

Jeddeloh Family History Interview (date ca. 1985)

Note:

Handwritten corrections are indicated like this: (sample)

Questioner: Karen J.

Respondent: Fred J.

Well, now we'll think back to our childhood and we'll pretend I'm Barbara Walters and you're lying on the analyst's couch here and you'll think back to the early days and so forth. I've been to Germany and I've seen Jeddeloh 1 and Jeddeloh 2 and you weren't actually born inside one of the towns were you?

Yes I was. I was born in Jeddeloh 1.

Ok. Was it a house, a street?

Jeddeloh 1 was a little village with a number of homes. It was a little farming community. The houses were typical of that era, thatched roof and so on and so forth. The cattle lived in with the people.

The cattle lived in the same homes?

Same building.

Same building. They were in a separate portion of it.

Separate portion of it, yes.

Like they had their own barn and the housing was adjoining of it?

The housing portion was to one end of it, and the cattle had the other end.

And so if you leave the door open and someone asked you if you were born in a barn, you could almost literally say Yes.

That is correct.

Do you recall where this house was located? Did it have a street address?

No, no. There were no street addresses in those days in those small villages. Everyone knew each other.

Right. So UPS didn't have any trouble finding people (laughter). Did you spend all your childhood years in that home?

No. When I was born in 1905 my parents moved away from there in May of 1909.

When you were 4.

When I was 4 years old. And I only a very few vague recollection of this place.

Ok. Where did they move to then?

My parents moved from there to „Ordenberg“ (Osternburg) ... which is a suburb of...

Oh, so they moved into...smaller..of the city?

Yes.

And that was in a house?

That was in similar situation. My father bought a dairy, a little dairy. A little home suitable for a dairy. He rented pasture, acreage near by, and had sufficient hay storage for the cows in the winter time and that's how my folks made their living.

Was with a dairy.

A dairy.

What kind of cows did they have?

Typically what we would call Holsteins here.

I was afraid you were going to answer dairy cows (laughter). That's what George would answer. Is this the place where the story occurs that you were telling me during the first world war when the soldiers came to the farm and you had a crop of potatoes? There was a story that you told at some point about a crop of potatoes, and that was really all you had, and the soldiers came to the farm to...and your father hid the potatoes under a pile of manure in the barn.

That was my grandfather.

Your grandfather did that?

Yes. During the war, the first world war, my father had to go... had to report to his regiment. And at that time my mother – and my grandfather moved in with us in order to help us – help my mother with the farming chores and so on and so forth. And he stayed with us all during the war years.

This is your father's father or your mother's father?

My father's father, my paternal grandfather.

Oh, ok. Here we have some company arriving. We'll come back to that. Your parents had just bought the dairy farm in „Odenberg“ which I can't pronounce. Say it once for me.

„Odenberg“. (Note: This pronunciation is at 42 on the transcriber.)

Well, I just want to have on record the correct pronunciation of it because I've never been able to say it right. Anyway, they bought that dairy and that was when you were about –

4, 4 ½.

That's right. That would have been about 1910. And then you stayed there until when?

Untill 1922, I believe. Or was it '23?

When did the years of inflation start in Germany?

Right after the war.

Right after the war. And the war ended in?

1918

Ok, and so from 1918 to 1922 you were there.

During the days of the worst inflation, yes.

Now was that the time period you were telling us the other night about the Story about going to the store to buy a chain for your bicycle?

Yes.

You went from diary, from home, to the store in Odenberg?

No, no. Stop that for a minute if you can.

So that's fine. Let's back up a little bit. This was after the war. Your father came back.

He came back.

And the man wouldn't rent the –

Pasture land to us anymore –

For the dairy, and –

We were forced to find something else. And father rented a farm in Holle, H-o-l-l-e. Which is about 15 Km from Odenberg. There we lived until 1922

when father became eligible for government – because of his military service and being wounded in the war – he became eligible for government assistance in acquiring government land near the North Sea. He took advantage of that and built a house on this land we moved there in 1923.

What town was that near, do you recall?

That was at a little village, a whole new village was being built there. All set up by veterans from the war and it was called „Nory (Neu) Algosten G...“ Spelled G-r-o-d-e-n.

What does that – „Nory Algosten“ I can follow... how does that translate??

It probably was named after somebody named Augusta, Augusta is the key name in there. Neu means new. The meaning of Groden is addition or additional land, growing land.

Ok, so it'd be something like we'd put the word Addition. We say the Player Addition in Clinton.

Yes.

So that was in '23?

Yes. This land was very rich because it had been deposited by the sea. It consisted mostly of the silt of the sea plus the decaying sea creatures from the smallest to the very large, and made a very rich soil.

