

Transcript: Frank Hoffmeier<sup>1</sup>

Interviewed and Transcribed by Rita Kirchgassner, 20 January 1984

Edited and Researched by Karin Page

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## Side I

KIRCHGASSNER: The 20th day of January 1984. This interview is taking place in York Township, Dearborn County, Indiana. The interviewee is Frank Hoffmeier, the interviewer is Rita Kirchgassner. Tell us when you were born.

HOFFMEIER: I was born January 15, 1900 - that is my birthdate! I was born sometime after 12 o'clock, midnight. Born at home in a house on York Ridge.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, where was the house at?

HOFFMEIER: [?] down – where Egnor lives.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, OK. Not that far away. OK. Then, who were your parents?

HOFFMEIER: Jacob<sup>2</sup> and Mary Hoffmeier.

KIRCHGASSNER: OK. Tell us about the Hoffmeiers - where did they come from? Do you know what part?

HOFFMEIER: Well, my father was born at St. Leon and his father came from Switzerland.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did they speak German?

HOFFMEIER: That I couldn't tell you - I imagine they did - they both had German at home and German in schools - German catechism and German religion was taught to us.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you [know] anything about the Hoffmeiers? Do you know anything about your parents – anything interesting?

HOFFMEIER: Well, on my mother's side - she was born in Cincinnati.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank J. Hoffmeier b. 15 Jan 1900 on York Ridge; d. 30 Sep 1995; formerly of Guilford. (Lawrenceburg Public Library Obituaries; Press Oct 3, 1995; Register Oct. 5, 1995.)

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Hoffmeier d. 2 Dec 1948 at the age of 83. Resided in Yorkville. Married Mary Winter 23 Jan 1894. Had sons Joseph, Frank, Bernard; daughters Mrs. Nicholas Richle, Mrs. George Miller, Mrs. John Reer, Mrs. Carl Hessler, Mrs. Hubert Knue, Mrs. Charles Widolff. Brother Anthony Hoffmeier; sisters: Carola and Sister Otillia. (Lawrenceburg Public Library Obituaries; Press Dec. 16, 1948.)

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, what was her maiden name?

HOFFMEIER: Winter. She was born in Cincinnati. Her mother come from Germany, and, well, that's about as far as I can go back in history on that.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did you know her mother's name?

HOFFMEIER: Mary.

KIRCHGASSNER: Mary also. You don't remember her maiden name, do ya?

HOFFMEIER: No, I don't. No, I don't remember her maiden name.

KIRCHGASSNER: That would have been your grandmother. Let's backtrack to the Hoffmeiers. Do you remember who Jacob's parents were?

HOFFMEIER: Jacob.

KIRCHGASSNER: If you can't remember that's OK.

HOFFMEIER: I can't remember. It'll come to me directly. His father's name was Jacob. His mother's name was Hauck. She lived with him till he died - the baker - down at Lawrenceburg. You don't have the book with you?

KIRCHGASSNER: No, I didn't bring it. It's in there. OK. You were born in Yorkville. Is that where you were raised? And you went to school in Yorkville. Could you tell us about where you went to school?

HOFFMEIER: About like any other school.

KIRCHGASSNER: You went to a Catholic school, right? What courses did you have?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, we started in the first grade - with the a, b, c, d, e, f with the, what-you-call-it, the alphabetic. We started with the math, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 with the what-you-call-it, the math. First four grades were a lot of drawing in there. Oh, just anything the sisters thought about to bring up in the small grades like that.

KIRCHGASSNER: How many were in the school that was called St. Martins?

HOFFMEIER: About 80-85 along in there. They had eight grades; each teacher had four grades.

KIRCHGASSNER: That was a real challenge for them, I bet. Were they really as strict as they say?

HOFFMEIER: They were strict, yes. I say that. They were a whole lot stricter than they are now.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did you ever get into trouble?

HOFFMEIER: Yes, one time - with Sister Frances Marie. And, she, I will just say this much, was a "heller." That's all there is to it. Every Friday afternoon, the girls come downstairs to sew - they had a sewing class there - kinda of a Home Ec. And the boys would go upstairs and had drawing upstairs. And when we came downstairs. Shermie Ausse[?] was ahead of me, and he hit that old banister and he came down a-flying. And I come down in back of him. But I didn't ride the banister the way he did. I had my hand on the banister and was coming down step by step. I hit the bottom of that thing and she hollered at me. And she said, "You come back up here again." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "You rode that banister down there." And I said, "No, I did not." She said, "I said to come back up here." I said, "No, I won't come back up there. I know what is going to happen when I come back up in there and I am not going back up. I did not ride that banister down there." So, she come down. I knew what she was going to do. She wanted to get ahold of me and put me back in the cloak room and keep me there 'til everybody was gone home, see. And I wasn't going to stand for that. So, I just went out the front door. And she said, "You come back in here!" And I said, "No, not while you're a teacher here. I'll never coming back in here again."

So, I went home. And left my cap there. I don't know whether I had a coat or not or whether I had a sweater or not. But, anyway, I just didn't go back up in there. So, Father Baron was pastor up there. And about three days later, my Dad says, "Well, you ain't going to school." So, my mother said, "Don't take your dinner bucket because I am going to straighten this out, once and for all up there." Then Father Baron came down about the third or fourth day that I didn't come to school and he wanted to know why I didn't come to school. My Dad told him. And he said, "She was dirty enough to hold his cap there so he couldn't wear his cap home. You better do straighten that thing out right quick. He's not going to go to school until she gives up that cap and apologizes for it. And the priest went back up and he made her apologize.

