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Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Hermann Boerstler, German immigrants, in Wilmington, Delaware, November 7, 1973, by Steven Schoenherr. Mr. Boerstler's answers are indicated by "A," Mrs. Boerstler's by "B."

A Mrs. Dodd...she wasn't born in Germany.

Q No, but I wanted to talk to her in relation to the German Club...she knows a lot of people in the German Club...and her parents, I think, came over from Germany...and I just wanted to talk to her...

A Yeah, her parents...her mother is my sister.

B Did you ever go to the German Club?

Q I've been there once. I was invited to go with some people two years ago to your New Year's Eve celebration. And I don't know very many people in the club...I just went as a guest. But I was very impressed with the building.

A We had an affair last Saturday...it was a benefit for the Luther Towers here in Wilmington...I'm in the proceeds from the tickets there already...for that purpose. Yeah, we went there...and mostly people from Zion Church...everybody had a good time.

Q It appears to be a very active club.

B Are you married?

Q Yes.

B I shouldn't be nosy...but there's a bazaar there next Saturday if you're interested in German things. I've got a paper here. And after that they have a dance...there's no admission...

Q I talked to Richard and Margaret Traeger last night, and I guess he was involved in building the club.

A Oh, yes, we were working together.

Q You worked on that crew to help?

B ...they have German foods there, you know, for lunch and supper...and they have, you know, a regular bazaar...and at 9:00 they're having a dance there...it's no admission, you know, it doesn't cost anything, in case you're interested. That's why I asked if you were married.

A I think your Mrs. she would probably enjoy it too because they have all kind of things...they have German food, and...

Q Yeah, I'd be interested.

A By the way, I hate to ask, but I don't remember your name.

Q Schoenherr. Steve Schoenherr.
I'm Hermann.

I'm a graduate student in the history department at the university and I'm working on modern American history...the history of immigrants and so on. I came originally from Indiana...my parents were born there, and I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana...and my relations...my family came over from Germany in the 1880's...we've been there since then. And I have some relatives in the Pennsylvania area.

My parents were from here too...they got married over here.

Did they come over from Germany?

Oh, yes, they came over. But my brother John he was born over here. And my sister, Mrs. Kaeks, Dorothy Kaeks, she was born over here. And they came back later on. My parents went back to Europe and my sister she came over first, then my brother a few years later he came back over here again too. And we came over here after the war.

Well, perhaps we can start the interview. One of the first questions I usually ask is when you were born and where you were born in the old country...in Germany...you know, where and when, a little bit about your family and life over there. Did both of you immigrate?

Oh yes.

Did you marry in the United States?

Yes, we got married over here.

So you didn't know each other in Germany?

Yes, we knew each other, but we didn't get married over there.

O.K., Mr. Boerstler, can you tell me where you were born?

I was born in Galizaa...that was in Poland. That was part of Austria before the First World War, you know, and after the war was over, Poland took it over and then the second war it was taken over by the Germans. We had our Germans...we had German schools there, and churches and all that...sort of like a colony, you know.

Is it a very small town?

Well, I was in a village...we had a little farm. We had a good-sized village. I would say there was about maybe 60-70 houses, you know...I mean, all farm houses.

Most of the people were farmers.

Yes. Everyone...just about...there were a few who worked in factories, you know, in a small town about two miles away, you know.

What was the nearest major city...large city?

It's like...I don't know how to explain it now...one was Lisko...it
was a little bigger city...and it was sort of like a county, you know. And a bigger city was Limbarz...that was a bigger city...that was further away...almost like a state, practically, you know. Well, not in this sense, but just about, you know...in the bigger part.

Q What about your family on the farm...how many brothers and sisters did you have...

A Well, I had one brother and I had three sisters.

Q Did any of those come to America?

A Oh, they are all here now. A sister, she came first...I didn't even know her before I came over here...that's the first time I knew her, because I was just about two years old when she came over here.

Q When did she come over?

A About 1927...I was two years old then...I was born in '25. My brother, I knew him...I was about eight or nine...he came in '33.

Q And then when did you come over?

A In 1951.

Q After the war...

A After the war, yes. My mother came over in 1949...my father had died in the meantime...he died back in 1945.

Q Was he in the war?

A No, he was too old, and he wasn't well...he had asthma, you know...had quite a bit of trouble. See after the German army invaded Poland, they were in about a month to six weeks then they asked all the Germans to meet with an officer--I don't know, a colonel or general or whatever--and he told us that the German army was gonna leave again, that whole part, and Russia was gonna take that part over, you know...they made an agreement with the Russians to leave that part to Russia. Everybody who wanted to come back to Germany was welcome to it...they would get transportation and everything, you know, but they had to leave...just take essentials, you know, and leave everything else. They gave us about one week...that was all. That was in 1939. So we decided to leave, because nobody wanted to stay with the Russians...we heard so many bad things about them and all that. So we did leave then and we came into Posen--that was close to...not too far from the German border...that had belonged to Poland, you know...but originally that was German too, wasn't it? Before?

B Well, that was before the First World War that was Germany, and then Poland took that.

A Well, they got part of it after the war was over...the First World War...
B The First World War... Poland took that then... and then in '39 when the Germans took all that part... they divided Poland... half to the Russians and half to Germany, you know. That was before the second war...

A No, during the war.

Q In 1939...

B In '39 they took it, yes, but after that... after the war, everything... 'cause they took again, see... see, Poland took everything...

A Oh, yes, they got it then back.

B They took everything... the Russians they kept theirs... The Russians didn't give anything back, you know. The Russians kept their part and Poland got even more than they had before.

