

The following interview is with Mr. and Miss Walter and Esther Stucki at their farm in Bethany on June 20, 1978. Throughout the years, the Stuckis have contributed much to the preservation of the history of Washington County. A number of students working on various projects in the surrounding public schools have visited the Stucki farm to talk about farming life of a different era, to view homemade films on cheesemaking, threshing, and other facets of farming. In addition, Walter and Esther have donated a number of artifacts, documents, and photographs to the museum collection.

These two people were very hospitable and generous with their time. Being modest folks, however, there was a certain reluctance on their part to open up and talk about their experiences at length. Whether it is just their nature or a failure on the part of the oral historian, is for the listener to decide.

There are some unique passages during the hour interview however. They speak of armlife in general, the Swiss and German community of the Helvetia-Bethany area, the art and skill of cheesemaking, and the building of the Sunset Highway across the farmers' lands. The most valuable segment of the tape comes toward the end. Walter and Esther read a German poem written by a Helvetia settler, Jacob Youngen, in 1917. The poem expressively tells the story of the people of Helvetia. The museum has a written copy in the collection (L75-3) donated by Walter Stucki himself. This section vindicates the rest of the tape and indeed the whole field of oral history.

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WALTER AND ESTHER STUCKI

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Die Schwizer Kolonie Helvetia.

1) 13, Wenger 2) Bueller 3) 37 Hershey 4) Yun_en 37 5) 39 Rufner
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Q: Good Morning. To start out, I would just like you both to introduce yourselves, your name and

A: I'm Esther Stucki.

Q: And...

A: I'm Walter Stucki.

Q: And, could you tell me where and when you were born?

A: (Walter) I was born on this farm in July 8, 1897.

Q: Hmmm. So that makes you 81 years old?

A: (Walter) Next month.

Q: Yes. And you were born on this farm, too?

A: (Esther) I was born on this farm.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents, then? When they came over here and tell the story behind that, why they came?

A: (Walter) My father came here in 1887, and he bought this farm in 1889. Mother came here in 1893 from Kansas; originally, from Switzerland.

Q: Uh-huh. Your father was coming from Switzerland, too?

A: (Walter) He spent five years in Ohio.

Q: Did he ever mention to you any reason why he came from the Old Country, then?

A: (Walter) To get out of Military Training. At 20 years they had Military Training, and the young men didn't want to be in Military Training so they left the country.

Q: Was that the case with a lot of young men?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: When he arrived in the United States, then, what did he do when he first got here?

A: (Walter) He lived in Ohio and he was a chipper for the railroad. He chipped the castings, the excess edges on the castings. His brother-in-laws lived out here and they asked him to come out here. And, that's why he came out to this country.

Q: Uh-huh. Another family up in Helvetia was telling me that their family, their parents, came from Ohio, too. Was there quite a few Swiss living in that state?

A: (Walter) Yes, but more so in Wisconsin than in Ohio. Wisconsin is a dairy country and the Swizers are dairmen, the same as in this district.

Q: Was that why they were attracted to this area, then?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Hmmm. How many other Swiss families were there when your father came out here?

A: (Walter) It was mostly Swiss and German. When I went to school there was 38 pupils: 1 was of English decent and 1 was of Danish decent and the rest were German and Swizers.

Q: Is that right? (They laugh) Are the Germans and the Swiss cultures similar? The Swiss speak German, right?

A: (Walter) Yes. The Swiss can understand the Germans but the Germans can't understand the Swiss. The Swiss use the German language in print. It is similar, but...

Q: And they speak a differnt one, then?

A: (Walter) Yes, a dialect. Even Switzerland has a lot of different dialects. I don't know about German except that they have Low German and High German.

Q: Then all of the Swiss and German immigrants out here would speak their native languages?

A: (Walter) Their native language, yes. And the churces here were all German. The Presbyterian Church where we go changed over to the English in 1929.

Q: Hmmm. How big of an area are we talking about, that the Germans would settle in?

A: (Walter) Helvetia, Philips, Bethany.

