



## **Citation for this collection:**

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

## **Contact:**

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library  
181 South College Avenue  
Newark, DE 19717-5267  
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)  
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>  
[askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

## **Terms governing use and reproduction:**

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. [askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

## **A note about transcriptions:**

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. [askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

*Schilling*

Interview with Mrs. Max Schilling, German immigrant, in Wilmington, Delaware, December 17, 1973, by Steven Schoenherr.

Q Now, your full name is Mrs. Max Schilling?

A That's right.

Q What is your maiden name, can you tell us that?

A Kueger.

Q How do you spell that?

A K-u-e-g-e-r. Shall I write it down for you?

Q No, that's fine, as long as you can spell it into the tape recorder so we can spell it when we type it. Now you were born where in Germany?

A In Berlin.

Q Berlin? What part of the city? East or west, north or south?

A Oh, now what is it now...now wait a minute. What is it now? It's the west, isn't it.

Q You were born in the western part of Berlin?

A Yeah. Uh huh...west is it now. See, at that time we don't have this, you know. Now it's divided, isn't it.

Q Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

A Well they're all dead.

Q What did your father do for a living?

A Passed...father and mother passed.

Q What did he do for a living...did he work on a farm...your father.

A Oh, father. Well, what he...what his name...I can't remember... oh, you know, I can't pronounce that...say it...He put the hot iron in the oven with tin...what do you call it...I cannot say that...I don't know that in English.

Q He worked in a factory?

A Yes. Uh huh. For Krupp.

Q How long did he work there?

A Oh, my goodness...

Q Most of his life?

A Yes, that's right. He died at 81.

Q Did your mother work?

A No...housework. We were six children.

Q How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A Oh, they're all gone...three boys and three sisters...we were six. Oh, that goes on already? Oh, I have to watch myself.

Q No you don't, just speak naturally, whatever you want to say. Don't be afraid.

A Now what is the next question?

Q When did you come to the United States?

A In 1927.

Q How did you manage to come over here?

A Well, my husband was here. He came in '25, and he works for DuPont right away. Of course we came, myself and my son, we came 2½ years later in '27.

Q You were married in Germany then?

A Oh, yes. My son was 13 when we came over. Henry is his name.

Q You had been married then...

A 45 years now...Christmas it will be 45 years.

Q Did you have any trouble coming over?

A No.

Q Getting out of the country?

A It was pretty hard. You know how it is, getting used to... yeah, it was pretty hard. But....

Q Did you come over by boat?

A Oh yes.

Q A crowded ship? Was the journey difficult?

A No, it was the English line...English line...we went from Hamburg to Antwerp with a train and then we shipped from Antwerp we went...came over.

Q How long did it take you?

A Oh over eight days...I can say 12...December was bad weather, you know. Oh it was 12 days I can say.

Q Was the ship crowded?

A Oh yes. It was 27 ton...it was a big ship.

Q What class was your ticket?

A Oh the second class.

Q You were second class...so you had your own room on the ship.

A Oh yes.

Q Was the food good on the ship? Were you treated well on the ship?

A Oh excellent, excellent...wonderful. See it was written...the menu was in English and German. Oh the boy enjoyed it. Oh I shouldn't say that.

Q No, that's fine. Did anything happen to you during the trip?

A I was seasick, yes. The whole trip...but the boy enjoyed it--he was well. He was all right. He enjoyed it.

Q Now you landed in New York?

A Yes.

Q Can you remember where at in New York--in Hoboken, or...

A No, right away to Wilmington, because my husband's relatives--sister was here in Wilmington.

Q How did you get from New York to Wilmington?

A Train...with a train.

Q Did you know the language when you first came to New York?

A Oh, no, not a word. But the son just a little bit from school...but not much, you know. But he make very well, you know. He know the teacher, my husband, well it's a long story now. My husband knew the teacher here in Wilmington, and he went--he works for DuPont--he went to Tennessee with 25 men.

Q The teacher, now, or your husband?

A My husband--and so the teacher told him that he is leaving and my family is coming. So of course is the boy 13. And so he say, "Don't worry about it, I take care of him in school." And it was wonderful...it really is. It took him six weeks.

It was on the east side. All the immigrations generally they had to go on the east side in school.

Q Which school was this...do you remember the name?

