

FATHER JOACHIM SCHIEBER

Joni: This is a portion of the oral histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940's program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with the support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is May 19, 2009 and we are doing an interview today at the Conception Abbey in Conception, Missouri in Nodaway County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley and we are here to interview Father Joachim Schieber and he was born on January 1, 1919 and he's going to tell us a little bit about himself and about the history of this area and information about the 1940's in this area. Okay well could you tell us a little bit about yourself and then tell us a little about the history?

Fr. Schieber: Well, I am Father Joachim Schieber and I'm 90 years old now and I feel that this is a personal account of the area, I lived here all my life, I was born here, born in Clyde, I could hear the bells of the Convent and Abbey when the wind was right. I lived my whole life here except about two decades when my priestly ministry carried me to various parts of the country and otherwise very much involved. I feel that to tell the story has to be the history of the area. Yes at the end I would like to go into the personal story of living in not only the 40's but the 30's would be involved too; during the 30's wouldn't it?

Joni: Yes.

Fr. Schieber: That's a whole area? But in order to tell the development of this area I think it's necessary to wrap into the immigration of the area and the people in order to understand the influence of this area and I certainly don't want to tell the story without bringing in the benefit of these people because I feel very much indebted to them and they should be recognized. As I remarked to you I don't think that there can be any bigger challenge of importance in the county, yeah the whole Nodaway County, to the city of Maryville and this area in it's development because the whole Nodaway County is set in the agricultural area and very good for raising crops or seed crops or farm animals and it's that way throughout the whole county so any direction you go it would be the same story and later on at the end I'll bring in about how the county was so developed at that time.

So, to begin with Missouri of course was established in 1830 because the Federal Congress could not solve their problems so they just threw it out here in the prairies of Kansas and Missouri called it the Missouri Compromise and let them fight it out between whether it would be a slave or free state so Missouri was entered as a slave state and Kansas as a free state and that border war has always still alive. Ah, what happened as the thing went on within two decades almost, it was less than two decades, the middle of the 40's the government bought land from the Indians of the area and added to the northwest corner of the state of – the boundary of Missouri the boundary of Missouri was straight but with this purchase it was all this was added on of 5 counties of Platt, Buchanan, Andrew, Nodaway and Atchison and it was called the Platt Purchase after the Platt River down here and of course that was in the '40's. Now to kind of flash out back why you had a story going on in the east in Pennsylvania in the center part of Pennsylvania an Irish man – a priest came over from Ireland and he was a missionary in the western part – the center and western parts of Pennsylvania – he had to make a lot of missionary visits out through Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma even into Texas and then he was assigned to one of the major parishes in Redding, right in the center of the state and when he inherited that

he inherited the problem of the Irish you know that was a time when the signs were up “No Irish Need Apply” you know because they were Catholic and in the area was going on a barn burning those who hated the Irish burning the barns and the Irish fought back and _____ and burned their barns and it was called the barn burning period and these barn burners was very upsetting for his people and so he consented to guide them through the Homestead Act. This land out here cut a spot on the land and you own it then and so he took one of his most influential men with wealth the Felix family and they became a big name in this area and they bankrolled the group and there was a selection of 4 of them to represent the group including Father Powers and they came out here into the Midwest and he brought them into this area because he liked the area and they settled in Gentry County over here right southwest of Stanberry and northwest of King City and they settled on that prairie road area because that was the land and they went down to the Land Office in Plattsburg and the officials weren’t there and they went in and blocked out their land on the maps of what they were going to have and said the officials were going to be there for the opening of the signing up in the fall so they came back in the fall and they found out that all the land – the boundaries of the land that they had platted that they had blocked out had been taken by the family that owned the land office and their friends and of course the fact came out and I certainly proved it in the documents of several investigations that I have that that was done because that was the “Know Nothing Party” halved of Catholics and Democrats and that family had elected a member to the Federal Government – Federal Congress from that area for the Know Nothing Party and they hated the Catholics and they hated especially the Irish because they were all considered as Catholics and that’s why the action had been taken. So the Redding group was a very influential group and they had a lot of contacts and so they were very good friends – had several good friends of President Buchanan and they had a congressional investigation – the House – full fledged thing – went on for months and because of the jurisdiction of the law and everything it was hard to clear it up so they recommended to this group in Pennsylvania to accept land here in Nodaway County on the southeastern section next to the Gentry County that had been given to the soldiers in the Civil War after they resigned that they hadn’t claimed and so they came out and looked at the land and they liked it – it was very comparable to the land they had picked out on Prairie Road down here and they signed up for it and that’s how they got into the southeast corner of Nodaway County. [See my thesis for my MA offered you.]