Q: Did the people in these areas co-mingle with eachother?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Then your family settled in Bethany?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Well, Walt, is Bethany a town or was it more of an area?

A: (Walter) It was a Post Office and a grocery store and a blacksmith shop. That's it. And today it is still a store/restaurant and a barbershop.

Q: Hmmm. Was there like a community hall there?

A: (Walter) Yes, there was two community halls, but most activities took place in the schools. McKinley School.

Q: What were some of the activities that took place, that would be a typical activity?

A: (Walter) Entertainment. They would put on plays by home talent. Helvetia had a dance hall where they would gather on Saturday night.

Q: Well then, when your parents arrived were they dairy farmers themselves.

A: (Walter) Yes. They grew up on dairy farms.

Q: What was the typical dairy farm back then?

A: (Walter) 20, 25, 30 cows. There were 175 cows from Bethany to Kernell (?)
Road on 185th.

Q: In all the farms?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: So that was about how many farmers?

A: (Walter) Oh, about 6.

Q: Well then, the Swiss and German were famous for their Swiss Cheese, then, was that right?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Did they carry the method or the way to make cheese from the Old Country with them?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Was there something special about the way they made their cheese? What was unique about Swiss Cheese as opposed to any other kind of cheese?

A: (Walter) I wouldn't know. It's made different.

Q: How is it made, then, basically. You don't have to go into detail, but...

A: (Walter) It had to be heated to a certain temperature and rennet extract was added. And then afterwards, its worked over and heated again. And, it is put into molds and put on the curry shelves. Cheddar cheese, like in Tillamook, they put the salt in the vat while they're making it. With Swiss cheese, you put the salt on after you do the curry room.

Q: Were the farmers quite proud of the way they made their cheese?

A: (Walter) Yes. Some wouldn't tell other how, they just said it was an art. They wouldn't tell others how to make it. But, we always told everybody who ever asked us. And nearly all of the farmers could make good cheese. There were about five or six of them that made cheese at one time. The roads were pert-near impassible in the winter time and so there was no market for milk. They hauled it to Hillsboro (?) to the condensor or they shipped it into Portland by train.

Q: The milk or the cheese?

A: (Walter) The milk.

Q: How about this cheese? Was it made for your own personal use, for your own family, or was it sold?

A: (Walter) No, we marketed it into 10 or 11 states.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: (Walter) Most of it was sold in Portland. At one time, we turned out 50 pounds a day.

Q: Wow! (They laugh) Is cheesemaking a year-round process?

A: (Walter) You have to do it everyday. You can't hold milk over. We've done it every-other-day, but it's best to make it everyday. And, it is a year-round process. Your cows give milk year-round. You can't shut down one day and then start up another day, then.

Q: There was nothing like taking a month vacation, then, during the year?

A: (Walter) No. Mother started to make it when she came here. Before that it was a cooperative among the neighbors. Then we took it up and we made it for 51 years, commercially.

Q: Do you still make cheese?

A: (Walter) Yes. Whenever we have milk.

Q: Hmmm. You had a sheet of paper there describing thrashing. From what I've heard it was really a community thing, that during the thrashing season the farmers would get together. Was that the case here?

A: (Walter) Yes. Albert Croney (?) used to do our thrashing. He started this in actually 1906 with a steam engine until 1924, then he used a gas tractor. And, in 1927 my neighbor and I bought a machine. Albert told us to go ahead and he would show us how to run it. And, so we took it up and I thrashed for 30 years. I thrashed custom thrashing throughout the neighborhood. Now I just do my own. The others bought combines and...

Q: Was it because the price of a thrash was prohibited that only one person in the neighborhood would own one?

A: (Walter) They didn't all have the power for it. If he would have broke down with his engine, Mr. Croney, he would pert-near have to ship to the factory to get a new tractor. Nowadays, everybody has enough power they could run a thrashing machine, but not in those days.

Q: Hmmm. When you say "power", what do you mean?

A: (Walter) Belt power for the tractors.

Q: That was run by steam, correct?

