

Charlotte Palmer

The Fascinating Henry Schmulbach

Michael Nobel Kline: Today is the 24th of July, the day after the Italian Festival. And so--Say, "My name is."

Charlotte Palmer: Charlotte Palmer, Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corporation. I'm the director of corporate communications and a native of Wheeling, West Virginia.

MNK: And your date of birth?

CP: March 6, 1944.

MNK: Okay. So you grew up here.

CP: I did, in Brooke County.

MNK: Not right in Wheeling.

CP: Right. Born in Wheeling, and I was raised in Brooke County.

MNK: Can you talk a little bit about your interest in history?

CP: Yes. Well, part of that sprung from my being on the board of the West Virginia Humanities Council. I think I've always been interested in the history of my own family for one. And I've done extensive research going back three or four generations. And actually having photographs of my parents' parents. I have four photographs. I have eight photographs of great grandparents and even three photographs of three of sixteen great, great grandparents. And they were all born in north Georgia or in North Carolina. So even as, as a kid researching my own family has caused me to be interested in history. And in getting on the board of the Humanities Council enriched that. And suddenly, I guess, working in this building when I was transferred from the Pittsburgh office back to the Wheeling office in 1988. I suddenly walked into a historical building. And the, the sad side of it is that Wheeling Steel and the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel has lost track of its history and things have been destroyed. I don't think there's any one place where a lot of information on the company exists. And I think that's happened because of the change in management. We've had seven CEOs since our bankruptcy. And new people who have come in obviously could care less about historical. They have their own agendas, and rightfully so, to keep a company viable and, and keep it running and profitable and providing jobs for people in the Ohio and, and the Mon Valley. But little by little I've tried to, to recapture and to make available when someone calls and says that they have boxes of information, they're going to throw them away or do we want them. And I know Forest Kirkpatrick has quite a history on the company as well. And Bethany College, I think, is setting up something out there where they hope some day that Forest will, will leave what he has. And I've even collected some documents, some books and brochures, extra ones. And I've filed them in my attic at home. And hopefully that that's what I can do at some point in time. That people will be interested enough to combine

all of their information they've collected and be able to provide some sound historical information on steel. But coming into this building and knowing that there was going to be some first person ... that the Humanities Council has already on Eleanor Roosevelt, I just got interested. And it's not like I need another project. But I started digging into Henry. And of course Henry was a, a German immigrant who came over to this country and made a success of himself, did a lot for this city. And was not all that accepted, from what I hear. Now--And, again, all of this hasn't been documented, but because of his background and the fact that he was German, he was not always accepted in society in this town. And so I started digging. And my research, I hope, will go on and on, and I can just find out more. And this is an opportunity that someone else now is interested, and I can, can share some information and hopefully get some stuff back. But--

MNK: So he, he was--His family immigrated here when he was a child?

CP: Yes, I think he was eight or nine years old. In the 1850s.

MNK: Do, do you know where they came from and--

CP: I have the name of the city marked down. Right now I just can't think.

MNK: That's all right.

CP: Braunschweig, Germany. He was born November 12, 1844. So he was born one hundred years exactly before I was, to the year at least.

MNK: What, what was Wheeling like, do you imagine, when, when they arrived here?

CP: I imagine that Wheeling was a thriving port. I think it was busy. I think there were quite a few people, you know. National Road came through Wheeling in the, I think early part of the 1800s, 1820 maybe. And so it was a very busy place because of the river and because of National Road. A lot of progress. I think--Was it the--There was industry. We were known as the nail city. There were many nail manufacturers, manufacturing facilities here. A lot of breweries were here. I think there was a lot of commerce. There was a lot of wealth in Wheeling. The one home that's out where the Shriners, out Elm Grove, that was the first brick home, I think, built in, in the whole area of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. I'm trying to think of the woman who lived there. Lydia Shepherd, Lydia Moses Shepherd. And of course they had all the congressmen and--A lot of activity. I think there were a lot of things happening in this town. So they, Henry and his family came in at a time when there was a great deal of opportunity.

MNK: And, and a rather large German--

CP: Yes.

MNK: Population ...

