

Interview with Henry Hersch (HH)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

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Bismarck, North Dakota

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MM: This is Michael M. Miller, Germans from Russia Bibliographer, North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo, ND. It is November 9, 1993, and I am here in the home of Jake and Helen Loeb. Helen Loeb's father is Henry Hersch, who lives in Bismarck with his daughter and son-in-law. Henry Hersch was born in Krasna, Bessarabia. Good morning, Henry.

HH: Good morning.

MM: Henry, could you tell me when you were born? What was your birth date?

HH: December 15, 1898.

MM: So, December 15, 1898 and you were born in Krasna, [Bessarabia]?

HH: Yah.

MM: I believe Krasna was a Catholic colony?

HH: Oh yes, all of them. There was no other religion in there. The whole village was all Catholic.

MM: What were the neighboring colonies?

HH: I don't know. There were some Lutherans [in Ungekot ?] village. And other than that, it was mixed with Jews and everything else.

MM: Now, let's go back to Krasna. First of all to your family. What was the name of your father?

HH: George Hersch.

MM: Do you know by chance, when he was born?

HH: No, I don't.

MM: How about your mother? What was her name?

HH: Barbara.

MM: What was her family name?

HH: Bachmeier.

MM: Barbara Bachmeier. And then she became a Hersch? How many children were in your family, brothers and sister?

- HH:** Six, four girls and two boys. Margaret, Susan, Irene, and Rose. Henry and John. Two sons and four girls.
- MM:** Were they all born in Krasna?
- HH:** Rose was born in Strasburg, [ND] and the others in Krasna. She is the baby in the family.
- MM:** So, when you were living in Krasna, how old were you before you left for the United States?
- HH:** Twelve years old.
- MM:** How many of the children came with the parents?
- HH:** Five children, and one was born here.
- MM:** How old was the oldest one when you came?
- HH:** I don't know how old she was, but her name was Margaret. She married [Tisman ?].
- MM:** Now, let's go back to the Krasna village. Was your father a farmer?
- HH:** Yah.
- MM:** What did he raise?
- HH:** He raised wheat and stuff like that, corn. And they had, as far as fruit is concerned, they had all kinds of apples and pears and had a big vineyard and all that stuff. They had a lot of stuff like that.
- MM:** Do you still remember some of that?
- HH:** Oh, yes, yes. I remember some of that.
- MM:** Were you close to water?
- HH:** No, we weren't too close to water.
- MM:** How was the house built, where you lived in Krasna?
- HH:** It was built of stone, with a thatched roofs over it. It had a big ridge loft over it.
- MM:** How was the stone put together?
- HH:** It was sawed, like they have these here tile and brick, you know. It was sawed in big pieces and piled up. Just like you would build a tile house, you know.
- MM:** How was the roof made?
- HH:** The roof was made of thatch. That stuff that was cut out of the lakes. I called it thatch. They had some twine and stuff and sewed it on there.
- MM:** How many rooms were in the house?
- HH:** Two rooms, kitchen and living room.
- MM:** So, everybody slept in one room?
- HH:** Yah.

- MM:** Was there a barn too?
- HH:** Yah, the barn was off the other corner.
- MM:** Was the barn attached to the house?
- HH:** Oh, no. The barn was sitting over there by itself. And there was a shed built, what they called it, a Schaffshed [sp ?].
- MM:** How many animals did they have?
- HH:** Oh, I don't know. They had a team of horses, cow or two, pigs, chickens and stuff like that. Not much.
- MM:** Was there a summer kitchen?
- HH:** Yah. Well, the kitchen was a summer kitchen, it was used for a summer kitchen. You see, the oven was built into the living room and you fired that oven from the kitchen, baked big loaves of bread in there. You would fire it up and put the dough in there and it would come out great big loaves of bread, just like cotton.
- MM:** What about the fuel for that stove?
- HH:** Manure. They made that themselves. They saved all their manure from the cows and horses and they hauled it out to the back yard, spread it out and rolled it and cut it in square pieces, about like that.
- MM:** Did you have to do some of that work?
- HH:** Oh, no. I was too young to do that.
- MM:** Did they go out and get cow chips too?
- HH:** Oh, yah. Then they went out and got cow chips too, but mostly they made their own out of the manure they saved from their own stock, you know.
- MM:** Did they have enough for the winter?
- HH:** Oh, yah. Yah, they seen to that.
- MM:** Was there a lot of butchering?
- HH:** Not much. Sometimes butchered a pig or so, that's about all. They were all, what you would call poor people. A few were wealthy, but the most of them were poor people. They didn't have much.
- MM:** So, they went to the market to buy their things?
- HH:** Yah. They went to Ungekot [sp ?], a town.
- MM:** How far away was that from Krasna?
- HH:** Oh, I would say about ten, twelve miles.
- MM:** They went there to the bazaar?
- HH:** Yah, they had clothing and everything there.

