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Interview with Gertrude Ankeny

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Transcript of interview with Gertrude Ankeny

War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends

November 16, 2017

Cherice Bock: The following recording is an interview of Gertrude Ankeny for the project War and Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940–1975. You will also hear the voice of Ralph Beebe, one of the researchers for this project, and I am Cherice Bock, the other researcher. The interview took place at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, OR on November 16, 2017.

Ralph Beebe: Well, Gertrude, thank you for coming and for sharing, and we're going to ask about you, and of course about Harlow. And our main subject happens to be the military and the relationships and conscientious objection. But even though women weren't drafted, it's important to know how you felt about it if you had been drafted, or about you, how you feel about the whole thing of conscientious objection or military service. What year were you born?

Gertrude Ankeny: I was born in 1928.

Ralph: And what year was Harlow born?

Gertrude: The same year.

Ralph: Okay, that, that would mean that you became of age, at 18, just at the time the war was over, and so you didn't—neither of you—faced any specific questions about shall you go into the military for the war, but the draft continued. Was, was Harlow ever drafted?

Gertrude: Well, I think he signed up, you know, when he was 18.

Ralph: Yeah.

Gertrude: He signed up, but he didn't ever have to serve.

Ralph: Okay.

Gertrude: But, one thing was that he didn't register as a, as a CO, but later on he, we, he went to—I can't remember where we had to go, but we went somewhere and he changed, to change his registration.

Ralph: Okay, so at the beginning, he wasn't a CO?

Gertrude: No, he didn't, not when he first, uh, because like I say, I think it was, he was, when he was at 18, and so...

Ralph: Yeah.

Gertrude: Well although, you know he had two brothers that were in the service, but he was the youngest of the family.

Ralph: Do you know what the influences were that caused him to decide he was a CO?

Gertrude: No, I think he just, maybe, I think then that they weren't telling young people as much about being a CO—make it a choice. And like I say, his, his two brothers—older than he was—were both in the army, in the service. Yeah. Both Morris and Harold.

Ralph: Yeah, okay. Did, did he, do you know whether he had to appear before the draft board and answer any questions?

Gertrude: Well, I think we must've. I don't know, I can't remember for sure, but I know we went to some place in Portland when he decided to re-register as CO. And, but then also, see, they weren't drafting any fathers then, so before anything much happened, I was pregnant with, with Kurt, and so I think that was registered, and so he, that just kind of, you know, answered the question generally.

Ralph: Yes.

Gertrude: Because as soon as he, his wife was pregnant, then they, they called, they—he was a father, even before the child was born.

Ralph: Okay. But so far as the military is concerned, that took care of it.

Gertrude: Yes.

Ralph: How do you feel—if, if the military had drafted him...?

Gertrude: Well, I don't know. Like I say, his brothers, Morris and Harold were drafted and, and so, I, he, I doubt that he—I don't know. It's hard to know. But like I say, his two brothers were in the service.

Ralph: Yeah.

Gertrude: So he might have gone in.

Cherice: Did you both grow up in a Friends church?

Gertrude: Yes.

Cherice: And so did his brothers?

Gertrude: Yeah, so see, I, I know that—yes. I mean, the family had—because they had started going to a Friends church, but they still lived in Nebraska.

Cherice: Okay.

Gertrude: And I'm not sure about Morris, but I know Harold, he, in fact, he was, he went into the service on his 19th birthday.

Cherice: And so then they moved out here?

Gertrude: Yeah, they moved from Nebraska to—well, Harlow went his freshman year of high school in Nebraska, and then his other years he was, they lived in Salem, and so—his other three years—and then he came to George Fox, where I met him.

Cherice: Yep. Did you have any influence on his change between being a—

Gertrude: I don't think so, if I did, but I'm not sure. It's hard to know, to remember. And especially my memory's kind of poor. I don't know that, I'm not sure why he... I think maybe there was, he did more reading or more talking to others about being a CO, because I don't think that, in those days, that would have been, that... I don't think there was much teaching on it in the, in the ch—in the Friends church.

Cherice: Was that your experience, too? What church did you go to when you were growing up?

Gertrude: Well, I grew up—I've been in the Friends church my whole life.

Cherice: Yeah. But I mean—

Gertrude: But I grew up, I grew up in Idaho.

Cherice: Okay.

