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INTERVIEW WITH WALTER HOOPS
INTERVIEWED BY IRENE CORTINOVIS
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PART 1

CORTINOVIS: This morning I have with me Mr. Walter Hoops of St. Louis, Missouri and this is Irene Cortinovis of the Archive and Manuscript Collection. We are making this tape on August 17, 1971, for the Oral History section of the Archives. Mr. Hoops came from Germany and this tape is meant to accompany our immigration series. So I'll just let you start, Walter, and tell us everything you want us to know about your life.

HOOPS: I was born in Hanover, Germany in 1902, and went to public school and high school, and when as an apprentice in a commercial establishment that eventually sent me to various parts of Europe that had branch offices in Paris, Barcelona, Vienna, and other cities in Germany. When they opened a branch in America, in the United States, they sent me to New York to help open the office there in 1927.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of business was this, Walter?

HOOPS: We furnished and made architectural supplies and school supplies. It was a huge company, with branches all over the world and about 3,000 employees. The main factory was in Hanover which was the headquarters of this company. And that's how I got in, because we happened to be in the same town. I worked in New York and was traveling salesman for this company called Pelican Works. Pelican was our trademark, the bird, the pelican bird. But when Hitler came to power in Germany, even before he became chancellor, many of our American customers and many of them were Jewish did not want to buy any merchandise made or had the stamp on "Made in Germany." And even a number of boards of education that we supplied with material, they adopted resolutions that no supplies should be purchased any more that would be coming from Germany. And then, of course, Hitler took over entirely and there was nothing they could do but close their office. After I came back to Germany at that time, they invited us to come back, all of us, but I like it here as a matter of fact, I liked it here from the very first day. I knew that I would never go back. The first day when I landed in New York I settled with some people in the Bronx. I walked around, the first of May, it was. I just loved the people. I just loved the way they were walking, none of that European stiffness in them, loosely, I liked the husbands pushing the baby wagons. In Germany none of them would do that. Now probably they will, but in those days it was unheard of. My father would never carry a package, my mother was loaded sometimes, but he wouldn't, it was absolutely unheard of, it wasn't done. And I liked this kind of spirit here, I don't know. Even many years later when I came to Germany sometime, I came out of the

station in Hamburg, and walked around, and somebody asked me if I wanted to sell American dollars on the black market. I says, "How in the world do you know that I come from America?" I didn't know the man. "Oh," he says, "the way you walk." You see apparently Americans have a jog, a springy way of walking, I mean not that type of stiffness that probably comes from military training, I don't know, where it comes from, but I think this man was right. I think I also could point out and we'd be in Germany on the street, point out without knowing the person whether he was form Germany or whether he was an American.

CORTINOVIS: Before you came over, did you have any military training?

HOOPS: No, in the war, I served in some kind of auxiliary force in 1918 when the revolution came. I was just sixteen. That was only to help the demobilization process, because many of the soldiers just dropped their guns and ran and walked away from it. To keep some kind of discipline, they formed some kind of auxiliary military force. They gave us all kinds of decorations, so that we had some kind of authority. I was supposed to be an attendant of some kind, but that didn't last long. After a while, after the soldiers were all gone and we had seen to it that they did not go certain places where they were not supposed to go. I mean, to avoid venereal diseases and all things like that. I mean, when a big army like we had in France all of a sudden thousands of people come home, and without waiting for their separation, for the day that was set, the officers had no control about them any more. If the officers had tried to do anything about them, they would have killed them and they did, many of them. I mean, not many of them, but they killed some of them I know. So they hired neutral people to help them out, you know. We had bands around our arms, to guide them to certain health places, information about trains and things like that, so, and de-lousing stations, you know. Soldiers, they, were full of lice, and for about a year, we helped t get them back to normal. But I haven't seen, I have no military record of any kind. But my brother, my older brother was a volunteer and was killed in the First World War in 1916 before Verdun. And when I went to France in 1923, when I worked for this company in Paris for a while, I visited the battlefields which were still preserved at that time, and I even tried to find his grave. But it was impossible, miles and miles and miles of cemeteries, the most depressing thing you can think of, looking for somebody's name. So I gave up. But when I came here to the United States, I was settled first in New York, then they opened a branch in St. Louis for shipping purposes, and that's how I came to St. Louis. And then they closed up their branch in New York. I could have gone back to Germany, but as I said I liked it here, and my wife had come over in 1928 and lived with me here in St. Louis. So we decided to stay here and become American citizens. We have never regretted it. i became a citizen already in New York and in 1932 my wife became a citizen in 1933 here in St. Louis, after we had moved here. So we settled here and I worked for various companies and, of course, we were in the midst of depression. And I had a variety of jobs, wherever one could get to keep going. Fortunately, my wife was a dancer—not a ballet dancer, but you call it, dancing, I think you call it here, barefoot a la Isadora Duncan. And she established some reputation here. She taught at John Burroughs School, you know the more affluent people, and Monticello in Godfrey, Illinois, and Webster College. And many times it was her money that kept us going. But I always had a job of some kind, sometimes I had two or three at the same time. But we managed to survive. And we even managed to buy a house, in those days, when I think about it, it was a quite an optimistic thing to do. But we were determined to make it go, and we made it. We had a daughter who became a chemist and has a good job, and we

