

## Interview with Frances Kuntz Bernhardt (FB)

Conducted by Betty Maier (BM)

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Transcription by Lena Paris

**BM:** Today is August 3, 1995. I am Betty Maier a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritw collection North Dakota State University Libraries in Fargo. It is a pleasure to visit with Frances (Kuntz) Bernhardt in Bismarck where she lives in her own apartment at the Marillac Manor. So we are going to start with some basic questions. First of all what is your name?

**FB:** Frances Bernhardt.

**BM:** Date of birth.

**FB:** September 29, 1904.

**BM:** Where were you born?

**FB:** (011) District east of Linton.

**BM:** What was your father's name?

**FB:** Jake Kuntz.

**BM:** Do you know where he was born?

**FB:** He was born in Russia somewhere.

**BM:** When did he die?

**FB:** He died east of Linton.

**BM:** Where is he buried?

**FB:** St Michaels east of Linton.

**BM:** What was your mother's maiden name?

**FB:** Feist.

**BM:** What was her other name?

**FB:** Frances

**BM:** Where was she born?

**FB:** She was born in Russia, I guess near Strassburg. I think it was in Odessa or someplace.

**BM:** Where did she die?

- FB:** She died at Linton.
- BM:** Where is she buried?
- FB:** At St. Michaels.
- BM:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- FB:** I had five brothers and five sisters.
- BM:** Do you remember them?
- FB:** Rose and myself, Frances, Marcus, Pete, Rosena, Barbara, Jack and Joe. Oh I forgot there was something I made a mistake Sebastian comes between Rose and I.
- BM:** Okay we got all the brothers and sisters. How did your parents decide to name their children?
- FB:** How did they decide to name their children?
- BM:** Urn hum.
- FB:** I suppose just like people do now.
- BM:** Did they name any family names like after your grandfather?
- FB:** Yes.
- BM:** Grandmother
- FB:** Yes.
- BM:** Did any of them have middle names?
- FB:** I don't think so.
- BM:** Did your mother tell you any stories about the old country?
- FB:** Oh yah, she really didn't say the stories, but yes when we asked she told us how. I guess they lived the same as here.
- BM:** Did she tell you about when she was growing up?
- FB:** What do you mean?
- BM:** When she was a little girl.
- FB:** Well, I really can't remember any, you know we asked you know and she told us and I guess they were brought up the same way as we are.
- BM:** How about your father did he tell you stories?
- FB:** Should I tell you some. That happened when they came over here. I suppose they didn't know anything about what a skunk was you know. So they lived in Kansas first. I don't know where they landed, but then when they lived down in Kansas they were stacking corn in the corn field and so all of a sudden they guy said," A skunk a skunk" and ran away so they thought that little think I can kill that. So he said,

after I had killed it I knew why they were Anyway they buried it and I remember telling them that when something happens like that and they buried the (053) for I don't know how long but then they only washed and that took the smell off.

**BM:** Wonder what did they do with the shoes?

**FB:** I don't know they had only one pair of shoes. You know that we still laugh about.

**BM:** Was there a lot of laughter in your family?

**FB:** Oh yah, as far as the children we were the same as these children now and my parents were with us.

**BM:** Do you remember anything that happened with ten children in the home? What happened on a daily basis? Do you remember any of the meals you had?

**FB:** Well as far as meals I wonder myself, but I can't remember. Later on but when you are so young you can't remember. I remember the people and the things we played and laughed about.

**BM:** Did you have certain games that you remember that you played together?

**FB:** Yes, we played the same things from little on I really don't remember. I know we played house, and we made little tables with paper and we had this old oven standing up the hill, little ways off the farm there we played house and that was our room my sister Rose and I.

**BM:** Did you help your mother in the house quite a bit and the boys outside?

**FB:** When we were older we worked around like the children now.

**BM:** Did you have to help outside any?

**FB:** Yah, I worked outside. I loved to work with my brothers. My sister Rose worked more at home. She was much shorter than I and I was taller. I guess I was stronger than she was. We had a good time. Grandma and grandpa Kuntz lived west of us and grandma and grandpa Feist lived south of us. Neither one was a mile. So we could walk over there. My mother's sister was five months older than I, so we were together a lot.

