RALPH L. TSCHIRHART

MEMOIR

Alsatian Customs and Traditions

B14

RALPH (BLACKIE) TSCHIRHART - 1908

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Castroville Public Library Oral History Project B. Deanna Hoffman transcribed the tape and Connie Rihn was the interviewer and editor. The interview took place at the Library October 20, 1981.

Ralph Tschirhart was born February 13, 1908 to Ed. A. Tschirhart and Cecilia Huesser, both Alsatian. He has been a life-long resident and businessman in Castroville. He was active in city government, helping to incorporate the city in 1947 and helped organize Castroville State Bank. He was a trustee of St. Louis Catholic Church for many years and served as Athletic Director of St. Louis High School in the early 1950's. His many business interests include owning and operating Ed. A. Tschirhart & Son Grocery, Rainbow Theater, the Lone Star Beer distributorship, a liquor store, and he has farmed and ranched most of his life. His knowledge of the dialect and his desire to preserve the Alsatian language have led him to write and publish an Alsatian-English dictionary. "Blackie", as he is known to his friends, talks about Alsatian customs and Catholic Church customs in the early 1900's in Castroville.

Tape # B14
45 min.
transcribed

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Today is Tuesday, October the 20th, 1980. This is Connie Rihn interviewing Ralph, better known as "Blackie" Tschirhart, at the Castroville Public Library. I'm interviewing for the Oral History Project B. And we're interviewing at the Library. Ralph is my father, so I will be addressing him during this interview as dad.

Q Before we go into the topics on Alsatian customs and traditions, I'd like to have a little family background. When and where were you born, daddy?

A I was born here is Castroville on Friday the 13th, 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, 1908.

Q And who are your parents?

A Ed A. Tschirhart and Cecilia Huesser.

Q And how big of a family did you have? How many children were in your family?

A We were only three in our family. I was the oldest one, I had two sisters.

Q Okay.

A Cecelia and Helen.

Q Okay, what was your father's occupation when you were growing up?

A He was a blacksmith and wheelwright.

Q Where did he learn his trade?

A In Quihi. From Mr. Schraeder. He went to Quihi when he was 18 years old and worked nine months with him out there without pay.

Q Okay. Did he have any other occupations besides that?

A Later on, farming. He was always a farmer.

Q Oh, that was just an extra, on the side.

A Well, he did what he was -- blacksmith. That's all he did, for 25 years.

Q Okay. At that time when he was a blacksmith, was that when they didn't have any cars here or what?

A No, they didn't have no cars. He was a wheelwright, that's, that was the mechanic to keep you going in those days.

Q Were there alot of blacksmiths in Castroville at that time?

A There were two. And he always had somebody working with him. But, the blacksmith, he did the shoeing of the horses and the wheelwright part, that's keep the buggies and the wagons and the plows and things going.

Q Oh, I see. Okay. One of the strongest traces of the Alsatian culture that we have here in Castroville that has remained, is the dialect. And you have been busy for about two years writing a dictionary with the Alsatian dialect, English and Alsatian. And you're getting ready to publish it. How did you come to have such a strong knowledge of the language? When you were little, did your parents -- what did your parents speak at home?

A When I was little we only spoke Alsatian. My parents never spoke English at home.

Q Never spoke English?

A No. My grandma and my grandpa Huesser who were lived close by us, they couldn't speak English at all.

Q Did your parents speak English?

A Yes. My mother could speak pretty good English, my dad not so good. But later on he could speak, learned a little better, but when my mother learned her English when she worked as a maid in Del Rio, where she had to speak only English. And that's where she learned to speak English.

Q Oh, this was before she was married?

A Before whe was married.

Q Okay, but when did you learn English?

A When I started school. I started school with a first reader in German and a first reader in English.

Q Oh, so you had a bilingual education?

A And the German came easy, because we had only speak only Alsatian. English --

Q Oh, so the German was easy to learn?

A Yeah, easy to learn.

Q So you had a bilingual education then, huh?

A Four years, 'til World War I. And when World War I broke -- when we entered World War I, the German books were taken away from us. And we stopped. We only had about three and a half years of German.

Q Oh, un-huh. Of German. Okay, but they used the German longer here in town in other places, I mean, in other things in school --

A Oh, you never stopped speaking Alsatian. We spoke Alsatian all the time.

Q Like on the school grounds and everything?

A Oh, yes. Kids all spoke Alsatian.

Q And what about in church? Did they use the German --

A German was preached. We prayed in German and the sermons were all in German.

Q You didn't stop this with World War I in church?

A No, no. We didn't stop because as long as Father Heckmann was here, he couldn't speak too well in English. He spoke mostly in Alsatian.

Q Oh, he spoke in --

A No, in German.

Q Okay, did he ever --

A But he was from Alsace.

Q He was an Alsatian. Okay. I'm looking at your family tree here. And every branch of your family is from Alsace, in the Mulhouse area of Alsace. Which means that your family is true Alsatian. When you think back, when you were growing up when you were little, do you think of your mother as being traditional in Alsatian customs? I mean, did she do everything that was handed down from her grandmother and mother?

A Oh, yes. She had mostly but --

Q Like her cooking. What do you remember about her cooking?

A Well, we made the same things everybody else did. We killed three hogs a year. She had a garden --

Q But was there a certain time for killing hogs?

