

Metz Fire

Mrs. Kowalewski Oral Interview

Mrs. Kowalewski – October

Interviewer: 15th

Mrs. Kowalewski: 15th 1908. Ah, I and my ah three brothers and one sister, headed out for school, it was a beautiful morning and uh...

Interviewer – About what time did you, did you, were you first aware of it?

Mrs. Kowalewski – Oh, ah.

Interviewer – You know the fire.

Mrs. Kowalewski – At noon, at noon, we got to school and at noon while we're eating lunch ah, at different times when the wind blew really hard, the school room darkened. I mean from the smoke and the, everyone knew there was a, um, fierce fire burning south west, from the school house. And two families came for their children with their horse and wagons to take them home because they lived, ah, nearer to the fire than where the school house was.

Interviewer – mm-hmm

Mrs. Kowalewski – And ah, then, the school teacher dismissed school after the families came for their children – he dismissed school and we walked home too. And when we got home, um, I imagine one o'clock or right after [inaudible] noon hour at school,

Interviewer – mmm-mmm

Mrs. Kowalewski – and ah, we walked home and we, when we got home, my mother was already packing our best clothes into trunks and, uh,

we were, uh, the my older brothers put them on a wheel barrow, took them out to the potato field, you know that, what's, plowed?

Interviewer – Uh-huh.

Mrs. Kowalewski – And ah, then, well as soon as we came home then, my parents had already decided to go to Metz to get on to a train to go to Alpena. So then, as soon as that was done, the trunks were taken care of and we were off again. and ready to start out [inaudible] My father and my older brothers, uh, went to the farm and ah, chased the chickens all out and closed the door and also the horses were let out and, and being it was noon of the day, the other animals were all outside. But I think the pigs were also put out and closed the door. So ah, and then we walked, must be, must be about a mile and a half before we could get to the depot and we had to walk across our field first then we crossed the the barbed wire railroad fence and go and walk to ah, to ah Metz to the depot.

Interviewer – Was the idea to go to the depot so that you could get a way on a train?

Mrs. Kowalewski – Oh yes, because, once, I don't know if they knew that there was train but at least we could take the next train that came to, to Alpena to escape from the fire.

And um, I remember when we were at the, when we came thru the railroad track, where we crossed over to go, ah, from the field. Well, then ah, we had our dog. His name was Jack, and I know my brother chased him home, because he couldn't come along with us, you know.

Interviewer – Uh-huh.

Mrs. Kowalewski – and ah, well, we got to the depot and ah I think we got into the car right away. And like, there was waiting and finally the train started off. And as we were going down the track towards Posen, our farm, we could see our farm, but it was already burning.

Interviewer – [inaudible]

Mrs. Kowalewski – But there was woods ah, all the way after we left Metz already and um, there was sparks coming all the time. And it was always dark. Ah, darker and darker, and by the time that the train did come to a stop at Nowicki's Crossing, we called it, well, then it was dark and it was all the light there was, was from the fire all around. And the wind kept, ah, blowing so many sparks and ashes and smoke was here and ah, and um when it stopped, some got out right away, to see where people could go.

Interviewer – mm-hmm

Mrs. Kowalewski – and ah...I followed some of the people out to where the way they were going and crawled on that sewing machine (?) and got to the top of the car, and I jumped down, and then I followed the people going toward the open field. There was, somebody knew there was an open field there, a farm, small farm.

Mrs. Kowalewski – and uh as we got to the open field, well there was a railroad track fence, I mean a fencing and an older man stood there, and separated the barbed wire so I wouldn't get caught and helped me through, then, uh, I followed the other people and uh, we uh, all went to this open field.

Mystery person: [inaudible]

Mrs. Kowalewski: no. uh-uh [inaudible]

Interviewer: [inaudible] you were the only one in your family then?

Mrs. Kowalewski: After we got to the field, then my brothers were there and my father, and when I got there he asked for the rest. And ah, he, he went back again and uh, he brought back my younger sister. She was a year and 8 months younger than I and ah, but by then, there was not a sound anywhere.

Interviewer: In the fire.

Mrs. Kowalewski: no, uh-uh. Whoever brought them out, maybe same time as I, and whoever, oh, I think my sister said he, an older, some man helped her out or threw her out over the top, and my father found her when he went back.

Interviewer – [inaudible] your mother and three sisters

Mrs. Kowalewski – mm-hmm. One was older than I, she held a 3 year old sister, and my mother had the 9 month old sister.

Interviewer – uh-huh

Mrs. Kowalewski – That's the way that I left them when I got to [inaudible].

Interviewer – Yes. And they were along with how many other people were lost in the fire?

Mrs. Kowalewski – Oh well, there were three mothers, each with 3 children and uh, I don't remember who the other people, I think they were men.

Mystery person – yeah

Mrs. Kowalewski – I think they were.

Mystery person – Yeah, there was a fireman and brakeman.

Mrs. Kowalewski – uh-huh, I think they

Mystery person – died

Mrs. Kowalewski – uh-huh

Interviewer – Did they think that they died from, ah heat or

Mrs. Kowalewski – oh, yeah, from the ah intense heat and the smoke and panic you know

Interviewer –yeah

Mrs. Kowalewski – and heart attack, who knows

Interviewer –yeah

Mrs. Kowalewski – From the situation was so fierce, that everyone only thought of themselves, I think.

Interviewer – Yeah, ...

Mrs. Kowalewski – mm-hmm

– [inaudible]

NOTE: This story is being told by Theresa Hardies Kowalewski. (born April 9, 1901; died November 30, 1981). She married Albert Kowalewski December 22, 1916.

Theresa's mother and three sisters died in the train car.

Theresa's mother: Emma Hardies (Mrs. Edward Hardies)

Sisters: Pauline, Mary and Minnie Hardies