A Bancroft? No.

Q Well, they all went to the same school, is this what you're saying?

A Every children that they came, they have to go down on the east side first...immigration school. But I forgot the name, I tell you. I think maybe it was Bancroft School. I'm not sure yet.

Q So your son went to this school.

A Yeah. He was 13.

Q What did he study in school...what did they teach him?

A The language, of course...language first. And he did very well. Then he came to 28 School on 8th Street. He did very well at the 8th...I don't know how long that was, but he went into college. And he graduated in '36, in June '36.

Q Did you go to school when you first came?

A Yes. It was near the library, across from the library here, in what-you-call-it...everybody has to go there, see.

Q When did you get your citizenship papers?

A Oh, I don't remember...I have it down.

Q You don't have to remember the exact date, just, you know, about when.

A Well, it was between '36 and '37. 1936 I think it was.

Q Did not knowing the language those first couple of years...did that cause you any problems?

A A little bit, yes, so true. You know how it is, very hard, you know, when you come from home, you know, and then here. It is strange.

Q Can you remember any specific things that happened to you?

A What you mean?

Q Can you remember any particular thing that happened to you because you didn't know the language. You can't remember any specific thing...like going to the grocery store, or...

A Oh, well, yeah. I love to...well, I have a girl friend, see

and she came the same time and we went to the 5 & 10...and that was easy to buy because it was all laid out and I know what I want, a pencil or something, you know; and then it was hard with the money, you know. You have to learn everything. So it was easy there, you see, you could took it and pay it, see. Otherwise I liked it very much, you know, right from the beginning. Of course, it was all different, you know, from home.

Q Can you remember, when you first came to Delaware, what were some of the things that really struck your mind as being different...automobiles, dishwashers, bathrooms...

A Oh, no, not at that time. 45 years ago, we have not a dishwasher. I wash it by hand. We washed by hand, you know, on a wash board.

Q Can you think of anything, though, such as those things that struck you as being really different from the old country?

A And then of course my husband...well, I don't know, it comes now between...when we arrived here on the 12th of December, my husband--I didn't know it, but he told me later--we went in a train. He was glad to see us, of course, and he was glad. I said, "You're glad?" He said, "Now, you're not so sure I'm glad to see you," but he show me the ticket. I said, "Well, that's a ticket to Wilmington." "No," he said, "It's my ticket to go to Old Hickory, Tennessee. My men...I have 25 men working for me, and I have to leave tonight." I said, "No," I say, "If that's so, I go right away back to Germany where I come from." "No, no," he said, "You have to live with my sister." So of course we arrived here seven and twenty-five minutes in the evening. And 9:30 we both--and my sister-in-law brought him to the station...so it was a hard nut to crack. So of course after 2½ years I haven't seen him, see. So of course I lived then with my sister-in-law and brother-in-law. They had two children. So...I thought maybe we can go down to Tennessee, but my husband always has to come back to the DuPont when the job is finished...he has to come here in the main building. So he came, after nine months he came home. Meantime then I had in the family there...and my brother-in-law was sick. And after three months I paid her, but I thought I can do better when I have my own. So I looked for apartment and I lived then on 21 West Fifth Street--upstairs apartment.

Q Where did your sister live?

A Clayton Street.

Q Is this downtown?

A Yeah. Clayton Street here.

Q Were there other Germans living in the area?

A Oh, yes. My husband had two sisters...other two sisters. And the oldest was in Washington in laboratory, and the other was a nurse...school nurse. So we visited each other and they came here and visit me. But after three months like I say I rent an apartment there and I moved then...bought the furniture...

Q So you moved into your new apartment then?

A Yes. So...and then bought furniture. And we weren't happy, see. So after half a year, he came home...in his own home again, you know. So of course he was there six weeks then on the road again. See he worked the machine for DuPont and so he went...he was 19 years on the road for DuPont...even South America...Buenos Aires. And the last job he was then in Seaford...built up the nylon machine. And then he was in a shop here before he retired.

Q He was away from home quite a bit then.

A Yeah, 19 years. So we...most of the time we were alone. And Henry really knows...you know...need a father, isn't it? But he did very very well in school and in '36 graduated in the university. And that same month, in June, he got a job in Flint, Michigan as a chemical engineer. And now he is still there. And he is married, three children. He's 59 now.

