

Comments/stories from Interviews

Language. Fern Goering said her parents did not learn English until they got an in-law who did not speak German. Marlene and Maynard Krehbiel had parents who spoke English but German was spoken at church and home.

Marlene recalled (probably during the war time) a time when she and her mother were speaking German while they were shopping in a store in Newton. When a store clerk overheard them, she told them, "We have nothing in the store for you."

Turkey Creek and the Burmac Road separated Low German from the Schweitzers. Maynard said that his grandfather told his dad as he was pointing across the creek, "Don't go across the creek. That's the land of the Philistines and that's where the Low Germans are."

Nicknames: Fern Goering's Dad was Andrew Goering, and there were four Andrew Goerings in the community. Since they lived near a mound, and "hibble" is the German word for hill, her family was known as the Hibbles. "A family that had a lot of land were called the 'Land Koenig' which means they were king of the land, and then my uncle who loved gravy got the nickname of 'Gravy Flickner' ...almost all of us had nicknames."

Sunday evening Folks Games, no it wasn't square dancing. We'd sing all these different songs and then go on to the next couple and the next. "These were precious times in the Mennonite community. You learned to know people; we were together and it really included mostly people from the Eden church."

The Vaterland. Marlene's great-grandma was 16 when she came and she described how their houses were and the school and the church were at the end of the villages and someone would take the animals out to graze and bring them in at sundown. "She would speak about the beauty of the Steppe. It was so big. They came out of Germany where the plots are little and the forests right there and now the immenseness and the beauty of Russia...She said Russia was prettier than Kansas and without the wind, and dust...Gentlemen too would almost weep at having to give up that beautiful land; they really talked about the beauty, the immenseness of it."

Dress. We were not to be of the world. Wearing a necktie, going to a movie, that's worldly. And playing cards. You would never have found a woman in church in pants, ever. No matter how hot it was in church (no air conditioning), the women still wore the hose and the dress to mid calf or whatever." Great Grandma told her grandson, "you don't leave your house on Sunday morning with a short sleeve shirt."

Fern said she remembered "when someone in the community, oh maybe building a barn, or something went wrong with some building, the neighbors would come in and help...It used to be if there was a need or wheat cutting, there would be as many as six and seven combines come."

Swiss Mennonite Food. Fern said “poppy seed rolls, anything with poppy seed. Beroggi, case beroggi and even better is kraut beroggi...I still have a kraut cutter that comes from Russia.”

A pure church. Marlene said “when you read some of those old stories, they warn their children to marry inside their group.” Holcomb continues, “so that was part of maintaining identity, the church identity, the Swiss German identity. That was so important to them that they didn’t want to have their heritage and their culture diminished or changed by that outside influence.”

Holcomb’s Follow-up Thoughts/Projects to Consider

- Collecting the fascinating folk stories of our elders; they need to be shared with young people or these will be lost.
- Doing research on the Swiss Mennonite experience in Russia - the founding story - and writing this.
- Pooling resources with Swiss Mennonites in Pretty Prairie and Kingman and South Dakota to commemorate historical sites with some kind of markers.
- Acknowledging the founding fathers and mothers, the men and women who deserve to be recognized in the official history of the Swiss Mennonites. Who are these?
- Connecting with the Dayton International Peace Museum in working on peace issues or initiatives.

Holcomb left us with this challenge:

“This more specific identity of Swiss-German Mennonites makes this group even more interesting because it sets you apart more clearly as a distinct ethnic group within Mennonite and other communities of South Central Kansas. It also means that you might have a greater responsibility to make yourselves more known to the state of Kansas.”

Summaries of the interviews can be read on the website. The complete interviews are available on request. SMCHA Board thanked Jason for his time with interviews and encourages more stories to be collected. *Please let SMCHA leaders know of persons to be interviewed or send stories to the SMCHA address.*

--Kathy Goering