- MM:** So, there was no bazaar in Krasna?
- HH:** No. No, there was no bazaar at all.
- MM:** Do you remember going to the bazaar, the market? What was it like?
- HH:** Oh, yes. You seen lots of different things. Different people, Jews, Gypsies. Lots of different kinds of people [that] all spoke a different language.
- MM:** You only spoke German, I suppose?
- HH:** All we spoke was German. I couldn't even speak Roosian [Russian]. None of us could speak Roosian. We didn't have no Roosian teacher.
- MM:** As long as we're talking about a teacher, you had to go to school when you were six years old?
- HH:** Oh, yah. Yah.
- MM:** Do you remember going to school?
- HH:** Oh, yes. I remember going to school. I didn't learn a hell of a lot.
- MM:** Why was that?
- HH:** Oh, I don't know. Just that way.
- MM:** You had to do some work at home?
- HH:** Yah.
- MM:** Everybody had to do their chores?
- HH:** Yah. What there was to be done, they had to do it. Yea, we went to school. We had a German teacher and then we had a Russian teacher. But he tried to learn us how to count [Russian words]. Something like that.
- MM:** What about your classmates? What were some of their names? Do you remember?
- HH:** Well, there was Anton Kuntz, Maximilian Riehl, and Ambrosius Riehl.
- MM:** What about your neighbors, when you lived in Krasna? Do you remember the houses of your neighbors?
- HH:** Oh, you betcha. See, there was an alley coming from the markethouse through the village and old Arnold lived right on the side of the alley there and then was our next house. Arnold was over here in America. Strasburg [ND] was supposed to have been built on his homestead. But his wife didn't like the way they had these cast iron stoves and stuff and she didn't know how to cook [with them]. So, they went back to Russia.
- MM:** What was his name?
- HH:** Arnold. The last name was Arnold. I don't remember his first name, but his boy's name was Maximilian. He had a boy and he was married to Adolph Riehl's sister.
- MM:** And he came over to Emmon's County to Strasburg, [ND] and his wife didn't like it?

HH: Yes. She didn't like it and so they went back to Russia.

MM: And why didn't she like it?

HH: Well, you see, she made her dough like she did in the old country and she fired that old cast iron stove up and shoved it in there and left it that way. But you got to keep firing, see, in those old stoves. And when she come home, why, the dough was all over the oven and there was no bread.

MM: Well, that would be interesting. Do you remember her coming back?

HH: Oh, yes. You bet. She was quite a lady. I was sick there. I must have been about six, seven, or eight years old. I had pneumonia awful bad and their house was built on the land close to our home. Like our lot was here and theirs was here and I laid in the shade back there. She used to give me this chocolate candy. She was a nice woman.

MM: So, you remember when she came back from America? What did she say about the whole thing?

HH: She didn't like it at all. Too wild.

MM: Really? I wonder why it was too wild?

HH: Well, there was too much open country. Like it used to be years ago, just a few settlers here and there and nobody hardly knew one another. There were the mixed breed people. There were Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, Irish and all of that. The people were so mixed in this country. She wasn't used to that. All she knew was German.

MM: And the language was only German, of course.

HH: Yah, yah.

MM: Who else were your neighbors, Henry?

HH: Matt Sane [Zane sp. ?], he was our neighbor. And there was a widow woman. Her husband was sick, he drink so much he kept shaking his head all the time. But I forgot her name. And there was Henricus Maximilian.

MM: How was the village built, Krasna?

HH: Well, it was built all in one line. Like east and west, the way I understand. There were little villages start [ing] to build in the back. But, it was just a small village.

MM: Where was the school located?

HH: The school was located back in the middle of the village, and the church.

MM: And the church?

HH: Yah, they were in the middle of the village.

MM: And they were together, the school and the church?

HH: Yah. The church sat kittycorner on the lot and the school was built along the sidewalk. Yah, I remember all that.

- MM:** Now the church, was it quite a nice church?
- HH:** Yah, a nice, big church. Had a pastor there all the time. Had nuns there.
- MM:** Do you remember going to church there, then?
- HH:** Oh, yah. You betcha.
- MM:** You had your First Communion there?
- HH:** Sure.
- MM:** Did they do a lot of singing in the church?
- HH:** Oh, yah. You bet.
- MM:** Do you remember some of the songs?
- HH:** Maximilian Wagener stood up for me when I got confirmed. He was my dad's oldest sister's boy. He stood up for me.
- MM:** Your mother did a lot of cooking with such a large family?
- HH:** Oh, yah. She done all the cooking. She used to make everything. Kartoffel and noodla.
- MM:** A lot of noodles?
- HH:** A lot of noodle stuff.
- MM:** What about the meats?
- HH:** Oh, we had some pork. You know, butchered a pig or so and that was cured. And of course, that was divided up for a certain length too.
- MM:** In the spring, I suppose they would plant their garden?
- HH:** Oh, yes. They had a nice big garden. And by the garden, they had an orchard where they had apples, pears, and plums, apricots. You name it, they had most anything there.
- MM:** Did they have some wine too?
- HH:** Oh, wine! Christ, they had wine running down the streets some years. Oh yes, they had so much wine.
- MM:** Was there always wine on the table?
- HH:** Oh yes, there was always wine there. I never saw coffee until I came to the United States. We'd drink a glass of wine with a little sugar in it and butter bread, or whatever we had, or a piece of meat. But, we never had coffee. Never got drunk. Never got to be an alcoholic either.
- MM:** So, you had wine even as a child?
- HH:** Oh, yes. Yes. Never got drunk. Now, you take my family here. I had nine of them and not one of them can say they saw me drunk.
- MM:** Wonderful. Did you have some chores to do at the house?