are now retired. We enjoy ourselves very much. We like it here very much. Well, as a German, I got in contact with a number of organizations here in St. Louis, that I already knew from New York, especially of a political nature. I am not much of a mixer at social affairs, but I was very much interested to fight Hitler. I am politically a Socialist, and he had of course arrested many of my friends in Germany and killed quite a few of them in his concentration camps. And here in New York, in America, they tried to organize the Germans to collect money to help their cause in Germany. We have, you know the Bund here, as it was called. And so we...all those who were opposed to Hitler, we formed a national organization that was called the National Society Against Fascism, I think it was called. And I was their financial, national financial secretary. We had got people that had escaped from Hitler to make speaking tours; we financed those speaking tours so that they would alarm all the other societies all over the country what the Nazis were up to.

CORTINOVIS: So, then, what year was this, Walter?

HOOPS: This must have been in the thirties then, thirty-four, thirty- five, thirty-six...

CORTINOVIS: Shortly after Hitler came to power.

HOOPS: Yes, I mean, before we actually got into the war. I mean, we prevented the Nazis from collecting thousands and thousands of dollars that they had been siphoning off the treasuries of the German societies here, telling them that it was for some charitable purposes. And many times these motions were now defeated because we had our man in those organizations to prevent this. We collected money, too, for the victims of fascism, and later one, when the first Jewish refugees started to come here, we formed what was called the Wiedergutgemachts Committee that was that was meant to make good the evil that Hitler had done. In my house, for instance, we had the third floor set aside for these people that would come over from Germany...so that they had a few days a home...until the Jewish Committee could find other places for them either here in St. Louis or in other parts of this part of the country. Because most of the Jews when they came, they wanted to stay in New York or in Chicago, but there were not enough people there to take care of them, so they wanted them to go all over the country...many of them came here to St. Louis. And one of the refugees was a young lady from Berlin and another a writer from Vienna, and the three of us started a book shop. Book, Record and Print Shop, we called it, the Three Arts Shop. We established a business on Delmar, 5717 Delmar.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, I remember that.

HOOPS: And then later on, it was moved to University City.

CORTINOVIS: I wonder, Walter, was this unusual among the Germans in America at this time, to be so helpful to the Jews? Was there feeling against the Jews? Among some German Americans?

HOOPS: Well, . . .yes, yes, there is very little sympathy for the Jewish people among the Germans, especially the plain German people; the people that came from the country and form the villages and from the small towns.

CORTINOVIS: How do you account for this?

HOOPS: First of all, it may be, it probably is, a religious prejudice. They still believe that the Jews killed their Lord. Secondly, many of them have been victimized by Jewish merchants and have paid probably more than they should for things they bought. Many of the peddlers that we have in Europe before the First World War traveled in villages in wagons and in cars, they were Jewish people.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, like some of the big merchants who came, who later became rich Americans. Even some of the big banking families came and started like that, the Straubs, and the Strausses, and the Leopolds, the Loebes.

HOOPS: Yes, they were also the only way, outlet, that these people in the villages could buy pots and pans and things. I know, my Aunt was living in the country and I spent my vacation there all the time. I remember this man would come around while I was there, loaded with all kinds of utensils and things which was for her the only means of getting the things. But of course this man charged her more, and she later maybe came into a city nearby, and I'm sure that she resented the fact that she had to pay more for it, not realizing that this man went out of his way to reach her instead of her going wherever the stuff was. And that this man had overhead, his wagon, his horse, and he had to take care of them, and that whenever he went any place to stay, that they over-charged him, too.. Because they took advantage, they knew that he needed a place to stay and they charged him more then they would have charged other people. But there is latent anti-Semitism all over Europe which is kept in control by the government, by people, that it cannot assert itself. But once it is given official standing. . .