A: (Walter) Yes, originally. And then in 1924, he and also I shifted to tractor power.

Q: How many farms would he thrash for?

A: (Walter) Oh, at least 30, maybe 40. And he would thrash from July clear to October. Nobody had thrasher machines, so they had to wait till he got around to the job.

Q: How long would it take for him to thrash one farm?

A: (Walter) Oh, hours. It would take, let's see, 40 acres would take around a day.

Q: Hmmm. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions, if you don't mind.

I am curious about what it was like for a young girl growing up on the farm. Were you involved in, well, I imagine you didn't do too much of the heavy work, but you must have had a certain amount of chores to do. What were some of the ones you would do?

A: (Esther) Well for one thing we would make cheese everyday. And had to take care of the chickens, help with the milking, and help with the harvesting. And then there's driving horses for raking or pulling the hay up in the barn, or whatever. Just anything. Garden work.

Q: Was it the womens' responsibility to make the cheese?

A: (Esther) Yes. The older sisters made the cheese.

Q: How many children were in the family.

A: (Esther) Oh, there were 12.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: (Esther) My father had a family of 4 before he married my mother, and there were 8 of us.

Q: Was that quite common among the farming families to have a large family?

A: (Esther) Quite a few. Some had 7, 8, 12. We knew a family that had 16.

Q: Do you think the reason families had quite a few children was to have help working on the farm? Or is that just an accepted tradition?

A: (Esther) Oh, I don't know. I just don't know.

Q: What was it like growing up in a family of 12?

A: (Esther) I didn't grow up in a family of 12 'cause one was gone long before I was born. I was only 2 years old when another one passed away. And, another one passed away when I was 4. So I didn't grow up in a family that size. And, one got married. So, the family was less while I was growing up.

Q: I sense then that, even though you were a girl, the girls and the women probably worked just as hard as the men, only in a different way.

A: (Esther) Yes. It was always a busy day.

Q: When you went out in the field, would you come in and have your food ready for you and your meals prepared.

A: (Walter) Mother would take care of that.

Q: Well, the mother on the farm must have had quite a few responsibilities?

A: (Esther) Did she! I should say! (They laugh)

Q: She worked hard?

A: (Esther) Long hours and she saw to it that her daughters knew how to clean the organ or the piano, and to sew and embroidery and to crochet, and whatever... She taught them all.

Q: That was in addition to all of the other responsibilities?

A: (Esther) Yes.

Q: Okay, I was reading in something else there that there were five churches in this area. Then, I would gather that church and people's religious beliefs were quite an important thing in their life. Was that right?

A: (Walter) Yes. They brought it from the Old Country.

Q: How do you think people's Christian beliefs affected their daily lives? That might be a bit general of a question, I think, but...

A: (Walter) Well, they seemed to be very honest. And lots of them lived their religion.

Q: It seems like I always get the impression that small world towns and communities had quite a feeling of neighborliness and sharing. Do you think that was in part due to their religion?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: So, what church did you attend, then?

A: (Walter) The Presbyterian Church.

Q: When you were smaller, too?

A: Yes.

Q: It that still there?

A: (Walter) Yes. We still attend it. Maybe you're right. The sheriff said that he didn't find much trouble out here. So, I put in that the churches must have been the good influence upon the neighborhood.

Q: This is the county sheriff that mentioned this?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: I see that you have a pamphlet there? Maybe you can just give me a little history of the church, briefly, from what you know?

A: (Esther) This is in a museum in Hillsboro. In 1969, I wrote the history of our church, starting with 1873. I wrote everything I could think of on the old body, each pastor's work while he was here. And I wrote an article on the Sunday school, on the Lady's Aid, on the Christian Endeavor, on the cemetery, and then made a list of the pastors, elders, beacons, and so forth.

Q: Well, you mentioned that a lot of their religious beliefs were taken from the Old Country. Were there other traditions that were brought across from Switzerland? We've mentioned making the cheese, but, in manners of dress or food? Did your parents talk about Switzerland much at all?

A: (Walter) Oh, some.

