

Oral History Interview with Ferne Adams Roberts
Morris Hill Neighborhood Association History Project

LMK: Today is the 7th of August 2013. This is Linda Morton-Keithley interviewing Ferne Roberts for the Morris Hill Neighborhood Association history project. So, when we talked yesterday, you know that the focus of this project is the Morris Hill neighborhood itself, but like I told you yesterday, we like to get a little bit of background that kind of puts it in context of who you are, who your family is and how you ended up in the Morris Hill neighborhood. You were telling me yesterday that you, yourself, are a native of Idaho and that you grew up in Meridian. Could you give me just a little bit of that family background?

FR: Well, my grandfather came out here in a covered wagon from Arkansas, and that's interesting. His name was Matlock, and he owned quite a bit of property in and around Meridian. And I think that was the beginning of the Ford garage there. I grew up on a farm northeast of Meridian, which is now McMillan Road, which used to be Route 1, which is now a great big, beautiful subdivision. I graduated from Meridian High School and worked in Boise. Met my husband at our church, Nazarene Church, in Meridian.

LMK: And, you had told me he was from South Dakota?

FR: Yes, he was from South Dakota.

LMK: And how did he end up in Idaho?

FR: His folks came out to work at Northwest Nazarene College [now Northwest Nazarene University (NNC), in Nampa]. Because of a change in presidencies, that didn't work out and they bought Stockman's Mill in Meridian, which is no longer functional, but it was [a thriving business at that time].

LMK: What kind of a business was that?

FR: It was a grain and feed business. So, we lived in Meridian...well, not at first, but we ended up in Meridian, before we came to Boise.

LMK: What year did you and your husband marry?

FR: 1940.

LMK: And, you had told me yesterday that he attended NNC and trained as a pastor.

FR: Yes, he did. Then we moved here; then in '46 he pastored a church here, the one I told you was on Emerald and Garden.

LMK: So, he pastored a Nazarene church there?

FR: Yes. Then he built across the street and down one block; we built a Nazarene Church. It was called Immanuel Nazarene Church [4508 Emerald St.], which is now kind of a bindery or something. I don't remember just what it is. Then in 1950 we went to Oklahoma for a few years. Before we went, we moved into a new parsonage right next to that church. We had that parsonage built.

LMK: That was the Immanuel Nazarene?

FR: Immanuel Nazarene. There was a little grocery store on the corner of Garden and Emerald – Averill's [802 N. Garden St.]. [The] Averills ran it; it was a nice little grocery and they were lovely people. They had a son about the same age as one of my children. When we came back, we didn't have a church. We came just back to start a church. We worshipped at Maple Grove

Grange [11692 W. President Dr.] for a while, then building started on the church there where it is now, Boise Bible Missionary Church [4203 W. Morris Hill Rd., originally Cedar St.], on Morris Hill.

LMK: Emerald and Morris Hill...no...Roosevelt.

FR: Yes, that lot we had bought before we moved; hoped that someday we would build there. But since we needed it for a church building, we gave it to them and that's where they built the church.

LMK: Can you tell me a little bit about building a church at that time? The process? Did you have to go to the city to get a building permit? Did you work with an architect?

FR: You kind of did your own thing, I think. [laughs] We had a lot of volunteer labor, and, of course, we knew people that were professionals in different things and they could help us. That was...I think we finished it about 1958 or '59. We did just a part at first and then a few years later, we built... Of course, it's been added to since then. Then, in 1963 was when we opened the Boise Christian School [210 N. Roosevelt St.].

LMK: Is that the building that sits to the north of the church that is a school now?

FR: Yes.

LMK: Would you tell me a little bit about that and its function – what your goal was with the school when you opened it?

FR: Schools were good then compared to what they are now, but we felt the need for a Christian school. And, it did really well for a while, but, you know, we had to close it. I think the last year we had it was 2010. The economy – people couldn't afford it and you can't run a school without money.

LMK: Tell me a little bit about the school. Was it the only Christian school in Boise at the time that you opened it?

FR: That I know about, but since schools just spring up around...The first graduating class was in '63, so we had it for quite a while.

LMK: What school grades were you offering the classes to?

FR: We had through high school to begin with. We had some excellent teachers and I think I mentioned my son to you – he was the principal. It was what you called an A Beka¹ school.

LMK: I'm sorry, what was that word?

FR: A Beka. It wasn't an ACE [Accelerated Christian Education] school; it was a traditional school. Anyway, that's kind of the way it went.

LMK: In constructing the school, was that also done with volunteer labor as the church was?

FR: Very much so.

