

Interview with Philippine Baumgartner Berglund (PB)

Conducted by Betty Maier (BM)

September 2, 1997

Linton, North Dakota

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BM: Today is September 2, 1997. I'm Betty Maier, a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, NDSU Libraries in Fargo and it is a pleasure to visit with Philippine Baumgartner Berglund in Linton, ND where this interview is taking place. We are first going to start with the interview form. I'm not sure if we are going to stay with it, but we will start with it anyway. So let me start with the first question, what is your name, your birth date and where were you born.

PB: My name is Philippine Baumgartner Berglund and I was born in Strasburg, ND on March 23, 1910.

BM: I need the name of your father.

PB: My father's name is Michael Baumgartner.

BM: And he was born where?

PB: He was born in Germany--in Russia.

BM: In Russia.

PB: He was born in Strassburg, Russia and came to America in 1889 by going to Hamburg, Germany by railroad, and then by ship to New York, by train to Eureka, SD and by oxcart to the area where Strasburg now is.

BM: He used almost every kind of transportation that was here, and it was there that--

PB: He took up some land and farmed and, then went to Strasburg and there he was in business. He was president of the Strasburg bank, the Security State Bank. He was interested in cattle buying and was in the lumber yard. He had a lumber yard in Hazelton at one time and did many, many things.

BM: He was a busy man.

PB: Yes, he was very busy and loved every bit of it.

BM: And who was your mother then?

PB: My mother was Odellia Wolf and she also lived in Russia and then came through Germany to America.

BM: And they got married over here?

PB: Yes, they got married over here.

BM: They were married in Strasburg?

- PB:** They got married in Strasburg and out of that union there were 10 children.
- BM:** Oh, my!
- PB:** The 10 children were my brothers and sisters. Eva was the oldest, then Michael, Barbara, Margaret, Frank, John, Mary, Philippine, Agnes and then Odellia like my mother. The first child, a boy, was named after my father and the last girl, last child they had, was named after my mother.
- BM:** They had a system to it, then.
- PB:** Yes.
- BM:** Now, your father died and is buried in Strasburg and your mother also?
- PB:** Buried in Strasburg in the St. Peter and Paul cemetery.
- BM:** Were they married in St. Peter and Paul Church?
- PB:** No, that wasn't built at that time. It was built in 1910 when I was born. My mother always talked about that. The priest couldn't come to Strasburg when this marriage was arranged, but there was a priest in Fort Yates so they had to cross the Missouri River and were married in Fort Yates. A storm came up and they couldn't get back. The people in Strasburg were celebrating their wedding. My mother always said, "I didn't come to my own wedding."
- BM:** That is interesting. Did you have recollections of what your mother or your father told you about the old country, being in Strassburg, Russia?
- PB:** Yes, my mother's mother was a widow in Russia and then she, the mother, was quite wealthy with the first husband and when her husband died, she married the gardener. They had an orchard and with him, she came to America with the second husband.
- BM:** That would have been Wolf then?
- PB:** She married a Urick, the second husband was Urick. She came to America with him.
- BM:** But your mother was a child of the first husband. Were there any other stories that she told?
- PB:** And then she said that they cried for days because she came from a nice place over there, here to prairie and nothing. She said it was just terrible and if I could have walked across the water, I would have gone back. But, of course, after a while, they were settled and were happy here.
- BM:** How old was she when she came?
- PB:** I think she was only 16 and then she said there was no work around here and her stepfather was just starting too, and she and her sister had to go to Eureka to work. And she said, "One day I washed and the second day I baked bread." Always the same thing over and over.
- BM:** Did they ever receive any word from Russia, from family back there or maybe a letter?
- PB:** Maybe they did--you see by the time I was born, it was a long time and I never heard of anyone getting a letter or anything.
- BM:** What language did you speak as a child?

- PB:** We spoke English as soon as we went to school but, German around the home because my grandfather lived with us. You know, my Mother and Dad talked German, but my father was very good in English. In fact he took English in Germany and when he came over here he was a teacher for a while.
- BM:** So he knew English when he came over here?
- PB:** He could write well, all in English.
- BM:** You talked about your grandfather--was that your mother's father?
- PB:** No, it was my father's father.
- BM:** It was your father's father and his name was-
- PB:** John Baumgartner, Johannes they called him at that time.
- BM:** That's the German. Do you know what dialect you spoke?
- PB:** No, I don't. Most of the Germans around here spoke the same way.
- BM:** It is the language that came from Germany to Russia for almost 100 years.
- PB:** And then the nuns came to teach us, the Ursulines. I went to the first and second grades with the nuns. They spoke the High German and what you read so we also had German in school. I learned the German language. I can read and write it now. We learned it from the nuns.
- BM:** That was a different German.
- PB:** It was different from what we spoke, they called that High German.
- BM:** I don't know what the technicality is--
- PB:** I don't know either.
- BM:** Now let's hear a little about you, Phil.
- PB:** Well I graduated from Strasburg High School in May, 1929. There were only three graduates at that time because it was only the third year they had high school there. The three graduates were Ray Hehn, Mary Wagner and myself. Then after that I went to summer school. I taught country school for 4 years, 2 years in Exeter district 13 for \$45 a month and 2 more years in Heiding district. I went there the next 2 years because they paid \$5 more, I got \$50 a month. Then I taught 2 years in Strasburg and got \$55 a month. Every year when I moved I got \$5 more. After that Mr Jenkins, the county superintendent of schools, came to me and said, "I'd like to have you be my deputy", so I said fine. I went back to Valley City and graduated from Valley City College in 1935.
- BM:** How many years did you go to college?
- PB:** Until I graduated.
- BM:** Was it 2 years?
- PB:** No, it was more than that.
- BM:** It was 4 years.

