

## Somewhere in France

Stories that give meaning to the landscape. This was the phrase that caught my attention last Sunday during the adult forum. Stories that give meaning to the landscape. John Soderberg, archeology professor at the U and St. John's member, was talking about Irish fables as tales that gave meaning to places in the landscape so that when you traveled to or mentioned a place, immediately you would recall the story associated with that place name, the tale that gave that location meaning. Of course, what often happens over time is that the names remain but the stories are forgotten. Who of us remember the stories of Calhoun or Harriet or Hennepin or Marquette or Xerxes or Wirth?

Or, closer to home, who of us remember the stories of Crary or Karagheusian or Dikian or Davidson or Masters or Darby? Yet we are surrounded by their names, over 30 in the sanctuary alone. These are the names of those who have gone before us, whose legacy we enjoy, lives that are remembered in windows and paintings and furnishings and in their stories.

I have been intrigued these last couple of weeks with two of those names in particular. And I would like to share what I have learned of their stories. I do this in an effort to keep **our** landscape alive, to give **our** landscape meaning. In an effort to help us worship in a space that is not simply made of stone and wood but that breathes the lives of those who have left us, but who are not very far away.

September 1st, 1917, St. John's celebrates its first service in this space. The building was begun the year before and among the families that played a role in its inception and construction, were the Johnsons, who lived at 4212 Linden Hills Boulevard, and the Crandalls who lived at 4237 Linden Hills Boulevard. The Johnsons had arrived from Austin, Minnesota. Father Alfred Eugene Johnson, mother Clara Miller Johnson and children Charles and Laurene. Son Charles and mother Clara were received as members in 1913 and Father Alfred and daughter Laurene were received in the confirmation class of March 21st 1915. Also in that confirmation class were Edward Frank Crandall and Sarah Eleanor Crandall, patriarch and matriarch of the Crandall clan whose descendents still sit in the Crandall pew on most Sunday mornings.

Alfred Johnson and Edward Crandall serve on the vestry in 1916 and Clara and Sarah serve on the Altar Guild. Alfred is one of those stalwart workers pictured in the photo in the library holding shovels and axes and digging forks, every man in a hat, Alfred in a white striped shirt and tie.

But this story is about two sons, two veterans, both pilots, both killed doing what they loved and serving their country. Killed in separate world wars but united in this sacred space. Charles Seymour Johnson son of Alfred and Clara and Edward Francis Crandall, Jr, son of Edward and Sarah.

Charles Seymour Johnson was born in 1895 and along with probably every other boy of his generation was fascinated with flying and flying machines. He had dark hair and his mother's piercing blue eyes. In 1917, as the United States entered the war, determined to both fly and serve, he, along with his neighbor on Linden Hills Boulevard, Lee Sage, hopped on the train at the Milwaukee Depot and went to Canada because the United States did not yet have an Air Force. His sister Laurene, vividly remembers the last time she saw Charles, on the platform at the train station, waving and smiling. At Camp Borden, near Toronto, they were told by the recruiting officer that they should look at a map of Canada, pick a small town to claim as their birthplace and sign on the dotted line to enlist as pilots. After three months of training at Camp Borden, they were shipped off to England where they became pilots in the Royal Flying Corps.

Tuesday, August 13th, 1918, Charles was flying a mission near Nieppe, France. This was during the last great push by the Allies on the Western Front. The official reports from the British Army said, "Fine weather on August 13th again enabled a large amount of aerial work to be carried out... Fifty eight tons of bombs have been dropped during the last 24 hours... In fighting 21 enemy machines were brought down and 10 driven out of control. Six of our machines are missing." One of those missing flying machines belonged to Lieutenant Charles Johnson.

On Wednesday, August 14th, his parents received a cablegram suggesting that he was in a hospital. On Sunday, August 18th, they received another cablegram listing him as missing in action. On Thursday, November 14th, 1918, the minutes of the Altar Guild of St. John's say the following: "The Altar Guild had Corporate Communion in the Chapel. Misses Schmuck, White, Johnson, Crandall, Christian, Melges, Cowing, Benton and Hoag being present. After the service a very short meeting was held in the Rector's Sacristy. Mrs. Johnson received a message of her son's death."

Charles' sister, Laurene, remembers almost a year of uncertainty, feeling sure he was a German prisoner, before he was officially declared "killed in action". Sometime after that, the family was visited by a Captain from the United States who had also flown in the Royal Flying Corps. He reported to the family that he had seen Charles' plane go down in flames. Charles' remains were never recovered.

Eleven months later, July 10th, 1919, Edward Francis Crandall, Jr. is born to parents Edward and Sarah. He is baptized at St. John's in November and confirmed in 1934. He is the youngest of five children by seven years, in fact he is sometimes referred to as the "oops" baby. He is truly the darling of the family, all his siblings playing a role in his upbringing. He attends Pillsbury Military School in Owatonna and enrolls in Carleton College. After three years at Carleton, in 1941, right after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Edward Francis Crandall, Jr. joins the U.S. Army to become a pilot.