A: (Esther) Mother couldn't talk about Switzerland. She came over when she was 2 years old.

Q: Oh? Hmm. I am curious. Before I turned the recorder on we were talking about Frank Bueller and his interest in Indian artifacts. Have you discovered or know of anyone that has discovered arrowheads or any Indian-related artifacts on your property?

A: (Walter) We have 2 mallots that they ground corn with and we've found a third of a bowl made of rock. That's all we ever found here.

Q: You found this on your land?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Did your parents ever mention anything about running into Indians in the area at all? They came, what, you said in 1883?

A: (Walter) 1887.

Q: 1887. Were they all gone by that time?

A: (Walter) Mother was in Kansas and there they have Indian troubles. And, the neighbor would bring his wife over to them to stay at their place if he had to go off somewhere. And, one time the soldiers came through to settle a dispute. They came right through the farm, headed west, into Indian territory. But, here, there never was any trouble. Esther found a colt gun, 1845.

Q: Oh, is that right? You found this on your property here?

A: (Esther) In the garden.

Q: This was when you were really young?

A: (Esther) No, about 15, 20 years ago.

Q: It was burried in the garden?

A: (Esther) I found it while I was working in the berry garden.

Q: Where do you think it was from? Do you have any idea or did anyone ever tell you about it at all?

A: (Walter) No, we don't know where it's from. Whoever lost it here or left it here or what, I don't know.

Q: What was this area like during your young life? Geographically-wise, physically-wise?

A: (Walter) It was all timber. When Father broke this place in '89 there was only 28 acres clear. The rest was all standing timber and it cost too much to haul it to Portland in cordwood, so they burned the logs. Then cleared the land.

Q: You can go ahead and speak. If there is something that you would like to say, go ahead and feel free.

A: (Esther) I was just going to say that now there is just one tree left on our farm.

Q: Oh, is that right? Out of all of that wood at one time?

A: (Esther) The place was 120 acres. The October storm took the last ones down. (W)

Q: Did your father do all of the clearing himself?

A: (Walter) Oh, he'd have a hired man to help him and he had a stump-puller that worked with horses to pull the roots out of the ground. They used dinamite.

Q: Did you help with clearing?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: That really must have been backbreaking work.

A: (Walter) Lots of shoveling.

Q: Especially before the days of dinamite. I just can't imagine doing that.

A: (Walter) They burned it. They would dig under the stump and get the stump a'going, then they would burn it. A man asked me, in Portland, "where do you live?" And I told him I live on the Harpcloth's place (sp?). He knew where it was. He said Mr. Embry used to send him over there. He said the stumps were so big there it took them a half a day to walk around them. (They laugh.)

Q: Well, how about not only your farm, but the whole area. Was it all timber as far as when you were really young, then?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: There really wasn't too many open spaces that weren't cleared by the settlers?

A: (Walter) But the land was easier cleared on the plains, what we called the plains from here to North Plains and to Hillsboro. They had a leafy tree instead of Fir. And, it was easier to clear than what fir trees were.

Q: There were no fir trees?

A: (Walter) There were some fir trees but there were a lot of leafy trees.

Q: So, do you think that had been cleared before?

A: (Walter) I don't know why it runs in streaks like that. Then, in Helvatia they had big stumps. When the younguns came there they told the boys "Quit looking for land. Where there's big stumps, there's good land."

Q: You also mentioned in there that--you were talking about the beginnings of the Sunset Highway. Do you remember the building of the highway, then?

A: (Walter) Yes. They took 10 acres off of our place.

Q: That must have been quite a project, at that time, building a highway like that?

A: (Walter) They built the first 2 lanes in '47, '48, and then the last 2 lanes in '64.

Q: Were the people in this area-- well, what were their feelings toward the highway?

A: (Walter) They were against it. They even had meetings and so forth, but nothing would stop it. It was built as a military road, from Vancouver to the coast. But, money talks, so they built the highway so it would come through Portland, to the south end of Portland, and then catty-corner through Washington County, instead of going directly from Vancouver to the coast.