CORTINOVIS: As in Russia. . .

HOOPS: As in Russia, in Nazi Germany, in other places, then of course, all this old stuff from years back comes out and becomes very ugly. When I was reading, I am working on the period of the Reformation right now, there were people, not Martin Luther so much, but people connected with the movement at that time, men like Ulrich von Houte, and a man like Etienne Dulais, a Frenchman. I was amazed to see how often there were pogroms in Germany, in cities like Spier, in Worms, in other cities against the Jews for some reason. They believed that Jews killed Christian children and used their blood for certain ceremonies. And the people, the common people in the country, they believed that. They had no way of checking up and even within the churches, within the Lutheran as well as the Catholic churches, no attempt was made to stop this. They felt that the Jews should assimilate. Luther wrote a tremendous anti-Semitic treatise because he was disappointed that the Jews would not join him in forming his protestant church. As a socialist, anti-Semitism is incompatible with being a socialist, I mean you cannot hate anybody because you are an international person. You work with all nationalities; nationalities, color, creed, sex doesn't make any difference, I mean you treat everybody on an equal basis. And so this group that we formed were mainly the liberal and the socialist element in America.

CORTINOVIS: Of the German-Americans.

HOOPS: Of the German-Americans.

CORTINOVIS: So that's the group that was able to work with the Jewish Committee? In the

various cities, oh that's very interesting.

HOOPS: As I said, my third floor on Maple Avenue was a regular hotel, they came in and out. They came for two or three days, then the Committee sent them, they gave them money and travel expense, then they left town and came back again because they didn't like it. You know, it was just like sending a fellow from Vienna, for instance, to Cape Girardeau, I remember. Well, a man like that is never happy in a small town, from Vienna, as a matter of fact, this particular man went back to Vienna because. . .

CORTINOVIS: . . .a more cosmopolitan atmosphere. . .

HOOPS: So the Jewish Committee could not be so particular about it, they had to get rid of them. Almost, they got fifty, sixty Jews sometimes coming at one time, you know, and there were not enough places here to take care of them. But they did a wonderful job. I remember one day when Hitler marched into southern France, there were hundreds of thousands of refugees piled up in Bordeaux, in Marseilles and Bordeaux, and I signed 99 affidavits in one day in some office, vouching for these Jewish people who wanted to come over.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, that's in '39, then?

HOOPS: That must have been '39. Every affidavit I signed, I testified that I had so much money in the bank and so much, that was that was all necessary. But I didn't have enough for one, but at that time there was no question asked. They did not investigate. They sent these things over, and later on I got several letters, well six letters, I would say, from people that used my affidavit and actually made it and thanked me for doing this, asking me if they personally couldn't come to St. Louis and thank me in person. CORTINOVIS: Even one would have made it very worth while. HOOPS: We were very, very happy to help. When I get letters now from those people who get those dollar care packages, it just, I sometimes cry when I read them, you know, what you can do with one dollar, 20 pounds of food, you know, an earthquake in Greece wherever this or wherever they have it right now to Pakistan or India. But these things like the affidavits, we try to do good, to show the German, that there were Germans that were not of the Nazi stripe. And many of the Jews, I mean, the American Jews, they appreciated it very much that they were assured that there were some people here and of course we were a minority, it doesn't mean that all of them were as bad as the Germans and Hitler in Germany. But it did not come out publicly, they did not want to be involved, they maybe gave some money secretly for some support, but they didn't want to get involved.

CORTINOVIS: In St. Louis, beside you and your wife, who else was interested in this work?

HOOPS: Well, we had an organization here, we have, still have which was called the Workman's Benefit Fund, it is now known by. But it was a sickness and health benefit society which the Germans founded when they came over here in the 1890's and 80's. They found that there was no health insurance here, see we have compulsory health insurance like Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Germany since 1880.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yes, I know that Germany was way ahead of the United States in that respect.