- PB:** I worked as deputy superintendent from 1935 till 1943 and from 1943 to 1954, I was elected superintendent. I quit the superintendent job on Saturday and on Monday I started teaching the first grade in Strasburg and stayed there until I retired in 1973. My husband, Bergie, came to Linton after the World War II in 1945. We were married in 1944, in St. Augustine, Florida on Dec. 24, 1944. Then he was the principal and superintendent in the Linton High School until 1962. He then was the high school superintendent from 1962-1973 in Strasburg, and we both retired in 1973. He passed away one year later. I was only 61 but were going to retire early and travel. We had one year of retirement and then he died in October, 1974, the last day of October. My sister, Agnes, was his principal in Linton and also in Strasburg. She was still the principal in Strasburg a year later. She came home from Strasburg in February, came into the house where she stayed and said, "I'm tired". Mrs Korner said, "Won't you have a cup of coffee with us" she said, "No I don't think so" and she fell over and was gone. So I lost my husband in October and my only sister in February. I don't know how I made it through that time. It was very difficult but it was 23 years ago and I'm still alive.
- BM:** We had one of the worst past winters and you survived that too.
- PB:** I survived that too. But I am still in the same house and I sit in the kitchen where you and I are, and I can still hear my husband's typewriter in his office below this kitchen. We don't forget.
- BM:** No, and you know he lives on here. When I talk to people in this community, they always say Well, Bergie was around then and I know his name was Gus, but I don't know anyone who calls him that it was always Bergie.
- PB:** Everyone was calling him Bergie and since--even before and many of the students that he had. I was really surprised and I wish I had asked that fellow his name, he was in the restaurant on the 4th of July and he said, "come on over here", so I went over and he said how are you. I should have asked his name but I didn't and he said, "You know your husband was absolutely the best teacher I ever had". Now I am a teacher and every day when I walk into that classroom, I want to walk in there just like he did. He was the best example to me.
- BM:** OK.
- PB:** Of all the times I visited schools I enjoyed it. In fact, I enjoyed being in a classroom very much and the very first school I visited was my sister Agnes' school. She was in her second year of teaching.
- BM:** And where was she teaching?
- PB:** In Lake district and when I visited she was really doing her best. She was a good teacher and got better all the time, and was my husband's principal all the years she was in Linton and Strasburg. They died just 2 months apart. It is hard to believe. I enjoyed being county superintendent, the part I enjoyed the most was visiting the schools and working with the children.
- BM:** Do you remember any of the teachers that were there?
- PB:** Oh yes, I remember a lot of the teachers, I remember them working in the classroom. Those were rural teachers. I don't see hardly any of them anymore. They are married and moved away. But when I was through being county superintendent, I thought to myself so what I really like is teaching. I quit the superintendent's office on Saturday and started teaching the first grade in Strasburg on Monday and just

loved it. First, I taught at the Sister's school when it was parochial and later it became a public school but the nuns taught it. We stayed there until my husband and I both retired.

BM: So you were commuting then from Linton?

PB: Always. I remember I had a little white Plymouth and I finally gave it to the demolition on the 4th of July in Strasburg. The fellows who were through school said, "There is Mrs. Berglund's car". They shouldn't put it in the demolition.

BM: Can I go back to your county superintendent days. You said you really enjoyed visiting with the teachers, do you remember how many schools you had?

PB: I had 160 rural schools and we visited them. Mrs. Jenkins was my deputy.

BM: And these were only in Emmons County?

PB: Only in Emmons County, 160 rural schools and I visited them twice a year. In the fall and in the spring and the roads were not good.

BM: I don't imagine.

PB: When I went past Strasburg and out that way, I took my mother along and her 3 old lady friends. I took a picnic lunch along every day for them and they thought that was the greatest thing. They were scared of the roads and I was scared all the time. If it rained a little bit, you would slip. Most of them weren't even graveled.

BM: What were your duties when you visited those schools?

PB: My duty was to just sit and observe the teacher and help her in any way that you could. And I would make suggestions. I found out that every teacher had a certain way that was different, it was good. I learned something from every teacher, because every one had a different style and a different way, but I really enjoyed it. I believe I got to be a better person by visiting them.

BM: What about the children? What kind of activities? This was grades 1 thru 8, right? What was the average size of those schools?