LMK: Do you recall what some of the courses were that you were offering to the students – kind of what the school day was like?

FR: Well, there was just a regular... We had kindergarten; excellent kindergarten. A Beka is a really good program.

LMK: I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with it.

¹ A Beka (now called Abeka) is a curriculum used in many Christian schools and home school programs.

- FR: Well, because you're not in education. [laughs] It was a traditional school. The first several years we had typing and shorthand – things like that. I think, that probably went by the wayside. It was a very good program.
- LMK: Do you remember what the student body might have been in any given year? How many students you had attending it?
- FR: Well, I kind of wanted my son to come over because he could tell you all that.
- LMK: Yes. You said he was the principal; he would know that. That's fine. Were you and your husband actively involved with the school, or was your work more with the church itself?
- FR: It was more with the church; although, he had quite a bit to do with the school before Larry came. I taught high school typing and shorthand for a year, and I taught 5th grade for a while. I didn't like that; I'm not geared for kids but it was an experience. [laughs]
- LMK: You had said that prior to your marriage you had worked in Boise. What kind of work did you do?
- FR: I worked for the Idaho Power Company in their central billing office.
- LMK: Is that the building downtown?
- FR: Yes, the building at Idaho and 13th or something like that. [general offices, 1220 Idaho St.] I think it's still there.
- LMK: Something like that...
- FR: It's down there somewhere. I don't know much about downtown anymore. Yes, I worked there for several years. At that time, when you got married, they didn't employ you after you married. So different now; everything's so different, isn't it?
- LMK: Yes. So, the church – which is the First Boise Missionary Church now, I think?
- FR: It's called First Bible Missionary.
- LMK: Thank you. Is that what it was called when...
- FR: Yes.
- LMK: And, was it based on the Nazarene tradition?
- FR: Yes. Some people left there to start that. It's the same doctrine if that's what you mean.
- LMK: Yes. So if you could tell me a little about the church? You did say it was added on in later years. At the time that your husband and his congregation built it, could you, just, kind of describe it? What did it consist of?
- FR: I can show you some pictures.
- LMK: Okay, why don't we do those after I turn the recorder off?
- FR: To start with, we just had a straight, old building; just someplace to get in to worship. It was different if you've never been in a storefront church building; it's new to you. You've probably always gone where it's already established, which I had before, too. But, when you don't have, then you do the best you can. After a couple years, I think it was, that wasn't sufficient and we needed a better building. That building was like this [gestures] and we built out here.
- LMK: Out to the side?
- FR: Out to the side, and that faced Morris Hill, not Roosevelt. It faces Roosevelt now. We just had a lot of dedicated people that helped with building it. When you have a congregation, you generally have people that are able to help you.
- LMK: Yes, absolutely. Did you, yourself, have an active role working in the church?

- FR: Well, I always helped with the music, was my biggest deal, and missionary work, you know. And, I had four children, so I had a pretty busy schedule, but I enjoyed it very much – a lot of good memories.
- LMK: So, you and your husband, you were telling me yesterday, ultimately built a house on Bethel Street [4505 W. Bethel St.], not too far from the church. Would you tell me a bit about that?
- FR: We didn't have a house. We lived here and we lived there, two or three places. We had a very nice house. Friend rented us a house out on Franklin Road, but he needed it back – he sold it or something. So, then we were without a house. The church bought this lot, where the house is, on Bethel Street and gave it to us. In the beginning, see, we had given our lot to the church to build on. We had a friend who was a builder, had built a lot of subdivisions, so he helped my husband build the house.
- LMK: Do you happen to recall his name?
- FR: Yes, it was Van Hess.
- LMK: Van Hess?
- FR: Yes. He's deceased now. With all that was going on, it was a wonder we ever got everything done – pastor a church, work at the school, build a house – but we did.
- LMK: Could you describe that house to me? If we were standing in the front yard and walking in the front door, could you kind of describe how the house was laid out?
- FR: Oh, yes. You go into the living room, then there was kind of an archway, and you went into the dining area and the kitchen. Then, it had two bedrooms downstairs and a bath, and it had three bedrooms and a bath upstairs.
- LMK: Okay...And, did you tell me yesterday that it was a split-level?
- FR: It was split-level, what we called split-level. Wasn't a two story, per se.
- LMK: I noticed...I had driven by it yesterday on my way here, and was it a one-car garage? And then there was living space above the garage?
- FR: Yes, the bedrooms were up there. There were three rooms upstairs but I think they've made it into two. It looks quite a bit different; of course, my age and their age makes a difference. But what they've done to it looks nice. I think they're happy there.
- LMK: Had you made any modifications to it in the 46 years you lived there? Any renovation projects or anything like that?
- FR: Well, we built a patio in back and built on a carport on the side. Yes, we did a complete kitchen. I took a vacation – while my son was still principal at the school, they did a U.S. tour. He bought a RV and they took all the kids that were, I think, in the high school (weren't too many that year). Anyway, we took a U.S. tour, and I went with them as a chaperone. While we were gone -- this is what I was going to tell you -- my family completely gutted the kitchen, put in new cabinets and everything. So, that made it available, when I got ready to sell it; it helped a lot. And, I did a remodel in the bathrooms, too. And, of course, I had carpeting but the place had... I don't know what they've done. I stopped one day, I guess it was last summer, thought I'd visit with Amanda a little bit. They weren't home or something. You know, she has twins so I guess they were busy. Anyway, we had hardwood floors, but I didn't like hardwood floors. Of course, you know how it is now, everyone likes hardwood or some kind of Pergo or something. But anyway, I had carpet; I preferred carpet.