HOOPS: Bismarck did that, not because he loved the people but he wanted to stem the socialist tide that was growing and growing. So he thought he was buying them off by giving them compulsory health and old age and invalid funds, and all kinds of things like that. And, well, we got used to that and when we came, when they came over here, they didn't find anything like that so they founded their own. It became the biggest, and I would say still is the biggest German organization in St. Louis, because it was built up on the fraternal principle. Anytime you build something where for some small dues you get some benefits, then you get something permanent because these people are not going to come in and out because they don't want to lose those benefits that they have paid for. Any ethnic group that builds an organization on the fraternal principle of paying something out whether it's a death benefit, a health benefit, they are the ones that are surviving. Because there the people have an asset that they don't want to lose. Just like thousands of people belong to unions, not because they believe in the unions, but they know that that's the only way they get decent wages and all the fringe benefits and so on and so on. So they have to stick to it. They are what Walter Reuther called "pork chowers." You know they believe in pork chops. There's nothing wrong with it, I mean, I do not criticize it. Well, I belong to the Workman's Benefit Fund, still do, they own a big camp in Pacific of 210 acres of land, which was meant originally for people who had been sick to go out there for a while and recuperate. They have camps like that in all the big cities...that part is not in existence any more, but the camp is still there. It's a beautiful place; I go there quite frequently. They are the ones really...out of their membership, we recruited the people for this anti-Nazi league. There was also another small group here for a while. The republican elements in Germany had formed a defense organization against the Nazi storm troopers and that was called the Reichsbanner. They were para-military people, kind of soldiers; they drilled like soldiers and we had that for a while here, too. But it didn't go over too well. But there were among the liberal and the left elements, including the Communists, ...at that time, there were a number of people that formed these groups to defeat the Hitler manipulations here in America. They were what I call the "free-thinkers", what the Americans call the "Rationalist Group", which was started in 1832 in Hermann, Missouri, and was incorporated here in Missouri in 1850. It was called the Freigemeinde of St. Louis, which means the free congregation of St. Louis. They had leaders like ministers of a parish; they had Sunday services. They could marry, and they could baptize...all the prerogatives of a religious organization. All the people that came in 1848, they were almost by definition, anti-clerical, because the Church was in alliance with the powers, with the establishment, with the king, with the princes, because in Germany, they are paid employees of the government. Every minister, every priest, everybody connected with the church, gets a salary every year from the state. Not like in America where every congregation has to pay for its own people. So they naturally had to support the power and since we were the liberal elements in 1848, were against the powers, we wanted to have a Republic. They found out very soon that they could never depend upon any support from the churches, except a few priests at the lower level,...you always find those, you know...and maybe pastors, too, that will go along with you. But the hierarchy, the system, was so everybody from Carl Schurz down...Carl Schurz, the greatest German-American...as Mr. O'Connor calls him...the "good" American....they were all anti-clerical...! mean, they were not fighters. I mean they did not make speeches against the church, but they were just...they just didn't work with them. They felt they were on the other side of the barricades. And these people founded then the Freigemeinde because they didn't want to go to church, but they wanted to have a Sunday School for the children. They wanted to have a place where they could get married, could have their lectures, and they could invite prominent people. They

way the Ethical Societies operate now is very, very similar, exactly the same set up.

CORTINOVIS: Is it? The Ethical Society in St. Louis is about the closest to the Freigemeinde.

HOOPS: That's right. We gave to the Ethical Society last year our whole cash fortune of \$26,000, because we felt that they were the ones that would continue our work.

CORTINOVIS: This is when you decided that you would sell your building? Suppose you tell us about that.

HOOPS: Well, we had a building first on Twentieth and Dodier Streets, as a matter of fact. We had a building first somewhere else in North St. Louis. When the public school system was established in St. Louis, we gave this building to the Board of Education to use as a public school.

CORTINOVIS: Oh? When was that?

HOOPS: Nineteen...whenever the public school system was started in St. Louis. They had a little building; I have a picture of it...around 1900. Maybe I can give this little pamphlet to you to go through it because it's... I'm still a member of the Ethical Society here. That's the first organization...American organization...I joined. And I delivered, oh, two or three months ago...a lecture there on Spinoza at the Sunday service. And I'm going to do more lecturing this season, and probably also to other societies. I have already received several invitations to come to other cities, because I don't charge anything for the lectures...where they probably have to pay for some of the other people that come to them. But this Freigemeinde group, the German group, they formed in 1956, a national organization called the American Rationalists Federation.

CORTINOVIS: In 1956? Or 1856?

HOOPS: No, no, 1956. This is modern now...modern. And until then, they were just separate. I mean they were a group of their own, but rather where their impetus came from. But they formed this national organization threw the magazine The American Rationalist of which I am the editor. That's why I wanted to put it in, you know, so that gets in there. The most... most of the Germans that came over here were small town farming people. They came from Southern Germany because of the inheritance laws. Any estate had to be divided equally among a number of children. Finally, the plot they lived on, the estate or the farm would be getting too small. They just had to get away; they had to get out. So many of these people came from there. I would say 75% of all the immigrants in America are southern Germans and southern Europeans. In Northern Germany, we don't have those inheritance laws. The farm stays intact for the oldest son, and he has to pay out in money the other children that are there. But the estate or farm cannot be broken up.

