

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

Q: This is February 15, 1980. I'm talking to Charles Bertram. Perhaps you could tell me a little about your German ancestry--grandparents. Where they came from and when they came here.

A: Okay. I was born and raised east of Haubstadt, a small German community. When I started attending the public school in that community there were eight students in my class. I was born of the Protestant religious faith. The number of students at the Catholic Elementary School in this community had probably thirty or thirty-five in their grades. I can remember in the Seventh Grade we got down to six students--we had two boys. The Catholics attended Grades One through Eight in their own elementary school. We attended One through Eight in the public school. In Grades Nine through Twelve we attended school together.

Q: At Haubstadt?

A: At Haubstadt. We had release time for religious education. There would be a Protestant minister from probably five or six different small rural churches in Johnson Township. One church, which was located in the town of Haubstadt, would take turns coming for this religious education instruction. The other people would go to St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church where Father Lindauer would provide instruction for them. The people who did come into the school in the Ninth Grade were from two different Catholic schools--St. James's School, located south of Haubstadt, and St. Peter and Paul. At that particular time the little area where I was born and raised was completely of German background. We were practically all related, maybe even as close as cousins. Farms in that particular area had been in families since the time they were taken over from the federal government. I can remember in the church that I attended, which was an evangelical church...

Q: This was the evangelical church that united with the Brethern?

A: With the United Brothers. People would sing German songs. We had German songbooks. I have some bibles that they had in the church at that time that were in German. My grandmother used to speak to my mother in I think what she called High German. I always felt they wanted to talk about things they didn't want me to hear about. She could speak German very fluently. My two uncles were twins who would have been born about 1900. When they started attending a small rural school called Bertram School they had to learn English. They spoke nothing but German. The teacher was hired by the Township Trustee and would board with people in the community. The teacher had to teach them how to speak English before they could get started in the school and the curriculum. I also remember at that time in the area in which I lived every family there was of Protestant religious faith.

Q: This was a little settlement east of Haubstadt?

A: Yes. You know where Lakeview is?

Q: Yes.

A: Okay. You would go east from there. There's a big white church on the hill. I don't know if you remember that or not.

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

Q: I think so, vaguely yes.

A: If you continued on there you would end up in Dale. Just east of that is where my great-grandfather Henry Bertram, who came from somewhere in Hanover, Germany, came into the port of New Orleans. He came up the Mississippi River, then the Ohio River, and as the story goes he took the Wabash and Erie Canal and settled in that area on a farm. Again, this is just a story, but apparently that area was infested with snakes--just huge snakes there. I guess that it really took a lot of courage to stay in that particular area to start to settle it. Going on with a little bit about the background of the thing, some of the names there were German names as well. Meanna Kramer was born in June 15, 1842 at Prussia. Another name was Henry A. E. Dassel. He was born in 1848 in Germany.

Q: Are these people who lived in that area? Or are these relatives?

A: They were the initial people who settled that area. That's my understanding.

Q: Was there a name for this settlement?

A: No, not to my knowledge.

Q: This was just a small cluster?

A: Most people would refer to it as the Taber Church Community. That was the evangelical church there. Another name was Fuelling. Another was Büsing, spelled B-Ü-S-I-N-G. Actually you would pronounce it "Bëssing" with an umlaut over the "u", which I think is a typical way of using the "u" in Germany. She was born in 1825. Another name was Dassel, and May. Tracing this back to another generation, which would be my great-great-grandparents, the oldest one I have here was Frederick E. C. Dassel born February 11, 1803. I don't know if I am pronouncing this name correctly or not but he came from Hanover, Germany. There were certainly a lot of things that I can remember. When they would come in over their lunch hour from working in the fields my mother would churn butter. I can't remember them doing this because we always had electricity, but my mother always tells that they would take this butter, put it in a container, and drop it down in the well. Apparently, this was very much a tradition in Germany. By and large the people in that area were very frugal. They played hard and they worked hard. When they worked they worked when they played they played. Probably the interesting thing is that the people who settled closer to Haubstadt were more of the Catholic faith. They indulged a lot more in alcoholic beverages--beer and wine. In the particular area in which I lived it was not nearly to that great an extent. That was the sort of thing that they talked about in the homes. The Catholics drank a lot more beer. On Saturday nights it wasn't unusual for the people in the high school to meet. The boys would get together and bring the home brew from home and their wine that they had made and go out and have a party on the town.

Q: Both sets of your grandparents were born in Germany?

A: No, not my grandparents, my great-grandparents.

Q: Great-grandparents, oh, okay. So you have four great-grandparents all German born.

A: Well, it would be eight.

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

Q: Eight . Okay, four sets .

A: That's right. Eight of them were born in Germany.

Q: Were they born in the same area?

A: As near as I can find out they were all born in the state of Hanover. I think some of that is in Prussia now. I was down in New Orleans the early part of this year . They have a lot of passengers lists there. The name Bertram was there although I was never able to pick out one that I could clearly identify as being a relative of mine.