Gertrude: But my parents, yeah, were—we attended the Friends church in Star, Idaho.

Cherice: Okay.

Ralph: And had you been a man. how would you have registered?

Gertrude: I don't know, that's hard to tell. But, but I had two older brother—or well, one younger and one older—but they weren't, didn't have to go, and they did go serve after the war was over, both of them.

Cherice: So they chose military service, or they served as not non-combatants?

Gertrude: No.

Cherice: Okay.

Gertrude: They were just, the war was over, and so I think they just, just served as...

Ralph: Regular army?

Gertrude: Yeah.

Cherice: So, based on that, maybe you would have made a similar choice, is what you're saying?

Gertrude: Well, I don't know.

Cherice: Yeah.

Gertrude: I, but I know that in the place of my younger brother, he, he went into the, I suppose you'd say it was in the service, but it was after the war was over. And my older brother, I know, was in the, served in Japan, and after the war was over. See, that was the other thing, was that we had, we lived on a farm, and I think they got...

Cherice: Farm deferral?

Gertrude: Yeah, for me.

Ralph: But it didn't have anything to do with conscience?

Gertrude: I don't think so that much, not with them.

Ralph: Yeah, okay.

Cherice: So you grew up at Star Friends, and was there very much knowledge about the Friends testimony of peace or any sort of thing like that?

Gertrude: Well, that's what I was saying. I don't think that, I think that later on, more, they talked to young people—young men more, maybe, about the CO, but as far as my—my brothers were concerned—and it probably was the same, maybe, with Morris and Harold—there wasn't that much teaching about being a CO.

Ralph: So in spite of the fact that you were a Quaker, it doesn't, wasn't a really powerful influence on you, so far as the war was concerned.

Gertrude: Well, I think that with Harlow, that he did, as I say, he—after he'd registered just a regular, like, what they, whatever the 18-year-olds have to do, that I think he did feel like he should change if he could. And, but then by that time, you

see, both, both his other brothers—the war was over, I mean, they were, they had served, and I think some, maybe and some in combat that, because I know Harlow thinks it shortened his mother's life because she was so concerned about her sons.

Cherice: And so, did you have conversations with him during that time, that you remember him thinking about making that choice, and what it was based on?

Gertrude: Yes, I'm sure that we, I'm sure that we did, I can't remember specifically, but, I think that we, because, I remember going in to, I don't remember what led up to it, but I know that we went in to Portland and were interviewed.

Cherice: Okay. And were you supportive of that decision, to change his status?

Gertrude: Yes, yes.

Cherice: Why?

Gertrude: I don't know why. Just because he was, that's what he thought he ought to do.

Ralph: Can you think, if you, if you had been a man, would you've made the same decision?

Gertrude: I don't know. It's hard.

Ralph: You didn't have to worry about it at the time.

Cherice: Yeah. But you were at least supportive of that decision. Did it have any connection for you with your faith, or did he have a connection with his faith in making that change?

Gertrude: Well, I think so, because they, because they had started going to a Friends church when they were lived [sic] in Nebraska, and so then after they came back, they were, they attended the Highland Avenue Friends in, in Salem.

Cherice: And do you think there was more of an emphasis on the peace testimony in his church in Nebraska, or Salem?

Gertrude: I, I don't know, I don't really know whether they—because, like I say, I think, of course Morris, his older, oldest brother, older brother, Morris, was already living in Idaho and was married, and then, but like I say, and then Harold went in. I guess what that would still be while he's living in Nebraska, because...but I don't really know whether they had any teaching in the ch—from the church, or whether his brother Harold did, but I just know that he always remarked that, that he was, he went into the service on his 19th birthday.

Ralph: Yeah.

Cherice: Was there teaching at George Fox—or Pacific College, at that time—that was about Quaker testimonies or that sort of thing, that might have influenced him?

Gertrude: I don't really know, and I don't really... I don't think there was that much teaching at George Fox about it. But of course, by that time the war was over, so nobody... And then, but, but Harold would have been drafted while they still lived in Nebraska. But they attended, they started attending a little Friends church in Nebraska because their background (both of Harlow's parents) was not in the Friends church.

Cherice: Okay.

Ralph: Do you know why they attended the Friends church?