KIRCHGASSNER: Really?

HOFFMEIER: She owned up to it that she did it. She told him, "He slid down the banister." He says, "No, I don't think he did. Did you find the first fellow that went down there?" She said, "Well, I never did see the first fellow go down." "Well," he said, "then you must be mistaken. This thing just don't jive. He just went down that thing and hit the bottom of the stairway and he was out the door." And, of course, I was walking down there. I wouldn't give up. My Dad told him, "He ain't gonna lie to you - he better not lie." And he said, "That sister was wrong from one end to the other." He said, "We don't like her here anyhow." He said, "You might as well get rid of her." I don't know whether they got rid of her the following year or the second year after that. Anyway, I never did go back to school until she sent my cap down with Frank Krieger. Frank Krieger went to school up there and

she sent the cap down with him, see. And she never did say a word to me about anything, about sliding down the banister or anything. So, she was wrong from one end to the other.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, right. That's kind of interesting though. What do you remember growing up in Yorkville? What was it like? What did your day consist of?

HOFFMEIER: Well, of course, in the winter time, it was school - up 'til I was fourteen years old. I went back and took the eighth grade over the second year in school. I didn't graduate nothin' and finding a job, I never did lie about it. I always found a job to go to work. Of course, we worked around Yorkville up there. The [?] was down Burtzelbach and he worked on a section. And we would go down there and cleaned up his pastures in the summer time and fall of the year for 50¢ a day.

KIRCHGASSNER: Cleaning up the pastures - what did you do?

HOFFMEIER: Now, you know what these big parsnips<sup>3</sup> are. He had just millions of them in his pasture. We would go down and cut those off so they wouldn't re-seed. We had to catch them before they would re-seed, see. Before the seed fell out of them. All stuff like that. On the other hand, then, covering the sports, why, every Sunday afternoon, we was not accept - of anything - but going to church. We had to go to Vespers.<sup>4</sup> You don't remember anything about Vespers, do you?

KIRCHGASSNER: Kinda. You went to church in the morning?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, yeah. Went to mass in the morning and then two-thirty or two o'clock in the afternoon, mostly two o'clock in the afternoon, we had Vespers - sing psalms and everything. Then give Benediction and then [we] was released. And then we'd take off from there down to the ball diamond and watch the big boys play ball.

KIRCHGASSNER: Where was Marman's at?

HOFFMEIER: You remember where Bill Yeager lives over there. Right up above their house, they had a pasture there and played in that pasture. George Scheibel.

KIRCHGASSNER: On the corner of Keubel Road and York Ridge?

HOFFMEIER: Yea, where they turn in. But the ball diamond wasn't there, see. The ball diamond was above the house facing Scheibel's. That was the ball diamond, see. And there we would play ball.

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<sup>3</sup> "Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) may have chemicals called furanocoumarins. These chemicals can cause severe sunburn (photosensitivity) in people and animals that eat them and become exposed to UV light (sunlight). Sunburn occurs after ingestion when furanocoumarins are in the blood vessels just below the skin." Source: "Wild parsnip: problem plant in hay and pastures," University of Minnesota Extension ([www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu) : accessed 14 April 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Vespers, evening prayer of thanksgiving and praise in Roman Catholic and other Christian liturgies. ([Britannica.com/topic/vespers](http://Britannica.com/topic/vespers) : accessed 12 Jul 2021.)

KIRCHGASSNER: And how often would you get together? Every Sunday?

HOFFMEIER: Every Sunday.

KIRCHGASSNER: How many would get to?

HOFFMEIER: Well, when we first started out, we had a team there. Why, we just picked up whoever come along, we know them. We play anybody who come along. Finally got the team together of nine boys. And Sherman Aust was doing the pitching.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you remember the names of the nine players? Shermie Aust did the pitching?

HOFFMEIER: Sherman Aust [?] did the pitching. And I played the catcher for him. We played 1914, '15, '16, and '17, and '18. George Koehler, he done a little pitching for us when Shermie wasn't there. George Koehler did the pitchin' first. And George was first cousin of mine. He was Genie - Eugenie and Red's father, see. And we very seldom lost a game there and we played up until that time. And then in '18 and '19 and '20, oh, it was the later part of '18, I guess, when it started. Then the big team grabbed me.

KIRCHGASSNER: Who was the "big team?"

HOFFMEIER: Well, the big team then was Eddie Aust and Ben Aust, and Sisabill Miller, you know Sisabill up on the hill here. Those next to Brookbank, and he had two, three brothers with him. And Les Taylor from Guilford, and Ted Cook from [?] Creek, George Schmeltzer from Mt. Pleasant Ridge. And Bob Brandt from Manchester, Bob Brandt's brother - he was a County Commissioner then, he played with us. And we had a lot of fun. Les Taylor, he caught, too, and I done most of it. When Les didn't caught, and I caught, well, he played short. When he caught, then I played short.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did you play teams from around in the county?

HOFFMEIER: Anywhere we could find them.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did matches get very intense?