A Before they got a big part of East Germany, you know.

Q So what did you do in Posen?

A I started a trade... you know, an apprentice. That was usual, you know, when you were 14, 15, after you went through grade school, you would learn a trade. And I started as a goldsmith trade... I learned for two and a half years and then I had to go in the army... I was drafted.

Q How did you start as an apprentice... did you know someone, another goldsmith?

A I just hear of a goldsmith that he was looking for an apprentice, and I went in and talked to him about it, and he interviewed me, and he said all right, and I stayed and lived with him... in his apartment there, you know. By the way, he was... what do you call... a misplaced person, too...

Q A refugee?

A A refugee, yes. He came from Latvia... Riga... he had his own store there, and shop and all that... and he left that too. A lot of people from all over, from different countries, you know came back over to Germany after the Russians started to come in. So I stayed with him from... I thought it was in 1940... yeah, it was early in 1940... 'til just about the end of 1942... it was about 2 1/2 years. I had another year to go. But I was drafted then, and I went in the army for basic training and was entered in action... I was in Italy during the Second World War from November '43 'til the end of the war... then I was a prisoner of war there for about a year. In the meantime...

Q A prisoner of war of the Americans?

A Yeah. But I wasn't captured... we capitulated in May '45.
Q Were you treated well by the Americans during that year?

A Well, later on, yes. In the beginning, not too well. We were starving for about six or eight weeks, you know...we were just about starving, you know...they just gave us enough to keep alive, that's about all they did. And then later on we were divided into different groups, you know, and sent to different places...but that section, that group that I was in, we went to Rome...the big airfields there...and we were working there for the American Air Force, you know...we were building runways and all that, you know...laying the metal strips...I don't know what you call it...we were laying them out and bolting them down and stuff like that, you know. That was, oh, a few months, and then we went to another camp. We went to a few different camps, you know, and from there on we went back into Germany...they transported us to Germany into Bavaria—to Ingolstadt Camp...and that's where I finally was released...from that camp...in March of '46. And then I didn't know whether anybody in my family was alive because I lost contact with them, you know, during that time. So they had what you call a search action going from the Red Cross. I finally did locate them after a while so I went back...they were in Hameln (sp?)...that's where my parents were...my mother (my father had died in the meantime)...so I found a place where I finished my apprenticeship—it was in Hildesheim...It was in a British zone, you know, the way it was occupied, and so...I got my diploma...about 1½—not quite 1½ years to go...and I finished that up...and well, I worked...well, I was done in '48...in September of '48. Well, it was a pretty good distance to travel back and forth from there to my mother, you know, and sister, where they were. They were in a village in Hornburg—that was near Hameln (you've probably heard of the Piper from Hameln?)—and I found a job there, came back there, and then I lived at home...I was commuting by bus, you know, going back and forth, sometimes riding a bicycle when it was nice...because it wasn't too far...people were riding a lot of bicycles over there...most of them, you know. Didn't have too many cars. Well, in '48, and I worked there 'til '51, then I came over here. You started proceedings...my brother-in-law started proceedings, you know, to sponsor me...my younger sister and me. And it took some time, and they went to different places, you know, we were investigated...and it finally was approved, you know, and we came over in November of '51. And, well, my wife...we were engaged before we came over...she came over a few months later.

Q Now, had you been writing to your sister during the war?

A Well, you couldn't write much. You could send a certain amount...I think it was 25 words or something like that through the Red Cross, you know. Just a few words that you were well, everybody was all right, and that was it, you know...it was a typewritten letter...it had to be opened and it was censored. That was all...and well, regular communication resumed then after the war was over. But during the war you couldn't write much, you know, everything was censored, you know...
Q Was the fact that you were in the German army, did that hurt your chances, or did they investigate that?

A Oh, yes, they investigated. And I was asked...I was in the Hitler Youths, too...I was asked, you know, when they were checking my nationality and all that out, why I went in that. I said, well, I had no choice, I had to join. And a lot of them who didn't join they were forced to join a special group, you know, and the same with the army, why I didn't refuse. I said, "What would have happened if I would've refused any order?"--you know? It's just like here in the American army, too. We were disciplined, you know. And in action when you were in the war, any company commander could shoot a man for refusing to obey an order, you know. It was as simple as that. And well, I mean, you just had a job to do just like everyone else, you know. And you did it, that's all. And well, after I came over here I worked here with a goldsmith for a while in Wilmington...yeah I started about a week later after I came on November 6.

Q Was your sister living in Wilmington?

A Oh yes. She lived right up here on Scott Street.

Q What is her name?

A Dorothy Kaeks. That's the mother of Dorothy Dodds. So I stayed with them from the time I came over 'til we got married here...1953.

Q Can you remember...did your sister tell you anything about Wilmington while you were in Germany?

A Oh, yes, she would write letters, and so we knew quite a bit about it...how things were, and all that. And the same with my brother...he was here in Wilmington, too. And my mother came over first--she came over in 1949, because at that time they said you have to have a parent over here, see, in order to immigrate into this country. My mother wasn't even too anxious to come over here, but they said, "Well, you would like to come over so I think it would be a good idea if she would come over," you know. So she finally did come over then in '49, and two years later my sister and I came over. And then one sister was still living over there...her husband was missing in action, you know...missing in World War II...she had a daughter...and we had stayed with her, you know, there after my mother came over here. And she came over here with her daughter about two years later.

Q Did you have any trouble coming over...you came over by ship?

A Oh, yes, on a troop transporter.

Q American transporter?