- HH:** Oh, no. The wife took care of all the house chores. I took care of the outside stuff, like taking care of the milk cows, the team of horses, feed the pig and the chickens. I took care of the outside stuff.
- MM:** No. I mean back in Krasna when you were a boy.
- HH:** Oh, yah. I didn't have to milk no cows. The mother and the oldest girls milked the cows.
- MM:** So, then each day the farmers would go out into the field and come home each night?
- HH:** Yah, they didn't live out on the land. It was quite a ways out. You see, they had the grazing around the village and then there was the farmland. If you had so much land, then you were allowed to run so many head of cattle or horses for grazing and the farmland was separate.
- MM:** So, for the grazing, the cows and horses were all together?
- HH:** All one bunch. The herder would take them out in the morning and bring them back at night, the milk cows.
- MM:** So, the village had a herder?
- HH:** Yah, they had a herder. He would take them out in the spring, in the morning, and bring them back at milking time.
- MM:** So, there was one person responsible for that?
- HH:** Well, it was a couple of people. It was too big a herd for one person, sometimes.
- MM:** I wonder what their names were?
- HH:** I don't know. That's beyond me. I never knew.
- MM:** Well, you remember when they came to get the cows?
- HH:** Well, they had their time in the morning. When they started out at one end of the village, see, and then bring them up to the other end and out on the grass, every morning. And they would bring them back at milking time every night. And, of course, the horses [if] they didn't need them, why, they run out there. They would call the herder. Then they would bring the herd in.
- MM:** So, let's go back into the house when you were a kid. Did you have some play time?
- HH:** No, there was not much play time.
- MM:** Wasn't too much play time?
- HH:** Worked, eat, worked and sleep, and go to school if we had to. There wasn't too much school.
- MM:** About how many months of the year did you go to school?
- HH:** I don't remember, about five, six [months]. Something like that.
- MM:** So, you were twelve years old when you came to the United States?
- HH:** Yah.
- MM:** How long did you go to school then? Until you were twelve?

- HH:** Yah.
- MM:** And your brothers and sisters were of course, older than you?
- HH:** Yah. The ones that were older went to school, the ones that were younger didn't go to school.
- MM:** When you went to school, did you only have German classes? No Russian?
- HH:** German classes and we had a Russian teacher, too. Yah. We had a Russian class and a German class and then we had Catholic catechism too.
- MM:** Had Catechism too? Was this after school?
- HH:** In school time. Had Catechism all in German.
- MM:** So, you learned to read and write in German, of course.
- HH:** Not too good, not too good.
- MM:** What about your dad? Did he have some brothers and sisters? How many were in his family?
- HH:** Yah, he had a brother. I don't know how many were in his family because we left there when he got married. But they say he had a big family, seventeen or eighteen kids. My uncle, John Hersch, my dad's brother, you see, he was in that Russian-Japanese war. When he came back, why that made up his mind. When he came back, he got married to a girl that lived there, a next door neighbor. And his dad said there was no room for three families in one lot there. So, dad sold out and came to the United States. He sold what he had.
- MM:** Did your mother have brothers and sisters?
- HH:** Oh yah, she had brothers and sisters. Her sisters stayed over there and the brother was here, old Vatslav Bachmeier. He lived out here by Roddy [sp. ?]. St. Gertrude's there.
- MM:** So, you left Krasna, Bessarabia at the age of twelve. And that was, of course, in the early nineteen hundreds.
- HH:** In 1912.
- MM:** [In] 1912 you arrived in North Dakota?
- HH:** No. No, wait a minute. In 1909, we arrived in North Dakota.
- MM:** So, do you remember those days when your folks decided to leave? So, how did they approach the family?
- HH:** They didn't like it. Felt sorry, cried and all that stuff. They didn't like it, but dad had to go.
- MM:** Were there other families that went with you?
- HH:** No. Not out of the village. We were the only one at that time.
- MM:** So, you left. And then, did you take the train?

- HH:** Well, we had to go to Odessa. There was no train by the village there. There was no train through that country. But, we had to go to Odessa to where we got on the train.
- MM:** So, you went on the wagon?
- HH:** Yah, we went with the wagon to Odessa and then we got on the train.
- MM:** So, when you left Krasna, there were five children and even a baby. You were twelve years old and I'm sure you wondered, where in the world are we going too?
- HH:** Yah, I know that. What scared me though, we were sixteen days on the ocean. They didn't have the fast passenger ships like they have now. We run into a bad storm and the waves were four or five feet high [that] hit the ship and splashed over on the deck. I was scared to death. And I swore if I ever hit land again, I would never go on the water again. I'd stay on the ground.
- MM:** You don't remember the name of the ship?
- HH:** No, I don't remember the name of the ship.
- MM:** But, when you got to Odessa, you took the train. But where did you go with the train?
- HH:** We went to Libau. That was a town next to the ocean, someplace in Russia. From there, we got on the ship.
- MM:** How long were you on the ship?
- HH:** About sixteen days.
- MM:** Were there other German people on the ship?
- HH:** Oh yah, there were other German people on the ship. People from all over, on the ship. Jews.
- MM:** So then, you arrived where?
- HH:** New York.
- MM:** After you arrived in New York, what happened?
- HH:** Well, they gave us shopping bags full of food, you know. They put us on the train and Strasburg was the end of the line.
- MM:** Did you ever go to Ellis Island first?
- HH:** No. No, we went right on the train. You see, when we came in, the Ellis Island, that is the Statue of Liberty. That is out on the ocean. Yah, we seen that. We passed that coming in to New York.
- MM:** I wonder what your thoughts were, coming to the big city?
- HH:** Well... Oh, we couldn't think of nothing. We were scared to death, that's all.
- MM:** So then, you took the train and how long did that take?
- HH:** That took about two, three days. Yah, about three days to get to Strasburg.
- MM:** Did you stay overnight anywhere or straight on?