When they came out here now let’s see – the next thing I should go into is – this group now remember Nodaway County was added in the 1840’s – middle of the ‘40’s this Platt Purchase it was called – after it was added in that area and there were no roads, there were no developments and it was very difficult and so they thought – now I don’t want to go into too long on this – anyway well I think I’ll just go into what this group then that comes out here and the white settlers – immigrants that came into this area and founded and developed it they came here and they arrived about 2 years before the Civil War broke out and they came down – there was about 12 to some 15 families that started out from Redding and came down the Ohio River the Missouri River over land to St. Joe and when they got there they were so tired that they – so difficult traveling that only 5 families came on up and of course they had to follow the Platt River because that was the only direction they had to get here they knew it ran through the area, there were no roads and ah when they got here why the Civil War broke out right away and there are stories of how they had – they gathered in the center of the area to protect against what was reported as a planned Indian raid and the Indian raid never did take place against them but in the camp when they were protecting themselves as they thought a gun went off and fell over and

killed one of the members and he was the first one that was buried in that grave yard up here in _____. Ah, they had a very hard time during those 5 years of the Civil War but then at the end of the Civil War Father Powers, this Irish Priest came preaching to be freed and come out. He chose of all these missions of places he had been he chose this place of course a lot of his friends were here and it became known right a way that there was a priest here that had a parish and rested here and he had started a school for kids. The people flocked in – the flocked in from the New York seaport down through Iowa into Missouri and that's when my paternal side came in from Luxemburg. The other side came from southern ports up through Daniel Boone's area Kentucky and Missouri. So Father Powers was faced with a problem of the Irish and the German and he didn't know German and so he couldn't take care of the sacramental assistance for the German people and so he took a trip to Europe and in Engelburg he found the monks that were willing to come over and turn a face and take care of that area and also the Irish and that was the bringing of the Benedictine Monks from Engelburg, Switzerland in and as that happened Father Powers had a very difficult time with mixing the two and building the church before they come but when the monks came in they built the church and in order to build the church they needed to satisfy the problem they put St. Boniface he was a missionary with the Germans and put him in a red vestment on one side of the church and they put St. Patrick in green vestments on the other side and there's a kind of medal in the wall there yet that after they took out the alters and the first marriage they had was a German man married a Irish lady that broke the thing and it came out pretty well.

The thing that must be told in order to develop what happens afterwards is that people gave land to the monastery and they gave lands on the other side which was by the way my maternal side of the family gave land out east a couple of miles and that's where they were going to build but they couldn't find water but they found water here so they built here. Then comes the period of the railroads and the railroads are very important in this area. The Wabash decided to build from St. Louis to Omaha and they chose this place – this area as the middle, the center of their – and at that time as you know the steam engine had not taken over and they did a lot of changing and of course they came to our land about 4 miles out here and our founding Abbot was Brother Father Conrad and he was a German and he was of the old country and he was going to protect the – his people, his monastery from the world and he would not let the railroads on his land and he was successful in those days of keeping the railroad from crossing his land. So, the railroad, Wabash turned north there and went to Clyde – they wanted to cut there between Clyde and Conception because both of them were building and this was the biggest area – the biggest building projects in the area and of course all the material came in by the railroads. So they had stopped at Clyde later on – this is just a influx here – I took a picture – cut out a picture from the paper and showed the business that the district of Clyde – now this is important because it refers to this relationship to Maryville and that picture showed from the railroad station up to the post office of business shops which is just a little short of 2 blocks was completely settled on both sides of the streets with business. There was a bank, a hotel, 2 grocery stores, hardware, doctors office, everything that you would need for a village like that and it was very nice and that was the development in this area and in a very short time then the Chicago Great Western came in and would go from Chicago through Minneapolis-St. Paul to the coast Seattle and Portland and again they chose this area as their half-way point junction of railroads because you know they had to relay their engines and everything so they so they built a halfway stop and their railroad. The Abbot again would not allow them on the ground here and so they couldn't make any connection with the Wabash and they skirted our land down there and made the connection at Conception