Q Did you ever go back to Germany?

A Once. It was in '59.

Q Things were very different then.

A Oh, yes. And then of course we would go earlier but my husband was always working out, you know, on the road. And in the war, you know, we had 13 families and they went hungry so we sent packages. I had a large family and my husband had a large family. So we sent the package there. Otherwise we could go to Germany, but we spent that money to send the packages. Of course, then my husband died in April five years ago...it will be April. So of course it's lonely now.

Q Do you belong to the Saengerbund?

A Yes.

Q When did you first join that?

A Oh, right away. I like to talk German. Um hmm...right away. And then we went right away in church, too...in the old church.

Q Zion?

A Zion...oh yes, right away.

Q Do you remember who the pastor was?

**Hasskarl**

- A Pastor ~~Haskell (?)~~...um hmm...he visited us quite often, you know. He was very nice.
- Q Did you meet any German people?
- A Oh, yes. Oh in Zion, oh yes. The apartment I had, the next door neighbor, you know, was Mrs. Meier...and the other family was new also. You know, when I met somebody else I said yes...made like that, then I'd greet 'em, see. But most I talked German...many Germans here. So of course you like to be under them, see.
- Q Do you remember the building the old Saengerbund was in downtown.
- A Oh, yes. We had a good time there, and now we have a new place then. Yeah...very good...cooked dinners and celebrated...it was very nice. There were elderly people...of course many passed away.
- Q Do you remember some of the people? We're interested in the history of the Saengerbund. Do you remember who any of the leaders were of the club at that time?
- A Oh, yes. Mr. Kleitz...his whole family was...you know, you forget the names.
- Q You got together what--every Wednesday?
- A Pardon me?
- Q How often did you get together in the club?
- A Oh at that time I was very often there...oh, once a week at least.
- Q I know they get together now once...
- A Well, now, you know we get...well, I can't go, I have not a car. See, I can't go--I have to wait when somebody pick me up, and then I go see. Otherwise I have to stay home. You know when you have not a car you can't go places. Of course at my age, you know, I wouldn't drive, you know.
- Q Did you drive when you were younger?
- A No.
- Q Did you ever want to drive?
- A I want to drive, but my husband don't let me. He said, "No, no." Yeah, I made a big mistake. Of course now maybe I couldn't drive now. I'm 79 now. Time goes by.
- Q Do you think you would have come to America even if let's say your husband didn't come.



A Well, see, three sisters went here, and the time was so bad... he has no work....They asked the one sister...they asked...wrote a letter and asked, they wanted to come over. Well, of course it was hard decision to do, you know, and then he said yes. And he left in 1925 but he didn't like it. You know, he was in the 40's too, now, and--or 38 or so--and it was hard to speak the language, you know. He didn't know it either, not a word. It was very hard. Every letter he said, "I like to come back." But he didn't. He pushed it off and pushed it off and finally I decided without that he knows, I sold all my furniture, and we have a garden...I sold everything. And it was very hard to do so. Well, we left on...then I went to the agent, "I like to go to America." But "the shortest way with the ship." Well, he said, from Kiel we have to--it was Kiel where we're living--from Kiel to Hamburg--we had to go to Hamburg--get all the injections. So...and he made arrangement to leave from Hamburg with the train...Cologne...you stayed there second class...you stay in a hotel second class...and from there after two days by train to Antwerp. So we left there on the 10th of December and it was stormy stormy weather. We went...for two days we couldn't move...that ship couldn't move...that was like mountains. Everyone was seasick...that started already. My husband--I didn't write him that we come to America.

Q You didn't tell him you were coming?

A From England...the agent sent a telegram to here on Clayton Street to his sister. And he was still there but he had the ticket to go to Tennessee. So that telegram arrived...she say, "There's a telegram there," his sister said. "Oh!" He opened it in a hurry, you know. He never ate sweet potatoes that day, but that day he ate. And he went to New York. So, see...that we're coming. So the agent on the ship asked me somebody is waiting for me on the pier. I said, "No. I have to go to Wilmington." And finally time came, all people... I saw the big crowd, all crying and hankies you know, and all that. I said, "Nobody is for me." Well, the agent told me they make sure that I go to Wilmington with my son. So and I went outside, then I saw the big crowd. And finally I moved a little by sight and looked at people...other people. And I saw my husband. And I near lost my voice. He said, "All right, where is Henry?" "Well, you stay here and wait in the same spot here, and I tell them that he goes there." So, I went in. I said, "Henry, Daddy is there." "Oh, my!" he said. So he went out and said, "Pop...Daddy," you know how it is. Of course and then our luggage came all down and we went by train then, see. And that was the story then, see.

