

EHRMANN: Garter belt of some kind (chuckles). It was a circular band, held up by a garter, and mine were very heavy.

END OF TAPE

TAPE 2

JH: Continuing our discussion with Dr. Howard Ehrmann concerning his early elementary schooling, we were discussing clothing.

You were speaking of having short pants and long stockings. Were these wool stockings or cotton . . . ?

EHRMANN: Depending upon the season. I don't recall. I think my stockings were cotton. I don't recall woolen stockings.

JH: Did you wear long underwear?

EHRMANN: Oh, I wore long underwear. Yes. I wore long underwear and stockings and garters, or a garter belt. And the trousers were short and tight, and when I was a little younger -- my first years -- I wore what were called "knee protectors" which were a kind of pad that you put on around your knees, because boys played marbles. And in playing marbles, they kneeled. And if you didn't wear a knee protector, well your knee might get sore but . . .

JH: It wore your stockings out!

EHRMANN: You wore out your stockings! When I was very young, I called them "knee-er 'tectors."

JH: (laughing) Well, then you acceded to the long pants only after you went into high school.

EHRMANN: High school, the beginning of the second semester. I can still remember my feeling of awkwardness as I went in and one of my teachers, my English instructor whom I liked very much and who was one of my close friends all through high school -- Anna Hayward, who lived on South Center Street. And when I came back from Yale, I always called on Anna Hayward. She was a DePauw graduate. She was an Alpha Phi at DePauw. She was an awfully nice person. I was very fond of my Wiley High School faculty. They were awfully nice people.

EHRMANN: Well. Now, where are we?

JH: We're back on clothing. We want to finish this up. You said that . . .

EHRMANN: The shirt . . . I don't remember much about the shirt and there must have been a shirt and a tie, of course. And I wore a jacket, and I don't recall what kind of an overcoat I had. When I was a little older, I can tell you the make of clothing. Mother would take me to Joseph's clothing on Main Street. There was Myers', and Tune's and Joseph's and there were some others. And I wore Society brand clothes, which we got for me at Joseph's (that was when I was in high school). A blue serge suit was the important item in . . . but they slicked up a little, so you could wear them 'bout so long, and then they were work clothes.

JH: Well, now you didn't wear these Did you wear a suit to school or did you wear . . . ?

EHRMANN: I've no recollection of that. I've a recollection of the trousers, and I know I must have had a jacket of some kind, and I know I had an overcoat, but I don't recall.

JH: I'm . . . I'll bet you . . .

EHRMANN: And I had a cap!

JH: Yeah. That's what I was going to say.

EHRMANN: And I had a cap and my hair was not awfully short. My hair was medium cut.

JH: Did any of the high school fellows grow a beard or a mustache?

EHRMANN: No. We had nothing that way.

JH: Was it not permitted or just not in style?

EHRMANN: It didn't occur to anyone to do it. No one thought of that. Beards and mustaches were worn by older men. They weren't worn by high school students.

JH: Were they out of style at that period by some chance? Generally speaking?

EHRMANN: For young men, yes. I don't recall anyone in

EHRMANN: my fraternity at DePauw that had a beard or a mustache. And they were in the 18-to-22, 23-year-old age bracket. They didn't have them.

JH: How old were you when World War I started?

EHRMANN: Well, World War I began in 19-- . . . started in August of 1914. I was 16.

JH: What was your attitude at that time?

EHRMANN: My attitude at that time was I believed that the Germans were responsible for the war and that they had no business being in France, and I sympathized with the French and the Belgians.

JH: Well, now as someone of a German background, did this create any conflict in your family?

EHRMANN: No. There was no conflict at all in the family. As I said earlier that Uncle Max supported the war. No, my mother, of course, was English and Scotch; and my father My German blood stems from the Revolution of 1848 and the influx of Germans that came in to America in '49 and through the 50's. That's when my German grandparents came over. In the 1850's. They were not Prussian. They had no use for Prussianism. They were Rhinelanders. They were from Baden, and I'm not certain . . . I think from near Heidelberg. But they were not Prussian Germans at all.