It wasn't too salty?

No, no it was not because the land was so laid out and drained that the rains would leach the land. If there was any salt accumulation it would leach out. The rains would flow out into the sea, but when the tides came in which would have normally covered the land, the gates were closed so the seawater couldn't come in.

Ok. That's very good. You were telling us some things last night about when you were in Holle during the inflationary years, the worst of the inflationary years and about the story of when you got your chain for your bicycle.

During the inflationary years, money became worthless, an item to be gotten rid of as soon as possible. In fact it got ludicrous at times. I needed a new bicycle chain and when I went up town to buy a bicycle chain, I couldn't get one for money but the man induced me to bring him a pound of butter. He knew that we had cattle and cows and were milking cows and were able to scrounge up a pound of butter. So I did and came back with a pound of butter and I got my bicycle chain.

And then there was a story about you were a teenager and wanted to comb your hair.

Yes, right. I was a teenager and wanted to comb my hair and wanted to buy a comb. I couldn't buy one for ordinary money but I had a ten/tenth penny piece left from pre-war mintage which was still a regular silver coin. The merchant was glad to give me a comb for that particular coin.

I can imagine silver probably could have bought 30 combs (laughter). Did you realize at the time the value of what you were giving him just for that comb?

Yes, I do, but still tenpenny was only 2½ c/, pre-war value. So 2½ c/ was not too much to pay for a comb.

I can imagine I would pay 2 ½ c/ for a comb. Now when we were talking with Bill and... he was telling us that you knew the Dirks when you were there?

Yes, yes. We knew them very well. And when we lived in Holle we were only 5 Km apart.

He told us that he used to come over occasionally and help you and your brothers and your father harvest the rye.

Yes.

Was rye what you mainly planted there?

Not the main crop but a good part of the crop.

One of the crops. You also mentioned something about you took some cows to the market when your father –

Yes. During that period of inflation I remember one particular time when father took a cow to market and sold it and did not want to take the money back home but went to the... with the wagon and we bought rye grain for total price of the cow so we wouldn't lose the value of the money.

People really had no confidence in the government apparently as far as their ability to back the money.

...because the government was just spending the money like normally...

Was the money backed by anything?

No. It had no backing whatsoever. In the final days of the inflation, 4 billion – the American dollar could command 4 billion of Germany marks. \$1 equal to 4 billion German marks.

That's incredible.

Yes.

I can't even imagine how many a billion is. It's hard enough to imagine a million. I guess Americans who went over to Germany could get a great deal for their money when they were over there.

Oh yes they could.

Did they take the foreign currency, the merchants take American dollars?

Gladly, gladly.

It must have made training and so forth very difficult if you weren't sure of what you were going to get exchange for whatever you were going to provide.

Yes it was a very difficult time.

Was the farm pretty much self-sufficient?

Yes. We had milk cows of course, and we raised crop (?) potatoes and beans and garden vegetable.

What kind of potatoes?

Just ordinary potatoes.

Oh, I thought you called them something specifically.

No. Just potatoes enough for our own use.

Garden variety potatoes.

Yes, just enough for our own use.

So you were too young for the first world war and then you left before the second.

Yes.

Bill (Bill Dirks, Cousin) told us – and I asked him why he wanted to leave Germany and that was how we got on the question of the inflationary times – was that the reason that you wanted to leave also?

Well, yes. We had relatives here in America. We were in touch with them.

His father and mother were already here?

No. The Gettkes (sp.) (Götze)

The Gettkes were already here. Ok.

They had been here for a long time. We knew many people who has relatives here and the reports from America were always so glowing and so beautiful that... young man having the spirit of adventure in me somewhat and I was encouraged by my mother and father too because they could see no future for me in Germany. Then it so happened that my father's cousin, Helen Gettse (Götze), who was a single woman, had been living in San Francisco all her life, working there, was in Germany for a visit. When she stopped at our place for a visit I got to talking to her and that cinched it. She wrote... my father then wrote to her brother, which was also my father's cousin (Binn Götze), in Seaside Oregon whether he would...for the 5 years. At that time it was – the United States government required any immigrant to have a sponsor who would go good (?) for the immigrant for 5 years. And my father's cousin replied in the affirmative, even sent me the steamship fare. He bought the steamship ticket and sent it to me.

And so when you left then you would move to the Alsea (?) town in '23. So you'd been there for a year or 2.

For a couple of years, yes.

You were 19 then right?

When I left Germany that was in 1925. It was in August of 1925.

Ok. And Bill Dirk (Dierks) (?) was already here.

Bill Dirks was already here and that was my destination. The farm in Nebraska where Bill Dirks worked.