A Oh, yeah, in the wintertime only. It was the only time you could kill a hog.

Q But Alsatians eat alot of pork now, don't they still in Alsace?

A In Alsace they eat more pork than they do beef.

Q Well, do you think the Alsatians --

A But, it's the climate, it's the climate there. We would eat it here too if we had the -- but, we're living in a different climate. Alsace is in a cold climate, therefore they eat more pork. And it's cheaper --

Q Do you think the Alsatians brought pork to this area?

A No, I don't think so, but they naturally -- that's a custom all over the world, pork, I think.

Q Well --

A But we made the -- when I went to Alsace we make the same things from when we kill a hog as they do over there yet.

Q *Okay. What are some of the things you made?*

A We made when we killed a hog, we made head cheese, we made blood sausage, which they call Kudla. We made bacon, we made sausage and saus which we call gollery. We never had no English word for it.

Q What is that gollery?

A Gollery, it's made from the tail and the ears and the feet and it's kind of a jelly-like process put on it.

Q What do you soak it in something?

A No, just, it's kind of sour and it's real good eating.

Q And it's the pigs feet in other words?

A Pigs feet and the ears and the tail. It's nothing wasted when you kill a hog.

Q *Okay. Do you think this habit of not wasting any part of* that hog and we've heard this from several other people on

tapes, do you think that is an Alsatian trait or do you think this is just because the people were here?

A No, they did that everywhere. I imagine everybody does that. But, they did that in the old days, they still do it over there today.

Q Oh, they do..

A And they made -- we made from the -- they made what they called -- oh, that -- from the tenderloin this -- they would soak that overnight in vinegar and then they made the pastata pie --

Q Oh, pastata, okay.

A Pastata, that was one of the delicacies. Now they -- we went over to France and they make pastata out of any kind of pork meat. But we only made it out of the tenderloin, here.

Q It's seems strange that you would use the tenderloin in a pie?

A Well, it's a delicacy. That was something special when they killed they had pastata.

Q Oh, so the pastata was special?

A Oh, that was something special?

Q Okay, when did your mother fix pastata?

A Oh, a day or two after we killed

Q Okay, was it for Christmas maybe?

A No, no. We made it everytime we killed.

Q Everytime you killed. Okay, when you think about Christmas when you were a little boy or when you had your sisters too, what did your mother do for Christmas?

A Well, we had a Christmas tree. Dad would go up in the hills and cut a cedar tree and bring it home and we'd make a -- have a Christmas tree and --

Q But how did she get ready ahead of time? Did you watch her do this or did she --

A No, she, -- she baked the cookies and things ahead of time and she always had cookies that she made with a little kind of a decorative things on the cookie that she hung on the tree. That glistened when the light would hit it.

Q Oh, little colored sugar or something?

A No, no. Cookies with sprinkled some kind of -- like silver stuff on it -- you'd hang that on there --

Q Okay, did you -- did she let the children watch her do this or did she do it in secretly? Was everything a surprise to you?

A No, no. She did that I think the night before. Because we never did help make the Christmas tree like they do now.

Q You never did make the Christmas tree?

A No.

Q Well how was the tree -- how did she do this?

A Well, dad would fix it in a bucket or something and she would trim the tree with the little candles that they clipped on there. And at night they'd -- we'd light those candles.

Q Well when did you see it for the first time?

A On Christmas Eve.

Q Okay, so she kept it hidden 'til then?

A No, I don't -- I can't quite remember how -- I think she

just fixed it the day before.

Q Well, I remember when we were little, you would put it in a room and you decorated it, you and mother and we didn't see it until Christmas Eve. You did that to us when we were little.

A I don't remember. Well, I guess we didn't see it either, I don't think until Christmas Eve. Same way at Easter, the Easter nests.

Q What?

A She would put them outside. We'd fix our nests and one morning I got up at 5:00 and I come around one part of the house and she was coming around the other with the eggs. And that day we never got nothing in our nests.

Q (Laughter) You never got anything in your nests?

A (Laughter)

Q So you were trying to beat the Easter bunny?

A Yeah.

Q Well, okay, getting back to Christmas. What were some of the old time cookies or the things she made at Christmas that you remember.

A Well, she made those special cookies with the --

Q With the icing.

A With the icing and she drops little, real little round silver like things in it. And that would shine. And we always have a cake and we had a turkey.

Q Oh, you would have turkey?

A Oh yeah, we'd have turkey on Christmas. We had a turkey, and we'd go to out in the country and buy one. Usually

from the Karm's, up here.

Q And she cooked this in a wood stove, I guess?

A Oh, yeah everything was cooked in a wood stove.

Q Well, what other things did she make for Christmas? I know she had some other specialties that she made. Well, you mentioned a cake, what kind of cake?

A Oh, --

Q Just an ordinary cake.

A Chocolate and potato cake.

Q Oh, well did she make fruit cake? Was that a --

A Oh yeah, and made a fruit cake, yeah.

Q Okay. When you'd get together with your family, like was it just your immediate family or would you go to your grandparents?

A No, the grandparents would always come to us. We had every Sunday we had people here for dinner, every Sunday.

Q So your mother was considered a good cook, wasn't she?

