

MARTHA TAPY

Tape 1

April 10, 1981

At Mrs. Tapy's residence--314 N. 21st St., Terre Haute, IN

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JW: This is April 10, 1981. We are with Martha Tapy talking about the history of some of the churches here in Terre Haute.

Martha, what's your first memory of being in church here in the city? Can you describe that for us?

TAPY: I can't remember when I didn't go to church, really. I was taken there when I /was a baby/. I have a little Bible that I was given when I belonged to the cradle roll department when I was 2½ years old. And (laughs) I don't remember that, of course, but it just gradually went on and I've always gone there. I remember when I joined the church. I was only /5 years old then, but I remember that well/. I just can't remember any time that I didn't /go to church. I am still a member of the First United Methodist Church, and I am now 74 years old/.

JW: And that church was /formerly the/ First United Brethren church?

TAPY: That's right. And it was the second building /erected on that corner/. The first building was an old /wooden/ frame building /and was/ right in the middle of a cornfield. /It was built in 1866./

JW: At 14th and Chestnut.

TAPY: /Yes, / at 14th and Chestnut, /southeast corner/ right where the building /stands/ now. /When/ that /building/ became too small, they built this /second/ brick building. They had to buy an extra lot there /to have enough room for it/.

JW: Do you know when the brick building was built at 14th and Chestnut?

TAPY: I can tell you, I think, if you give me just a minute here.

JW: I'll give you all the time you need.

TAPY: O.K. I can tell you that. /It was built in 1892 under the pastorate of Rev. J. O. Connet./  
Reverend Nugent was the first pastor.

JW: How do you spell his name?

TAPY: N-u-g-e-n-t. Now, he wasn't a full time pastor.

The first church was organized with just a little group of people who met part time in a schoolhouse; part time in a machine shop. And the man who really organized that class (it was not really a church) was Reverend Nugent. He was put in charge of the work there, and he held preaching services at the home of a man called Captain Anderson, who lived on South 3rd Street. And then at the next session of the conference six months later Terre Haute was made a mission station, and Reverend Moore was appointed pastor. Now, he /too/ didn't really have any /church organization/ but he did carry on /with/ this /group/ for a while.

Then in 1865, Reverend Givens of Centerpoint was appointed to the charge, and he organized the first real church of /16/ members, /and they continued to meet in the schoolhouse/.

JW: This was /the/ United Brethren church.

TAPY: /Yes,/ the United Brethren church. And he held his preaching services in a little schoolhouse, which my grandfather tells me is still there. /It is/ that little white building between 14th and 15th /Streets/. It looks like a schoolhouse, but that was the first /church according to the records that I have read/.

JW: On what street?

TAPY: On Chestnut /1469 Chestnut Street/ between 14th and 15th. And if you notice, there is a little white house there that looks like a schoolhouse.

JW: Sure.

TAPY: And he has told me that is the /very place/

TAPY: where the church was started, the first church. However, the lady who owns the house says there is nothing in the abstract about that, but maybe they didn't have abstracts at that time for schools. But he's told me that was definitely /the place/ -- just a half a block from where the church is now. And in the spring of 1866 where the first church is now, there at 14th and Chestnut, the lot was purchased for \$500; and it was lying in a cornfield. And in less than two years there was a little frame church built there. And it faced 14th Street on the west, and the cost of the lot and the building altogether was \$1700.

And this continued to be the church home until it was replaced by the /larger/ brick building in 1892 /under pastorate of Rev. J. B. Connett/.

JW: So, that building there is 1892?

TAPY: No, not this one. This is the third one.

JW: O.K.

TAPY: The one that's there now.

JW: So, a brick building in 1892?

TAPY: A brick building, yes. And the first church /building/ that was there was sold, and it was moved about a block away north and west. Now, this is according to the autobiography my grandfather's written and also /according to/ the church history of the United Brethren Church. /Exactly/ where that /building/ is I can't tell you, but it is still there and it was converted into a dwelling house /and is still being used/.

Then, for quite a while the growth of the church was very slow. And it was out there in the cornfield, and it was 'way out in the suburbs, really. And the kids /big boys/ liked to come, go 'round the church, yell in the windows, and cause a lot of distraction /during the services/. And, of course, it was not very substantial /strong/ at the time. But anyhow, in 1885 they decided that they needed a /full time/ pastor who would live there /on the charge/. Up until this time it had been made just a missionary station hooked onto another church. And maybe the preacher would /only get to preach once or twice a month/.

JW:               What do you mean by "missionary station"?

TAPY:             Well, the church was paying most of the . . .  
I mean the denomination was paying most of the ex-  
penses for the church.

JW:               It wasn't self-sustaining?

TAPY:             That's correct. And it was not able to be on  
its own, so they just hooked it on to a circuit that  
was already established. Well, of course, that didn't  
work too well, and so in 1885 they decided that they  
needed a full time pastor to live right there. And  
that's when my grandfather came. He was the first  
resident pastor.