He goes to flight school at Parks Air College in East St. Louis, Illinois. He trains out of the Curtiss-Steinberg airfield, a popular stop on trans-continental barnstorming

flights having been visited by the likes of Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindbergh. But on a training flight, February 18th, 1942, two days before his graduation, something goes terribly wrong. He is killed in a crash in a cornfield, near Millstadt, Illinois. James Tapp, an aviation cadet from Eveleth escorted his body home, fellow students from Carleton served as pallbearers. The commanding officer of the training school said, "He is in our minds just as much a hero as those men with more training who have been called upon to make the supreme sacrifice in actual combat." The picture in the Minneapolis Star Journal on February 19th, 1942, shows a smiling pilot, goggles perched on his head on his leather cap, flying scarf tucked around his neck, looking every bit a Crandall. The priest serving St. John's was the much beloved Father Gear. Mary Miller still remembers how distraught Father Gear was at the death of his young parishioner.

In the gospel passage this morning Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth..."

We who sit here this morning are immersed in two of the most ambitious experiments in human history. The older of the two, the church, has a history of beauty, nobleness of purpose, aspiration to self-sacrifice and commitment to the truth. We, also have a history of self-deception, cruelty and exclusion. The second of the two, the United States also has a history of beauty, nobleness of purpose, aspiration to self-sacrifice and commitment to truth. We, also have a history of self-deception, cruelty and exclusion. Both experiments are full of stories of hope, aspiration and deep, deep loss. Both experiments consistently reach beyond their grasp, push the boundaries of what seems possible and, when they are at their best, inspire people to live lives of beauty and purpose.

And as a country and as the church even as we sometimes fail to live up to our ideals, we keep trying. We keep trying to realize the dreams that seem just beyond our grasp. We, in the church, keep listening for that spirit of truth that will guide us and we, in the United States, keep trying to live up to the ideal that we are all truly equal.

And what of these things which Jesus would tell us but we cannot bear them? Perhaps some of them are these: that we will experience much loss, sometimes almost too much to bear; that we will have dreams unrealized; that some stories will be forgotten; that we will, at times, lose our way.

In the minutes of the Altar Guild from May 15th, 1918 they write of the knitting that is being done by the guild members. The secretary writes, "Mrs. Robert gave a most detailed report of the knitting done by the guild. Some parts of it were not very encouraging, but it is sincerely hoped that the members of the Altar Guild will try doubly hard to accomplish more in the future as we are working under the Cross as well as the flag and we dare not fail." It is worth noting, that the word cross is

capitalized even as the word flag is not, lest anyone be unsure of what our priorities should be. We work under both, and we dare not fail.

I think that most of us don't think a lot about our legacy. Most of us are not driven to leave behind monuments to ourselves, but I do believe that most of us would like to be remembered, to leave behind enough stories for a generation or two to tell them. Two veterans, two lives, two deaths, two stories. Although both died without direct descendents they both live on. About a year after Charles was killed a brother is born to his now 48-year old mother. The brother, Richard, becomes a Marine pilot. Charles's sister, Laurene, has a son, Dean Charles Swanson, named after Charles, a retired Navy pilot now living in Georgia and running an organic apple farm. Edward lives on in the Crandall clan, including in the name of our own Edward Crandall.

But they also live on in our landscape, in the very structure and rhythm of our worship life, in things that we see and touch. Edward Crandall, Jr. in the window in the sanctuary depicting the visitation of Elizabeth by Mary. Mary's arm extended in greeting and blessing to the older and kneeling Elizabeth, as if Edward's hand extends in greeting to us these 70 years later. The name under the window is Edward F. Crandall, Jr.

And Charles is found here as well. His name appears on a plaque in the bell tower listing all 22 World War I veterans from St. John's. There is another plaque in the bell tower dedicated to him listing his name, squadron and date of death. And in 1917, when St. John's celebrated its first service in this sanctuary two gifts from the Johnson family were used, and have been used every Sunday since. One is an offering plate bearing the name of Charles' sister, Laurene. The other has graced our altar ever since that first service. The missal stand bears the inscription, "Ad Gloriam Dei, A Thank Offering, Lieutenant Charles S. Johnson, RFC, 1917." Not memorials, but gifts given in thanks for the lives entrusted to the care of Clara and Alfred.

In Lakewood cemetery, among the thousands of markers are two that I will visit more often. One, in the shadow of the Crandall family monument, within earshot of the trolley, says, "Edward F. Crandall, Jr. 1919 – 1942, Aviation Cadet, U.S. Army". And 200 yards away, under the shade of the oaks, sits another. Next to the marker for Clara Johnson sits one for Alfred. It says, "Alfred E. Johnson, 1870 – 1930". And underneath those lines, these achingly haunting words, "Somewhere in France, Lieutenant Charles S. Johnson, 1895 – 1918."

William D. Peterson  
Trinity Sunday  
Memorial Day  
May 30th, 2010