A That's right. That's how we came over. Well, the trip didn't cost us anything, you know, because we were refugees, you know, and we didn't have too much, you know, left. We had lost everything twice.
Q Did your sister send you any money?
A Oh, yes, she sent us quite a bit of food and cigarettes and coffee and all that, you know, things that you couldn't get over there for a long long time, you know. I mean, after the war was over, everything was still rationed...and a lot of stuff you couldn't even get, even...so it wasn't rationed, you couldn't even buy it, because it wasn't there. So...oh, that's just about it. Oh, I worked here for Kleitz...in a jewelry store...he's closed up now...it was on 6th and Market in Wilmington-till 1955. Things were really slow then, you know. It was mostly repair work...jewelry repair work. There were two other guys there, working, and I was the last one to start and since there wasn't too much work, he said, "I'm sorry I have to let you go." So I was looking for a job, and Wilmington isn't the biggest city, you know. And in that line, I don't know, there wasn't too much, so I got something else. I started to work with Speakman Company.

Q Which company?
A Speakman--plumbing supplies. So that's where I'm still at...I work as a machinist now...making plumbing supplies. That's about it.

Q Do you ever think about going back into jewelry?
A Well, I'd like to. I don't know. I made a lot of jewelry...every piece of jewelry my wife has is handmade.

Q Did you bring over your tools?
A Well, I did work when I worked in the store there, you know, and I did some of it over in Germany still, you know...made a lot of stuff. And I have a few tools, you know, but I don't do anything...just once and a while as a hobby a little bit, you know. I don't have enough equipment to really go into it...I'd have to get more equipment.

Q Did your wife come over on the ship with you?
B No, I came later.

Q You came later? When did you come?
B I came in '52.

Q How did you come over--by ship also?
B I came by boat, yeah. I was a refugee, too. We was thrown out after the war...I come from Schleissing (sp?)...and we was thrown out after the war. First the Russians came in...

Q Now Schleissing is in Poland also?
B Poland has it now. Poland took it after the war.

Q But in 1939 when the Germans invaded, did they invade your town?
B No. No.
A That was Germany.
B That was German, yes. But in '45 the Russians came in, and after three months the Poles came in. You know, the Russians wanted to keep us and the Poles wanted to throw us out. Well, but since they took the Russian soldiers out and Poland took over then, and a year later they threw us out.
Q Did you live on a farm also?
B We had a small farm...and my father worked in a paper factory.
Q So where did you go then, after they threw you out--this was in '45?
B That was in '46 they threw us out. We went to Hameln.
A Yeah. That's where we met. We lived in the same village--Forenberg (sp?) it was actually...the name's translated before the mountain...foren - before, berg is mountain, see. Forenberg...a strange name, but...
Q So you were engaged, and then...
B Then we came over.
Q Did you have any trouble with the language--either of you?
B Well, we didn't know the language. You know, the first thing is we went to Wilmington High School, took the evening classes...I don't know if they still have it. Do they still give lessons in languages and so?
Q I don't know.
B I know I went for five years to school.
A I don't know if you know it or not...that used to be up on Delaware Avenue...Wilmington High School used to be there. And that's where we went to night classes.
B For five years 'til we got our papers.
A We got our citizen papers after five years. See, I came over on a Tuesday, November 6. And on a Thursday evening--that class was two nights a week, Tuesday and Thursday--Thursday evening I went to school already. So I went for about three, four years.
B I went for five years, I know that.
Q Do you remember your teacher?
A I remember one. Miss Miller was one of them, Miss Middleton...I remember, sure...little one, dark haired...
B Is that the teacher lives down in Elsmere here?
A Middleton? I don't think so.
B No? Because one teacher lives down in Elsmere...
A There were others, but she was my...most of the time my teacher. I remember her best. And then Miss Miller. I don't remember any others.
Q Was your class large?
A Oh yes. We had a pretty good-sized class.
B What was there...about 20? Maybe more.
A More in some classes. They would go in groups, too, you know, beginners and then advanced. In one evening...now wait a minute...it was strange; I didn't know too much, but I knew a few words. I started over in Germany before I came over...in fact it was in '39 I started to go to high school, you know...that wasn't mandatory there, you know...you didn't...and I went for about three months before I started as an apprentice, you know, as goldsmith. I went and I decided I didn't want to go to school. That was just before summer vacation, you know, and I quit and I went and started as an apprentice as a goldsmith. I had learned a little bit English there, you know. But by the time I came over it had been many years gone past, so I didn't know too much...a few words. And then I started to night school that evening. I went into one class and that teacher said, "No, you know too much. You go in the next class." She took me to another class and the other one said, "No, you go to that one." I stayed in the third place, finally. But it was rough going for a while, you know.

B I think it's very difficult to learn a language. They always say German and English is a lot alike, but I don't think so, you know, because in Germany you pronounce...you don't spell in Germany like you do here...you have to spell every word. Over there we don't do that. If you know how to speak the word you know how to write it, you know.
A It's spoken the way it is written.
B You know, it's the same thing. But here you cannot...you speak and you write it different, you know?
A That's right. You write it one way and the pronunciation is completely different, you know. That's why it's so difficult. And the same with writing sentences. When I started writing English I got it all mixed up because I translated exactly from the German, and that was completely wrong, you know. The sentence didn't make sense that way because it wasn't correct. In German it sounded all right that way, you know, but you had to go a different way about it, you know.
Q During those first couple of years when you were learning the language, did it cause you any special problems here in Wilmington or in Elsmere... were you living in this... downtown Wilmington or were you living in Elsmere here?

B We lived most of our lives in Elsmere.

Q Did it cause you any special problem?