HOFFMEIER: We had the colored fellows from Addyston come out and they gave us the worst time that we ever had. We beat them once. And they beat us about three times straight. They had a team. They had a real good team. Then we played the team out from Indianapolis. I was trying to think of their name and that was a colored team. We raffled off a Ford roadster. We stripped it from one end to the other and just put two seats on it. We run around the ball diamond up there. I forget who won that thing. Raffled off for ten cents a chance, I believe.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, my gosh! Do you remember, I don't know. You know, well, what I am trying to get at is, I want you to relate a couple of stories, you know, about something that happened in Yorkville. What are maybe two of your most favorite stories of an event that happened around Yorkville? Can you think of any? I know you know a lot of them. Of something that happened. Because around we never get any murders or robberies, did we?

HOFFMEIER: No. Chicken stealing, a lot of that going on.

KIRCHGASSNER: Really, was that the gypsies that came through, or?

HOFFMEIER: Well, they were supposed to live down Bonnell. They would come, walk up Burzelbach and then of a night, they would go in the hen-houses, clean out the hen-house as much as they could.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did gypsies live around here?

HOFFMEIER: Well, I wouldn't call them gypsies. I just called them, I don't know the - Stragglers come in.

KIRCHGASSNER: How do you spell that?

HOFFMEIER: Stragglers? S-t-r-a-g-g-l-e-r-s.

KIRCHGASSNER: What does that mean?

HOFFMEIER: Stragglers? That means the guy, they ain't got no home nowhere and they just, wherever he flops down, he's got a home.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh. I've never heard that term before. Can you think of any stories you'd like to tell us? Anything humorous?

HOFFMEIER: Might be too ornery.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, I don't think they'd care. Getting back to the sports and maybe a little bit of a story. Didn't, wasn't it the "Aggies" that were real fighters? Or who am I thinking of ... that used to fight? Did they have boxing matches or anything?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, they had exhibition boxing matches down here in Lawrenceburg once in a while.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh did they? Did anybody from Yorkville go?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, they would go to see them but that's it. Nobody would participate in them, no.

KIRCHGASSNER: Well, we can go on to something else. If you think of any, I'll let you tell. You want to tell us what you did during your lifetime, I mean, what kind of jobs you held or anything like that? Any work you've done?

HOFFMEIER: Well, the only kind of jobs I had I worked on a farm. I worked for Cyrus Smith<sup>5</sup> over here on the Ridge over here for one year. Thirty dollars a month and worked for Frank Fuchs down here at the old stone house for three years for thirty dollars a month. In the wintertime I just stayed at home, cut wood and this and that, you know. Did a little bit of everything.

KIRCHGASSNER: What was farming life was like? Because you've owned your own farm for how many years?

HOFFMEIER: Well, my Dad bout the farm back in the 1890s before we lived up there. 'Course I was born in 1900 and all the kids stayed home on the farm with him. Joe left in 1918, along in there. I was gone about the pretty near the same time. He went from there, after he raised tobacco out home there, off Fred Miller's farm. The next year he went to Bullock's in Norwood and that was about 1920, along in there, 1921. I guess about '21. He bought a Ford roadster and he's driving that around. And I didn't have no car, and, finally, I got me an old 1916 Ford. I bought a 1916 Ford. I got it for about sixty dollars, I think. Something like that. The thing could run. I finally went to work for Lunkenheimers at Cincinnati<sup>6</sup> - they're down on. Oh, I can't think of the name of the street their on. Anyway, I worked there from about September 1922 to August 1923. And I hooked up with Chevrolet at Norwood. Now, I kept playing ball all these years. I was always with a team.

KIRCHGASSNER: That was a long drive from Cincinnati to Yorkville, wasn't it?

HOFFMEIER: Well, it took about an hour, them Fords, you know? I got on their team up there, and played with them. We had Saturday ball, Saturday league then. We played league ball and I had a batting average over 500. I could really clock that ball. Then I played semi-pro ball on Sunday with a fellow by the name of Meeker, M-double "E"-K-E-R. He got up a team and he finally got a hold of me. That was the old Spinney league. I played with that, one, two, three, three or four years. And then I played with Chevrolet from 1923 to 1929.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, Cyrus W., Miller Twp., R F D., Guilford. (Source: "Dearborn County Directory 1908," Inter-State Directory Co.'s p. 212; Lawrenceburg Public Library.)

<sup>6</sup> Lunkenheimer Valve Company (1500 Waverly Ave., Cincinnati, OH. Originally Cincinnati Brass Works. Owned by Fredrick Lunkenheimer. Purchased by Condec in 1968.)

<sup>7</sup> "Some of the earliest games of 'base ball' in Norwood were played on any open field before development of the subdivisions reduced the number of places to play. Some of these places were the land behind Town Hall (now City Hall) and a field on the east side of Smith Road, near where Smith intersects Montgomery Road. The area was later developed as the Chevrolet/Fisher Body facility and more recently as Central Parke, a commercial/retail center. The site at Smith Road may have been named 'Langdon Field' for one of the early land owners, J.G. Langdon, but was often just called 'Norwood Park.' The listing in the 1915 Williams Cincinnati & Hamilton County Directory also recorded the 'Norwood Ball Park' as being located at Smith Road, south of Montgomery Pike." – ©2021 Lawrenceburg Public Library District

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh gosh! Did you get paid for playing semi-pro?