Oh. Do you remember the name of the people?

Hilbers, H-i-l-b-e-r-s.

Ok. You said that you got the money for the steamship ticket...and I always wondered what it was like to travel on the steamship in those days.

Well, it wasn't too bad. Nothing like the old stories we hear about the steerage. We had a cabin with 2 of us in a cabin and I don't remember a great deal about it because I was seasick the whole time from when we left the harbor until we came to New York.

(laughing) I can imagine that kind of blotted out the memories, huh?

Yes.

How long did it take?

I think if I remember correctly, 8 days.

8 days. Boy, 8 days of being sick...dehydrated by the time you got there.

Well, I was not too badly – not too severe. I didn't have it too severe, seasickness, just enough that it made it miserable.

I probably inherited from you my intolerance for that kind of thing. I don't have a whole lot of trouble on our boat in the lake and I've never had any trouble on any other boat, but I can't stand carnival rides and merry-go-rounds and stuff like that. Do they have merry-go-rounds in Germany?

Yes.

Did you ever ride on them and have trouble with that?

I don't remember.

You don't remember the name of the steamship do you?

The name Reliance sticks in my mind. It was sailing under a Panamanian flag, I remember that.

Now there's another story too about when you left...the poem (?) you gave him today, the 3 marks.

That I gave him the 3 marks. Oh, yes. When I left my mother gave me the 3 marks. It was right after inflation. Germany had printed good hard money again and also coin money. They minted hard coins that were silver content and that money was good. And mother had a 3 mark piece and when I left she gave me that and she says, Keep that until you get real hungry, then sell it and buy some food with it. As you can see, I've still got it. (I have this coin)

Now the steamship would have arrived at probably at that time everybody was going to Ellis Island?

We did go through Ellis Island, yes.

What was it like to do that?

Just a case of a lot of hurry up and wait.

Bureaucracy in action.

Bureaucracy in action. From Ellis Island we were put on a train, and as I remember we rode that train all night. When did we get on the train? I don't remember. But anyway we arrived in Omaha at 6 o'clock in the morning or something like that.

So you went all night on train from New York to –

Well, it was more than a night, but I don't remember the details of that.

Now is this where the famous pancake story takes place?

That's right.

Let's hear the famous pancake story.

Well, I was hungry about that time, very hungry, and when we found the Cafe, the people (?) cafe, and sat down on the stool at the counter. The waitress handed me a menu and I saw the word pancake which was very close to the German word „Pankuchen“ and I pointed my finger on it and said, This is what I want and the waitress understood. Well, in due time the pancake came but the waitress did not give me a fork. And here I sat and thought to myself, Americans eat pancakes with their fingers? So I just turned to the person sitting next to me and fortunately that person could speak German and I asked him what to do and he talked to the waitress and the waitress came and gave me a fork.

That brings up the question, How much English did you know that time ?

Very little. Very little means except on the boat I had made the acquaintance of a woman who had been an English teacher in Germany and was coming to the United States. And she took interest in me and taught me a few words in those 8 days.

In between being seasick.

Yes, in between being seasick, she taught me a few phrases, expressions, and where can I wash my hands and that sort of thing.

So you had a few things at least.

Yes.

Now comes a time period that I've never really heard a whole lot about and that's time period between when you arrived on the farm there until you met Mother. I know little things...you went to work on this farm for the Hilbers.

Well, no. I stayed with the Hilbers for several days or a week until they found me a job at a farm.

Ok, I see.

And I was then on my own and started working for somebody else. And I worked there until 1928 until I became dissatisfied with the farm life. As to not being my future and my vocation and I had written to the Coin (?) Electrical School, which is a trade school in Chicago. I had literature from them and several other Germans about the same ages as I am. We all set out together for Chicago one day in 1928. I think it was in the fall of the year, after the harvest was in.

I want to back up just a minute. What kind of work did you do on the farm?

Just ordinary farm work like in the Midwest. Like you do in the Midwest.

Cows and pigs –

Yes, cows and pigs and we had corn and we had oats and alfalfa. We had Cockleberry, the weed. And farming was done with horses rather than with tractors at that time.

Did you work the usual farmer's day of sunup to sundown?

Yes, yes, I did.

What kind of pay did people get in those days as a hired hand?

I think my first pay was \$40 a month...\$50 and I think I got as high as \$60, plus my room and board.

You were there for 3 years.

Uh-huh.

Things were looking pretty good in 1928 as far as-

They were just starting to collapse on the farm.

Oh, just starting to collapse on the farm.

Yes.

It seems like in other areas – the crash in the market wasn't until '29.

1929, yes.

