

FIELDWORK NOTES

Interviewer: Philip Martin;  
also present, Lewis Koch

October 19, 1984  
German-American Project

Informant: Harold Roeder  
Howards Grove, WI

It was an extremely windy and sometimes rainy day. Earlier that morning, Lewis and I had visited the old cemetery with the iron crosses near Harold's house, and considered photographing, since the atmosphere was right--but Lewis was doubtful that he could stand still enough in the gusty wind to take the shots.

We met Harold back at the Maywood Environmental Center outside of Sheboygan, where we initially had intended to do this interview, only Harold had left a folder of information/clippings back at his house, so we gladly followed him back home to his place NW of Howards Grove. Here we did the interview in his kitchen, at the table. In addition to Harold, Lewis and myself, Harold's grown-up daughter and husband were there for the day; she can be heard occasionally in the background, doing the dishes & puttering about.

Harold was very helpful and eager to assist our research. He seemed to feel that it was important work, and close to his own interests. He is a self-made local historian who has been collecting information, contacts & clippings about the German communities in that general area, with a special interest in the Lippe-Detmoldt settlement where he grew up. He mentioned that he had, as an adult, spent some thirty years away from the Sheboygan area, working in Philadelphia as a sales representative for the Kohler Company; he said that perhaps this long absence from the area was the cause of his continued interest and strong continuing memories for the older ways of life. His ability to remember those early days seemed clear and uncluttered. His information seemed reliable, and he was quick to point out gaps in his memories, to let us know when it was a personal opinion he was voicing, or when he felt he should refer us to another area informant for more precise information. All in all, it was a very interesting discussion, and seemed to have some well-expressed viewpoints suitable for radio use/excerpting.

The interview material included some interesting passages on harvest customs (including the still-continued practice of bringing samples of the produce into the church on a particular Sunday in early October to have the harvest "blessed"), also several proverbs in German (humorous), Christmas customs (including the old Black Peter character), also comments on land stewardship attitudes and rural cooperation in the old farming communities. He spoke a little of the Lippe-Detmoldt community where he grew up, though as an "outsider"--his father was brought to the area to operate the first cheese factory; Harold's German background in a mixture.

We recorded one 7" reel on the Nagra, took a short break to look over some newspaper articles and check some phone numbers & contacts, then recorded ca. half of a second 7" reel. Following the interview we drove to the nearby corner (past the old iron-cross cemetery) to the church whose spire was visible from Harold's house, to look at some displayed photograph copies of the church's 1904 celebration--the photos included a brass ensemble group, also vocal choir group; originals are in the possession of various members of the church--Harold can locate for us if we wish. The church also had some nice stained-glass windows, with titles in German.

Harold is on the board of the Maywood Center; it was the program director, David Aplin, who originally introduced me to Harold and recommended him as a good source of information.

As Harold seems to be well-spoken and willing to talk, a follow-up interview might be productive, to go over specific questions in more depth.