Gertrude: Well, I think when they were still in Nebraska it was, it was, I think it was some teaching from the church, but they—it was probably a convenience to them, because they, they lived in a little town called Allen, Nebraska, and there was a church in the neighboring town—a Friends church, a little Friends church.

Cherice: And then when they moved out here they chose a Friends church again?

Gertrude: Yes.

Cherice: So it must have been and okay fit for them?

Gertrude: Yeah.

Cherice: What about your family? Why were they going to a Friends church in Star?

Gertrude: Yes, I mean I, we attended in Idaho. And I think they had been associated with the Friends church for probably, I don't know, several generations, maybe.

Cherice: Your parents, and their parents and everybody, is what you mean?

Gertrude: Yes, because they, my grandparents in Idaho that—they were, they attended the Friends church. And then one of my, one of my dad's brothers was a minister at the Friends church in North Carolina.

Cherice: Wow.

Gertrude: He was a pastor. So I think that, I don't know how far back that goes but—

Cherice: Yeah.

Gertrude: But anyway, at least they, there was the Friends church and there was a teaching that, there must have been some reason Uncle Cecil went into the ministry! [laughs] You know.

Cherice: Yeah.

Ralph: Cherice's great-grandfather was a pastor at Star.

Gertrude: Who was?

Cherice: My great-grandfather.

Ralph: Nathan, Nathan Pierson.

Gertrude: Oh yeah, he married us.

Cherice: Oh really? That's great!

Gertrude: And then, after he was, after he performed our ceremony, and then later on he was a pastor in—what's it called today—I don't think it's even in the Friends church anymore—Highland Avenue Friends Church. And so then, he had the, he had the service for... Well, I don't, I don't think he did for it for Harlow's mother, I know whenever, but he was a pastor there. Yeah.

Cherice: Great.

Ralph: So you were married in the Friends church in Star?

Gertrude: Yes. And Nathan was our one performing the ceremony.

Ralph: Yeah. And when was your wedding?

Gertrude: September, September 8, 1979.

Ralph: '79? Wanda's and mine was in the same church with the same pastor.
[laughter]

Gertrude: Oh, not '79. '49, I mean.

Ralph: Okay. And ours was June 8 of '53.

Gertrude: Were you married on that same day? The eighth of September?

Ralph: No, June.

Gertrude: Oh, June. This was September, 8th of September, 1949.

Cherice: Great.

Ralph: Nice.

Gertrude: Yeah.

Cherice: So, and, and so, you felt like you didn't have a lot of background in the peace understanding of Friends in Star, but then a few years later you encountered the idea somehow?

Gertrude: Well, I don't know. When there wasn't a war on or something, I don't think they did, they did much teaching about... It was when the Second World War started that they, I think became a bit more aware of it. The thing about it, I don't remember really having anything taught in Sunday school or anything about being a CO or anything.

Ralph: And then, when the war is on, it's, there's so much pressure to represent the "good guys" against the "bad guys" that it's kind of hard to be a CO if they never thought about it before.

Gertrude: Yeah.

Ralph: Well, thank you so much, Gertie.

Gertrude: I don't know that I've been helpful!

Cherice: Yeah, it's helpful to hear everybody's stories and think about the influences and why they made the choices they did.

Gertrude: You see, but, evidently there must not have been much teaching on it, because both of my brothers went into the service, but they, they were deferred for a while. At least, my older brother, Marvin, was. Because—for a farm, you know, because they were people that were farmers.

Cherice: Yeah.

Gertrude: And, and I, as far as at Star, I can't remember there ever being any teaching about it.

Ralph: And what was your maiden name?

Gertrude: Haworth.

Ralph: And your parents' name?

Gertrude: Raymond and Hilna Haworth.

Ralph: I, I knew the Haworth part, I couldn't remember the other part. But for our record, for our book.

Gertrude: Yes, Raymond was my father and he had a long, he had a history of being in the Friends church for maybe, maybe most of his life, I don't know. They lived in, he was born in Kansas, I think, and like I say, he had a brother and, one of his brothers was a minister in North Carolina.

Cherice: A Friends minister?

Gertrude: A Friends minister, yes.

Cherice: Great. So they are kind of in Quaker communities all across the country, it sounds like. North Carolina, Kansas, and then Idaho, so that's great.

Ralph: Yes, well thank you so much.

Cherice: Yeah, thanks for sharing.

Gertrude: Okay.

Cherice: We appreciate it.