Q Did you have to go through customs?

A Oh, yes. But it was not too bad. And so and then of course we went, I told you before. And it was sad when he told me he had to leave us again. We met him just the time from New York to here, see, to Clayton Street. Of course it was bad. But I get used to it and Henry did very well at school. That was very important. So that was that.

Q You've always lived in Wilmington?

A Yeah.

Q Have you traveled anywhere else?

A Well, I went several times with my husband, you know, when he came near. He was in Buffalo, Richmond, and Martinsville, Virginia...so nearby, the cities, see, I could go.

Q Do you like the city of Wilmington?

A Oh yes, oh yes.

Q You've seen other cities...would you like to live some other place?

A No. Um hmm. No, I always liked to come back to Wilmington. So...time passed. I can't believe it myself that I'm here 45 years now. Of course now five years I'm alone. And the children they're in Flint, Michigan.

Q Did you ever work or have a job?

A No. Just kept house.

Q Did your husband enjoy working for DuPont?

A Oh, yes. Oh, when you know your work the company is good to you. Oh yes. He's very well know, you know--many people know him. Yeah, he enjoyed himself.

Q Did you ever go to any company functions, like dinners, or parties that the DuPont Company had?

A Well, no. Most the time the men were invited and they no think of the wives, you know and all. Where you print this...where you put it, in a book or what?

Q Yes, we put it into a little book. Well, do you have any other memories or things you can think of...things that have happened to you while you were here? Any bad stories, or good stories...

A Bad. I was here two years, I had an operation. Three weeks in the hospital. At that time my husband was in Nashville, Tennessee. Yeah, that was a bad one--after two years. Yeah, I always liked to go to South America at that time. Henry was in Flint, the son, Flint...and he settled there. And I would like to go to South America. I had everything ready...the company had everything second class, everything ready for me to leave. But I lived on Franklin Street, three-story house. And was a lady, she was the principal of the school, and she lived alone, and she really was so...she had trouble with her eyes. So I took care of her. And from the DuPont was everything arranged to leave in '36. I had my citizenship paper, and all the injections.

It was the last injection I got from the DuPont. I came home, opened the door, and I called her--she lived on the first floor, I was living on the second floor. And I knocked and knocked and finally she opened the door, "I can't see you,"...I said my name... she couldn't see me. I said, "What happened?" So she had a cataract on both eyes. Oh, what I do. I knew the school doctor, Dr. Parson, and he knew her very well from school. So I said, "Dr. Parson, this is Mrs. Schilling calling about Miss Loony,"-- was her name--Miss--she was not married, and "You bring her." So I brought her...took a taxi. Well, he said, "You have to go and see Dr. Meierberg." He was a specialist, see, of eyes. So she was operated. So we went home. She say, "Don't leave me. I know you to...it's selfish," she said, "You leave me now, and I have nobody." Oh! So I went to the DuPont and told all about it. I said, the lady downstairs and she had nobody and she begged me to stay. I said, "Maybe I can cancel my trip to South America." You know, she was 73 at that time, and very weak, you know, and not well. And I thought maybe something happen to her. And finally, well, she was better. She get treatment with the eyes and was getting better, and I fed her, you know...I cooked for her, and Monday she called me then and she said, "You're so good--I kept you from your trip." And, "I like to make it good. Let us go to a lawyer," and "Everything, my belongings, belong to you." I wrote this to my husband. He said, "Don't do that. Never do that," and "Come to South America, don't do it. You know, they say now she is alone but later on all the relatives coming, and you don't know them." Nobody came and visited her, you know how it is...and you pass, everybody shows up then, see. And nobody came...all the time, so long as I live there. So she made the will, all in my name. But I had a terrible time. I have to take a lawyer...and one family--two persons--came from Florida and claimed the will. So we were called in. Oh! Well, I had all the neighbors...ten neighbors...they were good to me, and I had Dr. Parson and I had Dr. Meierberg...my witness, see. And everything turn out in my favor. Of course it was an old house, three-story house...and meantime my husband came home. He finished his job somewhere, see, and he came home. So he said, "Now, you like to live here, or we have to move someplace else." Well, we call the builder and he say, "Now, this two apartment would be nice when you...either one you live downstairs or upstairs, you can rent one upstairs or downstairs. So it's up to you. You better...it's a good built home and you can rent one floor...and there's income for you." But we put \$6,000 at that time in the house and we rented then. Of course it was all right. So that kept us going, then, see. But the time came then...I'm here 15 years now...15 years ago the time came...it was a mixed area on Franklin Street, so it's time to move. So that's the reason we're here now 15 years...in this home. It's a story, isn't it?