LMK: How about the yard? What was it like? Were you a gardener?

FR: I was just looking at some of my pictures and I have a picture of my garden, yes. In the back, it had a big area for a garden.

LMK: Vegetable garden or flowers?

FR: Vegetable. But, I had lots of flowers too – had some really pretty roses and different things – but I don't know if they are still there or not.

LMK: When you moved there—I think when we talked yesterday we decided it was about 1960?

FR: Yes, it was 1960.

LMK: So this time, instead of walking into the house and describing it, in 1960 if we were standing out in your front yard, what would have been around you? Other houses? Open space?

FR: The Leichners lived next door [4503 Bethel St.] and there was where the Schnells lived. And next, right across, [Rosemary Godfrey lived there, I remember] but from then on [it] was a big open space. [Rosemary's house] was just, kind of, a little, tumbledown house. And at least one other house, maybe two, [or three], have been built there. It's so different; it was just wide open spaces. The only thing that hasn't changed much is the cemetery [Morris Hill Cemetery, 317 N. Latah St.]; can't change that.

LMK: No, it's not going anywhere.

FR: But, it's nice they have that extra space and the park [Morris Hill Park]; it's really nice since they put that in.

LMK: When you were living in that neighborhood, what schools did your kids go to?

FR: Well, they went to the Christian school but before that, they went to—the older ones—of course, we lived here before we moved away. They went to Franklin School [Franklin and Orchard] and they went to Jefferson School [200 S. Latah St.]; and they went to Borah [High School, W. 6001 Cassia St.]; [and] went to West Junior High [711 N. Curtis Rd.], too. They went to all those.

LMK: And, at the time that your children were going to those schools, how did they get there?

FR: I think they walked. [laughs] Can't remember of any other [way]. Most of the time they walked; there was no bus service. I'm sure if it was bad, we took them. From where we lived on Roosevelt to Jefferson, it wasn't too bad.

LMK: Do you happen to remember what kind of city services were available when you moved into the house on Bethel? Water? Sewer? Did you have all those basic services available at that time?

FR: Not the sewer; we had to put that in later.

LMK: Was Bethel paved at the time you built your house?

FR: I think so, I think so.

LMK: And for your shopping, what were some of the businesses that were around? You did mention there was a little grocery store run by the Averills at Garden and Emerald – I think you said.

FR: Yes.

LMK: What other stores would you go to for your groceries, clothing, whatever you used for shopping?

FR: Well, we had Montgomery Ward downtown [710 W. Idaho St.]. And, we had C.C. Anderson's [918 W. Idaho St.], which later became Bon Marche. We had Kress [Kress Department Store, 906 W. Idaho St.]. There was Newberry [902 W. Main St.]. And then you remember King's? My youngest daughter worked at King's. That was later, but I still miss King's; that was a nice little variety store.

LMK: Yes, they haven't been gone for very long.

