thing other, was that it was based on the receipts taken in by the office.

**Simonett:** The volume of the receipts?



**Dzuik:** Yes. Right.

**Simonett:** Then you started work at the Foley drugstore in '36?

**Dzuik:** In '36, yes. And I just hated it. I didn't like clerking, I didn't like selling, and I just didn't like it. But after I'd been there a couple years, I adjusted to it.

**Simonett:** Did you ever really like it?

**Dzuik:** Not too much until I became the pharmacist. Then I was very enthusiastic about it.

**Simonett:** You were the head pharmacist?

**Dzuik:** Yes, I was the pharmacist and sole owner.

**Simonett:** That's right. You bought the store.

**Dzuik:** I bought the store in '46.

**Simonett:** So you'd worked there ten years before you purchased it?

**Dzuik:** Yes. That's right.

**Simonett:** How did you come about to purchase it?

**Dzuik:** Well, Mr. McNamara died in '46, and under state law, he couldn't sell to anybody, but a registered pharmacist. I was the only registered pharmacist, so I bought it. The building – he rented the building – belonged to my grandfather's estate, so I had an edge there. I bought the building from grandpa's estate from my aunts and uncles and owned the building. So then they sold the store.

**Simonett:** The name of your grandfather was what?

**Dzuik:** Charles H. Latterell.

**Simonett:** Right. You said that before. Any changes at all, ups or downs, of the business world?

**Dzuik:** Well, yes. Quite a few changes. I can't think of anything specific, except that, of course, we were under state law license under state law, and we had to comply with the rules and regulations. We had annual visits from the State Board of Pharmacy, and there were regulations that we had to comply with. I never had any problems. But there had to be a registered pharmacist on duty at all times, so I had to open the store in the morning, and we stayed open all evenings at that time, and I was working from nine in the morning until nine or ten o'clock at night, Saturdays and Sundays included. Although, we didn't stay open that late on Sundays. But it was seven days a week. There were two buses a day, running from St. Cloud to Hinckley. We sold bus tickets.

**Simonett:** How far is Hinckley?

**Dzuik:** Well, Mora is forty. I would say about sixty miles. The bus ran from Willmar to Hinckley.

**Simonett:** Was this a Greyhound bus or what bus line?

**Dzuik:** Clipper.

**Simonett:** I was wondering, what the course work was like up at the university.

**Dzuik:** Well, it was difficult. It was practically all chemistry. Inorganic quality analysis, quantity analysis and organic chemistry. It was hard getting adjusted after being out of school for about twelve years, but I hung on. I didn't go to school until January. It didn't start until January. I didn't start the fall quarter. When I started in January, I couldn't take the beginner's general

chemistry, I had to take an advanced course. It was almost fatal. I really had to work. I worked hard, but then I went to summer school and by the second year, I was up to the level of the other pharmacy students.

**Simonett:** Do you want to talk about, you mentioned an inheritance that your mother received?

**Dzuik:** Yes. Grandpa had quite a bit of property. He owned the drugstore and the home on the farm in St. George Township, and he built this house. This house was built in 1900 or 1901, but it was the beginning of the 1900's. For Mother's inheritance, she got this house. Then we lived here until she died in 1959, and when she died the house was deemed over to me because I lived here all those years and took care of my parents, and so everybody agreed that I earned the house.

**Simonett:** I was wondering. Your brother, Rod, now owns the drugstore, is it still called Foley Drugstore?

**Dzuik:** Foley Drugstore, yes.

**Simonett:** It's nice that you can keep that in the family.

**Dzuik:** Yes, it is. It's been a good store. We've done very well with it.

**Simonett:** Even when, I think you said a Mr. McNamara, was running the drugstore, was the actual building owned by your grandfather?

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** Do you want to say anything more about your career in pharmacy?

**Dzuik:** No, I think I've said all there is to say about it. I enjoyed it. I'm working out at the nursing home. I retired in 1974, January 1. Since then, I've been working at the nursing home two days a week. I make up the orders for medications that the residents will need to the next ten days on Tuesday, and then I deliver them to the store, and then on Wednesday, I take the medications out and check them in the boats of the residents.

**Simonett:** That's nice.

**Dzuik:** Yes. It keeps me in contact with people, and I enjoy it.

**Simonett:** I wonder if we could talk a little bit about your serving on the city council in the 1950s?

**Dzuik:** Yes. I can't remember the years, but I served for six years. You can get them from the city clerk who handles records. Dr. Joseph Parent, a veterinarian, was mayor when I was elected to the council.