JH: Well, now there was a pretty fair-sized German community in Terre Haute.

EHRMANN: There was a German community. Now, I mentioned that my father broke from that (I think I started to say that) and he got into the Asbury Chapel because he wanted to get away from that German background. They went to beer gardens and drank a lot of beer, and father was for temperance. Father was president of the anti-saloon league later on here in life -- in his life here in Terre Haute. And he separated from his beer-drinking German people . . . German people.

JH: Was it a separation . . . was it a theological separation or was it . . .

EHRMANN: No, I don't think father was . . .

JH: . . . social?

EHRMANN: . . . bothered too much by theology. I don't think he accepted the beliefs of the church. He believed them, but he was Father read a great deal, but he didn't read . . . he was not interested in details of religions, dogmas, or such matters. He was superintendent of the Sunday School. He read the Bible; he knew the Bible fairly well. Mother knew it better.

JH: So your mother was really your religious guide?

EHRMANN: Yes, my mother was my religious guide.

JH: Which is kind of a tradition, isn't it?

EHRMANN: It's a tradition. In my family I was close to both my parents; I was closer to my mother. My sister was closer to father. If I wanted anything, I went to my mother; if she wanted anything, she went to her father. Neither one of us thought there was anything odd or strange in this. We thought the boy and his mother are close; the girl and her father are close. We thought that was . . . I never thought it was otherwise. I was years older when I learned that psychologists make a great deal of that sort of thing. It didn't mean a thing in my life. Just natural to go to my mother.

JH: You made the comment off tape here that you really had great respect for your mother and you didn't

EHRMANN: I had love and respect and we were very close.

JH: Do you think this was true of most families at that time?

EHRMANN: Oh, I think the boys I knew went to their mothers. We never talked about it. It was just the normal thing to do.

JH: Do you think there's a great difference now and then in parental respect?

EHRMANN: There is, and the great difference is that we've got this thing called psychology and this thing called sociology; and they've put a whole lot of ideas in people's mind. I don't know how young a child is before he begins to talk about Oedipus complexes and so on -- whether he's out of the kindergarten or not.

JH: What was the role of a woman? It was traditionally

JH: a homemaker and a mother, wasn't it?

EHRMANN: The role of homemaker and mother. She went to church, and she had church activities, and then she had some kind of an outside activity. With my mother it was the Women's Home Missionary Society. Mother was on the board -- not on the board of trustees exactly but some kind of a board of the Methodist Church for the Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis and the great Methodist Hospital at Gary. They had a board that included people like my mother and she was on that. And she went to the hospital meetings, maybe once a year. She visited the schools supported by the Methodist Church in the South.

JH: So really this was her outlet then?

EHRMANN: That was her outlet. And when we moved down to Florida, she moved down there with father half the year 'cause she didn't like the summer in Miami with the mosquitoes. Remember, the mosquitoes bit the life out of you. In those days they hadn't drained the marshes and gotten rid of the mosquitoes. The Methodist Church was below Miami in Coconut Grove. That was the William Jennings Bryan Church. And right near where we lived and in the Coral Gables community was the Congregational Church, which was sort of a Protestant center. So we went to the Congregational Church. And when father died, in his obituary in the Miami Herald they spoke of him as a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and associate (laughing) member of the Congregational Church at Coral Gables. I never knew you could be an associate member of a religion -- a religious denomination -- but my father was an associate member of the Congregational Church.

JH: (laughs) I guess he made it.

What took him to Florida?

EHRMANN: Health.

JH: Yes.