HOFFMEIER: No. The only semi-pro you'd get paid for is when you hooked up with one of them like Dayton or Springfield, Ohio or Indianapolis. They were all affiliated with a national league, or American league team, see. They get the money up so they could get some players, see. Dayton offered me up a job for \$200.00 a month. Well, I refused it because I was working at Chevrolet, I was making \$175 a month. That wouldn't pay me to drop there and travel up to what-you-call-it every day and be gone. Now these fellows just like these big teams, see. So, I didn't do that. I just dropped the whole thing, see.

KIRCHGASSNER: I don't blame you.

HOFFMEIER: [sounds of filling the wood stove] I've gotta keep the stove going.

KIRCHGASSNER: I know it is nice a warm. So, you played ball all these years. How did you meet the girl you married?

HOFFMEIER: I went to school with her at home.

KIRCHGASSNER: How long did you date her?

HOFFMEIER: About two years.

KIRCHGASSNER: When did you and Catherine Trossman get married?

HOFFMEIER: October 25, 1925.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did anything unusual happen on your wedding day?

HOFFMEIER: Yeah. Went to bed that night. It snowed in the morning. We had six inches of snow.

KIRCHGASSNER: Really? Oh gosh. In October even. Did they give you a shivaree<sup>8</sup> or anything?

HOFFMEIER: Just at the wedding at home.

KIRCHGASSNER: Really? What did they do?

HOFFMEIER: They just took pans and stuff out of the house and hammered the hell out of them.

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"Norwood Base Ball," database with images *Norwood Historical Society*  
([www.sites.rootsweb.com/~ohnhs2/NorwoodBaseball.html](http://www.sites.rootsweb.com/~ohnhs2/NorwoodBaseball.html) : accessed 15 Jul 2021.)

<sup>8</sup> Shivaree – a noisy mock serenade to a newly married couple (Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/shivaree : accessed 12 July 2021.)

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, that was fun though. Do you see any German traditions that are still existing today in the community that were when you were a child growing up?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, I don't think there is anything around here no more from that.

KIRCHGASSNER: Can you give traditions you used to do? I don't know anything real specific.

HOFFMEIER: Now, just what do you mean by "used to do"?

KIRCHGASSNER: Well, there aren't any traditions now, is there? I'm trying to get my thoughts together here. I mean, times have changed so much. I guess what we're getting at is, you know, people don't cook as the way they used to or they don't, things have changed so much. Or they don't butcher cattle or hogs as much as they used to. Things of that nature.

HOFFMEIER: We used to butcher about eight, nine hogs a year, I can remember that real easy. For years we'd kill that many. Of course, there were ten of us kids and the old folks was twelve, so that took a lot of meat. And, we'd kill about eight, nine hogs every year. And very seldom would you ever kill a beef in them days. Nobody just cared for beef - just hogs - sausage and liver sausage or meat sausage and smoked hams, and salted them down. That was done year after year.

KIRCHGASSNER: You stored them in a smoke house?

HOFFMEIER: Stored them in a smoke house, after they was smoked. Why, you'd, or you could leave them hang or salt them down in a barrel if you wanted to, you know. It would finally draw its own water, but you could help give it a start with a couple buckets of water and then put plenty of salted on it. That's the way they salted their meat. Finally got to dry salting it, with quite a lot of other stuff in it to go through the with it so the meat wouldn't spoil.

KIRCHGASSNER: When you butchered your own meat, like when you set down at the table to eat it, did your father, did he, everything passed to him first? Did that go on in your family?

HOFFMEIER: Well, not necessarily, no. We just, when you put ten kids at the table, from here on over to that what'cha-all-it, see? Maybe meat was down there, potatoes was down there, you know. Maybe he had them, maybe he had the meat up here, you know. He had the meat and he'd pass it down. And if you had the potatoes up there, you passed the potatoes down there. And the other started with the lettuce and the slaw or. You had all that at home. You didn't have to buy that, see.

KIRCHGASSNER: But, everything didn't start with him? I mean.

HOFFMEIER: Oh, no.

KIRCHGASSNER: Some of them said they that they did.

HOFFMEIER: Well, there's a lot of them which no doubt did that, as far as that goes. But in them days, when the neighbor come over to visit you - it was Mr. Krieger, Mr. Hornbach, nad Mr. Scheibel, and so and so. You didn't kiss and holler or hard shake. Or you didn't holler their first name out. "Hi, Tom" or "Hi, Bill" or "Hi, so-and-so" If they did If they did, there was hell poppin' right quick. You don't say that to them. It was "Mr. So-And -so" "Mr. So-And-So. That's what it was.

KIRCHGASSNER: Were your parents real strict with you kids?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, yeah. You learned manners.

KIRCHGASSNER: You learned manners. Did you ever get it with the razor strap?

HOFFMEIER: Yep. I broke a glass jug one time. Went over to Hornbach's<sup>9</sup> to get a gallon of kerosene. The jug was worth about a nickel and the kerosene was worth about a nickel. We had a water hole at the end of the garden. And I set the jug there - I don't know why I did it. I skipped rocks across there, across the water there. Bingo, went the jug - that was a dime.

KIRCHGASSNER: So, you got the razor strap for it?

HOFFMEIER: I got a licking for it. I don't know if it was a razor strap. I got it.

KIRCHGASSNER: You got one or the other. I'm trying to think what else that you might remember. I think I'm going to flip the tape because I wanta get into something.