JW:               And his name?

TAPY:             Reverend W. R. Muncie, m-u-n-c-i-e.

Now, he was a schoolteacher before he began to  
preach and the pay preacher's was so small . . . .  
In fact, the first year he was there his salary . . .  
the board voted to give him \$150 a year. So, of  
course, he had to do some other things, too to make  
some money. But he was a schoolteacher; and there  
were some complications getting out of the school  
system, and so on, that he didn't start until . . .  
in January that year 1884. But then he was assigned  
there for another year after that.

JW:               In what year?

TAPY:             Eighteen hundred eighty-four.

JW:               O.K.

TAPY:             And then he did stay another year after that  
1884 and 1885. And then his health . . . or his  
wife's health broke. That's quite an ordeal to live  
right on the charge, you know; and they moved back  
to their home in Middlebury, Indiana.

JW:               A little later I want to talk about your grand-  
father and some of the other things he did in the  
city, but I want right now to ask you . . . so  
three buildings have been at 14th and Chestnut.

TAPY: /Yes, three. Now, the reason the third one was built was because of a fire, /in fact/ two fires. They were a year apart. /This building was dedicated Jan. 1, 1919./

The first one was /March, 1917/. We've always kidded Reverend Blake. He was the pastor there /then/, and it /the fire/ started right in the pulpit both times. And we said it was because of his fiery preaching. But the first one was /not so bad, and the building was able to be repaired/.

JW: Reverend Blake. What was his first name?

TAPY: L. O. /Lawrence/.

JW: And he preached there how long ago?

TAPY: Let's see.

JW: A ballpark figure, you don't have to have the exact date.

TAPY: Well, I would say . . . oh, I can't tell you just exactly, but it was when I was about 15 years old. I'm 76 now. Figure it up (laughs). /about 1912 to 1921/

JW: O.K. We're talking about /the/ early '20s.

TAPY: About that, yes.

JW: O.K.

TAPY: It was a little bit earlier than that, because it was during the war, and it was hard to get material to rebuild. But the first one, they were able to salvage it /the building/. And then the next year it burned so badly that there was just no way to rebuild it.

JW: What year was that that it burned?

TAPY: Well, I think it was 1918 /1917 and the new church was dedicated Jan. 5, 1919/.

JW: O.K.

TAPY: It was during the war.

JW: O.K. That's good enough.

TAPY: And everybody discouraged us /from trying to rebuild because it was so hard to get materials and everything. But Mr. W. E. Williams was the head /president of Braden Manufacturing Co. at that time.

JW: What manufacturing company?

TAPY: Braden, it's on North 14th Street /about the 400 block on east side of street. It's not called that now, and it's only been sold in the last few years.

JW: What'd they make at Braden?

TAPY: Oh, sheet metal and roofing . . . big metal things. And he /Mr. Williams was the president of the board of trustees /of the church also. So through him they were able to get the materials, although it was very high /expensive during wartime.

JW: So, we have now the present structure from that?

TAPY: That's the third /building, yes.

JW: From that benefactor and the people working together?

TAPY: Right. But in the meantime when the church burned the second time it took so long, you see, /for they had to tear the /old church down. And the church /congregation went to this little Kent Avenue church over here on Sycamore and Kent Avenue and held services in the afternoon.

JW: Sycamore and Kent Avenue?

TAPY: Right over here.

JW: Could that be Chestnut? Kent Avenue and Chestnut?

TAPY: Yes, I guess it is /Chestnut.

JW: Right. Chestnut and Kent.

TAPY: That's right. It was an Evangelical church and they offered their building to us. We had meetings

TAPY: in the afternoon. But it didn't work out very well. People were going to other churches in the morning, you know, and in the evening, and they just didn't /come to our services in the afternoon and/ the congregation was just kind of slipping away. So, right on the corner of 14th and Chestnut across from our church on the northeast corner where that big house is now -- there where Dr. /Henry R./ Vandivier used to live years ago . . .

JW: Dr. who?

TAPY: Vandiver -- V-a-n-d-i-v-e-r. That was an empty lot there, and our church built a tabernacle /there/ out of wood. And it had a sawdust floor, and we've got pictures of it if you're interested to see it. But that served the purpose quite well, holding the congregation together. We heated with stoves, and I've thought so many times how dangerous that was with the wood stove and those sawdust chips on the floor (laughs), but we had no problem.

JW: But that was an interim thing until the structure was built.

TAPY: Until the other church was built, um hm. And then that was torn down afterwards.

Can you remember guest preachers coming into the city? Preachers who were well-known nationally or maybe regionally? Who was . . .

TAPY: I can remember two. Anybody that I talk to doesn't remember it, but one was a Dr. Lyons. And he had a /large following/. It was a city-wide evangelistic service. And it was in a building it seems to me, about where the Firestone /store/ is there by the railroad, right close to the railroad.