PB: They used to have 30-35 children. My very first school, I have to tell you about this. It was in Exeter and the children could not talk English, most of them talked German. It was a rule that we had to talk English--so I tried to teach them. So on this particular day, I drew a big cat on the black board and I said, what are these and I pointed to the ear, and I said this is the mouth and so on and then I pointed to the tail and one little boy said, "Well that's the schwanz".

BM: Was there a lot of singing or anything from the German?

PB: You mean right out there or singing in the homes. When there was a party, there was German singing all the time. In school there was no singing in German, you had to have it all in English.

BM: It was all in English, were the children punished if they spoke German?

PB: I don't think so. I never did, I just said we have to talk English, if they told me something in German that they couldn't explain in English. They were all pretty good that way.

- BM:** I grew up in a one-room school house.
- PB:** Did you?
- BM:** Yes, I did. YCL was an important part.
- PB:** In our schools it was Young Citizens League.
- BM:** We learned so much from that, with lots of responsibility. Most of the kids were sorta shy and this was an opportunity for them to take responsibility as president or secretary, for chairing and planning.
- PB:** Did you have to make your own fire in the morning?
- BM:** Yes, we had a stove did you too?
- PB:** I had to and wasn't very good at it because at home we had a furnace at that time and I never had to start a fire, and didn't do it very well. I had one big boy, an 8th grader, and he always came early and he knew more about starting fire than I did. He was so nice, and always had it started for me.
- BM:** Did you ever get snow bound in school?
- PB:** No, I never did.
- BM:** Where did you stay?
- PB:** The first year whenever the roads were open, my Dad would take me. I couldn't drive a car then. He would take me in the morning and get me at night. But in the winter when the snow was bad and he couldn't come, I would stay at the nearest farmer. I remember it was so cold in their house that they heated rocks and put them at the foot of the bed, a kind of stone rock they heated in the oven.
- BM:** We used to do that when we took the sleigh and horses and go to the neighbors. We would always put the rocks on or under our feet and go visit neighbors with sleigh bells on the horses. Well, Phil, I'm going to ask things about the family and religion, and so let's go into it. You were baptized in the Catholic Church and that was in Strasburg. Do you remember the name of the church?
- BM:** It was St. Peter and Paul. That was in 1932?
- PB:** I was born in 1910. It was St. Peter and Paul, and the Strasburg church, the one that is there now was built in 1919.
- BM:** So you were baptized in that church. What language were the church services in?
- PB:** Only Latin.
- BM:** And the prayers, too?
- PB:** The prayers got to be German, I think.
- BM:** Do you remember how your parents felt about when the prayers were switched to English?
- PB:** My parents didn't care because my father spoke good English, and there wasn't much commotion about that.
- BM:** And your mother?

- PB:** She just went along with it. We were one of the first families who had a telephone at home, I remember that.
- BM:** First television too?
- PB:** No, there was no television as long as I was home. There wasn't any until after I was married, then we had the first television in Linton. We had an apartment in the basement and on Saturday night so many from the town came to listen to Lawrence Welk.
- BM:** He was the local native person who made big. Were there any family heirlooms with sentimental value that were handed down? Was there a family Bible?
- PB:** If there was, I don't know anything about it.
- BM:** Were there any shawls or other things?
- PB:** Oh yes, I gave what I had to Mike.
- BM:** Oh you did, that is the North Dakota State University. Are there some things that we have missed about your upbringing or your experiences in working?
- PB:** Well, I do remember very clearly that in the summer, my sister Agnes and I had to go out and work on the farm. My 2 sisters were married and lived on the farm. I had to go to one and Agnes had to go to the other. But my youngest sister said, "No, I'm not going to learn how to milk a cow. I don't care." We had to go out there and help in the summer, so we learned about farming.
- BM:** Did your family sing or did anyone in your family play the accordion or other instrument?
- PB:** No, we didn't there was nobody in town to teach piano, and I wanted to learn how to play the piano. So we got some relative, my brother's wife, had a piano and brought it home but there was no one to teach. At Christmas time, I had learned how to play "Silent Night", and my Dad would say, "Everyone be quiet, Phil is going to play 'Silent Night'." and that's as far as I got. No, there were no piano teachers when I went to school.
- BM:** Are you proud of your German heritage?
- PB:** Yes, very proud of my German heritage.
- BM:** And you still speak German.
- PB:** I speak German and I can read German and write German because I learned that from the Ursuline nuns when I went to school in Strasburg.
- BM:** But your husband did not speak German?
- PB:** No.
- BM:** So you didn't speak it at home.
- PB:** No, we didn't speak it at home.
- BM:** Where have you kept up your practicing?

PB: My mother spoke German and those ladies that came to visit her all spoke German, and I don't think one can forget a language. I can speak it as well today as I ever could. When my niece from California comes home once a year and I go out there; we have the best time when we talk German with each other. She tells me German jokes that she heard years ago, and we just laugh and have a good time.

BM: Is there anything else that we have missed?

PB: No, I think we pretty well covered it.

BM: Thank you Phil, very much.

PB: You're welcome.