## **SIDE II**

KIRCHGASSNER: You have a reputation for being a good wine maker. Can you go through step by step? How we go about making grape wine?

HOFFMEIER: Well, let's see here. Who is going to pay me for this recipe, now?

KIRCHGASSNER: You don't have to give out specifics.

HOFFMEIER: Now, wine - ever since there people was on this earth, there has been wine. There was wine before Christ was born. Been wine ever since. There's a real gift to making wine. In fact, the people in this country, were, everything, of course, it's upside down

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<sup>9</sup> Store of either Charles Hornbach (grain and general store) or William Hornbach (general store) (Source: "Dearborn County 1916 Indiana Gazetteer and Business Directory," database Indiana's Gore ([www.indianasgore.com](http://www.indianasgore.com) : accessed 12 Jul 2021).  
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today. But they will never quit drinkin', they'll never quit smokin' and they'll never quit going to the races. Now, you can gamble on that. That's the things they are not going to give up, regardless of how the law goes. The law today is so complicated. They got so many laws on the books that you can never obey any of them laws that they got on the books, with the way they have them. And with as many laws as they have on the books. You just can't do it. There's no way of doing it. Then they come along and they want to fine you for this and fine you for that. OK. When you do that, then you're getting back to Hitlerism, which we are in today in the United States. I'm a United States citizen. I gotta say this. We're in that part of the world now where they was before World War I. Everything is going back to the past over there. And we're getting to do the same thing over here. You get - now the building code - which might be all right. But in lots of places, the building code, I feel this way about the building code. You've got your own places here, and they all holler, years ago, "We don't want nothing like that in America. That's Hitlerism. We don't want nothing like that." Then they turn right around and bring it back to the United States. You gotta have codes for everything, you know, which I think is wrong for this reason. They could make a building code, if I am building right here facing the road, with all the buildings I have. If I face the building so it is facing the road to make a good impression on the road. Then what I build in back here is my business, nobody else's. I'm the guy that is paying for all this. Now, here we go again. They charge you, I mean, they make you pay your taxes. Then they turn around, issue a building permit, for what? Issue a building permit. Just take, just anything you want to build, even an outhouse, you know. Then you lay down \$5 more for a building permit, on your own property. That's not right. These big guys, they steal a million dollars. They get by with it every year, you know. The United States government can never begin to catch the crooks we've got in the United States today. No question about it, they can't catch them. They can take a million crooks over here - over here sets another million just waiting. When these gets off, these start up again, over here again, you know. They just do that all the time like that. To me, I don't give a darn whether it's the Democrats or the Republicans. There is no justice in the law for the poor people anymore. Now, they can go along here and they can appropriate money for most anything in Congress, can't they. I can show you a nice example of it, which they could have done easily and it would have worked, but no, they said no, they can't do it. That is when they straightened out Social Security. OK, who broke the Social Security in the first place? The doctors was one of them. These guys had had 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 Social Security cards. If you go out on a line, you will find about a dozen people that worked hard in there to break the Social Security, and we just about did it, see. They got some of them had, which we heard over the radio or the television as high as 18 and 20 cards. One guy had Social Security cards and all. Well, he could do most anything, couldn't he? Alright, here come the guys out from Cuba and all these other countries, you know, and they wasn't here very long. First thing you know, we done over here, is put them on welfare. Which, they should never be put on welfare. Hell, if they can't be supported over there, why should we bring them over here and put them on welfare?

KIRCHGASSNER: I know. Boy, this really goes against our grain of our traditions, doesn't

it.

HOFFMEIER: It's the truth, isn't it?

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, right. I know, I.

HOFFMEIER: We put them on welfare. OK, we pay the bill. These people, it's their relation which they put on welfare. They swear up and down, as soon as they get them a job, take him off welfare. How many do it?

KIRCHGASSNER: Not many.

HOFFMEIER: No. I bet you, you got people down there on welfare, you could mention them if you wanted too, that you know darn well they are collecting probably two salaries.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, sure. I'm sure they are. It's a shame. Years ago, when you used to make wine and stuff, I know it's not any comparison, did you have to pay, no one had to get a permit? You could do it for your own use, right?

HOFFMEIER: That part there still stands.

KIRCHGASSNER: You can still do it for your own use.

HOFFMEIER: You can still do it for your own use. You can make 300 gallons of wine.

KIRCHGASSNER: You can make 300 for your own use.

HOFFMEIER: And the law does not tell you, there is nothing in the law that tells you you can't sell it. It doesn't say you can't sell it. It's open, so you can, you know use your own judgment there, you see. If that law is still that way, which it was about 10 years ago, because I checked, down in Aurora. We checked that thing one day, and it said that you, a homeowner is allowed to make 300 gallons of wine a year for himself.

KIRCHGASSNER: Boy, who can drink 300 gallons of homemade wine?

HOFFMEIER: But it doesn't say a word about selling it. OK. So, now, what happens? You know, they'll come along and sell it anyhow.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, sure. But tell us, how many bushel baskets would it take to make a barrel of wine?

HOFFMEIER: A barrel of wine? Oh, as you pick them off of the arbor, between two and three. Most of the grapes makes it look [?]

KIRCHGASSNER: OK. How many gallons is in a barrel of wine?

HOFFMEIER: Actually, you get out about, out of a fifty-gallon barrel of wine, you, after it's made, you'll run about forty-two to forty-five gallons.