- HH:** No. Well, we had to change trains there in St. Paul, but we didn't stay overnight. We laid up there for a little while. I remember that. I went into the bathroom and I turned on the water. I never had a faucet where the water came so darn fast. It run out over the sink and a couple of niggers came in and grabbed me and I thought they were going to kill me.
- MM:** That was the first time you ever saw running water?
- HH:** The first time, when I got to St. Paul. In the train station.
- MM:** Then you took another train, and again, were there other German immigrants?
- HH:** Oh yah, yah.
- MM:** Then where did you head to?
- HH:** Strasburg.
- MM:** Did you go by Eureka, or did you go straight on to Strasburg?
- HH:** We went by Eureka, but stayed on right to Strasburg.
- MM:** When you got to the depot in Strasburg, who met you there?
- HH:** Well, mother had some relations there and they met us. We went out to their farm and were out there for a few days. Then dad hired out to a fellow named Benedict Buechler and he was a pretty big operator. He bought another farm from a Hollander and had buildings on there. Then we moved in there and lived there all summer.
- MM:** What direction did he live from Strasburg?
- HH:** He lived west of Strasburg. We stayed on that farm while dad worked out there. He bought it from some Hollander. It had a nice little house, a barn, a shed and we lived there all summer. Come fall, why dad bought some horses, a cow and a wagon, and I don't know what else, and headed west across the river.
- MM:** So, he didn't stay in Emmon's County?
- HH:** No, he didn't stay in Emmon's County. He spotted that piece of land across the river, the old homestead. Then, he went to Mandan and put a homestead on it and went back. [He] had one of them one blade plows with handles on, wooden beam, a little wheel in front and plowed sod, oh, about three feet long and we cut them and laid them for the walls. Built a sod house and we crawled in.
- MM:** So, you helped build that sod house?
- HH:** Oh yes, I carried a lot of sod. You betcha.
- MM:** And exactly how did they build that sod house again, Henry?
- HH:** Well, they cut that sod about twelves inches wide. Then they cut it about two, three feet long, see, and they would lay it for a wall. All depended how thick they wanted that wall, see. They built the wall that way.
- MM:** What did they do for the roof?

- HH:** Well, they had to go... See, the main line was through McLaughlin, McIntosh, in 1908. Then, they had to go to McIntosh and get some rough lumber. And a ridge log to put across there and put some boards on there and some tar paper and some sod on top of that to hold it down, so it wouldn't leak.
- MM:** What about the floor inside?
- HH:** No floor at all, just dirt. In the summertime, the fleas would eat you up.
- MM:** Back in Krasna, was there a wooden floor?
- HH:** No, no, no. Just clay.
- MM:** What about this sod house then? How did they heat this sod house?
- HH:** We went down along the Cannonball River and picked up dry sticks. You know, whatever is fit to burn. Then we went out into the hills and we got that lignite coal out there. We got veins six inches thick, foot thick, and some three or four feet thick. Went out there and dug that lignite coal with pick and shovel. We kept warm that way.
- MM:** So, they didn't use cow manure then?
- HH:** No, no. Not for heating. They used cow manure for cooking. They would take a hunk of that lignite coal and put it in the stove or whatever the firing frame was, and let it simmer all night long and in the morning, you still had fire there. And then, put a few sticks on there and heat the thing right up again.
- MM:** So, they would kept warm there and of course, they had thick walls?
- HH:** Oh, yes. They had thick walls, about three feet thick.
- MM:** So, it kept it even cool in the summertime.
- HH:** Oh, yah.
- MM:** So, on the farmstead here in North Dakota, this was in Grant County?
- HH:** Yah.
- MM:** Did they also build a summer kitchen there?
- HH:** Oh, yah.
- MM:** What was the summer kitchen used for?
- HH:** For cooking in the summertime. So it would stay cool in the house. They had a stove out there.
- MM:** And the barn, they built too?
- HH:** Oh yah, they built a sod barn too.
- MM:** Oh, so it was a sod barn? Built like the house?
- HH:** Built like the house.
- MM:** How many cows and horses did they have?

- HH:** Well, that all depends. Some had two or three, some had four or five, something like that. They didn't have too big a herds to start out with.
- MM:** What was the closest town to you?
- HH:** Well, Shields. The Milwaukee branch came out of McLaughlin, built up to New England there in 1912. That was our closest town, Shields. Shields was a nice little town at one time.
- MM:** Now your folks, when your mother would think about the old country, did she talk much about the old country?
- HH:** Oh, yes. Yes, she used to walk down to the creek crying, wishing she had the barn they had in the old country to live in, instead of the sod house here.
- MM:** So, it wasn't an easy life for them when they came here?
- HH:** No, no, no. It was a rough life, a rough life. A rough life for all of us.
- MM:** What about, Henry, did they have any time for entertainment? Like a little dancing or singing?
- HH:** Not much, not much. Very little until they got a little older, you know. After they lived there eight or ten years, then things changed a little bit. The people had a little more to live on, had a little more fun, and stuff like that. But when it first started out, it was dead.
- MM:** 'Course you can remember, since you were older then too.
- HH:** Oh, yes. Yes. Well, I couldn't talk a word of English, but I got connected with an old Englishmen and he was married to a squaw, an Indian woman. He was a good man.
- MM:** What was his name?
- HH:** Tom Twigs.
- MM:** He lived down by Shields?
- HH:** He lived and drank on the place I have now. I worked a lot for him after I grew up, you know. I used to chop wood for him for the winter and stuff like that. In the summertime, I used to ride on his horses. He had quite a few horses and cattle. I used to work for him a lot and he gave me a lot of good advice.
- MM:** Did he speak English to you?
- HH:** Oh, yah. He couldn't speak anything else but English.
- MM:** How did you respond, since you could only speak German?
- HH:** Well, I learned fast.
- MM:** So, you learned just on your own?
- HH:** You betcha. I learned all on my own. I had no teacher. In fact, I didn't go to school at all here in this country.
- MM:** Did you folks ever learn to speak English?