A Not that bad.

Q With the neighbors, or...

A No, we knew enough....

B Enough, you know, to... I worked for Dr. Reardon here, before we got married...

Q Dr. who?

B Dr. Reardon, the eye doctor... and they had children... they had four children, you know, and I don't know, we got along all right, even though I couldn't speak a word when I came here, you know. And I was a week with your sister and after that I went to Dr. Reardon and... I mean, nobody spoke German there, but I got along. I had no problems, you know.

Q What did you do in his office?

B I did housework.

Q Oh, you worked in the house. Did you work for anyone else?

B No. No one at that time. See we got married after that... so...

A Yeah... it was 20 years this April.

B And it helped, you know, going twice to school, you know, and in the house they would show you, you know. You know, they want something, they would show you, and then say what it is, you know. And that's how you learned the language. So I'm not too good at it, but I mean I get around.

A There are people who have been here all their life and don't speak that much English like we do. I mean, so we get along all right.

Q I just wondered if it had caused you any special problems at the beginning.

A No, not too bad. There were some difficulties, you know, but nothing that couldn't be overcome.

B I mean, it sounds funny, you know, when you never hear that language.
It has an awful funny sound, you know, when you hear something new. 'Til you get used to it, I think, it's...I can't explain that.

Q Do you still speak German?

B Yeah a little bit. Not in the house...our children don't speak German. They don't want to, and so they don't speak German. They're not interested in German, so that's it.

A Well, our daughter did speak for a while, when my wife's mother was here.

Q How old are your children?

A Our daughter will be 20 next month, and our son he's 18--he's over at the university now...Delaware...he had a class tonight...he started as a freshman...

Q Is he taking history?

A I don't know what class he has. I don't know what class he has tonight, but...

B I don't think he's taking history...he has to take history, doesn't he?

Q No, not anymore. Well, it depends on his major. What is he majoring in?

B Engineering...civil engineering...I don't know if he has to take it or not.

Q I don't think they have to take that...they used to have to take it, but I think he has a choice now. He can take that or some other social science course like English or something else.

A But he has a late class, you know, on Wednesday. Monday he has one late...I think what it's at 7:30, the last class on Monday...and Wednesday.

Q And they don't express any interest in German?

A No, they really don't want to. I don't know...sometimes I think they were sort of a little ashamed of it, because children can be very cruel, you know, others were teasing them and they called them all kinds of names, you know, when they found out that we were German.

B And you know a lot of people blame us for things what happened with the Jews. Now we people really did not know anything about the Jews 'til after the war when we were told. Because we had no idea what was going on.

A The population over in Germany did not know.
The people did not know.

Only the ones who were directly involved with that, you know, in the camps and all that. Only they knew, and they were told to keep quiet and everything was secret...nobody knew about it, you know.

And here the people, you know, they blamed us for that what went on over there. So it would be the same thing as if I would blame you what you did to the Negroes, you know? I mean, you had nothing to do with it either, you know. But it's the same thing if you think on it. So our children want nothing to do with it, and we never forced them to, you know, because I said, you have to live in that country and the best way to get along maybe is to just don't say anything about it.

But I don't know...to me it don't make any difference. If somebody calls me a name...I just look at them and laugh it off...you know, it doesn't bother me.

Was there any trouble like that when you first came over?

Well, some people, yes. Some say, "You Nazi," and things like that, you know, but...

Yeah, you had to hear that. They would call you "Heil Hitler" and stuff like that, you know.

But only ignorant people do that, you know that. Anybody with a little common sense wouldn't do that, you know. And it's always the same type of people who do things like that, you know. You just have to overlook it and that's it. But I mean you got over it and we survived.

It didn't affect you in your job in any way?

No. No I got a pretty good job...I got a pretty good position...

How did you get your job...did you just...

Well, I went up there...went in there...you applied for the job in a personnel office, those big ones, and a few days later they called me back, and...

Did they have an ad in the paper...that they were advertising?

They had at one time before.

That's Ralph. (Ralph's remarks will be indicated by "C.")

I guess you're going to the university.

Right. Just got back.

I was just asking your parents if you took any history...history classes.
C This year? All I have is political science.

Q Did you take any last year?

A Well, last year he was in high school.

Q Oh, you're a freshman this year. You should take our class...205...History 205...Dr. Curtis. But I don't think you have to take any history, do you?

C No.

Q Where is your daughter living now?

B She lives over in Lancaster Court Apartments. She was supposed to get married in September, but they broke up before and so she decided to move out. She works as a draftsman...that's a funny...but she likes it...it's more a man's job, I think, you know...it used to be very...

Q Oh, I think that's all changing now, don't you?

B Yeah, but she likes it...she goes to college...she goes to DelTech.

Q Did any of your relation immigrate?

B No, I'm the only one.

Q You were the only child of your family?

B No. I had two brothers. One brother died about four years ago, and I'm the only one who came over here.

Q And you came over because of your husband?

B Yeah...that's right.

Q Before you met him, did you have any desire to come here?

B Well, I don't know....you know people talk different from America than it really is. You think you come over here and you get everything. But you have to work for everything you get...I mean, you have to work for it like everyplace else, you know? But people have a different impression.

Q So you really had no desire to come before?

B No, no.

Q Did you know about America before?

A Oh, yes. I had heard from my parents...see, my father, he was always talking about it. And he and my mother had many arguments about it you know. But he wanted to stay over here; my mother didn't like it. She wanted to go back. Yeah, my father really liked it over here.
He wanted to stay, but my mother, she had trouble with the language, too, and she didn't have enough friends, and it was too lonely for her you know. She wanted to go back. My parents got married over here... in 1908, I think it was. My brother was born in 1909, and a year later my sister... in 1910.