**Simonett:** How do you spell the mayor's name?

**Dzuik:** Joseph X. Parent. He served for three years then. The next mayor was Bill Vaillancourt.

**Simonett:** Were there ever any hot issues the people got excited about?

**Dzuik:** Yes. There were lots of publications. We had a liquor store manager. Everybody that got elected to the council had the idea they were going to get rid of tis manager because they felt he wasn't honest. Well, nothing happened until I was in my second term. Our local policeman went past the liquor store one morning, and he noticed Vic pouring from a funnel from one bottle to another bottle, and we thought it was strange, so he wrote to the Liquor Control Commissioner, and they sent a man up, and they watched. They finally got Vic. He was watering down the

liquor. He would pour from one bottle to his stock bottle, and he used poor liquor or watered-down liquor that he would always serve. Anyway, he was prosecuted. He was supposed to come up for trial. The council just sat on their heels. They thought 'Well, he's kind of a likeable guy.' They weren't going to do anything about it. They said wait until the trial and we'll see how it comes out. Well, he pleaded guilty, so there wasn't going to be any trial. Apparently, no action from the city council, so I wrote to the Liquor Control Commissioner and told him that we had this problem. I said some of the council members were not willing to take any action, and I wondered just how much of a case they had against him. I got a hot letter back. It said he has been robbing your village for years, and so I asked the Mayor to call a special meeting of council, and I read the letter I had written to the Liquor Control Commissioner, and I read the letter I got back that he wrote. We took action that day, and Vic was fired. I was so tickled. For one thing, the American Legion was getting their liquor license from the council, and some of the council members were very bitter about it because they said that for weddings, for instance, people would go to the American Legion and get kegs of beer, and they had no license to sell off-sale. So, I did a little investigating on my own, and went to see one of the men that were married, the bridegroom, and asked him where he got the beer for his wedding. He says 'Well, Bertha, I don't want this made public, but I got it from Vic.' Here, he had been starting the story that the American Legion was selling liquor off-sale, so I had that evidence, too. It was an interesting scrap. We had a lot of fun. But other than that, there wasn't much that came up for the council to act on. You know all about Anna Michalski?

**Simonett:** No.

**Dzuik:** Oh, there's been a lot of pictures in the paper. The Minneapolis had a whole spread on Anna Michalski. She owns an old hotel building, it was an old hotel building when she first came

to town. She hasn't been operating the hotel for many years, but she's the town character. She has a lot in back, and she accumulated junk any time at night after midnight. You'd go downtown and here Anna would be going through all the allies and hauling cardboard boxes, and anything, store figures, anything that was thrown out. She put it in that little lot behind her building. It was getting to be quite a scandal, but I understand that the Northern States Power disconnected her power. I don't know how she was living, really. The supposition is that she was using all these boxes of stuff for fuel. But anyway, the fire marshal inspected the premises and closed her down at the hotel because it wasn't safe, it was fire trap. There was an old guy, Bill Hall that used to go there for beer a lot, and she came to a council meeting one time with this old Bill Hall, and said this is my attorney. Well, Bill is no attorney. She was going to sue the village because they had condemned her building and for a loss of business. She had quite a case. Everybody was uneasy about it, and somebody suggested that we give her free water and sewage over a period of time to compensate for the damages. Finally, I said, well look, I said we've been paying liability insurance for a good many years. Why don't we just turn this over to our insurance company to settle. So, they thought that was a good idea. Of course, she just didn't have a case. We turned it over to the insurance company, and Annie didn't get anything out of it, but had there were quite a few little incidents like that. But, she had a spread in the Minneapolis Tribune on pictures of Annie and her place and one thing or another. She's been the town character for many years.

**Simonett:** Is she still living?

**Dzuik:** She's still living there. During the winter, they hauled truckloads of stuff out. She said she was going to reopen her hotel, and they hauled truckloads of stuff out, but you go back there

now, and there isn't even a dent in the junk she's got piled back there. You should go and look at that place. It's really something.

**Simonett:** Whereabouts is that?

**Dzuik:** It's right across the alley from the Foley Drug, this side of the Foley Drug. She's our next-door neighbor, and we treat her very gingerly because she can be kind of mean. I heard that brought a gun from in St. Cloud. She went to the Foley Hardware and tried to buy one, but they wouldn't sell her one, so she brought one in St. Cloud. I don't know if it was a threat or not. Nothing ever happened. But you can't get into the place. She had a step ladder, and she would climb that ladder and go in the second story window, She's got two doors in front, but there nailed shut. Anyways, she never goes in that way, and nobody else does. The UPW had some parcels to deliver to her, and they asked me how to get in. The only way I know of was to climb the ladder and go in the second story window. And he said well, you're kidding. I said 'Well, you could get a helicopter and land, but there's just no other way.' And there wasn't. There's no way to get into that building except up the ladder and through the window.

**Simonett:** This isn't real important, but do you happen to remember any of the other people that served on the council?

**Dzuik:** Mark Zawacki, and L.A. Grinn was the city clerk at the time. And Walter Bahner served, and Henry Chmielewski was Mayor at the time we got rid of Vic Imburski at the liquor store. John Semrau served.