Junction and that's how the development the Tri-C, Clyde, Conception, Conception Junction developed. Well in no time the Chicago Great Western really built up that town they built a round house and they had trains coming through, they always changed the engineer, they always changed the caboose – all the workers so they built hotels down there in Conception Jct. became a pretty loose town, a free-living town and that soon replaced Clyde. Now shortly before this Maryville had been made the county seat because the Burlington Railroad had ended there and because of the railroad as they were _____ they were geographically centered but their own reports that they write up said that they were a town at that time of 12 houses. So, I think the facts speaks for themselves that Conception would have been the area had the German man had not refused the railroads to junction here because even at that this area was growing up fast above it. Ah before we leave this now is there as I kind of think about it is there anything that I should have before I go onto the modern period then. Oh yes I think to show you the importance of the area the first document for Nodaway County in the State of Missouri for higher education is Conception in 1884 and it was only 20 years later in 1904 that Maryville applied for higher education for college which is now the university and so as it developed – as the county developed the - some of the judges I understand were elected from here as well you know because this was one of the more striking areas, more advanced areas _____ there were a lot of educated people among them from Europe and the founding leader that had been the paymaster of the Phoenix Railroad in Pennsylvania was the leader of the group that came out here and he was one of the first judges elected from here. My grandfather on the Schieber side was one of the judges and that was kind of shows you how this area was developing and it affected the whole area very much and just before I leave this, before I go into my own history now – all these villages had high schools. There must have been 12 or more, all the ones that have high schools now, there was by your place next to Tarkio you had Burlington Jct., you had Pickering as well as Hopkins, you had Clearmont there at the end of the Iowa line, you come down through there you had Guilford and Barnard and Skidmore and all these – Elmo and up in that area – they were all high schools and of course Missouri finally come to their senses and kind of consolidated so that they would get equipment and books for all their schools.

Going on to my own life then I was born at the end of that first World War and my paternal and maternal people were in 18 – right after the Civil War came in and they were among the founding fathers - they lived – and my parents even lived among the founding fathers that immigrated here and I lived with that story and when the crash came in 1930 – 1929, what was I – 10, 11 and it was terrible, you had a penny for a piece of candy that was something special in those days we suffered terribly but that was the nothing compared to life that developed after the crash. The 30's became so bad you know with those dust storms that they called it the "Dirty 30's", dirty in many ways and it was nobody – terrible crash, terrible finance and everybody suffered and I think in '36 – right in the middle of the 30's I was getting close to teenage and I was working with my family on the farm rushing to get the hay in because grasshoppers were coming, now then we call the locusts and I remember they were so bad that I left my fork out in the hay to go in for the noon meal and after it was so eaten up that I couldn't hardly use it but that afternoon the grasshoppers came in gradually this locusts, you saw them come in as group but that afternoon they had eaten up everything and they were eating up the fence posts – wooden fence posts, everything like that just it was terrible and I'll never forget it as a kid you know as a young fellow working there it was like blew alarm in the armed forces you know and they just rose up as a group – those locusts rose up as a group and flew away and as they flew away they blocked the sun you know like a cloud moved in they were that thick and that gives

you an idea of the tremulous period and of course that was the period of Roosevelt and before we got all the social work going and you know nobody had work and it was terrible and of course on a family like ours we had varied farm and varied animals and everything else not big flock of anything so we didn't have to suffer that situation that happened under Roosevelt whereby they had to line up their animals and take them out to a pasture and dig a trench and shoot them and bury them. They got paid for doing it. I never saw that as a group because we didn't have to do that however chickens was a very hard thing – we did begin to lose all our chickens but we ate well because we had to keep the families alive and so we had good food. A very interesting thing during that period, that was before the social programs that Roosevelt kept alive to take care of the social problems and so religious institutions – all religious groups took care of the social problems before the government did and I can remember highway 136 out here it was then a dirt road and in the meantime this Conception Jct. center for the Chicago Great Western they had got the steam engines and they didn't have to stop here but they still had all that area but they just left it and so there was that big round house down there and all those other buildings and so the people that had no jobs – they were all men – we called them bums you know but that was the period and they lived down there and they come up the road 2 miles very calm – and it was seared in my memory about seeing them – 20 to 25 people coming up that road for dinner, here, we had a regular room and they'd have dinner here, they'd go to Clyde Convent for supper, back to the round house to sleep and that went on for some time. As I got older and I began to play sports here why my friend and I – he's another local kid – and sometimes we'd play too long and so we would slip in and eat with the people down there, the bums as they called them. But that was the type of period we lived in and the lives that we had – very, very rough tough times. I don't know of anything else that I would add – that was about the time that I was in the second year of high school I was supposed to – I was the youngest of 11 – I was 11 of the children and I was to take over the farm and so I had to announce to them that I was going to enter the monastery and so my brothers took over as I entered the monastery I remember my brother – my sister – who stayed out to help keep everything paid, taxes and everything by teaching school and the story was told how she was complaining to him for bringing mud in the house, why didn't he get overshoes and he said I have no money. He had no money. I remember I was given the privilege to go out to her box supper for her school she's teaching and afterwards she took me kind of _____ for not buying a box – I says how can I, I have no money. That was the living that you had in those days it was tough, it was tough. Is there anything that you want to ask?

