

This is Rev. R. J. Love interviewing Rev. Lydia E. Cruchy, D. D., (no time or place indicated, presumably at White Rock, B. C.)

*Now Lydia will you tell us first of all where you were born and something about your family?*

I was born at a suburb of Paris called Anaif, France. My father was a Jerseyman from the Island of Jersey. My mother was an English woman. Because my father was bilingual and was sent to Paris to represent a British firm, so we were all born in France. I was one of ten children.

*Now we'll begin with your education, tell us about that?*

I had my primary education in the public schools in France and while still quite a young child, (I was 8 years old), my mother died, so when we came to be of teen age we were all sent to boarding school and I had all my High School education in boarding school in the south of England, and by that time, soon after I finished my High School, father retired from business. My brothers had already emigrated to Canada, and taken homesteads and father came out and brought the four youngest girls of the family; the two eldest were married in England by that time, and we moved out to Canada and joined our brothers in Strasbourg, in Saskatchewan. Then you finished your High School in Saskatchewan? Yes, I took six months and finished Grade 12 so as to be able to go to Normal School.

*And that was in Saskatchewan?*

Yes.

*O. K. Now what year was that that you went to Normal, do you remember?*

1918.

*Then you went teaching?*

Before that I did take a brief course for Third Class Normal and taught on a permit in the summertime, but I did go on teaching in rural Saskatchewan every summer until I finished all my University and College work.

*I see. Your teaching then was in the summer and your University was in the winter?*

That was how I put myself through.

*And you went to the University of Saskatchewan?*

Yes.

*And you graduated there in...*

In 1920.

*Then what did you do after that?*

Dr. Oliver was commissioned to find workers to train for church work among the New Canadians. He knew our family because my brother had been in theology and had been drowned during the First World War, and he also knew that my school work was all among the New Canadians, so he offered me the scholarship to take the training. It was for two years. After that was finished I took the third year of theology because I had become interested in it by that time, and I graduated from the Presbyterian College, which later became St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon in 1923.

*But you were not ordained then?*

No, the ordination of women was not feasible at that time.

*This was in the Presbyterian Church too*

Yes. It was close to the time of Union and Dr. Oliver, while he looked forward to my ordination, felt it would not be a good time to press for the matter, there were enough difficulties leading to Union without bringing in one more matter that might bring in complications.

*So the Union came about two years after you had finished your theological work?*

That's right.

*So what did you do after you finished your theology?*

The Home Mission Board of the United Church appointed me to church work at Veregin. I had been teaching near Veregin, and the people they knew me as a teacher, and my work was to go on Religious Education mainly, and I had access to the schools because that was my approach, and while I was there I had a small congregation of a few non-Anglo Saxons and gradually a few others. I preached in the schoolhouse, but all through the week I went to various schools and took half an hour after school in Christian Education, teaching the Bible. The children could have been withdrawn at that time, but none of them ever were and the parents Ukrainians, Hungarians largely, and Doukhobors were quite eager for the children to have instruction in the Bible, so that worked out alright.

*That was after school hours?*

Yes.

*But in the schools?*

Yes, sometimes the last half hour of school, the last half hour was allowed. So I had a horse and went on horseback and made the rounds and then gradually some of the school districts asked me to take a service in the school on Sundays, so that I was

having three services on Sundays and teenage work in Veregin and school work in the district, so I was fairly busy.

*Yes, you would be.*

That was in Kamsack Presbytery. Kamsack began asking for my ordination.

*Now before we come to that, you were in Veregin and then later Walco.*

In the same Presbytery?

Walco was in the Prince Albert Presbytery; but that was also largely among New Canadians but with quite considerable AngloSaxon congregation and two outside points as well.

*And were you still teaching in the schools?*

No. When I was in Walco I was in full-time church work, also under the Home Mission Board. Dr. Scott was the medical missionary at Walco, and he was able to do the work that I couldn't carry on. We worked very closely together at that time.

*Now where did you go from Walco?*

From Walco I went to Kelvington in the Saskatoon Presbytery, and I was there until 1936.