**Simonett:** Did Vic move out of town?

**Dzuik:** Yes. He went to California, and incidentally, his wife was a cousin of mine. Her brother, Margaret's brother, came to me afterwards, and he said, 'Bert, I want you to know that there's no hard feelings in the family. That asshole should have been hauled in a long time ago.' He moved to California, and he died in California.

**Simonett:** Sounds like he was a little bit disgraced in this town.

**Dzuik:** Yes.

**Simonett:** You served on the Library Board, and I was wondering if you could mention anything about that?

**Dzuik:** Well, there isn't much. When we started, I went onto the Library Board when I had graduated from college, and I served for probably twelve or fourteen years. Originally, we financed it ourselves. That is, we gave teas and food sales and one thing or another. Then, finally, we got an appropriation from the village council, and it was financed that way - through taxation. Now, the Library is a member of the 3 Rivers Library Association or something. It's a regional association.

**Simonett:** Is it a Carnegie library?

**Dzuik:** No.

**Simonett:** Is it a large library that you have?

**Dzuik:** Well, it isn't large, but it has been a good library. I don't know how many volumes they have, but for the size of the town, I think it's a good library. It's an attractive library. It's located in the complex with the City Clerk's office, and the Fire Department and Police Department, and



the Village Hall. Yes, I think the circulation is good and I wouldn't know any figures. They've served all throughout the county, and it's been a good facility.

**Simonett:** I was just curious, if you knew anything about the history of the funeral home?

**Dzuik:** Well, as early as I can remember, the Foley Hardware Company used to be the mortuary and it was situated uptown in the hardware building. Later, they moved to Dr. Donnelly's residence after they were gone. I think it was brought from the Foley Hardware by a man, Bock, and he ran it until his death. Now, Nicholas Wenner is the mortician.

**Simonett:** Then, you mentioned that your mother, Claudia wrote a book about, what did call it, The Plain Housewife?

**Dzuik:** Not a book. It was a weekly column in the St. Cloud Times. Also, in the Benton County News. She compiled the family genealogy from 1803 to 1933, and she also compiled a scrapbook history of Foley.

**Simonett:** How did she have time to do this writing with 14 children?

**Dzuik:** She just took time. She was a very remarkable person. She did a lot of reading, and she was self-educated. I think she attended grade school through the fifth or sixth grade. She did a tremendous amount of reading, and she was deaf. She had to wear a hearing aid.

**Simonett:** Was that a condition from birth?

**Dzuik:** No, not from birth. I remember she got it when we were still living down in that little house across the tracks. It was while I was still in grades school that she got her first hearing aid. It resulted from ear infection.

**Simonett:** What was your father's occupation?

**Dzuik:** When they were married, he was working for Grandpa in the lumber mill. Then he moved to Floodwin. They spent two or three years in Floodwin. He ran the lumber mill for Grandpa in Floodwin. Then we came back to Foley and he had the grain line here and then he went into the oil business. He worked for Pure Oil Company for a number of years. Then he got his own oil business until the times of the Depression. He lost it in the Depression.

**Simonett:** Did that really put a hole in the family finances?

**Dzuik:** Dad was on WPA for a few years doing work for the WPA. Then after that he went up to Alaska to work on the Alcan Highway. I don't remember who the contractor was, but he worked for two or three years in Alaska on the Alcan Highway. When he came back, he and Mother both went to Milwaukee and worked in a defense plant. When he came back from Milwaukee, he was hired as Street Commissioner in town here. He was practically the creator of Holdridge Park. He planted a lot of trees there and kept them looking neat, and took care of the streets.

**Simonett:** At the time, when your mother and father went to Milwaukee to work in the defense plant, how many kids did she have at the time?

**Dzuik:** Fourteen. We were all born before that time.

**Simonett:** So the whole tribe moved down to Milwaukee?

**Dzuik:** No, Mother and Dad went to Milwaukee. My older sister was teaching, I was working at the drugstore, five of the boys were in the service, one of younger boys, Jim, worked on the Benton County News. He is now working on the St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press. He has a real good job – slot man in the sports department. One of my sisters was working in the

telephone office. We were scattered all over by that time. But there was only four of us home when Dad and Mother were in Milwaukee. I was working at the drugstore, and my youngest brother was working for me. Two sisters lived here who were teaching school.

**Simonett:** I see. It sounds as if you may have been rather a close family.

**Dzuik:** Oh, yes. Very close.

**Simonett:** Two questions right now. One, I might have asked you this already, but what was your mother's name?

**Dzuik:** Claudia.

**Simonett:** Secondly, your father worked for WPA for a time. What was he doing?

**Dzuik:** Well, I don't know really. He worked in town for the WPA. I think they constructed the building over here where the Legion Club building is located now, and street improvements, stuff like that. That Legion Club Building was a WPA project and he worked on that.

**Simonett:** I think I've covered the things I have written down here. Did you want to add on anything?

**Dzuik:** Well, that's about it.

This concludes this interview.