A Well, she, yeah, she was a good cook, and she had to cook, because every Sunday grampa and people would come to church and they'd always eat dinner at our house, and we always had a big pot of soup. That was the first thing he ate, was soup.

Q Oh, the grandparents lived out of town?

A Um-hum, they lived on the farm.

Q This is Louis Tschirhart?

A Louis Tschirhart and Louisa.

Q Okay. So they'd come to your house and eat and soup would be the first course?

A First course, always, a big pot of soup. And we had, that soup was every day. My daddy always had soup for dinner, first course.

Q Oh, she cooked it every day.

A Every day.

Q Okay. Any other cookies besides those, that you remember?

A Oh, she had different kinds; oatmeal cookies and Marguarites and her specialty was seafoam candy. It was real good.

Q Okay. Seafoam candy. What type of candy is that?

A That's like, it's almost like divinity.

Q Divinity, yeah. I remember that when I was little, that she always had that hidden away and we'd run out of sweets she'd go and get --

A And pies, always had pies, all kind of pies.

Q 'Course now, pies were not from Alsace; they don't make pies like we do.

A Yes, they do. But they don't make 'em as good as we do I don't think. They don't make 'em sweet. Everything in Alsace, cake, cookies, and stuff is not sweet. They don't like our sweet cakes.

Q Oh, they don't have 'em as sweet?

A No. No icing like we have here. Well then right after Christmas then you started, they started baking for New Years and we had a special New Year cake they baked, they called it Ney Johr Wacke, which is New Year Bun -- kind, it's kind of a twisted dough and it's more like a coffee cake, and every, you'd go to your godfather and your godmother's and each one would get one of those cakes from

their godfather and godmother on New Year's Day, and they'd come to our house, whoever was their godchild or, and they'd give 'em one of those.

Q So the New Year's bread --

A New Year's bread, yeah --

Q Was, it was traditional to get it from your godparents?

A From your godparents, and you had some at home, too.

Q Did you have any other special relationship with your godparents?

A No, that was about all. Well, you'd always get, you'd always get, more of a, you did get nickels and dimes from your godparents during the year.

Q Okay. Did you call them any special name?

A Feter and Goda.

Q Feter and Goda. And Feter and Goda means?

A Goda means godmother and Feter means godfather.

Q Okay. And so you called them that? I know I called my godmother that too.

A Yes, yeah.

Q Okay, now, when you think about the Alsatian customs, as you got older, did you think about that your customs were different than people you met in other towns, for instance? Did you notice --

A In those days you didn't go to many other towns. As far as we traveled was LaCoste, maybe. We didn't -- I didn't go to Hondo two times in my life 'til I was grown. Nobody went anywhere. You didn't have the transportation; you had a buggy. My dad went to San Antonio twice a year with

his buggy to pay his bill at the hardware company where he bought his material and --

Q Well how did he get those materials?

A Well, he'd order 'em by letter, send the letter into the Housinger Hardware Company and they'd send him his coal and his iron for six months.

Q By train?

A No, by wagon. Freight wagons haul the freight from San Antonio, and so then every six months he'd go to San Antonio and pay.

Q Did you go along with him.

A I went along a couple of times and it would take all day. Leave early in the morning and drive to San Antonio in the buggy and then pay the bills and order some more things that you needed, order enough coal --

Q Okay, so you were born in 1908. So how many years of schooling did you have? Just tell me briefly what your education was.

A I went to school eleven years.

Q Okay. But how many years at the first school, which is the Sister's school?

A Nine. Nine and two more at public school.

Q Or eight.

A Nine. And two more in the public school.

Q Oh, okay. So they did have a high school here then?

A It was a high school. We had three teachers that took care of the -- all the children, the grammer grades and the high school. There was seven in what they called the

high school, but we had no facilities. The only two books in the library was Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

Q That was the only two?

A That was the only two books they had.

Q Okay. But then did you have any other education outside of high school?

A Well, I went to Draughhan's Business College for about, oh about five months I think, and I didn't like it so I came home.

Q Oh, you didn't like it?

A No.

Q But you lived in San Antonio at that time, didn't you?

A I lived in San Antonio with my aunt at that time, and I came home and went to work for Courand Company.

Q Okay. So your aunt was from Castroville originally? That was Me'lanie Huesser. But now, when you, there at the business college you probably met people that were not from Castroville. Okay, did you notice your background then?

A Oh, yes, everybody commented on my accent because my accent was pretty bad then.

Q How did they treat the accent? How did they treat you?

A Oh, they treated me all right, they just --

Q Did they laugh at you though?

A Oh, some did, but not too many. And of course we, I played hooky from school a lot there. I'd go down to the Grand Theater and watch the shows. Them days you'd go sit in it for ten cents all afternoon on Alamo Plaza, and play pool two games for a nickel down in the basements around

Alamo Plaza.

Q Now if your daddy would have known this what would he have done?

A Ooooo, he would have gotten me home in five minutes.

Q Well, I didn't know that you goofed off in school. Okay. Now, when you were growing up in Castroville, there are some people here, most people are Alsatian, but we do have some German families. Did you notice that their customs were different; like say at Christmas or so forth, than your families or the Alsatian families?

A No. Them days all the German people here were Lutheran and the culture those days, the way we were brought up, our religions conflicted too much and it's not like today. We --

Q You didn't mingle with them?