Q When did your parents come over here?

A I don't know that. I don't remember. But they must have been over here maybe two, three years or so... just roughly, I would say before they got married. And my mother came back over... went back over to Europe again. And that was in Galizea, you know, in that part. That's where I was born. And my father stayed over here. He wanted to stay here for a while, so he worked in a factory, was making good money at that time...

Q In Wilmington?

A I don't think it was in Wilmington. I don't think so. He came once to Wilmington for a while... but it must have been some place else, and I don't know that now either. But anyway, in the meantime the First World War broke out, you know, so he couldn't go back. He couldn't go back over there, so he stayed here until after the war, you know. He was sending money and all that. And so by the time everything was settled, the war was over, he had a lot of money and then what was it the inflation came or something like that there too. And he lost practically most of it. All he had left for was to buy a small house like a little ranch house, you know, and a few acres of land... that was all from his savings. He had sent money to my mother and all that, but a lot of it was depreciated, you know, and all that, and so lost... and so she couldn't get much... that's all that he had saved. And that was a... many an argument what they had, you know... He always said, "Well, I would have been better off if we would have stayed over there." My mom would say, "I didn't like it over there," and so on. So it went back and forth. And he really would have liked to come back over here, but he died in '45. The last time I saw him was in '43. But I never got home. Once I got in the army and into action, I never went home... not once, you know, in about three years. And... well, I don't know what else.

Q Did he talk to you about America?

A Oh, yes... quite often he did, yes.

Q About life... working in the factory?

A Um hmm. It was hard work, you know. He must have worked in a foundry, you know, 'cause he said that from all the smelting ovens and all that, a lot of heat and so forth... but he made good pay, you know. And he said if he could've he would have gone back over there. But then you know it wasn't so easy either, you know. Even so my brother was here and sister was here already again. But then he had three more children, you know. My sister, she is a little
older than I am, and I have a sister younger than me...so we were five...actually six—one was about two years old...she died...in the First World War...I don't know what she died of, but she was a little baby, you know...a little girl...she died.

Q What were your first impressions of the United States? What did you see first when you were coming over on the ship? Did you land in New York? At night...or was it during the day...

B We were out in the night time...see, they pulled us in in the morning...when I came. You know, we were out...we were not allowed to come in during the night, you know, we stayed out on the sea, you know, and 8:30 we came in in the morning in an hour, you know? They did not bring us in, you know, I don't know why....

A We came in during the day.

Q You mean on the ship over...you had to stay outside?

B Yeah, we had to stay out of the harbor, you know. We did not come in...we would have come in during the night time in the harbor, but they did not bring us in...we were outside, and then there came that what-you-call-it...tugboat?...and brought us in...I think it was about 8:00 or 8:30 when we came into the harbor. One thing what surprised me was the dirty...how dirty and filthy that was...that was the first thing...the streets...but I could not understand that. Today I believe the country is much cleaner than it was when we came...or we got used to it...I don't know. I think it is cleaner, the country. The highways look cleaner to me....

A It's a little different...people don't throw quite as much stuff around anymore.

B Oh, and Wilmington...papers...oh, it was terrible, and the wind was blowing...the paper was just going...

A That shocked me too, you know....

B And the people just stays there...and the kleenexes and cigarettes they just dumped it on the street...

A Just dumped it out...nobody would have dared to do that in Germany.

B That really got me, you know. I didn't understand that.

A You wouldn't throw a cigarette butt on the ground like that, you know, they have trash cans there in the street, so you'd deposit it in the trash can.

B You would put that stuff in your pocket 'til you saw a trash can.

A Nobody would dare to take a used napkin or a tissue, you know, use it and throw it in the street...or open a car door and dump a can out, or a bottle or stuff like that...huh uh. You would not see stuff like that. And if...oh, you would get fined, if somebody
would dare to do that.

B But I think the country looks cleaner today...I believe so...the highways...you know, I believe it looks cleaner...I don't know. This was one thing I couldn't understand.

A You know, one thing is now a lot of people travelled, too. They travelled all over the world, you know, Americans. And I think we got different impressions, too, from other countries and so on. Because we have seen how it is there and here and all that and so let's do something about it and so, you know. And I think a lot of people are doing something about it. So things changed a little bit. But there are places in Europe, too, that are filthy, especially in the south. I was in Italy, you know, during the war, and south Italy, oh I tell you, it was filthy. You'd just see people...girls walking around in short dresses and their legs were really dirty--you could see the dirt. Not the north of Italy...the south, you know. And I think that affects a lot of more southern countries there, you know...part of Spain, too...I wasn't there myself but I hear it from people who were there, you know. But it's a little on the dirty side, you know. So you find that a lot of places.

Q Did you have any other impressions when you first came?

A Oh, the first thing was strange things, seeing all the Negroes. When we came to Wilmington we came through one section...I don't know where I was, it looked like barracks, you know...and the whole...must have been on the east side...it was a whole section there. And we had seen some once in a while, you know, in the U.S. Army, you know. But here you saw them all around and all that and men, I was shocked the way a lot of places they were falling apart and all that, you know. And when we moved out of it, out of that section, it looked a little different, you know, but in that section, driving through there, I couldn't believe it, you know, what I saw. But that was really strange because we never saw...I'd never seen anything like that before.

B I saw colored people before, you know...but I was scared in the beginning. I don't know...it was a funny feeling.

Q During those first years while you were here, did you meet any colored people...talk to them...in Wilmington?