Q Yeah. That's very interesting. Do you still have that house, or you sold the house?

A We sold it. We have no money. Of course we liked that money but you know how it is with the real estate, you know.

Q Is the house still standing?

A Oh, yeah. It will stay 100 years more. You know, years ago they built the houses better than now. I can't believe it myself that we are here 15 years. But we liked it out here. Of course it's lonesome now. I'm alone in here...and the children away, you know. But I was lucky so far this year, I saw them twice. I went out to Flint, Michigan on Easter and then they came in July for two weeks. So it was nice.

Q What do you think of America today?

A Well, the time is bad...it's awful. Terrible. In every country, now...in Germany and everywhere. Looks very bad.

Q Do you read the Wilmington paper?

A Oh yes. Well, I had the German paper, but you know, you can't have everything, you know. It's too much now and everything is so high in price, see, and so I have just the evening.

Q Did you used to read the German paper?

A Oh yes. I had the German paper all the time. But the price went too high and that and so I quit.

Q Is that still being published today...the German paper?

A Oh yes. Yes. It comes from New York.

Q Do you know the name of it?

A Herald...

Q It's published in New York, huh?

A Yeah...published in New York. And it was always nice. Now I get the paper...I don't know, one day I get the paper from Washington in German. So I have to read it all. I have not the time, see, and so I have to read it. I like to read.

Q Do you follow what's going on in your home country, in Germany?

A Oh, I get the letters from my relatives.

Q And they tell you what's going on over there?

A Oh yes. The letters and then you read everything in the paper now...and television and radio...you hear every news, you know, you hear everything.

Q Would you ever want to go back and live in Germany?

A Oh no. See, my relatives they are near gone...they're all in my age and more than that...in their 80's.

- Q Is there any time in the past when you wished you would have gone back to Germany?
- A No. Well, see when you're here so long you're really...I rather stay here, you know. It's a big change, too, over there. No. You know when you're here so long you know the people and all, you know, and you have your home and it's different.
- Q How did the Second World War affect your life?
- A Well, I felt bad for my people because the bomb...they destroyed the houses. They went to the shelters, when the alarm was...shelters...and then they came home. See, we were over there in the First World War. That was bad.
- Q Did any of your relatives fight in the war? Any of your relations?
- A You mean fighting?
- Q Did any of your family have to go in the army?
- A Oh yes, my brothers and brother-in-laws. Yeah.
- Q How about over here. Were you treated badly because you were from Germany?
- A Oh no. Of course sometimes they came here, officer or what it was, and asked me, you know, sometime, or they went to the neighbors where I lived and...on Fifth Street...they asked the neighbors...what they say about me...the child, you know...but we never had trouble. Well, we kept our mouths shut. We couldn't help it that the war was.
- Q Did the Saengerbund still meet every week?
- A You mean I go there?
- Q Yeah, did you go there?
- A Well, I was...now we had a party over there last Saturday.
- Q No, I mean during World War II.
- A Oh, we went, yeah, we went there.
- Q You weren't afraid to go there.
- A Oh no. We had never never trouble, what I know of. Maybe something happened, but I don't know.
- Q Well, that's all the questions I have, unless you had any other stories to tell me. I'd be glad to listen to them.
- A Well, no. I think that's all. Everybody has trouble, you know. No, so far, but I hope...I hope will be different, you

know...afraid...breaking in, you know. So many things happen. Now you have to turn the heat down...with the lights, you have to save...now when they see I have the lights on, they say, "Mrs. Schilling!"

Q It's a real problem.

END OF INTERVIEW