A Well, we didn't mingle with the children because we went to the parochial school and they went to the public school and that way we didn't get together much. But German people were all, seemed like, harder-working people, and they were all very good people and strict people. They --

Q More serious, you think?

A More serious, oh, yeah.

Q Okay. The Alsatians here in Castroville have always been noted, everybody comes here, they love to come here for parties and dances. It seems like we've always had a reputation.

A Well, they're more happy-go-lucky, the Alsatians, they --

Q They like to have a good time?

A Yeah, they have the parties at the farms, wherever they were, everybody -- lots of 'em play a fiddle and some guitar, and they'd always have some kind of music and they had a lot of dances. Surprise, they called 'em surprise parties.

Q When do you think those surprise parties started? Was that always as long as you remember?

A Yes, as long as I can remember there were surprise parties. They had that way back there. When they didn't have no dance halls, I guess, they'd go to a house and they'd dance, and they'd usually last all night pretty near, as long as they could get somebody to play music.

Q Okay. When did they usually have a surprise party? What was the occasion?

A Well, just make it up and get together and go to somebody's home.

Q It wasn't a special occasion like an anniversary or birthday?

A No, not that I know of, just made 'em up.

Q They just made 'em, in other words, to get together?

A To get together, yeah.

Q Okay. So they always liked to get together and dance, and, okay, you mentioned fiddles and stuff. Did a lot of people play music around here?

A Oh, yeah, a lot of 'em could play music. Alfred Mann played the fiddle and we were just kids, see, he had a

kerosene lantern he'd put on the lawn and we'd go over there and he'd play -- every week we'd go once or twice and sit on the lawn and he'd play his violin.

Q Oh. Did he also play then for parties?

A No, he -- well, he use to before that, before he was, when he was young, way before that he played at parties but when I started going to surprise parties they had different younger people playing than him.

Q Where, was music always part of your life, in other words?

A Well, that's all we had is dancing. We danced; that's the only entertainment we had. Every Sunday was a dance.

Q You mean in one of the halls?

A In one of the halls or during the week we had surprise parties we'd go to.

Q Oh, during the week those would be.

A Well, one of the interviews, told me that the mother said they were going to dance just too much. There was a dance every night. They were always on the road, the kids. The old people, you know, would --

A But, and when I was a little boy they, the dances were, I don't know, they were real entertaining. I know I'd go to a dance and I'd be laying under the benches sleeping and my dad and mama would be dancing, and for 50 cents you could go to a dance when I was a little boy, real little, and 50 cents a person at 12:00 o'clock you'd be served a big meal, everybody.

Q What, at that meal what did they usually have?

A They'd serve it family style, all you could eat. They had roast, oh they had everything, everything was cooked, roasts, potatoes, and always lettuce, usually, when they had home grown lettuce, and a real good meal they served, pies, homemade pies for dessert. That was everything for 50 cents a person.

Q Okay. Talking about food again, we eat something here at parties now and nobody seems to remember when that started or did we always have it. It's parisa.

A Yeah, my grandpa, I remember he made parisa.

Q You remember your grandpa made it?

A Oh, yeah, Grandpa Tschirhart, he always made parisa.

Q So that is an Alsatian food, then?

A I don't know where they got it from, but they made it. Now it seems to me like over in Alsace they don't make that like we do. They, for some reason, they make something like it but they put raw eggs with it, but we never had it in ours.

Q Well, when your grandpa made it, what type of cheese did he use with that? Explain what parisa is.

A Parisa is raw ground meat with the fat trimmed off, absolutel no fat on it and the longhorn cheese and onions. That's all, and salt and pepper. Some put a little lemon juice on it, but they, but you could always buy that yellow cheese.

Q Okay. Did most people eat it in the old days?

A Oh, yeah. They ate that, when they'd have a little party or something they had parisa with beer.

Q Okay, un --

A Always a little barrel of beer, they never had bottle beer hardly, very seldom they drank bottle beer.

Q Well, the barrel beer is, was that made here in Castroville?

A Oh, no, San Antonio.

Q From a brewery in San Antonio?

A Same brewery, Lone Star and Pearl.

Q You don't remember when they made beer here in Castroville?

A That was before your time.

A That was way before my time. That's when my grandpa first came over here from Wittelsheim.

Q Your grandpa was a brewer?

A He was the brewmaster for the Kieffer.

Q For the Kieffer what?

A For the Kieffer family. They had the brewery. That was in the old --

Q Wernettes?

A Well, it was the Kieffer building first, and then Wernettes bought it later on. It was down in the basement where they made the beer, where it was cool.

Q The basement is still there. It's real cleaned out. Okay. When you were growing up, you went to the parochial school, which was St. Louis, and we've always had a school here since the Sisters of Divine Providence came in 1868, and they founded their order in Castroville. So our town has always had the influence of those sisters. Do you think that most of your education came from those sisters?

A Oh, yes, nine years with them and --

Q Do you think that the church had a lot of influence on family life?

A Oh, yes, yeah, strictly, because you were brought up in Church, every day you had to go to church and in school you got 30 minutes religious instruction every day. You had the catechism and you were really -- religious oriented.