CORTINOVIS: That's called entail, isn't it?

HOOPS: I think that the Saelic Law...some kind of an old Anglo-Saxon Law, I think it is. And so they were able to...I think the main reason is that the northern part of Germany is not as good soil as in the South. In the South, a man can live on little...on a little piece of land.

But in northern part of Germany, you need quite a bit of land to survive. And that may have been also one of the reasons for this. But very few people, comparatively speaking, in America, came from the northern part of Europe. They mostly as from the southern part. And they are people that are sociable. They like to get together and enjoy their company; the northern Germans are more of the type that like to be alone. They don't mix very well with other people. I was surprised when I was in Frankfurt the first time, I was in a restaurant, and I looked for a table where nobody was sitting, being a northern German. And I didn't sit down a minute when somebody came and says, "Oh, I'm glad that somebody's already here." He sat down and started to talk to me like he was an old friend, and he said, "I hate to eat alone." I said, "You picked the right man," and he laughed, and I told him that I was just sitting down because I wanted to be alone. And he wanted to move away, and I said, "Oh, no," I says, "stay right here." So, we became acquainted. But these people founded all kinds of societies when they came here. I mean, as a matter of fact, they didn't know English too well; they needed some people from the same neighborhood where they came from. They found societies based on the country where they came from...Bavaria or Swabia, or other parts of the country...Austrians. And they also helped each other get jobs. If you came as a new immigrant, that was the place to go. If you were a carpenter, you would find a carpenter there who knew where they needed somebody to work, and so they helped each other along. And they started all these Landsmanns Schaffne, as they call it, based on the place where you were born, where the neighborhood, the country where you come from. And then there was this tradition of the Turners, the gymnastic societies. When Napoleon conquered Prussia in 1806, he prohibited all military formations in Prussia. He didn't want an army in back of his army when he was marching into Russia. So, one man by the name of Jahn, who has a monument in Forest Park, he developed a system of gymnastics which was very, very close to military drill...so that if the time would ever come again where military would be needed, as in 1813, they would be ready. They defeated Napoleon after he came back from Russia. Jahn called this Turner.

CORTINOVIS: The Turners put up that monument, didn't they? It's right there by the canal at the foot of Art Hill.

HOOPS: Yes, that's right, and he developed this system so that at the time, they had military marches and drills and everything, but all under the cover...this was just meant to keep people physically fit. He was a patriot, and he wanted to help his country to remain strong so when the time came to beat Napoleon, he did. And for that he became a national figure, and they call him now the Turnvater, the father of the Turners. Well, this tradition was kept up in Germany after the War of Liberation from France in 1813. And there were Turnereins all over the cities and every neighborhood. And they gave demonstrations. And when these people came over here, they started the Turnvereins over here, too. And they had...I don't know... I understand there were sixteen Turnereins here at one time in St. Louis. There's only one of them left now, the Concordia Turners, that have their hall on Gravois. Well, you remember where.

CORTINOVIS: Yes...H

HOOPS: And they went very well, because they have not only German people, but many Americans come there for physical fitness programs and so on. All of the others have fallen by the wayside, I think, the victim of the automobile, perhaps.

CORTINOVIS: But with the renewed interest in physical fitness perhaps if they hung on...

HOOPS: Maybe, maybe, they could, but I think that most of the Germans, after awhile when they're not young anymore, they develop pouches and and become rather comfortable and lazy and don't want to. Those exercises are not easy. They're hard, and I think they...just one after another... have folded up.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever belong to the Turners? HOOPS: No, I was never a great physical fitness man. When I was a young man in Germany, I belonged to the Wandervogel movement, the hiking birds... young people that first developed...that threw their stiff collars away. We were the hippies of our age. We also had long hair. It always seems to have something to do with hair. We also got away from all the stiffness in clothing, and we used to wear short pants and comfortable shoes when we hiked, and we were just looked down on and made fun of...just as much as the older generation is now down on some of the hippies. So, we sometimes...at home...make remarks about them. I always remind my wife, "Don't forget what they talked about when you were their age." We weren't as unkempt as some of these hippies are. Being Germans, we were still neat in our...