**BM:** Do you ever remember being disciplined by your mother, your father or your grandparents?

**FB:** Not by grandparents. I remember more about grandma and grandpa Feist and Kuntz because they had this daughter older than my sister and I and they had one younger than Rose, so we were more over there. When we came over they gave us something to eat. We went to Grandma Kuntz once and then I was younger than Rose and Rose knew more what to say. So I said, "When we come over to Grandma Feist's she always gives us something" .If she doesn't have anything at all she gives us bread and syrup.

**BM:** So what did grandma Kuntz give you?

**FB:** She said (104) so she put this syrup (106) and I still see her standing and a loaf of bread cutting and give us bread and honey. You know they didn't get to town that they had something at home you know for treats.

**BM:** Tell us how she held the bread and cut it?

- FB:** She had her hand around it and she was standing and cutting.
- BM:** She had the loaf of bread in her arms and then she cut it.
- FB:** Between herself and her breasts she cut the bread. They always teased me.
- BM:** Because you didn't know your diplomacy did you?
- FB:** But I was wanting something to eat, but from there on I knew.
- BM:** You learned your lesson.
- FB:** I was the youngest of the three.
- BM:** Do you remember anything about grandma's house?
- FB:** Oh yes.
- BM:** What do you remember?
- FB:** Grandma Feist's was a sod house and there was a living room and a bedroom. That's what we had too you know.
- BM:** Just basically two rooms.
- FB:** Later on we had another building put on or whatever anyway there was another building and they fixed it up for a third room it was built all in one and I don't know if it was the barn or what. I can't remember anything, but I know the house where we played. There was three rooms. That was our house.
- BM:** How about grandma and grandpa Kuntz?
- FB:** I think their house in my mind but it wasn't a sod house, because I remember those big walls. Maybe it had a different roof on, a wooden roof. But I remember there was older children at grandma and grandpa's house. I don't remember much of them. When later on you forget the things that was talked about more.
- BM:** Do you remember what kind of floor was in these sod houses?
- FB:** I know we had put wooden floor in, but I suppose when they built them they didn't put wooden floors. They had wooden floor. I don't remember anything about a sod floor except we had a little entrance and there wasn't a wooden floor in there. We had to make that floor even.
- BM:** How did you do that?
- FB:** We made a little mud with clay and some kind of hardening so they mixed it with water and it was nice.
- BM:** Do you remember if your grandma and grandpa's Kuntz or Feist got homesick or lonely for the old country?
- FB:** I myself think that they were glad that they were over .
- BM:** They had a lot of family around them so perhaps they didn't have time.
- FB:** They were just glad to have all the children here.

- BM:** Did they receive letters from the old country?
- FB:** That I don't know.
- BM:** Did your families get any news from Russia where they came from?
- FB:** I don't remember and at that time I guess I wasn't interested. Later on there wasn't any. Now I know Leo's friend they had brothers and sisters over there and they had a rough time. They were even (171) change the subject they had some killed by the Bolsheviks.
- BM:** Do you speak German?
- FB:** I speak German.
- BM:** So your mom and dad and all your grandparents speak German basically in the home.
- FB:** Oh yah, we all speak German.
- BM:** Do they all speak the same dialect?
- FB:** No, my mother's side came from the Strassburg area. They pronounce words different than my dad.
- BM:** Can you say something in German for me? Did you know a nursery rhyme in German or a saying, phrases expressions?
- FB:** (195) I Didn't understand any of this.
- BM:** How much schooling did you have?
- FB:** I guess 6th or 7th grade, I don't know.
- BM:** Where did you go to school?
- FB:** (197)
- BM:** What was the school like?
- FB:** First, the school was standing on our land, so it was just a little ways from the house. It was the house, the barn and then the schoolhouse out by the road.
- BM:** How many grade levels were in the school?
- FB:** How many grades did they belong to?
- BM:** Was it a one room school?
- FB:** A little school.
- BM:** Do you remember how many students there was in the school?
- FB:** At the time we went to school there were very few children. There were children of four or five families I guess. I don't think any of the teachers went to college because anybody could each those kids.
- BM:** Do you know if there was first through eighth grades there?