B Yes, I did. By Reardons, they had a colored girl, she came in...she did the ironing once a week. But I don't know...I always had a funny feeling around her. I don't know why...maybe because she looked different...I don't know, because I never saw any before. You know, it's the first time.

A It doesn't bother me anymore. In fact, I'm real friendly with some of them at work, you know. But I tell you, a lot of them are nicer than many white people, you know that. I mean, well educated, friendly, and all that, and so it doesn't bother me at all. Now a lot of them don't feel like working, you know...we have some over at Speakman's too, you know...they don't do much work. But some of
them, they are hard workers and all that... earn good money. So...
I don't see that much difference anymore now.

Q Is this where you lived... in this area, when you first came? You
said you lived in Elsmere... was it this house?

A No, we lived in Elsmere Gardens... it's a little further down the
highway... you know where the Fire Department is... Veterans' Hospital?

B Straight down from the Veterans' Hospital.

A You know the Fire Department down in Elsmere... down at the traffic
light? Two blocks past that on the left... in back of it... that
was the development... row houses... Elsmere Gardens. We lived there...
we bought that house over there in '52... got married in '53... and
we lived there 'til '62. That's when we bought this place here,
and moved in... in '62. We've been living here ever since.

Q Are there a lot of German immigrants, or German people, in this
area?

B This area? No.

A Not right here in that little development, but...

B We have mostly Polish and Italian around here, you know, and I think
this is why it was with the children very difficult too, you know... just a different kind of people...

A There isn't really too many German people all together in one place
here. No, they are scattered all over the place.

Q Can you think of any reason why that it... why maybe German people
don't live together in little groups... like in Wilmington there's an Italian community...

A Yes, there's an Italian community, and there's Little Poland, what
they call Browntown, and things like that. I don't know... but you
don't see so many German people living in one group there. Maybe
they don't get along too well... I don't know. I get along with all
of them when we go down to the club, you know, the Delaware Saenger-
bund.

Q When did you join that club?

A Oh I joined it in... in fact I joined it right after I came over.
Yeah, my sister and brother-in-law, they took me down to the club...
it used to be down on East Sixth Street, Wilmington. And I became
a member there I would say in '52. And I joined the chorus... I
was singing for quite a few years... and I just dropped out, you
know... got tired of it. And they disbanded, you know. They had to
sell that place, the property... the City of Wilmington bought it.
And they didn't have a place for a while, then. Well, I wasn't a
member then... I had, like I said, I had dropped out. And they were
meeting at the Turner Club up here on Poplar Hill...Clayton Street, I think, right on...Turner Clubs, you know...it's a German club, too, but they are like gymnastics, you know...they have a big gym there, and so...that's their name...Turner...it means gymnastics, you know. And they were meeting there for about a year I think...or longer. And I started to go back to singing again...and we bought that property out in Ogletown there. And then finally it got so bad we didn't get along with the Turners here too well anymore and they were charging us outrageous prices, you know, for renting the hall, you know, when we had a dance. So we finally said, we have to see that we build our own place.

Q Are they still in existence?
A Oh, yes. Yes. They're still up there.
Q It's mainly German also?
A Well, I don't even think...there's still German people, and German singers, and all but...
B Not like the Delaware Saengerbund, you know.
A See, that is really still a true German club. And so we started building that place down there. And I worked for two years there...I spent practically every free moment I had...in the evening I would go down after work...Saturdays and Sundays I'd go down...and we were building that place...laying blocks and doing everything... working as a laborer, working as a skilled worker...everything, you know, you could think of. And we got it built. And, well, it's a nice place...we're really proud of it.
B Did you ever see the dances?
Q No, not the time I was there.
A Well, they're going to dance next Saturday. They're going to perform there.
B In case you're interested.
A It's folk dance, you know, from Germany, in shorts and leather... shorts and all that with them straps here, and the women in their dirndl dresses and stuff like that. They danced last Saturday at that dance there too. But they will perform in that Christmas bazaar over there.
Q Did the fact that there were so many automobiles in America affect you at first...when you came here? When did you buy your first car? Do you remember when?
B '56?
A I think in '56, yeah.
B '56 we bought an old car on time.

A Yeah, we bought a '51 Dodge in '56. That was the first car we drove. Well, we had that for a while...what, about two-three years? We bought a '53 after that. But that only had about 30,000 miles on it, that '53. And now we have four cars in the family. My wife has a VW; I have a Dodge—it's getting a little old and beat-up now too...a '66; my son has a '71—what has he got...a Dodge Demon; and our daughter...she went through three or four cars, you know.

B Well, see, practically...everybody needs a car...because everybody goes a different place. He goes a different place to work, I go different places...he goes to Newark...my daughter works a different place. So...I just listened to Nixon tonight when he said, you know, car pools and all things like that, you know...and it's not that easy, you know.

Q I missed that speech...did he...the speed limit...

A Yeah, he suggested that they lower the speed over the whole country...it should be lowered to 50 he said.

Q Is he going to make that a national law or did he just suggest that they do it?

B He suggested it, but vehicles from the state, they have to go 50.

A Oh yeah, government vehicles they have to...I don't know...I don't think he wanted to use that drastic measures.

B No, he just suggested...

A Suggested it to the states...that they enforce it, you know.

Q What do you think about President Nixon? There's been a great many changes...and a lot of Americans...I don't know...have reacted differently.

B I don't know. I don't like what he did with the tapes. This is one thing I do not understand. I mean, everybody was involved except him...I mean, this is...