It seems like that was preceded by a pretty good era in other economic areas.

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

So you and your...friend started out for Chicago.

We went to Chicago and we found this Coin Electrical School and I did take that 3 months' course and after I got through with that I was able to get a job with the...Public Service Company of Northern Illinois.

Public Service Company –

Of Northern Illinois.

Was this a public utility?

It was a public utility owned by Samuel...in those days. And they and Commonwealth Edison of Chicago owned a lake resort in Lake Delivan (sp) Wisconsin. I was getting a job being a maintenance man at that resort.

In Wisconsin?

In Wisconsin. And I had that job for several years.

What did you do as a maintenance man?

Well, the usual fixing blown fuses and fixing this and fixing that.

So you got a lot of experience doing this and that.

Uh-huh, yes.

I you were there 8 years did you say?

Let's see... '29...went back to Germany for a visit.

You did go back?

Yes.

I didn't realize – I wasn't sure if you ever did get back.

For a visit in '32. After the crash in 1929 the job was no longer in existence. I wasn't exactly fired but the whole thing was closed up in Lake Delivan and I found a job in Waukeegan, Illinois with the Oaks Mfg. Co. for a few weeks and after a bit the job ended and I made another trip to Germany.

The job in Waukeegan...

Yes. (END SIDE 1)

Ok, so the job in Waukeegan had ended and at that point you decided you didn't have the work so you'd take a trip, or you'd been planning to take a trip for some time?

I'd been planning to take a trip for some time and took a trip to Germany. I came back after 4 months to that same place and things were worse than ever. Then I decided to make a trip to Minnesota and visit cousin John Dirks.

I see. Let's go back to when you went back to your trip back to Germany. Did you just go back to visit your folks?

Just my folks, yes.

Did you go back by steamship again? Yes. Was the trip any better the second time?

About the same.

Any shorter?

No.

And you stayed there a couple months?

4 months.

Ok. And then you decided to go back to visit –

Come back to America

Ok.

I was an American citizen by then.

Ok. Was there a requirement then that you had to stay in one place for 5 years.

Not necessarily in one place for 5 years, but you had to be able to prove where you were in those 5 years. And the more you moved around, the more difficult it was always to prove.

You were an American citizen?

Yes. I was naturalized in Waukeegan, Illinois.

Do you remember when?

1931. Yes, 1931.

In '29 you left for Germany?

1932.

You left for Germany in 1932, ok. I've got a gap I'm trying to fill in. From 1928 –

In '28 we left Nebraska.

And you...with Coin you got the job in Waukeegan and that lasted until when?

Until '31 or so.

Ok, I thought maybe it ended in '29. And then also in '31 you got the job

that lasted a few weeks in Illinois.

In Waukeegan.

And during that same year, in '31, was the year you were naturalized?

Yes. In Waukeegan, Illinois I was naturalized.

So at that point then, then you went back after your got your citizenship.

Uh-huh. Yes. I was quite proud of carrying an American passport on my way back to Germany.

Did it make any differences the way people treated you?

Oh, not particular. Most people I contacted, they knew me.

They treated you pretty proudly and royally?

Yes, uh-huh. As much as German officials can be. They waved me right through.

I know German officials, they have to have everything stamped out down to the end.

There I can tell about something when Mother and I went to Germany in 1975, we had our American passports, you know, and leaving Germany at the airport we were ready to board the plane, we had to pass the German "ausbahn" it's called. And he looked at the passport and he said, You never signed them. (laughter)

Is that right?

That's right.

Oh dear. And that was right, you had never signed them, neither one of you?

No, neither one of us. (laughter)

They let you out, didn't they?

We signed them in his presence.

Well that's good. Ok, then you decided to visit John Dirks and this would have been in '32

Yes. And I stayed with John for some time, worked with him on his farm, helped him. John was glad to see me. John was very proud of his German cousins and German relationships.

Was John also your cousin?

John was my cousin. See, John's father was my mother's brother also.

Ok. A different brother than Bill?

Uncle Ben. Bill's father.

Bill's father, that's right.

See, my mother was the youngest of 13 children.

Ok. So John Dirks was also your cousin. Same relationship but different parents as Bill Dirks and he was glad to see you there.

Yes. And I stayed with him for several months. Let's see, how did this develop? We have Otto – he and I started in a machine shop in Janesville, Wisconsin (Error, Janesville is in Minnesota) which is about 14 miles from where John Dirks lived. And we started our repair work, all sorts of repair work for the farming community in that area. And later on we moved from that building into a larger building and took on the Pontiac agency car dealership. And we had that until 1939, '40.

Well, at some point in there you must have met Mother because –

Yes, yes.