Q Okay. One of the boys -- Sonny Mann mentioned that the boys always were mass servers and the older boys would teach the younger boys.

A Yeah, that's the way I started serving, and my teacher was Clarence Holzhaus. And we had to pray in Latin the confiteor we just grumbled awhile and we'd say confiteor -- (mumble, mumble) and go on and didn't know what we were saying, but Father Heckmann would take us to the rectory once a week and he would teach us the prayers in Latin to where we finally could say 'em pretty good.

Q Oh, okay. So --

A But most the time with the confiteor we never did say, we just grumbled and bowed our heads and just grumbled.

Q Well, did you teach other boys?

A Yeah, later on I taught. I served mass for nine years and always after you served one or two years you would take the next coming up and --

Q You said Father Heckmann was Alsatian. Did he fit right in here where his -- you know, did you think the Alsatian culture was stronger while he was here than later or before?

A Oh, I don't know. I think it was the same whether he would have been here or not. But he fitted in here pretty good. He was awful strict; a lot of the old people, some of 'em didn't like him because he told it how it was. He was a very strict man, and he was a real religious man. And at the same time we had a nun that came from there, Sister Marcella who was doubly strict.

Q Was she Alsatian?

A No, I believe she came from Germany because she was like a Army general. You had to march double-file, the boys and the girls behind, and we had to genuflect at the command and go in the pew at her command and kneel down at her command

Q Well, how long did she teach in Castroville? She, everybody mentions her.

A I don't know how long she taught, because as long as I was here she taught here. She taught me; I was in her room for five years I think.

Q She had the big school, huh?

A Well, she taught the eighth grade, yeah. And then the ninth grade -- had another nun that came out here, I think he brought her, she was a little sickly --

Q Where did the nuns live at that time? That taught you.

A In the house that Dr. Sharp lives in now.

Q Okay. What was the reason they didn't live in the convent, that big building --

A It was occupied by the -- what was this order in San Antonio'

Q The Oblates?

A The Oblates were there and then one time when they had the revolution in Mexico the Selesian, Mexican priests came.

Side B of tape

A The first few years I went to school when I was a little boy the nuns lived in the convent and they had a school, a boarding school there for girls. And then after about three years they, I don't know, they moved to San Antonio.

Q The sisters quit having that boarding school Did any of the girls from Castroville go to that boarding school?

A I think there's one or two maybe. Let's see --

Q Did you ever have any contact with them.

A No, no. They were --

Q Was there a fence between that school and the convent?

A No. There was a fence between us and the girls, and the girls were on the convent side.

Q Oh. You wouldn't play with the girls at recess?

A No, we couldn't play. They had a eight-foot solid-board fence. You couldn't even see 'em.

Q Well, okay. What about when you walked home in the evening? Did you --

A You had to walk on one side of the street and the girls on the other.

Q And the girls on the other.

A And the sisters --

Q Would watch you?

A -- watch from the corner. She could watch all the streets and she watched.

Q Well, did you ever remember getting into trouble because of any of these rules?

A Oh, yeah, I got a whipping in school every other day. Sometimes every day.

Q A whipping?

A Yeah, just a -- yeah, hit you with one of those yardsticks and they'd break the first time it hit you. And when Sister Marcella would use pomegranate switches, and they'd put red marks on the calf of your legs; we had on short pants --

Q Well, did you really do something to deserve it or do you think she was using you for an example?

A Oh, yeah, Naw, we were --

Q You were mean kids?

A No, not only me got whippings, we were just a little onery.

Q But I bet they didn't whip the girls, did they?

A No, not the girls, but they were always too good, you know. We didn't know the girls. They was on one side of the school and we were on the other, in the back pew.

Q In the schoolroom too?

A In the schoolroom, yeah, we wouldn't sit amongst girls or girls amongst the boys.

Q In other words, it sounds like they expected the boys to be naughty and the girls to be little angels, huh?

A Yeah, yeah, the girls. They were always angels.

Q Since the church had such a big influence on people's lives in those days, what were some of the things you remember about church holy days? What were the -- okay. For instance, --

A Oh, we always had every holy day people came to church. There was no early mass or nothing like that. They didn't put any -- People just took off.

Q What do you mean people took off?

A From their work. They went to church.

Q Oh, if it -- holy days are special days during the year.

A They were days of obligation, yeah, you went to church. And there was no school on Holy Days of Obligation. But you were, same thing as in school, you were in church for High Mass and at 2:00 o'clock you went back for vespers. There was always afternoon services. And on Corpus Christi they would have altars around the square in front of the church and the priest would carry the monstrance, what do you call it?

Q The monstrance?

A Monstrance with the Holy Eucharist in it and everybody would foller (sic) and they'd stop at these different altars and he'd have, he'd give them the Benediction. Usually two altars.

Q Two altars?

A Two altars around the plaza.

Q Okay. Did your family ever make an altar?

A No, no. They were put up by the church people. It was not a family altar, it was --

Q Well, yes, in the old days it was. The Jungmans put one up and the Fitzsimons put one up.