JW: On Wabash Avenue?

TAPY: On Wabash Avenue. It seems to me . . .

JW: It's near 10th Street?

TAPY: Yes, right there close.

JW: O.K.

TAPY: And it was quite a big affair. He was a well-known man. I wasn't too old. I can't give you the date of that /for I was only about 8 yrs. old/. And one of the things that I can remember so well /is that/ they organized the children . . . oh, everybody, but especially the children. And we met down at the courthouse, and we paraded down Wabash Avenue going to the church /meeting/. Well, of course, there were a lot of saloons then; and they were open Sunday and all, you know. And as we approached the saloons (the keepers were all outside, of course, watching), we had a chant that they had taught us /which went like this/: "Down with booze, down with booze, we want money, we want shoes." And that's always stayed with me.

And I remember one place we went /past/. The bartender came out; and he said, "Well, come on in. We'll give you shoes and food, everything." (laughs) But I can remember that one quite well, and it was /about 1914/. I wasn't too old then.

Then I can remember when (I think it was about 1923) we had a meeting by Dr. Bulgin (b-u-l-g-i-n), which was also a city-wide /meeting/. And that was held in a tent right about where the Ponderosa /steak house/ is now. That was /a vacant lot on the southwest corner of 23rd and Wabash/.

So, I was about 16 years old; it was about 1923. Anyhow, by that time I was a young girl; and, oh, we all were in love with the choir director. He was a young man (laughing); I can remember that. But it was a very successful meeting.

JW: That's interesting that you would march from the courthouse to the meeting place to emphasize the fact that you were interested in /people being changed/.

TAPY: We did. Our parents did, so, of course, we did. But I'll never forget that (laughing) crazy slogan and chant we were doing.

Then in recent years, of course, there was Bill Glass and Leighton Ford, of course, was a later one.

JW: Um hm, city-wide, yes.



TAPY: City-wide. That's what you meant, wasn't it?  
More than just our own church?

JW: Yes.

TAPY: /Those are/ the only ones that I can remember  
very distinctly.

JW: Describe for me the typical preaching at First  
Church 60 years ago, 65 years ago. What was the  
preaching like on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday  
evening? I assume you had Wednesday evening ser-  
vices.

TAPY: Right.

JW: And a Sunday evening service?

TAPY: Right.

JW: What was it like?

TAPY: Hell-fire and damnation. It was very emotional.  
A lot of "a-men's" and all that. But I can remember  
especially Reverend Blake. He would get so excited  
that he would jump right over the /chancel/ railing  
around in the church there, and then he'd have to  
walk back and start all over again, you know. But  
he was a great guy. He was a great preacher. His  
daughters and I are about the same age, and we were  
very close friends. But I can remember that very  
well. We had a very fine male chorus in our church.  
Our church was so crowded you had standing room  
/only, at times/. But at night we had at our ser-  
vices . . . we always had this male chorus I think  
once a month. And it really brought in a big crowd,  
too.

But the preaching was quite demonstrative.

JW: Strong.

TAPY: Strong.

JW: Um hm. Did you have an altar call usually at  
every service?

TAPY: Always, and /we/ usually had results. And the  
thing that I could remember, everybody was praying  
at once. You couldn't understand anybody, and

TAPY: everybody was praying. But, of course, I guess God could understand it. But you don't hear that . . . you don't hear much about repentance any more or any . . . . You know, you just have to say I'm going to change, and that's all there is to it.

But it was /a great time to be alive, and/ I would not take anything for the heritage that I have had in the /church/.

JW: Just how much ecumenism was there in the '20s, or even before, that you can remember when you were active in the church? Did churches work together much in city-wide campaigns?

TAPY: Yes, they did. Now, like these I /have mentioned/. But the thing that I can remember most /vividly/ was always their Thanksgiving service. Even way back then all the churches would have a union Thanksgiving service every year /on Thanksgiving morning/. And it was very well attended. I am not sure of how much the Catholics were in that, but all these other denominations did unite and it was very good. But as far as the other churches working together, I think they did but . . . except for the Catholics.

Now, I can remember living next door to a lady who was a Catholic, and she was a very fine /woman/. That's when I was a little girl. I can remember my mother invited her to go to /our/ church with her /to/ a special service one time; and she /the lady/ threw up her hands and said, "Oh, no! God'd strike me dead if I'd go inside of that church!" So, of course . . . . And you know I was almost brought up that way. If you weren't a United Brethren, you just weren't right, you know. But yet they /our church/ did cooperate but still their own church was it.  
(laughs)

JW: Well, today in the city of Terre Haute we have mainline denominational churches, some somewhat liberal; we have evangelical churches that would support, let's say, Bill Glass or Leighton Ford. But then we have a lot of what people would describe as fundamentalist churches that are separatists and wouldn't participate in any ecumenical city-wide revival. Were there groups that were even more conservative than First Church when you were a child,