In '38 is when you got married.

Uh-huh. About 136...engaged...we were already in this larger building and had this Pontiac agency. Then is where I met Mother in Janesville/Janesville. She was on that double date is where we first met.

She was teaching there in Janesville.

She was teaching, yes.

And she obviously already graduated from school. I always got confused about whether she was teaching English or math.

English and math.

Oh, both?

Yes.

Ok. You met on a double date. Do you remember who the other couple was...?

(See marriage certificate) Yes, Mary Wawereka (sp) was the other girl and –

Wewereka, is that right?

Wewereka, yes.

Like W-i-w-o-r-k-a?

W-e-w-e-r-k-a and she was also Czech ancestry and the name Wewerka means squirrel, your mother told me.

Mary the squirrel. Anyone else who became known to you later on?

No. Mary Wewerka we had kept in touch with for a long time, even got condolences from her when Mother passes away. Those two, Moher and Mary Wewerka, were close friends. This man and I were not particularly – we were very good acquaintances, we knew each other well, but not particularly friends.

Where did you go on that double date?

We sent to a dance somewhere in the area there...

.. '36 that must have been FDR's administration by then.

Yes it was, yes.

Where things any better then?

Well (pause) yes and no. Yes, of course they were.

You told me once that you sold vacuum cleaners door-to-door during the depression. I don't remember about when that was.

That was at the time I was in Chicago....

Was ist before you got the citizenship ant then went back to Germany?

(inaudible)

Or was it after you returned from Germany?

I think it was after I returned from Germany.

Maybe in between?

I don't remember.

Somewhere along in there in the earlier...

I sold vacuum cleaners from door-to-door.

How did it go? Was it very succesful?

Oh, up and down. You had your good days where you made a living and then you had other days where you starved.

Let's go back to Mother a little bit. We got away from that because I thought I might have... So you and mother met on this double date and you went to a dance and from that point on, did you fall in love at first sight or did you take a long time?

I didn't take very long.

I see.

...back together very quickly. I know we went to a prom (?) soon after that and from there on we were....

...living together?

Were together. I don't think she went with anybody else anymore and I didn't.

I know you met her in '36 and got married in '38.

Well, I'm guessing at '36 now.

I see.

I don't think it was more than 6 or 8 months from the first time we met until we married.

Mother told me one time and I...or she could be misremembering this, but you were at that time, you were Lutheran.

Yes.

You'd been raised Lutheran. And she, of course, had been raised Catholic and you had made arrangements for a mixed marriage to take place and then at the last minute you decided to convert to being a Catholic? I got the impression from Mother, and she could be exaggerating. I thought it was the night before you were going to get married.

No, the night before we get married I was baptized.

You were baptized then, ok. But you made the decision before then.

Oh yes, long time before that and had instructions from the priest in Janesville for a long time, quite awhile.

They probably went through months and months and months.

Well, no, not so terribly long. I don't think over 2 months. At the most.

Ok. So you were married there. Did you have a lot of attendants? Was her sister able to attend and her brother?

Yes.

And your relatives?

Otto. Otto was there. He was the only one here of course.

That's your brother, that's right.

My brother. And...

They were still in Germany.

(George Suddendorf my mothers brother (living)) So Otto was my best man and her sister Irene, she was the maid of honor. And I don't remember what George was doing. I can't remember.

Perhaps he was one of the ushers, would that make sense?

That makes sense.

Or he could have been – did you –

It was for that type of a small town, it was a very large wedding.

And it was in that- was it in –

Glendale (?) (Verndane)

It was in Ferndale/Vernedale (?)...there was only one Catholic church there.

Yes, St. Frederick's

And you probably had- now I seeing pictures of the pony cart. That was waiting for you after you came out.

After we came out of the church, that pony cart was waiting and when we got closer to the sidewalk, we were just glad to....(Karen laughing) and I was given the reins and said, Now you go ahead and go. (laughter)

Where did you go on your honeymoon? Did you go anywhere?

We went to... we stopped in the... we went north.

You didn't go all the way by pony cart?

We had a car waiting...

I see, ok.

And we went to the...next day far enough north to get across the border into Canada..”Warroad” (?) the name of the town I remember.

Say that again.

War road (?).

Roar road (?).

And we went along in Canada for awhile going west and then we came back down into the United States and started turning south. I don't remember the route we took and I don't remember how many days we were gone...something like 9 or 10 days fix in my mind.

So you just took a driving tour too. Somewhat like we did on ours. Except we had a place to go but you just kind of made a big loop up into Canada and back.

Yes.

This might be a good place to stop for now. You're probably a little tired talking.

Yes.