A Well, probably that's --

Q In your day it wasn't --

A Yeah, they had one at the Jungman's store there and one at the old drugstore. I didn't know the families put 'em up. But I know I was an altar boy and carried the --

Q The incense holder --

A Incense holder, yeah, you'd have to swing that incense holder towards the Holy Eucharist and then go off a few steps and turn around and then --

Q Oh, okay, and the little girls were strewing flowers --

A Little girls strew the flowers --

Q Yeah, we've had a lot of people to describe that. Did they carry the monstrance and did the priest walk under --

A Under the, what they called the Himmel.

Q The Himmel?

A Yeah, it was --

Q What's that in English?

A In English it's heaven, but it was just a --

Q -- canopy.

A Canopy, yeah. But in Alsatian we called it the Himmel.

Q Okay. The Corpus Christi was always celebrated, though. That was the feast that as long as you can remember --

A Oh, yeah, always, always.

Q I think that's an old European Catholic feast.

A And May Day, the first of May you had your procession around the square. Little girls all dressed in white with alittle basket of flower petals and the same way, the priest would walk around with the thing and they'd throw the petals

Q With the Holy Eucharist? On May Day?

A Yeah.

Q Oh, I thought that was strictly for the Blessed Virgin. I didn't know they carried the monstrance on those days.

A They carried it. I'm sure, because they --

Q But that wasn't in --

A They strewed the petals.

Q -- May procession, was that during a mass or was that --

A No, no, that was just --

Q In the evening.

A May procession in the evening, yeah.

Q And, okay. What about, it was May Day is a special day for the Blessed Mary.

A Yeah, we honor of the Blessed Virgin.

Q The honor of the Blessed Virgin. So what did you, what, it was a service with the rosary or what?

A Rosary, yeah. And you'd say the Litany to the Blessed Virgin

Q And did they do anything --

A And they'd have the Benediction after that, and that was --

Q Did they do anything to the statue of the Blessed Virgin (inaudible)

A No, I don't remember --

Q They didn't crown?

A But the little girls were all dressed in white.

Q Well, I know some women have said that they dressed up, curled their hair, had white dresses and they looked forward to that. It was a kind of a special day.

A Yeah, because you didn't have nothing else those days, anything was special because we didn't have no television or nothing to watch and stuff like that. Kids had to make their own entertainment. And they'd play in the evenings, the neighbor kids would get together and play 'til about 9:00 o'clock or so, until they heard the whistle and then they'd go home.

Q What whistle?

A From home.

Q Oh, Daddy would whistle?

A Yeah, time to come home.

Q What about, you said the only thing you got together would be dancing and music because that was all you had. Well, did you all ever get together and put on plays? Was that a big thing?

A We had a play in school every year.

Q Okay. Not outside of school, though, huh?

A No. Oh --

Q Dramas, you know --

A Oh, the older people did. My mother --

Q The older people did?

A Yeah, my mother was in several of 'em.

Q After she was married.

A Oh, yeah. After. They'd put on plays, yeah, and good ones, too. Yeah, good plays.

Q Well would they just get together and decide to do it or would somebody instigate that?

A No, it was -- they'd get together, oh, what's her name,

the Schmidt girls, they were good actors and singers and they'd every once in a while, they'd get together and have a play and they'd practice for six weeks before they'd put it on.

Q Uh-huh. Do you remember those?

A Oh, yeah, I remember 'em well.

Q And your mother would be in --

A Yeah, she had the lead role in several of 'em. She was a good actress.

Q Huh.

A She and Alfred Schmidt ususally had the lead role.

Q And this was all married people more or less.

A Yeah, well, the Schmidts, the Schmidts were old maids then.

Q Okay. Well, was your mother also in the choir?

A She was in the choir when I was little, but later on she had too much work and she gave up the choir.

Q Okay. Somebody mentioned that there used to be a men's choir here that sang German and they sang at Hermann Sons meetings and also at church. Do you remember that?

A Don't remember that. That's before my time.

Q When you were growing up the church choir consisted of what, of men and women?

A Men and women, yeah. And they had good choirs.

Q Okay. Another old custom that was brought from the old country was Rogation Days. Do you remember those?

A Yeah, going up to the Cross Hill and praying for rain.

Q And you went up to the Cross Hill, okay. And it was called

the Blessing of the Crops? Is that what that Rogation Days is, or is that not the same thing?

A That, the main thing was to pray for rain.

Q Oh.

A That's the only, that's what I remember it by, going up there to pray for rain.

Q When you had a funeral in the early days, to get to go up to the Cross Hill, I mean to the cemetery which is right next to Cross Hill, do you remember still walking?

A Oh, we always walked and --

Q And they used the horse --

A -- only way to get up, the hearse was drawn by two horses, and everybody walked behind.

Q Did you ever have a death in your family? That you remember the body being at the home?

A The only one I remember is my Grandpa Tschirhart. He was at the home yet.

Q At your home?

A No, at his house.

Q At his house. Okay. Do you remember the wake? What did they do at a wake?

A Well, they just sit out on the porch and talk. They'd have a little light in the room where the body was but nobody sat in there hardly. Just get together and talk all night long. Some would come later, some would come earlier, but, and they'd have a little something to eat on the stove always where you could get a snack or something.

Q Okay. Let's see.

A But the Mexicans, when they had a wake, you could hear them. They'd be singing and always get loaded up when they had a wake.

Q It was a celebration.

A Oh, yeah. They'd sing, and they'd get always stewed up at a wake, and you could hear 'em from blocks away.