A If he had nothing to hide, why didn't he come right out and say all right, here, have 'em...not to that panel...

B Not to the Senators...he shouldn't have given it to...

A But he could have let that Judge Sirica from New York...he should have let him listen on it, and if he would have found it damaging from security measures or so were involved, then he could have said "No, you cannot have it." But he should have let him listen to it, because if he doesn't trust that guy, then who can you trust then? I mean he's right next to the Supreme Court...a District Judge. So I mean I didn't approve of his actions there, you know.
B I did not like that. I mean, he did a lot of good things, Nixon. I mean, we have to...

A You have to give him credit for that...

B ...give him credit for that, you know, but that tapes, you know...

A That sort of spoils it all now, you know.

B I mean, if you have a big family and your family does something, you know, and you be the head of it, wouldn't you find out what goes on? I mean, that's the way I figure.

A That's right. It seems like everybody knew around him except him.

B I would find out what goes on and I would look into it.

Q Do you think he should be impeached for that?

A Well I don't know whether you should go that far.

B I think the people put him in and I think we should have an election now and see what the people want...if they want him in, or do they want him out. I think the people should go and vote. That's my opinion. I mean, the people put him in, right. But now the people should decide if he stays in. I think the Senate or those people shouldn't do anything about it. I think we should go and vote.

A It is too difficult, you know. I mean, has there ever been an impeachment...I think there was.

Q There was one President who was impeached, but he was acquitted. In other words, he wasn't convicted...he wasn't thrown out of office. It was Andrew Johnson, right after the Civil War. It is a very serious thing. Only one President has undergone that...and no President has ever been kicked out of office.

A That's why...I mean, you have to think about it before you go into something like that. It's...the damage is done...I mean, you can't wipe it out because...but I don't know...there should be some way that you could determine whether he knew about it or what, you know, about all that mess. But you know, the people were still behind him for quite some time. But once he refused to hand over the tapes, and then all of a sudden two of them are missing...see, you know what happened then, everybody is doubting now...nobody...you listen to one person, you say, well, you can't trust him anymore. You don't know what's what. The next one, he says something like that too. I mean, it is getting to the point where people don't trust him anymore, you know. I think that's his own fault. If he would have come out sooner, you know, but he kept quiet for too long after that all started, you know, that scandal.

B It would be bad, too, you know. We have no Vice President, you know. He's gone.
A That was the same thing, see, with Agnew. I mean, suddenly he was getting money left and right from all that contractors and stuff. Well, it gets to the point where you cannot believe anybody who is in politics. What's your opinion?

Q Oh, I don't know. It's a very complicated affair. I sort of doubt that we're ever gonna know the real truth. No matter what the tapes say, you'll always wonder if he changed them, or there will be some people who will always wonder if he changed them, or if he gave them all the tapes...and I don't think he'll...this is really something that 'll never be resolved. It is a serious affair.

A But you know that really hurt the Republican Party. Because you've seen in that election...when was that...the other day...

B Yesterday was election day, wasn't it?

A Right. And to most offices the Democrats were elected. Now who is to say that the Democrats wouldn't have done the same thing...but I mean, they're the angels, now...they're all clean, and...

B Oh, they all do something. It just doesn't come out, I think.

A Politics is really bad. I have never seen anything like that in Europe. It might be done, too, who knows? But not to such an extent, you know, where they would bring their dirty laundry out and wash it in public, you know...really come out with all that dirt and one accusing the other of this and that...I mean, I've never heard it like that.

B A lot of things should not have been said on television, I think. They should have kept it more quiet.

Q They shouldn't have had those hearings on T.V.?

B Not...some of the things...I did not listen often, but when they said that they had tapes of the embassies in it and so...now that they should not say that on television...

A That is bad for national security, you know...I didn't approve of that either.

B They should keep quiet what they do, you know, because I know that the Russians have them by the Americans too, you know, I mean, I think everybody knows about that...the Chinese and so...but...

A I mean, we shouldn't come right out and bring that out in the open.

Q Did you ever want to go back to Germany? Or just to visit?

A Maybe for a visit.

B I have just one brother living over there, you know. All my family is dead. I think if I could go back home...I mean all the way home,
where I was born, maybe I would go over there. But to go into the rest, I'm not that interested...and I would go and see something here.

Q Have you travelled in the United States?
A Not too much. One time we took a trip, went up to the New England states, you know, about three or four days.
B New England states and down to Virginia...and state of New York, Canada.
A ...Blue Ridge Mountains...and another year we went...where did we go...Oh, up to Buffalo and into Canada...Lake Ontario and all that...back through the state of New York, up into Pennsylvania, through the Poconos and back home. That's about the longest trip we have taken. Well, that was pretty nice. And now this summer we bought a place down at the beach...around Bethany...bought a mobile home and put it down...so I think we'll be spending a lot of our free time down there. There's still some work to be done yet, you know. But I think we will enjoy that. We like the water, you know, and the ocean.

Q This is something you didn't have in Germany was...other people have mentioned the same thing.
B The ocean...I never saw the ocean 'til I came here, you know.
A That's the first time I saw the ocean when I went on the boat, you know. I went on rivers and all that, but it's nothing like that.
B Mountains...we had mountains, you know.
Q Do you miss the mountains?
B Yes...skiing, when we were kids, you know...did a lot of skiing and sledding...ice skating...I miss that. Well, I'm too old to do that, you know, but I missed that when I came here, because we did that already before we went to school.
A Well, you were living right on a mountain...
B We were living...from October 'til March we had snow...solid snow, always. It didn't melt...so, you had to do something. But I missed that when I came over here.
Q Did you miss anything else, especially? Maybe during those first years...or even now...ways of life in Germany, or customs, or...
B Oh, we cooked German mostly, all the food was German, you know, so...
Q Oh, you still eat German food?
B Oh, yes. We cook a lot of German food, and we eat a lot of dumplings...
A ...roasts and all that different stuff...