*Now this was the year that you were ordained, in 1936?*

Yes, in July of 1936 I was asked to be the Assistant to the minister in Moose Jaw, in St. Andrew's church, Moose Jaw, and it was while I was there the same fall, that the General Council agreed to the ordination of women and on November 4, 1936, I was ordained in St. Andrew's Church, Moose Jaw.

*Now this was 13 years after you were finished with your theological course?*

That's right.

*Now tell us a little bit about what happened in those 13 years. How did the idea of the ordination of women begin?*

Kamsack Presbytery applied for my ordination. It went before General Council and it was not passed. It was sent down to the Presbyteries through the Barrier Act, and the Presbyteries had to vote on the general question of the ordination of women, not special ordination, but the general question, then it went back to General Council, and although there was considerable majority in favour, the General Council decided it was not the opportune time and deferred it, but eventually it went forward and back each General Council until 1936. Dr. Oliver was Moderator for part of that time, and the fact that he sponsored ordination, I think he was very much in favour of the movement, and eventually in 1936 it was passed.

As I remember it, there were about 80 Presbyteries in favour of the remit for the order of women, there were about 26 against and there were 9 abstained and didn't make any recommendation. I think that was it.

*So it wasn't a unanimous vote by any means?*

No, oh no.

*But you were the first woman to be ordained in the United Church of Canada?*

Yes, that's right.

*Well now, where did you go after you were ordained then?*

Well. I was at St. Andrew's United Church in Moose Jaw and I stayed there until 1938 when I was asked to become the Executive Secretary of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers of the Church with Headquarters at Wesley Buildings in Toronto. I was there for five years, although one year during that time I was also acting Principal at the United Church Training School while the Principal was taking Post Graduate work. So that was a time of really good experience. I travelled all through the church speaking to women's groups about the need for deaconesses and workers. There was a great need at that time, and it was a valuable experience.

*Were there many women recruited for church work during your period there?*

Oh yes. I don't know the figures, but it was quite an active time.

*And you must have been one of the first United Church Women Secretaries?*

I don't know whether there were any others in full Secretary work.

*Well now, after your period in the Secretaryship in Toronto, where did you go then?*

I accepted a call to Naicam, Saskatchewan. It was in October 1943. From there I went to Simpson, also in Saskatchewan (all my pastorates were in Saskatchewan), in 1948 and Kewpar in 1952, Neville-Vanguard from 1957 to 1962 when I retired.

*Now tell me, in your pastoral work in Saskatchewan, did you find it an advantage or a disadvantage to be a woman as a minister?*

Both. Some things were in my favour and some were not. In a lot of visiting the homes I am sure you have found that quite often the visiting is among the women. The men were out working. So in Saskatchewan the men were out in the field, and I was able to be quite close to the family, and usually often stayed and the men would come in at supper time and we'd get to know them too; but a lot of the afternoon work was among the women and children and I was able to make a contribution.

*Oh sure. How did you find any reaction among the men at all?*

No. When the call was issued there were a few that didn't want to have their names on the call, and usually after I had been there a little while they would say. "You won't see my name on that, but I am glad the call went through". I didn't find any difficulty that way, but I did feel that it was a good idea not to stay more than four years at anyone place because there are different emphasis that a man and woman can offer.

*Most of the places I suppose you had were multiple preaching places.*

Oh yes, all of them.

*And you had to drive a car? Did you ever ride horseback?*

Oh yes, I rode horseback at first, then I got a car while I was at Walco. Part of the time I was there I rode horseback, then a car from then on.

*The roads were not paved then?*

No, they weren't good at all. I got fairly handy about doing little jobs on the car because I didn't have a first class car either.

*Well, that's typical. Now during that period, you were honoured by the College at St. Andrew's?*

Yes.

*Well, what year was that?*

That was in 1953, I was given the Doctor of Divinity, honorary degree.

*And was that for any particular work or was it because you were the first woman minister, or just what was the reason?*

Well, I think it was probably largely because I was the first, but it was in recognition of my work in Saskatchewan.