Q Well, was there any drinking didn't go on at the Alsatian wakes?

A No, no. Oh, they'd have a little wine there or something, you could drink it, but nobody would get soused up.

Q What is the main drink that your family or at dances that always was at Castroville, what was the main drink?

A Beer.

Q Beer, always?

A Beer, yeah. And at home, I don't know if everybody, but we always had wine at home.

Q Did you make it yourself?

A My dad made 50 gallons every year.

Q Of wine?

A Of wine.

Q What kind of wine?

A Mustang grapes.

Q The wild ones?

A Yeah.

Q Did you help him make that?

A Well, I was there when he made it, but I never did help.

Too little to help.

Q You were too small. Okay, we've been talking about when you grew up. Now, after you had your education at the business school you came back to Castroville and worked?

A Worked at Joe Courand Company.

Q What type of work did you do?

A I was store clerk and assistant bookkeeper.

Q Uh-huh. And do you remember your wedding? When did you marry?

A 1929. I was in business then for myself already.

Q What kind of business?

A I had a grocery store.

Q So you've been a grocer, you were a grocer for pretty many years, or --

A From '28, '27, 'til '46, but I worked for Joe Courand Company only six months.

Q And then you opened your own business?

A No, before I worked for Courand I worked at Hondo, too, as a bookkeeper for Weynand Motors Company.

Q And you traveled there every day?

A No, no, I lived with my Uncle Joe Huesser in Hondo, but I only worked there six months and then I came home because I couldn't after paying room and board you couldn't make no money working out there. I paid $18 a month room and board and I was only making about $60 a month I think.

Q Okay. So when you came back home -- were you already going with --

A No.

Q -- mother at that time?

A No, I wasn't going with her then. I only started going with her when I came back here.

Q Okay. How did you meet mother since she lived in LaCoste?

A Aw, we knew each other long time; we'd meet at the dances. We danced together all the time. We were -- the girls from LaCoste and the girls from Castroville, that's about as far as we commuted.

Q Were you a good dancer in the old days?

A Not one of the best, but I could dance pretty good. Your mother was a good dancer.

Q At the dances, it was always traditional that they danced the Put Your Little Foot, the Schottisch --

A No, no. No, not in our time. That was before our time. That came back then after we were married they started that again, the old-time -- but when we were dancing it was mostly one-steps, foxtrots, and things like that.

Q Oh, but the Schottisch and Put Your Little Foot were old dances?

A They're old dances. And later on we started dancing them and we liked them better, but we danced foxtrots and Charleston and --

Q Those were the modern American dances that you all danced.

A Yeah, that's what we danced.

Q Okay. Did the old people remember the -- at the surprise parties what -- did they do those kind of --

A The old people danced them and they had special dances in our days for the old people.

Q And what were those?

A And they danced this Schottisch and one-steps and Chicago Glide and all those dances, and waltzes, lots of waltzes, and then we started going to them too because them dances were a lot, I thought, nicer than the ones we were dancing.

Q Oh, so they had a dance for older people --

A Old people, yeah, old-timer dance, yeah.

Q And then was the music different at the old-timer dances?

A Oh, yeah, they had their fiddle and piano and flute and, but our dances we had modern music, Jimmy Klein, about the same music as the Hermann in San Antonio now.

Q At the --

A Roaring Twenties, yeah, about that kind of music, yeah.

Q Big band era they called it.

A Big band era, yeah.

Q So you knew mother from growing up, I mean, you all knew each other --

A Well, yes, we knew each other.

Q Well, when did you decide that -- to start courting her, how did you get attracted to her?

A I really don't know. She -- we just started going together, and when, we made a date and we just kept on dating.

Q Well, then you married in April of 1929. Where did you get married?

A LaCoste.

Q Oh, you got married at LaCoste. In the morning?

A In the morning, yeah.

Q And what day of the week?

A I gues a Tuesday, pretty sure it was a Tuesday, yeah.

Q Everybody married on Tuesday.

A Married on Tuesday.

Q And what kind of a party then did you have?

A We had no -- we had just our godfathers and godmothers and we had a breakfast at Mother's house and after breakfast we went to San Antonio and took our pictures, had our pictures taken at the studio, and after that we went, the party went home and we stayed in San Antonio.

Q Oh, the bridal party went along with you.

A Yeah, yeah.

Q Oh, and so you stayed in San Antonio. That was -- where did you go on your honeymoon?

A Dallas.

Q Oh.

A In a model T with 14 boots in the tires.

Q Fourteen boots. What are 14 boots, what do you mean?

A Well, that's when you had a hole in the tire you'd put a boot in it.

Q Oh. Did you have a lot of flats going?

A Never had a flat either way. I put two new tires in the back in case one of 'em blows out, and I never had flat.

Q Well, mother's family was also Alsatian, right, even though they lived in LaCoste?

A Yeah, well, her mother was Alsatian, but the Droitcourts, I don't know where, we don't know where they came from,

on her daddy's side.

Q So mother's, when she moved up here, the customs she knew were the same --

A The same, exactly, yeah, 'cause they were all, her mother and daddy were raised in Castroville.