HH: Oh, yah. They did, but not too good.

MM: So, you worked for this man until you were how old?

HH: Till I was old enough to get married, I guess.

MM: What year was that?

HH: In 1921. I was 21 years old and I still worked for him at times. The last time I worked for him, he had some hay put up way down south for his cattle. He wanted me to haul that hay in. But he says, "Henry, I'm broke. I got no money. What are we going to do about that?" I says, "I don-t know." Well, he says, "I'll go and talk to your folks about it." I was painting the grain box, you know, it was just after threshing. I was painting the grain box before putting it away for another year. He rode in there and tapped me on the back and told me what he wanted and said he would talk to my folks about it. The folks said all right, if Henry wants to work for you. So, he says, "you work for me two months, hauling that hay in, and you can go out into the horse herd and pick out your's." He had pretty near close to a hundred head of horses. Hell, if you worked in the wintertime, you got only \$10 a month, and in the summertime \$15. Of course, horses weren't too high priced, but good horse was worth about \$50 or \$60. So, I went out and picked myself a good horse.

MM: What did you do after that?

HH: Went home. That was in the old year, in 1920. And in 1921, the 30th of January, I got married.

MM: Who did you marry?

HH: Brigitta Klein.

MM: Who were her parents?

HH: They lived in Strasburg. They came from Evenista [sp. ?]. They weren't from Krasna. They called them the Leichaka [sp.?.].

MM: What did they call them?

HH: Leichaka.

MM: Did they speak a little different German?

HH: Yah, they spoke a little different German.

MM: And they lived in Strasburg?

HH: Yah, they lived there.

MM: How did you meet your wife?

HH: Well, I just went over there and met her. Got acquainted and then, got married.

MM: How long was the courtship?

HH: Didn't take long, about two or three weeks.

MM: Is that right? You decided, now it's time to get married and raise a family?

HH: I got married and we lived with my folks that summer. And then, I rented a farm from the Milwaukee Railroad Company, the branch line that came out of McLaughlin. And then, I farmed for them. I had three quarters of land and I farmed for eight years for them.

MM: So, they had different farms out there?

HH: Yah, they had farms out there around Shields. I had about fifty head of cattle and had a little money in the bank. I wanted to spread out. I wanted to be bigger, be a bigger rancher like all those big ranchers all around. So, I told the old Hutterites [?] Milwaukee Railroad Company], "you've got to give me more land." So, they said, "oh, we can't give you more land. We had to let [cannot understand the words] have some, they owed me so much money." I said, "I can't help that. If I can't get more land, I'm quitting you." They said, "oh, don't you make a bad mistake."

Anyhow, I had about twenty acres of corn. I was picking corn, in the fall of the year, and here come this Bill Ordway, and Andrew Tutland. Bill Ordway was the son-in-law of a banker from Mandan here. He says, "I heard you're looking for a place." "Yah," I said. [He said,] "well, I got this place, Twiggs place. He can't make the payments and I'm going to take him off there and put him up by the Porcupine Hills and I can sell you that place." "All right, what do you want for it, [I said]?" "Thirty-five hundred dollars for the half section." I said, "that's kind of steep." It was, at the time. But, it was right on the river, running water we had there. So, I took him up on it and in three years, I paid for the damn place and had a hundred head of cows.

MM: Is that right? You worked hard?

HH: Oh, you're darn right. I had to. I learned how to work hard from all the ranches.

MM: And a lot of that was from home?

HH: Oh, sure, sure. But a lot of that was from those old timers. The way they had those herds of cattle or horses and not paying a cent of taxes for grazing. Everything was free. Grazing was free. Range free, see. There was no range limit. Hell, I thought, that was easy picking. Everything for nothing, but you work for it. 'Course, it didn't stay that way for long. Finally got the taxes. They divided the country into different counties.

MM: So, when you came, there were no counties yet?

HH: No, no.

MM: That was a big change, wasn't it?

HH: That was a big change.

MM: What was your attitude towards it?

HH: Well, we didn't like it. But we had to take it. It was the law.

MM: Now, you lived in Grant County, and then of course, in Sioux county?

HH: After I quit that Milwaukee Railroad farming and I bought that place in Sioux County. But before that, I always lived in Grant County.