*Because you had served there for many years. It looks from the figures here that you had served about 35 years on the prairie and in Toronto, of course that is from the time of your Theological course?*

Yes.

*Well now, you came to White Rick to retire in 1962. Had you had any contact with White Rock prior to your retirement?*

My sister, Mrs. Strudwick and her family were all in B. C. They were at Langley and I used to come up every summer and visit with them, and intended retiring eventually in White Rock, so I found a home. By that time my sister Florence had retired from missionary work in India, and was living with me, and we obtained this little house together and lived here until she died a few years later.

*You retired at the same time then, did you?*

She retired two years before and was with me in Saskatchewan my last two years there.

*Well now, maybe you'd like to say something of your general impression of the work of the Church in Saskatchewan during the years that you were there? You were there during the depression were you not?*

Yes, the Church was very vital in the communities, in the small towns. I was in the fairly far north. It wasn't the worst drought area, but people had moved up from that dustbowl, and we had a lot of people that came up from around the areas of Kelvington especially, with very little to go on for the first year or two, and we received bales from the east, and I was able to get in touch with the families and give them a good deal of help with the essentials through the bales and through the help of people.

*Tell me now. What about the Young People's work in those areas during that time?*

I had Explorers, Trail Rangers and CGIT, and it was quite active.

*Were there many who went into the work of the Church from the areas where you served or do you remember?*

No, I couldn't say that there were because my work was very largely among the New Canadians. Their parents were straight out from -the Old Country.

*Was there a language problem?*

They couldn't speak when they came to this country. One of my interesting experiences was among the Doukhobors. They had been accustomed to only sending the boys to school and when the time came I had to send in the reports at that time monthly, of children in the School District who were not attending school, I found out about the girls and the Community Centre had sent in their names and the head man of the centre came to me one day and said, "I got' this form from Regina". So I looked at it innocently enough, and he said, "Does that mean girls have to go to school", and I said, "That's what it says". Well, he made all kinds of excuses that I tried to meet, and he said, "Do they have to come?" and I said, "Yes" and he said, "Okay, I'll bring them Monday" and he brought a whole wagon load of girls from 7-16 who didn't know a word of English. And they had never been to school before? No, they had been taught to read and write in Russian by their parents. Some of them were lovely girls and they were quite pleased to come to school instead of working in the field all day. They wanted to learn Canadian ways and I had taught them how to cook certain things and do a bit of sewing and helped them make various things. We had a good time but it was quite an experience to teach these girls to speak English.

*It would be. That is very interesting. Now coming back to your retirement, what have you done in church work since you retired?*

I've been an elder in First United Church here and taken my part in the women's groups and things of that kind.

*And you've done some supply work?*

Well, I did over the first few years, but I've stopped doing that now. My voice doesn't hold out too long.

*And what about Presbytery, have you been active in Presbytery?*

No, no. I felt all along that those who are in the active pastorate have to carry out any propositions made at Presbytery, and it's up to them to have the say. I have had as a hobby, the teaching of French. Florence and I, and now Hilda Strudwick and I are doing quite a bit of the French.

*And do you have just individual pupils or do you have classes?*

Both. At first we had classes and then gradually it became more individual. At the present time I have two retired people coming individually for French conversation, and then Hilda and I recently have accepted rather an ambitious job teaching four and five year olds in the Community School. We have from 12 to 15 little things. Some of them are not even 4 years old and that is keeping us very busy, twice a week.

*It would. Now thinking back over your years in the Church and looking ahead, what do you see for the Church in the future?*

Oh, I don't know whether there'll be any changes. I think the future would be active, as it always has been. I'm afraid I cannot make any very wise pronouncements on that.

*No. We have a very unique congregation here of course.*

Yes, we have.

*It is one of the largest that I know of in the Conference, but it is composed of about 75% of retired people.*

Yes. The thing that I am a little concerned about is the fact that there isn't very active Young People's work in the congregation, but it is because of the composition partly, but there is room for work among Young People. We have to have it.

*Well, thank you very much, and we'll have this material all put in the archives and it will be down for all posterity to read and to listen to.*