Q We're going to change the subject a little. Okay. You've been to Alsace for visits in the last six years you've been three times. What have you noticed about the Alsatian people -- and you visited a lot of little towns in Alsace -- that is similar -- or how is Castroville similar to Alsace, Alsatian ways now?

A Well, in Alsace they live just exactly like we did when I was a boy, out in the country. Now, the cities is different. But in the country everybody still has their milchcow, milch cow or two, they have their garden and they stay at home, and the only thing they do is go to their work and they come home in the evenings they'd work in their gardens and they worked on their house. Everybody keeps a good home and take a pride in their home, and they don't have the entertainment that we have in this country. Their customs and the way we lived when I was younger is exactly the same over there now. They raise most of their own fruit, they have fruit trees and they have their gardens and the thing they have over there that we didn't have is most people in the country have a hutch of rabbits and they raise their own rabbits to eat.

Q For eating.

A And they eat lots of rabbits over there.

Q Well, did you all eat rabbits here is the old days?

A Oh, yeah, we killed rabbits, my daddy would go shoot rabbits.

Q But you didn't raise them?

A No, we didn't raise 'em, but over there they raise 'em.

Q Okay then, do you think that their way of life of the Alsatian is the reason that the people stayed here; because this was a frontier town and it was, it was real hard for the people that founded the town because there was, they had droughts and in order to survive they had to be self-sustaining. Do you think this is an Alsatian trait, that made 'em stay here, the thriftiness and the --

A Well, here they had, what made 'em stay --

Q And they knew how to raise their own food.

A -- there's no way that they could get back home. And that's the reason they had to stay here. Those that later on when they couldn't make a living here they would migrate to San Antonio --

Q Well that's what I was going to say.

A -- they would work in San Antonio, but if you had a little acreage you could always survive here. You could raise enough in your gardens and in your, with your hogs and your milch cow it didn't take much money to survive.

Q So each family was self-sustaining.

A Each family was self-sustaining, very self-sustaining.

Q They just raised their own food and --

A Own food and of course they had milk, butter, cheese, eggs (inaudible) whatever else that you need.

Q The Alsatian in the small towns in France today, they live a simple life.

A A simple life.

Q And so the people here also lived a simple life.

A Real simple, yeah. Of course now they have television over there, too, but it's a -- they don't -- it's not like we have television here, and they don't watch it as much as we do. But when they have a show over there on television there's no interruption; that show goes to the end.

Q Well, are the family ties, the family relationships in Alsace, are they strong over there?

A Oh, yeah, very strong. They're together today like we were when my grandma and grandpa, we'd go over there every other evening to visit. Now, in Alsace, I noticed the people, the family that lived close together, they go visit every day.

Q Uh-huh. They see each other in the family. Does the church still have an influence on the --

A The church over there, they still do the same thing as we did when I was young here. The men on one side and the ladies on the other, and that custom still exists over there. They brought that from over there here., And when I was a boy way back, the ladies would sit on one side and the men on the other.

Q Even the married couples, the men would go to one side and the woman to the other.

Q And their wife goes to the other side.

A Yeah, wife goes to --

Q And the children?

A The children, the boys on one side and the girls on the other, up in front.

Q Up in front. Well, I remember that still from when I was little that the boys sat on one side and the girls on the other. Well, you know, they always used to say, like when we'd have a party or something, the women would get together on one side of the room or talk and the men in another room. And they'd always say, "That's Castroville style."

A Yeah. That's Alsatian custom.

Q Alsatian custom.

A Yeah, when they --

Q Okay. You've lived here all your life except for the years that you went away and were racing horses throughout the United States. You decided to write this dictionary. What was the reason you decided to write the dictionary?

A Well, I was hoping that maybe we could keep the Alsatian language going here and being so many people from here are going over to Alsace now I thought maybe the dictionary would help 'em in their traveling, those that couldn't speak it, they could anyway use the dictionary to get 'em by.

Q Okay. You spoke Alsatian all your life. Did you all write the Alsatian when you were young, too?

A No, we never wrote it.

Q Why?

A Well, there was no occasion to write it.

Q Well, is Alsatian a written language?

A No. Because it's -- you cannot teach it because there are at least five dialects in Alsace, every area has a little different dialect, so how are you going to teach -- how are you going to settle on one --

Q Oh, I see. But basically it's a dialect of the German language.

A The German language, yeah, and in Switzerland. We speak more of the Swiss German around Mulhouse and around Colmar they speak more the German dialect in the Black Forest, and further up; oh, maybe more Hollandish, but there's so many, it can vary from one town to the other it can vary, and they can only be five miles apart and the dialect can vary.

Q Now, the Alsatian over here is dying out, like I'm fifth generation, and my age group, there are a few people that still speak it. But none of us are speaking it with our children, so this dialect is probably going to die out. In Alsace is the Alsatian dialect still strong?

A Still strong and never die out, because they caught it in time and they're trying to teach all the little ones to speak Alsatian now. They let 'em go to school, they start French, but at home they speak Alsatian and they're starting to teach it in the University of Strausburg now. But in Sungau, that's the southern part of Alsace, all the little ones start Alsatian.

Q What do you mean all the little ones?

A The little children in that part of Alsace. They speak

Alsatian when they're little.

Q At home?

A At home. Now, in the cities, that's where they speak French.

Q Okay.

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Ralph L. Tschirhart
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