CORTINOVIS: ... appearance.

HOOPS: But still we were different. I remember the first time I didn't even comb my hair properly...that I didn't have a part...my hair on this side and on the other side, but just combed back...was practically a revolution to my father and mother.

CORTINOVIS: It doesn't seem very important does it?

HOOPS: That is for them a symbol of rebelling...of not being part of their system. So, I never went in too much for the Turners. As I said, my interests were mainly political.

CORTINOVIS: I would like to hear more about your Socialist leanings.

HOOPS: We had a Socialist Party here...local; we had several local parties for awhile...German speaking and an English local, and we campaigned for Norman Thomas. He ran several times for congressman. We were very active here in St. Louis in organizing the C.I.O.

CORTINOVIS: Excuse me...before we get away from the actual political party organization...you campaigned for the national ticket...Norman Thomas. In what years would that be?

HOOPS: Well, I don't know...he ran so many times. I don't know...we supported him every time, of course.

CORTINOVIS: And was there a local ticket?

HOOPS: Yes, we had people on the local ticket. We had people running for alderman and mayor.

CORTINOVIS: On the Socialist ticket? And on the state ticket?

HOOPS: Yes, we ran governor, we had people...! remember one time we came home from the convention and the man who we had chosen, Phillip Miller, we had put him up for governor, and he was looking out the window and a fellow asked me, "Who's that?" I said, "That's the Governor of Missouri." I said not even future. Well, all of a sudden, he got all the attention. He said, "What happened?" And he said, "I thought you were the Governor of Missouri," and he almost knocked me over.

CORTINOVIS: That's in the thirties, then?

HOOPS: That could be. I don't know. We came home from somewhere in Chicago...from some convention. But we had local tickets. Of course, this is all recorded, probably at the Board of Election Commissioners.

CORTINOVIS: And about the connection with the C.I.O.?

HOOPS: Well, we were very active because Walter Reuther was a member of the Socialist Party, and his father was a member. We felt that the unions should be organized on an industrial basis. We were not very much in favor of craft unions, you know; the old type of guilds, such as they mean now. We wanted all the people in my industry...which weren't organized at all until Lewis from the coal miners started it, because in the mines you cannot separate people because of their trade...because they are all coal miners. So, when he started the C.I.O. and Walter Reuther took hold of the automobile workers union...which was controlled, to a large extent, by the Communists in the beginning, we gave him a helping hand to throw the Communists out and make it an American union. I mean...democratically controlled by the Socialists...because we were Democrats...Social Democrats. We would not dictate or anything like that. We were quite active. I mean, I was connected here with the steel workers organizing committee for a while. We organized all kinds of little plants and established the American steel workers and then the Automobile Workers Union, as it exists today. His brother, Victor, came to St. Louis many times. We worked with him quite a lot. He's still alive, I understand. I saw his picture in the paper not too long ago. But we had our meetings usually in the south St. Louis area in public libraries, and we had a headquarters on St. Louis Avenue somewhere...I forget now where...what the side street was called. Until 1932, it was not a big organization, but I would say we had probably two or three hundred active members. I would say about 75% German and Hungarian...quite a few Hungarians...and Bohemians...but definitely foreign born. Here in St. Louis, it never became a real American party. Some of the meetings they tried to speak German. The other day when I looked through some old newspapers, a friend of mine is writing or has written a book on the general strike that was in St. Louis in '88, I think it was...some of the minutes of the unions were written in German, and that's why he wanted me to translate what they had decided on. So, we had one of these machines, you know, that throw the newspaper on the screen, you know...

CORTINOVIS: Microfilm...

HOOPS: ...microfilm...and he wrote it down while I was translating it for him. But the enduring societies that we have here in St. Louis are the singing societies. German people like to sing, and they organized any number of singing societies, I know. You know, how

many there were...I mean you looked it up. We haven't that many anymore, but they have survived better than any other group. I don't know what's going to happen in fifteen or twenty years, but they are still...most of them ...are still functioning. The only thing that I...that has also been a handicap, which I think important to mention, is that many of these... I mean, the Germans when they came over here, they brought their class system with them. In Germany, we have classes...you belong to the laboring group, you are professional, and you...very, very few changes occur from one group into the other; it happens. In my generation, my father was...came...from a farm. He became a postal carrier, and I managed to get into the managerial-commercial group. And there was a transformation, you know, in one generation. My father could hardly wait, he had a hard time passing all the examinations. I guess if I hadn't coached him all the time, he would never have made it. But that happens...but doesn't happen often. And in Germany, if you were in a group...were not a white-collar man, you could not join a singing society or a Turnverein where they had white-collar people. They just wouldn't take you. So, they brought this system with them. And so many of these societies... they had bourgeois societies... I mean, white-collar societies, that's called...and blue-collar societies. And they wouldn't cooperate with each other; they wouldn't even speak to each other; they wouldn't work together or nothing.