- FR: And, for groceries, I can't exactly remember. Where did we buy our groceries? Funny how many things you forget.
- LMK: Of course. When we talked yesterday, you were telling me that in the earlier years, you recalled that Orchard Street was primarily residences.
- FR: Yes, it was very nice. It and Vista were the two prestigious roads or avenues.
- LMK: When did that start to change – because today Orchard is such a commercial corridor? What do you remember of businesses coming in?
- FR: Potters [Drug, 610 N. Orchard St.] was there and Pay & Pack [708-710 N. Orchard St.] came in. Those two were, I think, the main businesses. Of course they [Pay & Pack] moved over to where they are now [5730 W. Franklin St.].
- LMK: Pay & Pack moved into the store on Orchard in 1961.
- FR: Really! That was right soon after we moved there, then.
- LMK: Potter Drug, I don't know when they started.
- FR: They've been there a long while before that, I think. I was trying to think...there was – I was going to ask one of the kids but I forgot – on one corner, there was a little ice cream, kind of like a little root beer stand, on Bethel...I think it was on Bethel and Orchard. Do you remember hearing about that?
- LMK: No, I'll look into that; I'll check the city directories. [possibly Orchard Drive-In, 303 N. Orchard St.]
- FR: It seems like I remember. I know Vicky took piano lessons from a lady – Mrs. Hill – that lived right close to there. And, I was thinking about that.
- LMK: When your kids were growing up in the different neighborhoods that you lived in, were there ever any organized activities for children during the summertime?
- FR: Not that I remember. We were busy enough. During the summer we used to go for three weeks to McCall camp. We had a boys' camp and a girls' camp and a youth camp, that took three weeks. That was a big memory-making experience for all of us.
- LMK: Was that the camp that's right up on the lake?
- FR: Yes, the Nazarene camp was on the lake. It's not there anymore.
- LMK: I think I know the site, though, and it's quite a lovely spot.
- FR: Yes, it's across the lake, The Adventist camp, you may know where that is. It's around the lake but we were around across the lake this way [gestures].
- LMK: Okay...One thing that we found doing the research that was in that in Morris Hill neighborhood boundaries as we have defined now by the City was the State fairgrounds. Did your family go to the state fair, or was that not an activity that you partook of?
- FR: Yes, I know where the state fair was. Did the neighborhood go that far?
- LMK: That was the farthest corner of the way the neighborhood is defined today; that was the farthest corner.
- FR: I was just noticing in my things that we had a citywide revival there. My husband was involved in that somewhat. Bob Wells was the evangelist. But the fair – I used to go with my family when I was a kid – it was there. So, it's been there a long time until they moved.
- LMK: It actually started in that location in 1902.
- FR: Well, I can believe it, yes

LMK: So, it definitely was there when you were a youngster. So, there was an evangelical activity there, so they did make it available for other activities.

FR: They sure did for that, anyway. I don't remember just what year it was.

LMK: Do you have a sense of – from those early years when you moved to your home there – what the neighborhood was like? Was there a sense of neighborhood among the people?

FR: Yes, I had some good neighbors there on Bethel Street; they were very nice neighbors. And, at that time, I think, people weren't in and out all the time; most people owned their own homes, I think. It's not quite that same way anymore, I don't think. Some of them still are. It was a very nice neighborhood, but I think people just aren't quite as neighborly as they used to be, maybe... for the most part. And, that's nice to get together like they are doing.

LMK: I think that's what's behind this concept of the neighborhood associations – is to try to bring back some of that neighborly feeling.

FR: I didn't go too much, but the last few years I lived there, I tried to go a little bit more.

LMK: To some of the activities that they were doing?

FR: Yes.

LMK: I wanted to ask one more thing. You mentioned the contractor Mr. Van Hess. Do you happen to know, did he work with an architect? Was he just an experienced builder who kind of knew how to build a house? Did you, yourself, have some input as to what the house was going to look like and be laid out?

FR: Not too much; I just let them do it. I was just happy to have a house. [laughs] I suppose he did a lot of building, and I suppose he had to work with architects. I would think so! In his later years he lived up in Washington and built several homes himself. If you were going to stick your neck out, it wasn't the best for the builders, you know. So he kind of lost everything he had but he was a good builder.

LMK: Can you think of anything you'd like to add?

FR: I don't guess so. I've tried to think what I should talk to you about – didn't come up with anything too much.

LMK: Okay...I'm going to put this on pause for a minute. [recorder turned off, then on]

LMK: The question is—what were some of the other churches that were in the neighborhood other than the one you were involved with?

FR: There was a Wright Community [Wright Community Congregational United Church of Christ, 4821 W. Franklin Rd.] that's over on Franklin. And there was the Glad Tidings [now River Valley Community Church, 1121 N. Garden St.] – used to be called Glad Tidings – I think it's called River something or other now [River Valley Community Church]. [phone rings, recorder turned off, then on]

FR: That was called Glad Tidings Church, but I noticed that they've changed it. I don't remember but seems like it's River something.

LMK: It's on Garden?

FR: It's on Garden before you get to Irving?

LMK: That sounds about right. I drove past it yesterday...That sounds about right.

FR: I think it's still functional. That's the only two I think of right there.

LMK: Okay...Let me turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW

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