KIRCHGASSNER: After you pick the grapes, then you let them ferment. OK, what do you put in?

HOFFMEIER: I use the whole grape, put the whole grape in the barrel. Mash them first, then put them in the barrel.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you add sugar then?

HOFFMEIER: Yeah, add sugar.

KIRCHGASSNER: And then how long did you let them ferment?

HOFFMEIER: Six weeks.

KIRCHGASSNER: Six weeks. And then you get the grapes out.

HOFFMEIER: No. Just leave the grapes in there. They ferment in there, and as the grapes ferment. See, there is no fermentation in the grape. Get me right, see. Well, you put your grapes in there; they go to the bottom. And then, when you put your sugar in it, they'll stay on the bottom. They will start fermenting, you know. As they ferment and get through fermenting, with all that sugar in there, these grapes come to the top. So, what happens? When they quit working in six weeks' time, you can look down into the barrel. Take a flashlight and look down in there. You will see the grapes come up to the top. You can run a stick down. You'll go through grapes about, oh, maybe three, four inches thick, see. Of course, that takes a [?]. Instead of having a full gallon, I mean a full barrel, you don't get a full barrel out of them.

KIRCHGASSNER: So, you skim the grapes off the top then? You take them out of there?

HOFFMEIER: I don't. I just leave them in there, leave set and when I start taking the wine off, I drain wine off and leave the grapes in there, see. You just punch your hose through there, suction hose, and pull out as many gallons as you want to. Or pull it all out at one time. I used to do that, pull it out at one time and put in jugs. Then it's done workin'. Wine, when you make wine, wine only works once.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, I didn't realize that.

HOFFMEIER: Wine works once. When wine is still in [?] it's still workin'. When it doesn't work anymore, it's done. You still got that juice, see. Your juice is only as good as you make it. With so many pounds of sugar in it or whatever it is you want to put in with the wine. You can put it in afterwards, too, as far as that goes. You can make all your wine

without sugar and you can doctor it up afterwards, or you can put other stuff in there. It just doesn't make any difference.

KIRCHGASSNER: You know, something else I wanted to cover with you, a lot of them that I've interviewed said that their parents believed in the hexes. Did you ever?

HOFFMEIER: [laughs] No.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you remember any stories about the hexes?

HOFFMEIER: Well, if Mom was living, she could tell you more about that than I can. Because, some of the old people believed in that. But, I would say, like out at the parish at Yorkville, about all this hexing going on, it would be a but a very, very small percentage of them. Maybe two, three percent, something like that.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you remember any stories that your mother told you about the hexes?

HOFFMEIER: Actually, no, I don't. Of course, I never did believe in it from a kid on up. I could never see that. Of course, the old folks never did talk about that too much. Once in a while we would get company. They would say, well, "That couple was hexed," or "This lady was hexed" or "That old man's been hexed." Hex means just one thing, he's just a nut.

KIRCHGASSNER: [laughs] But, that wasn't your parent's definition of a hex, though, was it?

HOFFMEIER: There's very few parents in Yorkville that I could say, that catered to that in a way. Of course, there's always a difference in a family. All families are different, they're not all alike, all different, you know. But exactly what it is, why, you don't know. Some people tell you their troubles, some people don't.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you remember anything about that story in Yorkville where there was supposedly light, a beam of light that came through? Did you ever hear that?

HOFFMEIER: Well, I've heard that but there's beam of lights. I can remember way back that, all of a sudden, look up in the sky there, there would be a beam of light, see? OK, maybe right at dusk, in the midst of the dusk, when the what-you-call-it changes, you might see a flash of light through there. You might just have had a great big rain. Might have had a big rain go right over there, you know, and you get a streak of lightning over here. You don't see it over here. The streak of lightning follow that. I think that is what they...

KIRCHGASSNER: What they saw? But they, one of them I had heard said that when a certain person died, then they didn't see the beam of lights anymore. Did you ever hear

that?

HOFFMEIER: Well, when your life's gone, everything is gone. When that pulse stops beating for five minutes or about ten minutes, anyway, there is no life anymore. So how could you see?

KIRCHGASSNER: Well, they said that it [light] went in to this one guy's grave, that had one leg. I don't know who that was.

HOFFMEIER: Peg-leg Miller.

KIRCHGASSNER: Yeah, that's who it was! They said it went into his grave. That when he died, they never saw it again. What was this Peg-leg Miller like?

HOFFMEIER: Well, he was an old bachelor and lived on Burtzelbach. And the last place he lived before he died was right across from the [?] down there. Born across the road there, you know. I think [?] bought it before he died. He just let him live down there as long as he wanted to, see. But, he used to travel Burtzelbach and come over home and this and that, you know. He always come over home and asked for a glass of cider or a glass of wine. Give him a glass of wine or cider and he was satisfied. He'd go back home. And I do remember this. You got that thing turned on?

KIRCHGASSNER: Um-hum.

HOFFMEIER: I'd rather not tell you this. Let's turn it off.

KIRCHGASSNER: Is it that bad? I'll erase it if it's that bad.

HOFFMEIER: OK. Anyway, you remember Tilly [?]

KIRCHGASSNER: Yeah.

HOFFMEIER: Do you remember where she lived?

KIRCHGASSNER: Um-hum.