- MM:** Now, in Sioux County and in Grant County too, somewhat, but especially in Sioux, there were quite a few Indians?
- HH:** Oh, yah. There were all Indians.
- MM:** Now, how did the German-Russians get along with the Native Americans?
- HH:** Well, they got along all right. I got along good with them. They were the best friends I ever had. Depends them how you treat them.
- MM:** Did they speak English?
- HH:** Oh, yes. You betcha. I had the Indian Agents there in 1936. You know, everything went dry and I had about forty-nine head of cows and no grass. The Indian Agency had dug out a spring on some Indian land and it hadn't been used and there was old grass around there. I was moving my cattle around, looking for grass for them. There comes this Indian agent. He said, "Henry," 'course he knew me well. It was Joe Murphy. He grew up in that neighborhood. His father was an Irishman married to an Indian woman. He said, "take them cows down there to that tank and let them eat that dry old grass and drink that fresh water." I said, "I got no lease on it." He said, "I give you permission, go ahead." So, I took them down there and kept them there until Christmas time. Grazed them there and got along good. I never had no trouble with the Indians.
- MM:** Were the Indians farmers too?
- HH:** Some of them. And some of them were like any others, not worth a darn. Some of those young Indian boys, they made good. Like Pat McLaughlin, they were right up there. They must have had four or five hundred head of cattle connected with the big cattle companies. They had the education and they did good. But some of them, there was nothing but booze, booze, booze.
- MM:** So, when you got this country, there was no church yet?
- HH:** No, nothing. You see, we built that church that's in Shields now. We built that out west there in the country, from our place west about three or four miles. Durtsch lived beyond the other side of that church. Wagner's and we all went together and built that little church. There still is a graveyard out there, And of course, they want to move it [the church] to town. Everybody [had] moved to Shields. Shields was a nice little town. So, they moved it in there and then the Bishop closed it. Yah, we built that church. All the old people themselves, no help from anybody else.
- MM:** I forgot to ask you, Henry, when you got married, did you have a kind of nice wedding party?
- HH:** Oh, yes. We had a nice wedding party.
- MM:** Where did you get married?
- HH:** In Linton.
- MM:** You got married in Linton? How was the wedding celebrated?
- HH:** Good. It was on the farm.
- MM:** How long was the wedding celebrated? One day or more?

HH: Oh, just one day. A nice wedding.

MM: Have a wedding dance?

HH: Oh, yah. You betcha.

MM: Do you remember who played?

HH: I don't remember. The accordion? Senger, I think was his name.

MM: Do you remember some of the other bands that used to play?

HH: Well, not many. I didn't have time. I had to work all the time. I didn't get to too many dances. Well, there were different young guys that played there. Some played accordions at little parties.

MM: You didn't go to any dances when Lawrence Welk came over?

HH: No, I never went to Lawrence Welk. I never even seen Lawrence Welk, only on TV. I knew where he lived, southeast of Strasburg, on the farm. What I was told, his father was a little bit of a musician. He could play the accordion and Lawrence went on from there. I never even seen Lawrence or talked to him.

MM: What about back on the farm when you were growing up? Then of course, you got married, and had how many children again?

HH: Nine.

MM: Did they go to the farm school?

HH: Well, I had a school on my own land. The school district bought a house and set it there. They hired a teacher and had school there for the kids on my own property.

MM: Did your children speak English?

HH: Oh, yes. They had English teachers, you know. They had to speak English. Hell, they can't speak nothing else but English. They forgot their German language. Take Helen here, she can't talk German. There is nothing of German in her. Like me here, I ain't forgot nothing.

MM: Wonderful. Now, when you, later on in life, you know when these old Bessarabian Germans would get together, and of course, [with] your folks, what did they do for fun? Did they play a lot of cards?

HH: Yes. They played cards, had little parties, drinking wine, played cards.

MM: Did they celebrate namesdays?

HH: Oh, yes. They celebrated that.

MM: How was it celebrated?

HH: Oh, they had little drinks and food and all different kinds of stuff. Maybe a musician had a little dance.

MM: Any barn dances?

HH: Yah, there were barn dances.

- MM:** What about Christmas? Do you remember how it was celebrated?
- HH:** Well, when we first came out here, there was an Indian village out there, on the Sioux County side. A big log house, and the Indian kids and us, we went there for Christmas. Santa Claus would come there and distribute little things for the kids and stuff like that. Had a nice big Christmas tree and of course, the priest was there. In the morning, we had church and then we went home.
- MM:** Was Christmas celebrated back in Krasna?
- HH:** Oh yes, always. Always had a big celebration.
- MM:** How was that celebrated?
- HH:** Having fun.
- MM:** Was there a Santa Claus?
- HH:** No, there was no Santa Claus. They had a woman called the Christkindel. Well, she's just a young girl. Dressed her up with a white cloth and she was the Christkindel. She would come in there and throw candy and peanuts and you pick them [up]. She hit you with the switch and said if you were bad or good.
- MM:** Was there a Belzenickel too?
- HH:** Yah, there was.
- MM:** What did he do?
- HH:** Well, if you didn't behave, he would take you out and chain you up.
- MM:** Did that ever happen to anybody?
- HH:** No, not to me. I was too smart for that already. Because I knew there was no Belzenickel and I knew there was no Christkindel. I knew that was a girl. That's all I know.
- MM:** But the little ones didn't know that.
- HH:** No, the little ones didn't know that.
- MM:** What about Easter? How was that celebrated?
- HH:** That was celebrated in the same way. They made their Easter nests. Laid colored eggs in there.
- MM:** Was that inside or outside?
- HH:** Outside or inside or wherever you felt that Easter bunny would lay the eggs.
- MM:** I'm assuming your family is quite religious? So, there were prayers?
- HH:** Oh, yes. Yes.
- MM:** And then for Christmas, would you go to Midnight mass?
- HH:** Oh, yes. You never missed that.
- MM:** Did your mother do a lot of canning?

- HH:** Oh yes, whatever she had. It wasn't like it is now. Now, they have much more stuff to can. A lot more ways to do it.
- MM:** When you grew up, there was of course, no electricity and no running water.
- HH:** No, nothing. You had to get the water out of the well. Dipped up by the pail.
- MM:** Bring it in and heat it?
- HH:** Bring it in and heat it.
- MM:** And taking a bath was once a week?
- HH:** You would have a couple pails for drinking water and for cooking and stuff like that.
- MM:** What about light? What did they do about that?
- HH:** They had these kerosene lamps. You've seen them. Outside, we had those lanterns for the barn.
- MM:** So, you remember the first days when electricity came to the farm?
- HH:** Oh yes, that was something different..