B One thing, you had more clothes here than over there.

A Oh, yes, people didn't have that many.

B People over there they didn't have that much clothes to wear...you have much more clothes.

A I have...how many suits do I have? I have about seven or eight and combinations and whatever...and if I had two suits...or three at the most, I was really lucky to have three suits, you know. Because if you went to buy a suit, after the war, I had to work for about three months to be able to buy a suit...I mean, from the money that I could save up...at least that long, because you paid for a suit about...around 200 bucks...well, about 200 marks. Well, if you change it into dollars, it would come to about...a dollar was about four marks at that time...but still, a worker did not make as much in marks, you know, like you would translate...for every dollar you would make four marks--it wasn't that way, you know. 'Cause if somebody would make a dollar here, you were lucky to make a mark over there, you know. When I finished my apprenticeship, I made 90¢ an hour...90¢ an hour I made in '48. And then I got a 10¢ raise, I thought man...I could hit the ceiling, I was happy, you know, about a year later...so I got one mark. And when I left in '51 I was making one mark and ten.

Q What did you start out as a wage here?

A I started at $1.40...no, $1.25, I think. And I left I was getting $1.40 in '55. That wasn't too much either. So I was better off at Speakmans then, you know. I started at I think it was about $1.50 an hour, and now it's pretty good...about $5.00...close to $6.00 an hour. It can vary, you know. But it's a little different.

Q Oh, yeah, inflation and everything.

B You know, what I liked here was that you could sleep warm. You know, that it was heated, you know, and that...Over there we had just one oven in each room, you know, where I grew up, you know. And we would heat only the room when we were in it in the winter time. So we had one big room like a living room what we only used for Christmas...you know, when company came...that we'd heat it...the day before we had to start already the fire, otherwise we wouldn't get it warm, you know...it wouldn't get warm...the oven...I don't know what you'd call it, but it was from the floor almost to the ceiling, you know.

A Like tiles...German tiles, or so...

B And we always got cold. When we took water in our room, the kids, we always had a pot of water to drink, and in the morning it was frozen...that's how cold it was, where we slept.

A That old house wasn't heated like here...
B No, it was not heated.

A One room was heated where you stayed in during the day.

B The kitchen and one room where you lived in. And the big living room, like I said, only Christmas.

A And the bedrooms, they were cold. You had the big feather bed, you know, of goose feathers, you know....You know the feathers were used...like we used downs, you know?

B Oh, they have them in the ski jackets, too.

A They take that stem out...that hard stem, that would be taken out, and fill it up...that bed was about that thick, you know. It was the same way...you crawled under there, covered yourself up to your nose...it didn't take long to get warm...very quickly, you know? You were really warm under there...but when you got in first, you were shivering.

B But I wonder what the people would do today here, you know, if they would have to sleep like that...me too, you know.

A Well, I don't think they always had that heat like that either...central heat and stuff like that. They used to use other things too.

B I don't know...when we came it was...we always didn't have it. We didn't have it...the same with the clothes...we would wear our clothes for one week, and every week we would change our clothes. And here you would change them every day. The beds...we did not change the beds every week...only once a month, you know, you would change the bed...and here you change it every week. It's a different life when you think on that. So...we didn't have a washing machine—we had to wash the clothes by hand, you know, and we came here and had the washing machine...much more convenient.

Q Do you think...you grew up knowing the difference...and now you have these appliances, and the cars. What about the kids, your children, and kids that grow up in America, with all of these things...do you think...

B They would get lost if they would...

A Oh, they would have a hard time...they would have a hard time. It would be hard for us too, but we would adjust. We would be able to because we knew how it was before, you know. If things would change, you know, more primitive again and all that, we would be able to get along...you know what to expect then, you know. Them, I think they would be completely lost.

B We always had to made a fire...you want to heat some water, you know, over there, you had to make a fire you know to cook some coffee. And here you turn the switch and you have the gas, electric...but we didn't have it.
A  That's right...you had to have firewood...

B  And the pump, the water pump...now we were a lucky home...my mother always said, "Well, what are you complaining for...you don't have to go out in the cold," you know? The people had the pumps outside. They had to get all the water from outside. And we had about 28, 30, sometimes up to 35° cold you know, in the wintertime...

A  Below zero...

B  Below zero, you know, and we were lucky, we had the pump in the house already, and we would pump it from the house in the kitchen...you know, like an entrance corridor we had, and we had the water pump in it, and then we would pump it and the pipe would go in the kitchen. And in the stove we had basin, and when we had the stove on, the water got hot in that basin. You know, we were modern already. We thought we were modern, you know?

A  We didn't have that. We had a well. We had a big well in the ground with like some bricks laid around it, and a frame...you know that old type? Maybe you've seen it in the western movie sometime...with a rope on it, crank it--that's what we had...we would let that bucket down and fill it up with water and then crank it up...bring it up...

B  You see, life was much different when we came over here, you know...it was more modern....You know, the bathroom--we had our bathroom outside. Now you go outside when it's that cold, you know. And here you have it in the house with everything heated.

Q  Do you like living in Delaware? You've travelled to some other states, briefly.

B  Yes, I think I like it here, you know. Well, I think I would like the mountains, like up in the Catskills we were, or in the Poconos, you know.

END OF INTERVIEW