CP: Yes. That's right. There's a, a document too called *The Wheeling Register*. Are you familiar with that? It was a book on society, *The Wheeling*, I think it was *The Wheeling Register*. You got listed in it. And, and that's why I assume they weren't always accepted. Because they weren't always in this registry of the movers and shakers of the time. But that might be one of the documents you'll want to try to get your hands on.

MNK: Have you, have you looked through it?

CP: I have not, no. And I'm not sure where they are and what form they're in, if they're thin documents or

if--

MNK: But there may have been one for every year?

CP: Could have been, um hmm. Yeah. And that's where my research needs to take me as well. You and I both probably should look at that.

MNK: So do you have any sense of, of Henry as a young man?

CP: Well, my sense, I, I like to think that Henry was very industrious, bright young man. Certainly from reading about his involvement in various industries and in banking, I think he was intelligent. I'm not sure where he got his education. That's the other thing that is missing. He was nine, I think, when he arrived in this country, so I don't know what school he might have attended here in town. I think somewhere in here it mentions the church, or at least where he left money.

MNK: That was the same year that the B & O was, was completed through ...

CP: Really.

MNK: Eighteen fifty-three, I believe.

CP: Okay.

MNK: Would be the year that he arrived.

CP: Okay.

MNK: I imagine that the city was ...

CP: Yeah. I would think that--I would like to think he was a very protective man. He had two sisters. And I'm not sure they married. That he was a family person. I think he was quite the ladies man from what I have been told. That he had a lot of girlfriends. He played the field. And liked racehorses and kept a lot of racehorses. It was W. W. Holloway that told me that his grandfather told him that Henry liked fast racehorses and fast women and not necessarily in that order. I also like to think that Pauline, Eva Pauline, was maybe more of a modern lady than, for her time. She insisted on marriage. And I think that's kind of, kind of good. Because I like to think that she not only became his wife, but then when he passed away she got all the money. So maybe some of the other lady friends that he had made the mistake and didn't marry him and then ended up with nothing, financially at least. But I think he was very active in the city. And I think--Well, the one photograph where he was on a bowling league shows that he was involved in, in some things outside of business too. But banking and horses and the brewery and real estate, it just seemed like he had all, all bases covered. Very bright man, I think.

MNK: Do, do we know roughly when the brewery was built or at least in what decade?

CP: Eighteen nineties, I believe. Yeah.

MNK: So the brewery in 1890, and then the, the--

CP: This building. Yeah, 1893, I think, was the incline as well. And then this building, I think the date on the front of it's 1905 when it was completed. But what's, what's interesting, from what I can tell, the brick in this building is the same as the brick in his home. That's one thing you can find out there, is some of the old bricks. And it appears to be the same, same color and the same kind. So that shows you he might have been able to kill two birds with one stone too. Although this building came before the house did. But--

MNK: Order a couple of extra carloads.

CP: Right, right.

MNK: Brick.

CP: Yeah. But the time--There was a time difference, so it might have been he just went back to the same source for, for brick.

MNK: Any other stories about him or impressions?

CP: Very little documented about him as his personal life. There's a lot of documentation on his business activities and his, what he was president of, or how much money in, like his will, and a list of assets. I guess you can only surmise about how the man was personally. But I said I would like to think that he was an intelligent businessman and, and worked against some, some hardships. Personal hardships, the fact he was German, and coming into a new area. But--

MNK: So the--What is the significance of, of this building? Somebody said it was Wheeling's first skyscraper.

CP: Yes, it was. And, and it was in, the first skyscraper in the state. Twelve stories. It's still the tallest in Wheeling, I think. I'm not sure, but I--If not, one of the, one of the tallest. And this building, it's, it's, again, unfortunate, I think during the time of our bankruptcy when headquarters were moved back to Wheeling, there was some thought that it would be restored to some of its original grandeur. And they started with the executive floor, which is this floor, twelfth floor. And the cost to do that today, for instance, stripping of all the wood, cleaning of all of the brass. And that would be an ongoing expense as well. That because, and I'm not sure of the exact amount of money that was spent renovating the twelfth floor, but whatever it was times twelve they knew they couldn't afford to do it throughout the whole building. So there are still some floors that weren't even renovated, which is--The seventh floor, we'll take a walk down there after a bit just to--It's dusty, and it's, maybe has linoleum that was put, put down in the '30s, but some of the original hardware's still on some of the doors. And I understand that you'd have to have a custom door made today just to accommodate the hardware. So anyone--I did make a deal with our maintenance man that's the head of office services here, I said, "If you'll get me one of the doorknobs, I'll get you one of the beer bottles in exchange," which he did. I have no use for a brass doorknob, but it's nice to have it. And if I kept it very long, I'd have to clean it about every year or every two years. So it hasn't been cleaned! But, but once it would be cleaned, it'd be a beautiful piece of hardware. But anyone building a home today would have to customize the door. I think they're two inch, two inch doors, that they don't make anymore. But Henry signed his last, one of his last wills, the one right before he got married, on the ninth floor of this building I have found from the articles that are in here. So to know he was in this building it's, it's kind of, kind of interesting.