HOFFMEIER: Well, they tell this on Peggy. He never had been married. Of course, Tilly never had been married, see. So, he went over there one night and he caught her out in the barn feeding the calves. And he raped her, they tell me.

KIRCHGASSNER: Really?

HOFFMEIER: And she damned near killed him, fighting him off. But, they still claim he raped her. So, I don't know whether it really happened or not, I don't know.

KIRCHGASSNER: Well, how did he wind up with one leg?

HOFFMEIER: Actually, I don't know. How he ever, how it ever come to get away from him, I don't know.

KIRCHGASSNER: The whole story revolved about this Peg-leg Miller, now that you mention the name. That was it. Because my grandmother had told me this story. My grandmother believed in the hexes and all that. The Nordmeyers must have. And she said that they always saw these beams of light. My Dad would always say it was when they were coming home from a party. [laughs] And, they saw about three or four times and they said that Father Sunderman wanted to talk to these beams of light. But when this Peg-leg Miller died, that it went into his grave and that, no one ever saw the lights again. She told me that story so many times when I was a little kid.

HOFFMEIER: Well, like I said before, in olden times, people believed in that, see. They believed in somebody flying around. Well, stars fall out of the sky, wouldn't it?

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, sure. It's interesting, though, that it's such a Catholic community and a lot of these people believed in the hexes. They believed that someone could put a hex on someone, you know. Did you ever hear, one of them I heard, that if you boiled the feathers of a pillow, that they were weaved into a crown 'cause the hexes were working against you. And, then they boiled the feathers, and the next person they saw was a hex.

HOFFMEIER: [laughs] No, I never heard of that.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, that's what a couple of them told me. They were kind of superstitious.

HOFFMEIER: Yes, they were superstitious. A lot of them were.

KIRCHGASSNER: Do you remember any of the old superstitions?

HOFFMEIER: Actually, no. Only heard 'em talking about this and that - a little happened here and a little happened there, you know. Which you couldn't hardly put in your mind and actually believe that it actually did happen, you know.

KIRCHGASSNER: [laughs] I think there's still a couple of people in Yorkville who kinda believe in the hexes.

HOFFMEIER: It could be. I don't know.

KIRCHGASSNER: Or it's their way of explaining something that goes wrong or whatever. But it is interesting to think that these people really did believe in it. I wish you could remember some of the superstitions, anyway. But, like you said, you're like my father who

put it all out of his mind because he thought it was so crazy.

HOFFMEIER: [laughs] It's just that. Well, if you just come down and take it from beginning to end, it just don't make sense. People just got it in their head like that, you know.

KIRCHGASSNER: Were there any other tragedies that happened when you were a child? Anything that you can think of about the people in Yorkville?

HOFFMEIER: Well, right there where, below Marvin Steinmetz's,<sup>10</sup> what-you-call-it was on the left? [Wiedham's?]. Herman Billman<sup>11</sup> used to lived there. That's the guy that used to work for cutting parsnips down. He lived then, you know where what-you-call-him has got his home, Johnny Schott? He lived back in that lane. The first house back there was Billman's place. And the next house back of that was what-you-call-it, Big Joe Miller's place. But Billman when he first come to Yorkville come out of Cincinnati. And she [Herman's wife] was a Zimmer. Don't know where she came from. But anyway, they come out of Cincinnati. They always did think that old Nick Zimmer, who used to live in Yorkville there where what-you-call-it lives there now, you know.

KIRCHGASSNER: Louie [Armbrecht?].

HOFFMEIER: Yeah - was some of their relations, see. So I don't know. This Billman lived down there and his wife had typhoid fever. He was working on a section.

KIRCHGASSNER: OK, what is this section?

HOFFMEIER: Railroad. Keeping up cross ties so railroad the railroads could run.

KIRCHGASSNER: OK.

HOFFMEIER: And, he had his chicken house. Oh, about as far from my door out here to the garage door, that's as far from his house, you know. And he had the outside of the chicken house wasn't painted. But inside, the door, I don't know if the rest of the inside was, but the door was, he had that painted white. Oh, he used to have to get up, oh, along about the way he talked about that, oh, just about dark. Then he would get up around midnight and get her [his wife] a pitcher of cold water and the well was out on the outside. This one night, he knew that somebody was getting his chickens out there. He just opened that screen door and he started coming out and looked down there and saw the white door, white on the outside. He just set his pitcher down and tiptoed back into the room and got his shot gun. And he come out, just as he opened the screen door, this guy heard the screen open. And this guy's name was - he lived down on Bonnell. Anyway,

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<sup>10</sup> Marvin Steinmetz d. 25 May 2014 (Obituaries, Register May 29, 2014; Lawrenceburg Public Library accessed 12 Jul 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Herman Billman d. 16 Aug 1941 (Obituaries, Register Aug 21, 1941 and Press Aug 22, 1941; Lawrenceburg Public Library accessed 12 Jul 2021).

he lived down on Bonnell. And, he says, "Mr. Billman, it's me. Don't shoot." And Billman, he just upped with his gun, said, "If you want a chicken so damn bad, I'm going to give you one." And the guy turned. When he turned, he put fifty-two shots in his butt. Dr. Elliott<sup>12</sup> went down the next day and picked them out. He had fifty-two shots. I can remember him telling. My mother had typhoid fever in the old house about the same time as Billman's wife had typhoid fever over there. But she had typhoid fever. Started with hers about two weeks before my mother.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, my gosh! How many shots did he fire to get fifty-two pellets?