Joni: And that was during the 30's, correct?

Fr. Schieber: 30's and 40's. I entered the monastery in '39 I guess '38, '39 was ordained in '44 and that was in the 40's and then at the end of the '40's that was the beginning of the passing of all these social programs wasn't it? Truman was elected in the end of the 40's – he brought in Social Security then and Medicare came in and that was the beginning of the government taking care of the social problems of the people. That was part of the Roosevelt movement of that period, that was a very difficult period and then of course all during that period there was farmers, they had no electricity on their farms because they all had lanterns, gas lights and the like and he brought in TVA, Tennessee Valley and the electrification of the farms. By that time, I was in school work and I was always – the kids from the farms were always looked down upon from the kids from the city because kind of backwards you know and it was a very interesting thing to see that with the electricity coming in then the city kids became jealous of the farm kids

because they had a better life (laugh) very interesting to see that development. But those are examples of – you could go on indefinitely of the period – it was just a terrible, terrible time that – I remember I took a trip during the Dirty 30's and the end of the 30's, probably in '39, I was given permission to take a trip with my older brother, he had left home before I was born and he didn't know me and so he and his wife invited Mother and I to go on a trip with him and we got out in western Kansas and all of a sudden, we was out there in nowhere you know and birds would sit on the fence posts because there was no other place to sit you know and you go for miles without seeing a house and all of a sudden we saw this tremendous cloud come up and – my goodness we can't face that thing and luckily we hit a motel and got up in the morning there was no fence posts – all covered with dust, it was terrible, you couldn't keep the dust out of the house, you would stuff everything you know, that night I took a towel and wet it to keep breathing – that's the type of life you had – it was tough, it was tough in every way on the farm.

Joni: What was it like during the actual war; did World War II affect the Monastery in any way?

Fr. Schieber: Oh sure you know naturally you would we had influx – I think that the perfect example of that is Clyde had their tremendous farm and they couldn't take care of the farm and they needed help and so they got the German boys that were very trained in animal husbandry and through that they developed a very fine herd, Conception _____ our monks _____ so Clyde and Conception had the best animal herd, milking herd and everything and _____ in the western hemisphere and I remember when I was in high school that they had a meeting in Clyde in their big barns of the western hemisphere from South America and everywhere for honoring that. Yes you had people coming in for that. That's when a lot of people, I don't know, came in. But again you know that period especially in the '30's and in the first part of the '40's before Roosevelt began to get his social programs going you just existed. I don't know how else to say it.

Joni: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Fr. Schieber: Oh yes sure do. I was a very young fellow, I wasn't _____ they put me in school work I guess they tried to keep me there all the time and I was taking care of sports and I had just come from the sports center and I heard it on the radio _____ Pearl Harbor and I had 2 brothers that entered and they both came back, they weren't killed but my youngest brother who was closer to me he would never talk about it but he finally consented one day privately, got me aside and he said I'll tell you and then I'll show you the documents and ribbons I have and everything but he said I don't want you to every talk to me about it again.

Joni: Was he in Europe or did he go to the Pacific?

Fr. Schieber: He was in the Bulge in Germany, that's where he got injured.

Joni: Where did your other brother go?

Fr. Schieber: I don't know where it was, I forget. He died after he got back, quite young; he had 5 kids and died. I don't know his war record.

Joni: Were they both drafted into the Army?