- FB:** First to eight yah, but then later on when they build a bigger school and then there were kids. That's when we were maybe in the sixth grade. -(226)
- BM:** How many months during the year did you go to school?
- FB:** I really don't know maybe in the beginning only about three months. I remember we went to school in the winter and then later on there was quite a few then. I don't know how many but here was four families when I was still going to school.
- BM:** You mentioned anti-over how did you play that?
- FB:** Threw the ball over the schoolhouse and the other side caught it then they ran around I guess they tagged some and they went to their side.
- BM:** Sounds like fun.
- FB:** It was fun for us. Other times the teacher went out there too and played.
- BM:** Was there religion in your home?
- FB:** Oh yah very.
- BM:** So church was important.
- FB:** We had seven miles to church. We didn't go on week days, but we were in church on Sunday. At least somebody went.
- BM:** How did you get there?
- FB:** With horses and team and the buggy. They maybe first didn't have a buggy, maybe in a wagon.
- BM:** What language was the church service and prayers?
- FB:** In German.
- BM:** Do you remember when it switched to English?
- FB:** To me it was always German. I know my first communion was in German.
- BM:** How about confirmation?
- FB:** I think that was German.
- BM:** What was the name of the church that you went to?
- FB:** St. Anthony (261) It was about three miles east of us (264)
- BM:** Do you remember of any of your relatives passing away?
- FB:** I remember all the grandmas and grandpas that were all buried at St. Michaels east of Linton. In 1916, I guess, St. Michael's church was built.
- BM:** What were the funerals like? Did they sing or how did the grieve?
- FB:** I guess it was a Latin and German mass and the prayers were in German.

- BM:** What did you do after the funerals?
- FB:** After the funerals.
- BM:** Did they go to the homes or get together?
- FB:** They went home after the funeral. There was nothing there to go to.
- BM:** How did you celebrate Christmas with your family?
- FB:** We had lots of fun.
- BM:** What do you remember most about Christmas?
- FB:** They didn't have as many presents you know. I know we had presents when we were older and they had somebody dressed with a veil and things. That was the Christkindl.
- BM:** What did they do then?
- FB:** Well they brought gifts and the children had to pray.
- BM:** What kind of gifts did they bring?
- FB:** I don't know what each got, but I know there was a Santa Claus had a mask on.
- BM:** Did you know who it was?
- FB:** I myself didn't know from my years on if they had something, but later that was when we were older we went to other kids house. That I remember, but when we were little a Santa Claus came.
- BM:** Did you sing?
- FB:** I don't think they sang, I think they prayed.
- BM:** You did have a lot of fun on those holidays, didn't you?
- FB:** We had a lot of fun. My sister and I cut paper dolls (320) funny things you know that kids can do.
- BM:** How about Easter? Did you celebrate Easter?
- FB:** Well we cooked and colored the eggs and I remember my sister and lone Sunday morning when our parents went to church my sister and I colored eggs. But we didn't know maybe mother doesn't have any more colored things for Easter .
- BM:** How were the husbands and wives chosen for young people during those days?
- FB:** What do you mean?
- BM:** Was it an agreement between families or did you meet somebody and decided to get married. How were the marriages arranged?
- FB:** They were just like now. (341) that part I don't know. You chose your own mates. At that time some of them had cars.
- BM:** How did you meet your husband?

- FB:** My sisters husband had a car , a nice Dodge. So he came down where I guess he saw us was at grandpa Kuntz. Their youngest daughter was six years younger than I and so they came over there once (370)
- BM:** How old were you when you were married?
- FB:** I was nineteen.
- BM:** How old was your husband?
- FB:** He was twenty-one.
- BM:** Where did you live?
- FB:** We lived at the farm with his folks for two years and farmed. Then they moved to town and we stayed on the farm later on we bought it. Then it was our farm.
- BM:** How many children did you have?
- FB:** Six, two died all girls.
- BM:** Can you name them all in the order that they were born?
- FB:** Sally, Alice, Ida, Frances, Rose, and Pauline.
- BM:** Do you remember some of the German cooking that your mother did?
- FB:** They all still cook the same.
- BM:** What are some of the dishes you make?
- FB:** We made vegetable soup, potatoes and rice that I think we still cook.
- BM:** Did you make strudel, kuchen'?,
- FB:** Oh yah, dampfnudla, kvetsha, knepfla, sauerkraut. We made noodles with bread dough, we'd let them raise and then fry with onions gives them a different smell. Then you couldn't lift the cover as long as they were swelling, or else they would fall down. So they would get real light and fluffy (430).
- BM:** What was the bottom like then'?
- FB:** They was fried and browned on the outside. They were fried and good (438)