Q: Was it used for a military road at the beginning?

A: (Walter) No, they do travel on it, but...

Q: You mentioned that there were meetings. The farmers were really that much against it?

A: (Walter) Yes.

A: ~~XXXXXXXX~~ What went on at some of these meetings? Or did you have an opportunity to go to some of these meetings yourself?

A: (Walter) Well, I was involved in it. Because it was taken in our place, too. The neighbors would say, "I wish it would go through my place so I could sub-divide". But, I wanted to farm and I didn't like the idea. Our buildings, all but one, were on the highway, and we had to move off.

Q: Even your home?

A: (Walter) The home was built later, but the barn was on the highway.

(Esther) And along with that it took 3 wells that were on the highway.

Q: It took three wells?

A: (Esther) Wells for water.

Q: Oh, I see. So then you would have to dig new wells?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: How many farmers did the highway inconvenience?

A: (Walter) Most of them that it went through.

Q: Did it destroy the farmland?

A: (Walter) It make three corner pieces. And a man would have half of his rance on side of the highway and the other half on the other side. To us, it just took it all from one corner.

Q: Did they give you fair compensation for the land that they took?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Well, who was it anyway that did it? The State of Oregon?

A: (Walter) Well, we dealt with the State of Oregon.

Q: Once the two lanes were completed did you notice, was there a lot more traffic then? Was the traffic heavy?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Right when it opened?

A: Yes. See, it was a through road to the coast, so there was a lot of traffic going. And, now there is more freight than ever. There is not one minute at night that you can't hear a car going on that highway.

Q: Does that really bother you?

A: (Walter) No, it doesn't bother you.

Q: How about you? (To Esther)

A: (Esther) No, I don't hear it. My room is the west end and so I don't hear it. He hears the traffic from the east because it's right in front of him. And there's a 26 ft. cut right down here and so sound doesn't come up.

Q: It must have been a bit difficult to become accustomed to it at the beginning, though, I would imagine.

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: There really wasn't much noise other than a few animals, then, I mean, there weren't many cars in the beginning were there? Did people own many cars?

A: (Walter) Oh, yes. Everybody owned cars in thost days. But, since they built

the town here, why, the traffic is worse.

Q: You also mentioned that it sort of meant the end of Bethany. In what way do you mean that?

A: (Walter) It was a rural community of nothing but farms. Now it's subdivision.

Q: You mean because of the ready access to Portland as a result of the freeway?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: When did they start building homes out here, subdivisions?

A: (Walter) 1963. The first house was built in 1963.

Q: Did the farmers dread that at the time, too, out here? Do you remember?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: What was the feeling among the people?

A: (Walter) It was supposed to progress they told them. We don't like to see them destroy this farmland.

Q: Well, what happened when they first started building on it? Did some farmers sell their land, then?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: What was the feeling toward that farmer that sold his land? Was he sort of ...

A: (Walter) Well, we wished he wouldn't have sold his before, so we could have held them from taking it. They were after me for two years and I kept holding them up. I told them I didn't want to sell. I was still a farmer and I told them maybe this was the key place because they wouldn't do nothing until they got their fingers on my farm. Then, they said no, they would just go around you. But, ~~they~~ didn't build one house until they had my place. The taxes go so high that we couldn't make a living anymore. If they was to place for it, I don't know.

Q: So how many acres did you own then, at that time?

A: (Walter) 120.

Q: What were the taxes like then? In round figures?

A: (Walter) I think they run up to \$17 dollars an acre.

Q: That was quite a bit of money there.

A: (Walter) Yes. That was more than... You could rent land for \$10 an acre, so why

pay taxes of \$17 an acre just because you owned it?

Q: Have the taxes been continuing to climb? Property taxes?

A: (Walter) Yes. Father used to pay \$285 taxes when he owned it. For the 120 acres. Now, I pay \$285 an acre, taxes. On the five acres that I still pay taxes on.

Q: Well, do you think that is the general feeling among a lot of the old timers? That they are being intruded upon by these... Are they welcome or accepted by...