Fr. Schieber: Oh yeah. It was the whole area, whole area. The Meyers – my grandmother on the Schieber side was a Meyer and the Meyers out here right east of Clyde they had 5 boys – Father Joe has a picture them it might be something for your archives – five of their boys, big husky fellows were in the service at the same time and they came home and they all had a picture of them when they were home at the time and that was a type of thing. There's a graveyard up here in the tomb of the graveyard had 6 of the boys from the area that were kill at the same time during the First World War. The Second World War they are scattered everywhere but they were always there – there was a bunch of them. I must say a word for Father Andrew at this period. Father Andrew Kunkel, he was a pastor at Clyde and he was a very good man for the people, he really served the people – that was during the period you know that came in – in the '30's and '40's you know all during the war and when these programs of social work started working under Roosevelt he worked very hard to see that this section of the county was kept up and abreast of everything and the people – that they got the benefits just as soon as they were offered, he wanted this county – the power – to make sure that this county was always represented and he did very much with the people that way and consequently that was all part of the development of this area. I can't help but stress with you there's no question in my mind that this area had a tremendous impact on this county. But Father Andrew was a very dedicated man who served the peoples in every way of farming, you could just tell story after story of – he just gave himself completely. How he used to give his cars to us kids you know to drive – it was amazing – he just put himself out completely during that period because of all the people that he knew I guess everybody he had were in need you know and suffering.

Joni: Ah how was rationing taken care of did you have.....

Fr. Schieber: What?

Joni: Rationing during the war did you have any problem with rationing here at the Abbey?

Fr. Schieber: Yes, not the Abbey but Andrew, we – that's the type of thing that I was saying that he fought for that type of thing and he saw that his community, this area, was represented in all that. No I don't think – you know as I said we were a variety of animals and everything and we did our own butchering, we raised all of our food, we raised all of our meat, we raised all of our eggs and we had tremendous gardens but the brothers – the founding father that came over for this monastery founded with brothers and brothers did all that work in this place. When I entered the monastery at that time we in our younger years had to go out in the hay fields and in the corn fields and we'd do that type of work you know – that's completely gone now. But yes, and so we kind of took care of ourselves that way so the rationing didn't hit us so much – I'm sure that the business manager and everything would be all part of that. For instance I worked with Father Gilbert, he's now dead, but he was a varied man with a lot of ideas – original ideas – original thinking and during the time when the governments come out with the money to help people stay on farms they took what money they could of the monastery - he was in the business office and he took what money he could and they subsidized the local farmers to keep them on their farm to pay the money that would enable them to stay on the farm like the government was doing for people at the time and they did it locally for their people – I know very well because I had a sister married, two sisters that were married and their farms and this money program helped them and my classmate inherited that program and he was in the business office and the people were paying back their loans and everything and they would bring in wagons of corn and wagons of oats you know and how do I take care of all this stuff. That was a type of thing that went on and

the monastery went out just like Andrew did for his people, the monastery was constantly handling things like that for the people. Is that what you are asking?

Joni: Yes. Now at the end of the war how did you feel about Truman and the dropping of the atomic bomb?

Fr. Schieber: Well I guess, you know, the Church kind of looked upon it as unfaithful but I personally always felt that I listened to that program and I felt that was a very good argument that more lives were saved by dropping it than if they had gone in and fought it out without dropping it but they come back and say you can't do evil the good comes before them you know that's what goes so that's the big moral problem.

Joni: Now if you look at life in the '40's and life today in the monastery how would you compare the two?

Fr. Schieber: Oh it's entirely different there's no comparison because of the technology. The culture is so different it's like to me with the age that I have I just feel like I'm living in a different culture. The attitude of people are entirely different, I'm very blessed with the idea that I'm very happy with what the monks are doing, I think they are doing it right, I admire what they are doing, I right ahead you know I'm right behind them but it's a different world and a different way and the technology – this world today is so strange to me you know if somebody would just get in you know some smart kid get in and get a way to block the computers I don't know what we would do – all the electricity would go out – how would we eat if we couldn't get the food dispensed throughout the country. What a tremendous disaster – this is a different world. I don't see how you can compare them with the suffering after the 1st and 2nd World War and after this one. It was entirely different, that was a physical suffering then you know with all of the denials but now the emotional, physiological, it must be terrible, it would be different but the suffering is entirely different. They don't have to sacrifice like the people did at that time. I hope to God that we never have that physical suffering like that again.

Joni: Is there any one last thing that you would like to leave us with today that was important either to you or to the history of this area that one final note?

Fr. Schieber: Well I would just like to tell you why I wanted to tell this story and I wanted it because I feel I owe it to the forefathers of this area and to the folks and especially Father Andrew who was my mentor you know that they deserved this story to be told in their honor – that's what I feel and they served the people in an excellent way, most excellent way and that's why I brought so many people in.

Joni: Well Margaret do you have any questions you'd like to ask him before we leave?

Margaret: No, I don't.

Joni: Okay, well I think we're done and I really appreciate having the chance to talk to you about the history and everything here. It's been very enlightening because there is a lot that I didn't even know about the history here so thank you very much.

Fr. Schieber: You're welcome.