CORTINOVIS: You mean the German-Americans who brought that system here?

HOOPS: They brought it with them. I mean, it's natural; if you come from a country, you bring this with you. And so, for instance, what we have today here in St. Louis, the Liederkrantz Club is a typical bourgeois society of professional people, and owners, people of that kind, owners of stores. While the society which I belong to which is the Worworts is the typical blue-collar society, today it doesn't mean anything anymore, because I'm sure if anyone of our people from the Worwaerts would like to join the Liederkrantz, they would have no trouble. They would take him; first of all, they need singers; secondly, there are no longer these lines of distinction. They are not that strict here. Many of our people, I'm sure, make more money than some of the people they have in the Liederkrantz Society, as far as money is concerned. But, years ago, this was...these distinctions were made...and, of course, in many people they still linger on. I talked to some...one...of the Liederkrantz men at the picnic last Sunday at the Schwabenfein. The Schwabenfein is based, not on class distinction, but on the country where you come from... from the neighborhood you come from...parts of the country. But they are mostly working people, and he was quite amazed that these kinds of people, as he called it, could draw so much support and so many. It was not what he said, but the way he said it, you see. So, these singing societies are still functioning, and they have a paper which is called The Sanger-Zeitung, which means "the singing paper" and I am the editor of that paper. I just wanted to mention that, too. To put it in there...

CORTINOVIS: I want you to.

HOOPS: ...which is a bilingual paper...which is written half in German and half in English, but it gets more and more in the English, less and less German all the time, because some of these people that send me their reports of their affairs, they are much better...they can express themselves better in English than they can in German. Now, here in St. Louis, we have...an attempt has been made to start a school for teaching children German. The German parents, they call it "The Deutscheschuleverein." And the big affair that we have on the 19th of September of this year will be for the benefit...partly for...the benefit of this group. They rent

school rooms on Saturdays, and they have teachers and they try to perpetuate the knowledge of German among their children. And we have a group here in St. Louis called the Deutschenkulturverein, and I think you should probably get one of them to do this also. And the leading people in this group are people that left Germany; some of them two, three hundred years ago. Their families...they went to Bohemia or Hungary or other parts where they were asked to come in...to bring with them, you know...their products, and they formed German colonies like the Volga Germans in Russia.

CORTINOVIS: And the Sudetenland.

HOOPS: The Sudetenland. But when Hitler came in, you know, these people many of them sided with Hitler, and when Hitler was defeated, then they were pushed out of their country. Because they, like the Czechs...the Czechs kicked out every German there was in Bohemia after their defeat... after Hitler was defeated. And the Hungarians, many of them, left not so much because they were pushed out, but they didn't want to live under Communists. And these people are now active in this Deuschenkulturverein, this cultural club. And they are the ones that push this German language school. And I had quite a debate with their leader, not so long ago. His name was Peter Schuster who came from, I think, somewhere in Hungary, but I'm not sure, and he has established himself very well here as a building contractor and is doing very well. But he is German-Nationalist, Germany uber alles, so when he said the other day at a meeting that he was proud of being a German, and we should all be proud of being Germans, I took him up on it. And I said, "I am not proud of being a German." And he was quite upset, and he...I...said, "Many, many times I am ashamed of being a German." And then I mentioned some of the things, you know of, the two world wars...the first one, we could have prevented it if we wanted to. The second, we started deliberately and then, of course, all the things that went on under the Nazis. I said, "If you want to be proud of this..." He said. All right, I'm not, but I love Germany." You can love somebody in spite of the faults; just like a mother will always love her child whether the child turns out good or bad. I love German culture, German music; I love German literature, because I was brought up that way, but to say that I am proud of it, that I wouldn't say. And he was quite upset about it, but I think he's thinking about it. I think this distinction has to be made, if you want to be honest and, especially, if you want to be an honest American. Because how can an American be proud of things like that that went on that cost millions and millions of lives and money, all the misery that Germany has caused in the last fifty years. And there's no question about it, that we were involved, that there was no need for it.

CORTINOVIS: Are they perhaps thinking of the German culture than of the political traditions?