EHRMANN: And then he started going down in 1917. Father, just as when we went out to California, dabbled in real estate. Not dabbled. He bought land and had a subdivision. Here in Terre Haute he had several subdivisions. [It was a] natural thing for him to start in. But he loaned money. He got money from

EHRMANN: people who had money to invest who entrusted my father to invest in Florida. And he built that up to a point where he got a small subdivision, and he sold those lots. And then he got another. I think in all he had five of these subdivisions. Some of his mortgage loans in Coral Gables were made with George Merrick, the developer of Coral Gables, whose mother, mother Merrick, and my mother were very close friends. Then he just worked in and then he became president of the bank of Coral Gables. Then he became on the board of trustees of the Coral Gables Military Academy. Then he was very active in the Greater Miami Civic Theater on the financial side as a banker, as treasurer for a while -- treasurer of the Greater Miami Civic Theater.

Father, wherever he was, regarded himself -- you did good. He was on the YMCA board. When the Boy Scouts were introduced, he became one of the leading . . . not a scout master, but he became, for a while, the Scout Commissioner in the community. He was active that way.

JH: So there was a strong sense of civic. . .

EHRMANN: Strong sense in active civic participation of what we'd say was the good kind.

JH: Yes.

EHRMANN: And there weren't all these psychologists and sociologists to twist you on these things. We didn't know those things.

I don't recall any friends who were rebellious except the one I mentioned, and that was I think a special case.

JH: Well, in any event we all have personality conflicts.

EHRMANN: That's why I want to excise that. I don't want the thing . . . because, goodness, I never had anything against that boy at the time.

JH: Well, that's . . .

EHRMANN: But . . .

JH: You were just a child, after all. Weren't you a normal kid?

EHRMANN: Oh, I hope so. (laughs)

Like the sign we used to see. In Ypsilanti, Michigan, was the Normal College which is now Eastern Michigan University. And the people who had rooms to rent had (oh, I'm on the air) signs in the window that said, "Rooms for Normal boys," "Rooms for Normal girls," (laughing) and even in my time [during my] earlier years at Michigan, that was a laugh. Of course, it was a laugh to the people who put 'em up. Not the first time they put 'em up, but . . .

JH: (laughs)

Dr. Ehrmann, I'm sure I've imposed on your time much too long, and we appreciate your taking time out of your busy schedule here.

EHRMANN: Just shut that off for a moment and then we

JH: Dr. Ehrmann, in signing off, so to speak, I'd like you to tell us a little bit about your experience as co-editor of the Michigan History of the Modern World.

EHRMANN: In 1957, I joined with the late Allan Nevins (n-e-v-i-n-s) (a-l-l-a-n) as co-editor of the then-being-established University of Michigan History of the Modern World, the idea for which had originated with Professor Nevins, a very distinguished American historian. [He] remained, until his death, co-editor of that series. Subsequently, I became the general editor of it. In all, to-date, 18 volumes of history have been published.

JH: Is this an ongoing work?

EHRMANN: This is an ongoing work, but the ongoing part has been slowed very considerably by my employment and work in Washington.

JH: Who is your co-editor now?

EHRMANN: I have none. I'm the general editor and [there is] no co-editor. I would like a co-editor, a much younger person. The advantage of the much younger person is his knowledge, his acquaintance with the young and oncoming, ongoing historians.

JH: Are you going to seek this person?

EHRMANN: Yes, I'm going to seek this person. Yes. As soon as some plans mature, I'd like a co-editor.

JH: Dr. Ehrmann, I can't say how much I appreciate your giving your time to tell us all about so much of Terre Haute's early history and your own personal life. And I would that we could all be as lucid and erudite as you at your stage. (laughs)

EHRMANN: One final thing. The impression of my youth was of a Terre Haute of a Main Street, a very solid, a very substantial Main Street, full of stores, no vacancies. My impression today is of a Main Street with great gaps in it. And on Ohio Street and on other streets. If the demolition of these buildings continues, the justification is only that there is some kind of, or will be some kind of, a master plan so that something will be done to bring back that impression of solid, substantial quality to Terre Haute.

JH: Thank you. I hope this comes about.

END OF TAPE.