END OF SIDE 1 -----Missing Words----- BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

- MM:** There was no radio?
- HH:** No.
- MM:** Do you remember the first days when the radio came on?
- HH:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** I bet that sounded different.
- HH:** Oh, yes. It sounded funny, but it sounded good.
- MM:** I bet people wondered, what was all this about?
- HH:** People wondered what was inside of that, making all that noise.
- MM:** Do you remember buying the first radio?
- HH:** Oh, yes. Yes.
- MM:** Wondered where that was coming from?
- HH:** Yes. Yes, you had music.
- MM:** Now, Henry, did the German-Russians, when they came over here, being later there was county government, later on, county commissioners, where they ever interested in politics?

- HH:** Not too much. They didn't know too much about that. Oh, they learned, but there wasn't too much.
- MM:** Like in the school board?
- HH:** Yah. Well, they were all interested in the school, the county commissioners.
- MM:** How long were you on the farm?
- HH:** Until 1920.
- MM:** What happened in 1920?
- HH:** Well, I got married in 1921 and went on my own. Until 1928, when I moved off that Milwaukee Railroad Company.
- MM:** And after that?
- HH:** I bought that ranch down there, that Indian land.
- MM:** How long were you on that ranch?
- HH:** I ranched there for about fifty or sixty years. I'm not too long off of there. About twenty years off of there.
- MM:** Do you still own the ranch?
- HH:** Oh, you damn right. I own over three sections.
- MM:** Who is on the ranch there?
- HH:** Well... My son, he died here awhile back. His wife and their son are running it. They are paying the taxes. I don't charge them no rent, but they pay the taxes now.
- MM:** At the peak of the ranch, how many cattle did you have?
- HH:** I had no cattle when I moved off. I sold all the cattle to the boy, and the horses, and some of the machinery when I moved off.
- MM:** You remember the days when there was no machinery yet? You had to use horses? When you bought your first farm equipment? What was the first thing you bought?
- HH:** A H-tractor.
- MM:** Where did you buy that?
- HH:** I bought that in Shields, from the implement dealer. And later on, I bought another one. I bought two of them. That's what I farmed with. I didn't have no big tractor.
- MM:** What about a vehicle?
- HH:** Well, I had a car all the time.
- MM:** What was the first one you bought?
- HH:** A 1934 Ford.

- MM:** Brand new?
- HH:** Brand new. Bought it from the dealer.
- MM:** It was a big moment when a person could buy the first car.
- HH:** Yah. That's a long time ago.
- MM:** When you think back to Bessarabia, do you ever think back that far? When you were a kid?
- HH:** Oh, yah.
- MM:** What are your memories of back there? What do you think about?
- HH:** Well, it was a good country, if it was run right. When the Kaiser Nicholas was running it, people got along good. Whatever they raised, they paid very little taxes, it was theirs. Till the Bolsheviks took over, it was a different deal. But, they took over after we were over here. It was 1917 or 18 when the Bolsheviks took over. But, when we lived there and the Kaiser ruled, that was a nice [place] to live. Was no hard pressure on the people. People done as they pleased and whatever they raised was their own. They paid very little taxes. They got along good, as far as I know.
- MM:** And in Bessarabia, it looked quite different than this North Dakota did?
- HH:** Oh, it's quite a bit different yes. Some, but not so much. When the weather was good, they raised good wheat crops there. Corn, anything you know. Just like here, if you have a good, wet summer, you raise good crops. It's that way there. The only difference is, they got a longer growing season, about a month and a half longer. Earlier spring and longer growing season than we have in this country. Things mature better where we lived. I don't know if it's that way all over Russia, but anyhow, where we lived it was. That was a nice country where we lived there. Raise most anything there. They had nice big orchards. They had a flour mill in the southwest corner of the village where they took their wheat and had it ground into flour. They had their bran, paid so much for it.
- MM:** Did they have any other businesses in town?
- HH:** No, there was no other business. Church, school, courthouses, the [German word ?] or whatever you called it.
- MM:** What happened there?
- HH:** Well, if you done something wrong, you got fined and throwed in jail.
- MM:** Did that ever happen to anybody?
- HH:** Oh, to some of them. Never happened to me.
- MM:** What was the reason for being fined?
- HH:** Well, if they did something wrong, stole something, hurt somebody. Why, whatever it was, they got fined and got throwed in the jail. So many days in the jug.
- MM:** So, they had troubles there too?