HOFFMEIER: Fifty-two pellets. What he had had little shots in them, little bird shots, is what they called it. So there were more of the them in than the bigger ones. The bigger ones, number fours, number twos, number ones is the big shot.

KIRCHGASSNER: I bet he didn't sit for a while, did he?

HOFFMEIER: I don't think so.

KIRCHGASSNER: Wasn't there a bad fire in Yorkville? Where a family where some young kids died? Was there ever one?

HOFFMEIER: Oh, Brickler,<sup>13</sup> yeah. Down Burtzelbach, you know down there where what-you-call-it, Steinmetz bought the last place down there on the left up on the hill.

KIRCHGASSNER: About two miles out of Yorkville. Two, three miles.

HOFFMEIER: Steinmetz bought it. Then you go out, you go up the hill, up on the left there. Yeah, I was in Lawrenceburg that night. And well we were all out. That was a Saturday night. Somebody called down there and said that Johnny Brichler's house was on fire. And they think the kids all burned up because they couldn't get anyone out of there. And so, we drove down there right quick when we got home. I don't know, but I believe Mom, she went along down there. There weren't very many people down there. You couldn't do nothing. The house was on fire from one end to the other, you know. And Johnny was in there. And some people claimed that Johnny was cuttin' wheat. And they had their supper ready. And he made them all take a bath. They claim, people claim, that he sent some of them upstairs and shot 'em. And some of them just burned up. And, anyway, he lost, one, he had about eight kids, I guess. Six of them must have burned up and two of them came out of there alive.

KIRCHGASSNER: What year was this?

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<sup>12</sup> D.C. Pictorial History Vol 2. p. 15 includes commentary and a photograph of a Dr. J. C. Elliott of Guilford.

<sup>13</sup> John T. Brichler died 27 June 1942 in house fire in York township with five children. Note: Surname spelled "Brickler" in newspaper. (The Lawrenceburg Press, July 3, 1942 p. 1; Obituary July 3, 1942; Lawrenceburg Public Library. See family file.)

HOFFMEIER: Oh, Lord, back in the '30's.

KIRCHGASSNER: So, they think he? Did he die in the fire?

HOFFMEIER: No.

KIRCHGASSNER: Did they think he might have killed some of the children?

HOFFMEIER: Let's see. No. He killed himself, I think. I'm sure he did.

KIRCHGASSNER: He killed himself.

HOFFMEIER: He killed himself. After he shot them all, he killed himself. That's the way the ... Anyway, they finally got the fire marshal out of Indianapolis to come down and give it a going over, but he didn't find nothing. 'Bout the same old story. When it's burned down there's not much left, you know.

KIRCHGASSNER: Where was his wife?<sup>14</sup>

HOFFMEIER: She died at the place before then.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, she had died in childbirth or something? She died before the fire?

HOFFMEIER: She died before the fire, yeah.

KIRCHGASSNER: So, he was left with like eight children?

HOFFMEIER: Well, I forgot just how many of them was left. But I'm pretty sure that about six of them died in the fire.

KIRCHGASSNER: I bet that was a real ...

HOFFMEIER: What it was, was a story and a half. It's such a small house. It had two rooms upstairs. And the windows were just about, well, big enough so a small child could crawl out of it, but then. Well, in fact, you couldn't smell no flesh around there. I stayed there 'til along about 2 o'clock in the morning and I went home. It was over and done anyway. When I got out there, it was a full blaze. It was about, well, when we left Lawrenceburg, we had the lights on and drove out there. And when we got out there it was full blaze there.

KIRCHGASSNER: You don't remember what his wife died from, do you?

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<sup>14</sup> John's wife, Clara Gardner Brichler, and a baby died two years previous to the fire. (Sources: "Obituary: Clara Brichler," Lawrenceburg Public Library' "Brichler Family File," Lawrenceburg Public Library, citing: Lawrenceburg Press 3 Jul 1942. There was no evidence John killed his children. (Source: "Father and Five Children Cremated When Their Home Burns at Yorkville," Lawrenceburg Press July 3, 1942.

HOFFMEIER: No. I tell you where you could find out.

KIRCHGASSNER: Where?

HOFFMEIER: [?] Brichel's wife. At Alsace. They were sisters.

KIRCHGASSNER: Oh, OK. She's still living?

HOFFMEIER: You know where they live?

KIRCHGASSNER: I could find out.

HOFFMEIER: When you go into Alsace there. You turn to the right and you turn towards Dover. I don't know how many houses down. It is on the right hand side as you go down.

KIRCHGASSNER: I will have to go interview her and see what happens.

HOFFMEIER: She could probably give you as good a story as I can.

KIRCHGASSNER: That was such a shame. I can't believe that it really happened. I know it did. But I was just saying. That was probably one of the biggest tragedies in Yorkville.

HOFFMEIER: It was the biggest one I know. You know, with that many lives ... I know there was one girl. Some family got her. Well, she's still livin'. I don't even know what her first name is anymore.

KIRCHGASSNER: She would probably be in her 60's by now? Maybe.

HOFFMEIER: Could be. It seems to me that someone over toward Manchester got her. She could tell you about that.

KIRCHGASSNER: I'll have to go see her.