Q: Was that also the pattern for other people around the church to come from Hanover?

A: Yes, I believe that is correct because the people who lived around that church were all relations. They were all descendants of these eight people who lived...Well, there were some exceptions, but by and large the people who lived there were descendants of these eight great_-grandparents of mine .

Q: You remember your grandparents speaking German regularly?

A: Oh, yes. My one grandfather was dead before I was born. The other three spoke German very fluently. In fact, I doubt if there was a day that went past that they didn't talk to one another in German.

Q: You were born in...?

A: 1938 .

Q: So you knew three of your grandparents? Those three still spoke German and I suspect it was rather widespread around the church.

A: Oh, yes. They had church services in German. My mother may have forgotten it now but when I was younger she spoke a lot of German. She doesn't have anybody to talk to anymore in German so she may have forgotten it. I can remember her talking in German--her and my grandmother especially.

Q: Were there customs?. You mentioned one about the butter and the well. Were there other customs that you remember?

A: Well, I think the way the farmers had their farms organized reminded me a lot of what I saw over in Germany last Fall. They basically raised all different kinds of animals. They had a lot of little pens around their buildings. They raised different crops. They didn't let any land waste. They really didn't waste many things. I think this is still true. I think this is maybe typical of the German background. They throw very few things away. They save everything. There are a lot of wheat cradles, for example. I have a tool that my grandfather used which is a wood tool that I saw over in Germany. There are a lot of things. I'm just trying to think of some other things. The ladies, and maybe this is just my own opinion, but they all wore aprons and dust caps. Maybe that was typical of a lot of different groups, I don't know. I think this was something that was done in Germany.

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

Q: It's rather unusual. One of the things that strikes me about what you said so far is that there were very few evangelicals of that tradition in this area of Indiana, and very few people from that part of Germany.

A: That's right.

Q: What was the reason for that little community developing? Was it simply the fact that there were some people already there who...? I guess everything kind of descends from the eight original families.

A: That would be my opinion of the thing. I think that they came to this country and settled in that area and just pretty well remained there. There were other people with the German background who attended the church at Warrington. That was an evangelical reform church. I think they had a different German background. I think they were from different areas as I understand it.

Q: Well, the Protestants of this area are predominately from Hessa-Darmstadt and Wurtemberg-Baden. The Catholics are from Alsace-Lorraine and Bavaria. All were southern Germans, but there seems to be a kind of regional split which is curious.

A: Well, in the German communities we went into there was a church sign outside the community that normally would say Evangelical Lutheran, I believe, and then also Catholic. Those were the two church signs.

Q: When you were growing up what kind of relations did you have with the Catholics? You went to high school with large numbers of Catholics.

A: One of the things at that point I think children were told in the home and I think this was probably true in the Catholic home--I'm not criticizing it or trying to make an issue of it but I think it was probably stressed that a Protestant didn't marry a Catholic and a Catholic didn't marry a Protestant. I think the Protestants viewed the Catholics in that area as drinking a lot more and going to dances on Saturday night and doing those things that really were bad. Using that term maybe loosely. By and large the relations have always been good there. There were really very few problems over religion. There's always been a good mutual understanding. I think since the ecumenical movement there have been a lot more cross-relations, intermarriages. I think there's a lot less skepticism maybe or maybe being a little bit uneasy with one another. I think a lot of this depends upon some of the people there who were leaders in the community. The ministers who had been assigned to the churches there--Father Lindauer, for example. He was born and raised in Jasper, I think, or around Ireland in that area. We used to go attend church there. We would go to Midnight Mass and afterwards go to some family there and visit with them.

Q: Has there always been a community festival in Haubstadt?

A: No, that started in 1955, the German festival.

Q: What month of the year?

A: That was in the Spring because I remember I was a junior in high school. They were celebrating the One Hundredth Anniversary of the town of Haubstadt. It was named after Henry Haub who ran a livery stable there where the traction car stopped. Have you been up to Haubstadt? Oh, yes, you've been to

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

see Father Lindauer. Okay. You know where the railroad goes through? You know where the bank is? If you go east from there there's a post office right next to its It used to be Oliver Havick's Grocery Store. Then, next to that I think it's still a filling station but it used to be a livery stable. That was for the people who rode the traction car back and forth to Evansville to work. In the Spring of 1955 I was a junior in high school. This is the first time they had this. It was a celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the town.

Q: Was it late Spring, something like that?

A: It was in the last of April.

Q: That's when it still is?

A: No, they moved it out. They moved it out more in the summer now. It's the last week in June now I believe. One of the reasons for it was because of the farmers. They were very busy at that time. Later on in June they were able to have their crops pretty well planted and could help with it.

Q: You remember it in your junior year of high school. I've been told that there's a packing company in Haubstadt--Dewig's?

