



LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Ernest Hartwig.

[s.l.]: [s.n.], 1987-01-06

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/NNMBQJ3Z2XZOA85>

<http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0/>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

VISIT WITH ERNEST HARTWIG

- Taped interview -

F#12

Bonnie and Gail Roub visited Ernest Hartwig in his home on Blackhawk Island Road Jan. 6, 1987, and learned the following:

Frank Hartwig, the first husband of Lorine Niedecker, was one of three children born to Friederich and Rosina Hartwig, who emigrated separately from Germany to the United States about 1890 (he once served in the kaiser's cavalry) and were married in this country after they met in Jefferson, Wisconsin. Ernest, the youngest of the three, is the only survivor. He is the same age as Lorine, went to school with her and knew her all her life. Frank was born around 1899 and was perhaps four years older than Lorine. The older sister, Emma, was born in 1896.

Ernest remembers that Lorine started her education at the Blackhawk School, a one-room country building at the corner of Hwy 106 and County Trk J, now a private home, and that it was immediately decided that she should move to town and stay with relatives so that Henry, her father, would not have to drive her to school everyday with a horse and buggy. Ernest remembers her as a cute little girl who was always quite shy. He did not see her often again until high school, because he attended a Lutheran school. He remembers that she had weak eyesight even as a small child and wore thick lenses.

At Fort Atkinson High School—they attended the 1911 building, torn down in 1981 to make way for new construction—Ernest remembers always speaking to Lorine in the halls and remembers that her best friend was Anna Ramsey, a good student like Lorine and also quiet. Lorine went to the junior prom with several girlfriends and Ernest drove her home. She was writing poetry by then, and he teased her about one word in a poem, because he thought it wasn't just right. She replied that it had taken her two months to think of just the right word for that line, so even then she "sat for two months" on one line of poetry.

Ernest's memories of Theresa "Daisy" Niedecker, Lorine's mother: Extremely fastidious housekeeper who kept the wood floors polished and never let anyone into the house. She and Lorine could be sitting in the same room for a whole evening without passing a word. Even father, Henry, did not usually sleep in the house, but stayed in a quonset-like building next to the house, where he kept his seining gear and where the men were fed who helped him sein carp. This is the house about three doors downstream ^{on N. side of Road} from the Fountain House, where Henry later also allegedly kept his lady friend who is said to have parted him from his money. Ernest said he had heard something about this affair but knew nothing for sure and could not identify the woman.

Ernest on Henry Niedecker: Henry was never coarse, always polite. "Soft-spoken, calm. . . When he got angry he got really angry." Would not have used gutter language. At one time Henry sold horse-drawn farm equipment in Fort Atkinson before he got into the seining business. Ernest and Frank knew Henry very well and both worked ^{for with} him as high school boys and young men to make extra money. This is how Frank started going with Lorine.

On Frank and Lorine: Ernie remembers that Frank had a Model T truck and that he once saw the two of them go by in the truck on a winter's night when he was courting her. They were married Thanksgiving Day 1928 and the high school friend, Anna Ramsey, was maid of honor. Frank and Ernie both got jobs in road construction, and Frank and Lorine settled into a small house on Garfield Street (Ernie will identify it for us one day). There they lived for two years until the boys lost their construction jobs in the crash of '29, and Lorine and Frank returned to their parental homes.

Built
by
Harry
Mussel

Why didn't the marriage work? Ernie describes Frank as "very easy-going," and believes he would "not have interfered with Lorine and her poetry." Moreover, Frank's father Friederich died in 1929 and Frank went back to run the family farm, so Lorine could have joined him there. The mother Rosina was ¹⁹⁵³dead by that time and the father ^x had always liked Lorine, referring to her as "a doll" in an admiring way. Ernie does not believe there were any children born of the marriage. One rumor was that Lorine had still-born twins. Ernie believes he would have heard something if this had been true. He knows that Frank gave Lorine all their possessions from the Garfield Street house. Frank and Lorine remained friends, seeing each other from time to time but finally getting a divorce as late as 1942.

Frank stayed on the family farm until 1975 (he was still alive when Lorine died, but did not attend her funeral, according to Ernest, (who did), when the Hartwig farm was sold to a Swedish airline pilot named Christie who had spotted it from the air and noted that it offered an ideal passage for a runway. Frank then moved to a small cottage on a cooperative farm near Cambridge where he did maintenance work but refused to milk anymore cows. There, about 1980, he fell dead from a heart attack while carrying groceries into his cottage.

According to Ernest, his family is unrelated to any of the other Hartwigs in the area, even those living nearby down the road. He is a heavyset man of 84 who worked most of his life in maintenance at Jamesway and still serves as clerk for the Town of Koshkonong. He is hard of hearing, careful in his choice of words and what he wants to say, gentle, kindly, cooperative. He said nothing but positive things about Lorine and seemed to have great respect for her, as did his father. He spoke of her as being "very deliberate, always very refined. . . a cute little girl. . . fine boned. . . at first very shy. . . She never went out on the water, didn't like it in the boats. Never went out on the big tug her father built for his seining. . . From the time she was a little girl she was a naturalist. Watched birds for hours." One got the feeling that Ernie might have felt something for Lorine himself but was somewhat in awe of her. When Bonnie suggested that the marriage between Lorine and Frank may have failed because Lorine was "restless," he seemed to nod in agreement.