HOOPS: Well, if they were, it would be fine, then I would be feeling just like them, but you can't be proud of a culture; you can love a culture. I mean, how can you be proud...I mean, the Hungarian...anybody has a culture, you know, you love; you have a feeling for it, but to be proud of something that has so many sides, and so many evil things, too. I mean, in my opinion, I like to make a distinction there. I am also not very much in favor of perpetuating the German language in America.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, that's surprising to me, Walter, since you belong to these German-American organizations, and also since you seem to be so active.

HOOPS: Well, most of the societies do not speak German any more. They start sometimes for the first five minutes, and then the first one comes up, because most of them are here that long that they can express them- selves much better in English.

CORTINOVIS: Isn't that the glue that holds the German-American societies together, though?

HOOPS: No.

CORTINOVIS: No? Then what do you think is important...the most important... about an ethnic society?

HOOPS: It's the social part. The social part of having friends, of having meetings together, singing together. Our society sings mostly German songs, very seldom we sing English songs. But many of our other groups in other cities, they sing quite a few English songs. Because they have more members that are from other American groups. While we stuck to our policy of only having Germans.

CORTINOVIS: There must be something about a common heritage, though, because I notice in going to your affair, there was a wide range of ages.

HOOPS: Well, you don't see very many young people there. I mean, the young people that you see there...they are for some reason or other induced by other people to go there. They don't go by their free will.

CORTINOVIS: With their parents, perhaps?

HOOPS: Well, also, for instance, these German kulurverein, they have a dance group, a group that makes dances, German folk dances, and they perform at all kinds of festivals. Like yesterday, they performed a number of dances. Now everybody...first of all, many people like to perform; there's a ham in all of us, as they say. Secondly, they meet boys and girls there, so that it's a very nice way to get together and have a good time. Also, they get paid for this; I mean, they get a little contribution from the society where they do this. And they can go and make trips, and they can do things together.

CORTINOVIS: A little excitement, maybe.

HOOPS: That's right. I would say the minute this is over, that they get into college, let's say, or in business, or work some place, that these connections will stop because then they will meet American people, American boys, American girls, and they will wind up, most of them, marrying somebody of this country.

CORTINOVIS: Let me just ask you this, is there now, or has there even been in the past to your knowledge at least, any connection between the German-American societies and the other ethnic societies...like the Irish or the Polish?

HOOPS: Very little. And I have regretted it. I mean, I have asked many times that we should go to their affairs and they should come to ours. I did that once when I was in Dayton, Ohio. I went to a Polish-American Democratic Alliance. And they were so happy that somebody

outside of their group came. And I told a member that I was from St. Louis; I was not even from Dayton, you know, but from St. Louis...which, after all... that was the year when the Cardinals had won the pennant. I was...I could have had everything, so the fellow said to me, as though a member, "Anything we can do for you?" So, I said, "Yes, you certainly can. You get me one of your Polish dancers, and you play me a nice Polish polka, and I would like to dance." And so we had the whole platform to ourselves, and that girl could dance! And the Polish...their polkas are even wilder than ours! But I was really one of them. I still remember the expression of joy and happiness that some other group came to visit them.

CORTINOVIS: It's only when the Visitor's Center or the Chamber of Commerce gets together today that you have that much connection.

HOOPS: That's right. Only once that I remember when the Czechs had something...the Bohemians. The Bohemians are really a German speaking group...I mean, the old Bohemians. Bohemia was a province of Austria, and German was the language that all the official business was conducted in...the schools, the courts, was all German. And Czech was only spoken at home, you know, on the farms in the country. Well, I am now retired after fifteen years as export manager for a surgical instrument company and doing a number of things that I have been wanting to do all the time, especially working on a book on Diderot, the French encyclopedias, and his friends. A study that I have started many years ago, but was never able to give proper time to. I also published a book very recently called Our Rationalist Heritage which was dedicated to many men and women who during the ages have spoken up for their convictions and, in many cases, have been punished and killed for it. I like to write and talk wherever I have an opportunity. I have been at several universities and have given talks, seminars on the philosophy, background, history of the rationalist or free thought movement in Europe and in this country. Most of the time, most of the youngsters and many of the teachers were quite surprised at all the things that have been going on without getting into the text- books of philosophy. But there is so much to be known. I told a group at Antioch College not so long ago...on movements...that no teacher or instructor can know it all, so I wanted to warn them not to take it out on their teacher if some of the things I told them he had not mentioned in his lectures.