A: D-E-W-I-G . Dewig is what we call it.

Q: They apparently make a special sausage for that celebration.

A: That's correct.

Q: You grew up on a farm. Your parents made a number of things, I suspect.

A: We butchered. I can remember this. Every Thanksgiving we would butcher two pigs. The people who lived on a farm due north of us--actually the man was my father's uncle--each one would take one pig and then we would eat that up. Then right after Christmas or after the first of the year we would get together and butcher again. We would butcher two or three pigs, actually dip them in a scalding vat, clean the hair off and then make our own lard. We would cut up the fat in little chunks and put that in a big black kettle and stir it with a big board. You would stir this all day. What was left were the cracklings. They would put the cracklings in a sausage stuffer and press this down. Have you seen a sausage stuffer?

Q: No.

A: Okay. Well, anyway, it's a round object about twelve inches in diameter. It had a plate up top and as you turned the crank it came down and put pressure on it. Then you would press out these cracklings after they had cooked so long in this black pot. There would be a yellowish fattish substance come out of there. They would take this and put it in lard jars which were a foot to a foot and a half in diameter maybe eighteen inches tall and let this set a couple of days. As time went on it would turn white. This was our lard for the winter. They also picked the hams and the bacon and the shoulders and smoked this in the smokehouse. They would go up in the woods and cut down hickory trees. Of course, they wanted to be sure it was a hickory because they felt like this gave added taste to the meat. Then they would put salt on it and cure this meat. Normally they would leave it in salt for about a month. Then they would hang it up in the smokehouse and smoke it. That would be ham and the shoulder that you would eat the

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

following summer. Also, sauerkraut was another thing. I associate this with the German background. They would can sauerkraut. They had a process that they went through where this would go through a souring process or something. I'm sure this came from Germany.

Q: Yes. You made your own sausage, too?

A: Oh, yes. We had what we called head sausage. It involved the liver and the kidneys and different pieces, parts of the hog such as this. Then there was what they called red sausage. This was more of the red meat that they had trimmed off of what became the hams and the shoulders. Also, they would make mincemeat. This is another thing that they probably brought along with them from Germany.

Q: In terms of what is left in that area of Gibson County--is the area pretty much as it was when you were growing up or has it changed?

A: It's changed tremendously.

Q: Families moved out?

A: Well, the farms still by and large are in descendants of these particular people who settled the land. Most of the fences have been taken out. Most of the people who live there now are older. They are retired. There are a couple of fellows there who farm practically all of the land. Their names are Schwiersch, S-C-H-W-I-E-R-S-C-H, which is a German name. At one time they really raised, canned, and prepared practically all of the food that they would consume. This is not the case today. They still have their garden but they buy most of it prepared. There's been a tremendous change. I can even remember in my lifetime and I'm sure to my mother it's really a change.

Q: One of the things that several people have mentioned, which I observed about this area, is that virtually every family has its own garden. Even in the city you find a lot of that. You go along Cynthiana Road even with suburban-type houses and you see it.

A: I'll tell you something else. If you looked at the way the garden is layed out I think it would be very reflective of a German tradition. Most of them plan their different vegetables and things they want to grow in rows that were close together. Now, this is changing somewhat since the advent of the roto-tiller and different devices. They would plan them very close together and then they would have onions that they would plant. Then between the onions when they started to pull them out they would put in tomatoes. I guess, the point I want to make is that the amount of land that was involved was very small. They kept repeating and rotating crops. They would do this with a hoe and hoe them. My mother still does this. She plants her corn and tomatoes very close together. She would still prefer to hoe it rather than have someone go in with a tiller and work it this way.

Q: My neighbor does too. Well, you see the German legacy that we have now is primarily values in thrift, hard work, and resourcefulness--that sort of thing rather than anything that's more obvious.

A: I can remember as a boy most of the houses in the area were painted with what I would call "loud" shades of green or red. The whole facing on the window frame, the border along the edge, would be completely green or completely black. They would have shutters on which were painted a certain color. Usually the buildings were very well kept. Now again, this has changed. Most of the people now paint

Interview of Dr. Charles Bertram
Interviewer: Dr. Darrel Bigham
February 15, 1980

their homes completely white. They have a little trim on them. Many of them now are going to aluminum siding and that kind of thing. This is something I can really remember as a change. Most of the farms in that area had a number of little small buildings. There would be a chicken house or a colony house but again these are becoming older. They are being torn down and pole barns are being built--this kind of thing.

Q: But you think it has to do with things like suburbanization?

A: Oh, I think it's a case of transportation, communication, The people, by and large, have seen how other people do things. Again, most of them are interested in showing a profit when they get done. I think this is a better way of doing it. They will react to changes if they see it's going to provide a better life for them or they'll have a better profit margin when they get done. This really is a factor. I don't know if I've said the things you want to know or not.

Q: Yes, I'm getting quite a lot. Thank you.