A: (Esther) A lot of the old farmers are gone. (Walter) And, they bought up most of the land around us. The developers.

Q: You have a rhyme here. We have a copy at the museum that you so kindly donated to the museum, but I was wondering... Well, first off would you maybe explain what it is, who put it together, and when it was written. Then, maybe if you like, you could read some of the rhymes in German? As many as you would like. Why don't you first explain what it is and who wrote it?

A: (Walter) This chapter was written by Jacob Youngen in 1917. It is called "The Switcher Colony Helvetia". And here are some of the things he said about the people. He wrote about 60 families in Helvetia-Philips. (In German)

Q: What does that mean?

A: (Walter) That Mr. Ranger and his sons thrash all of the grain in Helvatia. (More German). Mr. Bueller is a hardworking man and you can tell by the looks of his farm. (They laugh.) (More German) He blasts the big stumps out with dinamite.

Q: This is really sort of a mini-history of the people that lived there?

A: (Walter) Yes.

Q: Well, if you don't mind, why don't you go ahead and read a few more. I think this is most facinating. Go ahead and pick out ... maybe you would like to read a couple of them.

A: (Esther) This is about Abraham Youngen. (German) He walked by the schoolhouse and the church up in Helvetia to Abraham Youngen's house. And, he says, I have to turn in at his house because he has good Swiss Cheese and also wine. (They laugh). (More German) Frederick Rufner lives on Mason Hill and he has a nice farm and quite a few children. (More German) Mr. Siegriest came from Switzerland

Siegristville, and he is a quiet man and he also goes to church. (German)

Mrs. Siegriest has a beautiful house and she visits the sick and shares with the poor folk.

Q: Did you know Mr. Youngen?

A: (Walter) Yes. Arnold's mother was a Youngen. And, Arnold's mother's father... there was three brothers - Christ, Abraham, and Yaclup (sp?) *⇒ Jacob?*

Q: Was he quite a creative person? He must have been for writing this.

A: (Walter) For writing this up. And at last he wrote, "If I insulted anybody come and see me about it. And if I missed somebody, go and put it in yourself". (They laugh).

Q: Why don't you go ahead and read a few more? I think this is great!

A: (German) I go down the hill to John Nisbaummer's home (sp?) and his nice family of children, they are well, mannerly, bright.

Q: There is one about a beard in there, about someone that had a ...

Why don't you mention the number it is and then someone referring to it can look at the copy. (He reads poem numbers as follows:

61, 22, 51, 53, 55, 47.).

Q: Is there one on your family? This is only in Helvatia area?

A: (Esther) Our family isn't in it.

Q: How about the Hershey or Bueller family, are they in that?

A: (Esther) Yes. He read those, 37 and...

Q: Oh, he did.

A: (Esther) He read a few of them.

Q: Which one is your favorite or do you have a favorite one in there?

A: (Walter) No.

Q: Was that something that... Did all families enjoy looking at that or was that something that...

A: (Walter) I don't know.

Q: That was a separate community from where you were living?

Q: That is really good. I am happy that both of you read sections out of it. That is about all of the questions that I have for right now, anyway, unless there is something that you would like to add about growing up in this area and in the Swiss community. Well, one thing maybe. When the immigrants were first arriving back in the 19th century and early 20th, from my understanding there was a bit of a stigma attached to being from a foreign country and they were really, really wanted to become Americanized. Was that something that you ever noticed or did any thing like that... What I mean is, it seemed like there was a desire among the new immigrants to become Americanized, now it seems to be the opposite. They take a certain pride in being from Switzerland and looking back on their ancestry and looking back on their individual roots and things like that.

A: (Esther) The Americans looked down on the immigrants because they were more ambitious, it seemed like, than what the Yankees were.

Q: Was that something that you noticed?

A: (Esther) Yes.

Q: Hmm. Was that the case, you think, that new immigrants would really work hard, with a new opportunity like that?

A: (Esther) They were used to it from the Old Country. They had hard times in the Old Country.

Q: Okay then.

End of Tape.