- HH:** Oh, you bet. They had law there too. I remember when I was a kid. It was threshing time. You see, they hauled their grain in out of the fields and had a place in the back yard. They thrash it out with their horses and stuff, you know. Well, anyhow, it was the fall of the year, the milk cows were coming home. There was a stray cow that come in with our's and Dad says, "take your dog and run that cow out." So, I took the dog and started getting the cow out. Here came, what they call here, the mayor, comes walking in. He owned the flour mill, walking along, swinging his cane. The old dog, he left the cow alone and took off after the mayor and tore his pants leg. The next morning, the sheriff come and says to dad, "you've got to come down to the courthouse and [German word ?]." Dad said, "I've got nothing to do down there." [The sheriff said], "yah, you do." He went down there and the mayor says "I got to fine you a ruble. Your kid sicced the dog on me and tore my pants legs." So, dad had to pay a ruble fine. Dog tore his pants leg. The dog didn't like the way he swung that cane. If he hadn't swung that cane around like that, the dog probably wouldn't have bothered him. He was a good little dog, but he didn't take nothing from nobody either.
- MM:** So, the mayor would walk up and down the streets?
- HH:** Yah. See, he had the big flour mill down there and they had men working there. And he would walk home in the afternoon or evening. He was walking by there and the dog took off after him instead of the cow.
- MM:** There they had rubles for the money?
- HH:** Kopecks. Pennies.
- MM:** So, there was no store of any kind?
- HH:** No. No store of any kind.
- MM:** What were the villages that you would go to visit? The nearby villages?
- HH:** Well, there was Belize [sp. ?] and Teplitz and different others. But they were Lutheran villages.
- MM:** So, you didn't have too much communication with them?
- HH:** No, not too much. Oh, Dad had kind of a wagon business. He used to fix up old wagons and sell them. He used to go to those places. He had friends there. He would find out who had an old wagon to sell and he would go there and buy that wagon and bring it home. Fix it up and made a ruble or two on it. That's the way it was.
- MM:** But the winters got kind of long for these people, didn't it?
- HH:** Sometimes. Not any longer than we have them here. Not quite a long as here.
- MM:** Did they keep themselves busy in the winter too?
- HH:** Oh, yes. They kept themselves busy. Playing cards, having fun around the neighborhood. They had nothing else to do. Had a team of horses, a couple of cows to take care of and there wasn't much chores to do like there is here.
- MM:** Now, when they would have the weddings, they wouldn't be in the wintertime?

- HH:** Oh, yes. They had weddings in the wintertime.
- MM:** Was that just one day too, then?
- HH:** No, that was two or three days!
- MM:** Oh, it was a little longer then?
- HH:** Oh, you're darn right. It was two or three days every time. Not just one day. They weren't satisfied in those days with just one day.
- MM:** What was the wedding ceremony like? Each day they would have what?
- HH:** Oh, they would have drinks and dances, and whoop it up, you know. Have fun, different things to eat, all the wine they wanted to drink.
- MM:** Did they have a root cellar?
- HH:** Oh, you bet. Everybody had a root cellar. They had two or three barrels of wine down there.
- MM:** But, no beer?
- HH:** No beer. No.
- MM:** They didn't make beer at that time yet?
- HH:** No. They didn't know nothing about beer until they got to this country.
- MM:** What about when someone would die in the village? How was the ceremony for that?
- HH:** Well, they had an undertaker there who would take them to the church and after that, to the graveyard.
- MM:** A lot of singing then too?
- HH:** Oh, yes. I don't remember what they would sing. Religious songs. Yeah, I remember about those funerals.
- MM:** Henry, is there anything else that you would like to mention about back in the village? Back in Bessarabia?
- HH:** I don't know.
- MM:** We talked about a lot of things already.
- HH:** Yah.
- MM:** Would you say that your folks were glad they came over to America?
- HH:** Well, they had to. After they were here and got settled and got rooted, then they liked it here. But, when they first came over, oh no, they were sick people.
- MM:** Did some of the relatives stay over there in Bessarabia?
- HH:** Yah, yah.

- MM:** Did they have letters back and forth then?
- HH:** They did for a while until the Bolsheviks took over. Then they lost track of pretty near everybody. See, the people that moved into Germany and other places and got killed.
- MM:** What about your folks, did they ever get a newspaper at home?
- HH:** Yah. They got papers, German papers. Well, they used to have a German paper here in Bismarck, the "North Dakota Herald". I don't know how he got it, but there was a lot of news in there from over there [in Russia].
- MM:** People would read that faithfully each week?
- HH:** Sure, they would.
- MM:** Did you get that back home too?
- HH:** No.
- MM:** So, you retired in what year?
- HH:** I don't remember what year it was. I've been retired a long time. About twenty years ago.
- MM:** So, you worked up until a pretty good age then?
- HH:** Oh, yes. I was up in the seventies, close to eighty when I quit.
- MM:** Do you keep yourself busy these days?
- HH:** Yeah. Well, only trouble I got is that arthritis. Otherwise, I have a good appetite. Depends what kind of food it is.
- MM:** So, you came over at the age of twelve?
- HH:** Yah, I came on over with my folks.
- MM:** Your brothers and sisters, did they go on to be farmers too?
- HH:** Yah, they all were farmers.
- MM:** And your children, some of them are farmers too? Ranchers?
- HH:** Yah. Yah, my grandchildren. See, my grandson that runs my ranch. He bought a ranch alongside of mine. We had two ranches connected. He died here a couple years ago. He had a softball team and used to play softball here in Bismarck and all over. They were playing softball in Elgin and he dropped over dead on the diamond.
- MM:** Really? I forgot to ask you. When you were in Bessarabia, did they play any sports?
- HH:** Yah. They played ball in different ways than we play over here.
- MM:** How was it different? How did they play over there?
- HH:** Well, whichever side had the ball, they had to throw the ball to the other side and hit somebody and then run off. And if they couldn't hit you, why you won. It was a little different there.

MM: When you came over here, did they play any ball?

HH: Yah, they started baseball. I liked that.

MM: Did you play baseball?

HH: Oh, yah. I played quite a little. When I went to school, we always played ball.

MM: We are going to close our conversation today with Henry Hersch. I am in Bismarck, North Dakota and it is November 9, 1993. It was a real pleasure, Henry, to speak with you about life back in Bessarabia and then coming to Grant County and later, settling in Sioux County. Is there anything else you would like to say?

HH: No, there isn't much of anything else to say. I had hard times. I've fought prairie fires, fought floods and stuff like that. I went through what you would call hell and high water.

MM: I'm going to close today and thank you so much.