MNK: So, so Eva made sure that all of his, all of his assets were going to pass on to her? She had a, what we would call a prenuptial agreement?

CP: Yes, prenuptial. And I don't know if that was his doing or hers. I said that wasn't necessarily, you know, they didn't include women too much in the business back in that time. But I like to think that maybe she was a stronger woman, kind of before her time. And the very fact that at age sixty-eight he got married for the first time. So it took some convincing on a woman forty-seven years old. Say, hey, you know, you

want to be around me or be with me, then I'll be your wife. Maybe that was her idea, maybe it was him finally saying, "Well, I've, I've played the field long enough, and it's time." But I think that's unique and unusual for a man to marry the first time at age sixty-eight. You had quite an adjustment, I would think.

MNK: ...

CP: Yeah. Yeah.

MNK: Do you know when--Oh, so Roney's Point was built just for her, I guess, huh?

CP: That was his, to be his retirement home, yes. Um hmm.

MNK: How--We don't know how long he had been going with her or--

CP: No.

MNK: Whether he had her in mind when he built Roney's Point?

CP: No. I'd like to find out, but I don't know if--I think there's some Birchys still in Wheeling that may know. I mean she died in 1936, so there could be some--I'm sure there weren't any, any heirs of theirs, but there might be close friends. And she had nieces and nephews and had family from her side. That probably there's still some documentation out there that we can't find.

MNK: Um hmm. What--I'm just trying to think of other possible sources.

CP: Um hmm.

MNK: Recollection that people would have.

CP: Well, I think when you go through a lot of this information, and it's something that I said works, when you see one source or you see one document, it sometimes leads you to, to other documents and other sources. I know there's a woman here in town that collects post cards. And she's supposed to have 100,000 of them or something. Now, I'm sure that woman's got some post cards of either the brewery or the incline. And that might be something else that could be found. I'm sure that in the library or in the county clerk's office, if you went to cross reference under the brewery, perhaps, you know, with all the business that went on at the brewery, perhaps you would run into something else. Or then all the names that are listed, of his closest friends, go back and, and see--Like who was best man at his wedding. I don't know that, but maybe somewhere that's documented. I'm not sure though too many people have the interest that I do in historical figures. I think here in Wheeling we have very prominent people that we know very little about. Walter Reuther. I mean a modern-day person that did so much for the labor movement. But if you go back to, to this time when Wheeling was growing and when it was thriving, there's so many people that--The Holloway family for one. I mean their influence in steel and--One thing I will say as far as Henry Schmulbach, I believe he gave back quite a bit to the community. I, I think he gave back to the people. From what I've been able to find in, in my research, he was a man who was appreciative. He was generous. I think there are a lot of industrial, other industrial people, even some modern-day people, they take from a business or from an organization, and they do very little for the community around them. I mean he built a park. He did a monument down at the river. He built this building. Now, naturally he was going to get the revenues from the rent from it, but he helped this city grow using his money and his influence. And there are so many others that I've even known personally that they, they will take money out of a business or take it and run, you know. And, and it, and it becomes

a family, just their family wealth, not so much that it's been shared. Andrew Carnegie, of course, was the one that did so much in, in that way. I'm from Pittsburgh, and I've done a little, you know, on the Frick family and the Carnegies. And their name, Carnegie, will be known, hopefully two or three hundred years from now, where a man like Schmulbach will be buried in history. Because Carnegie had enough insight to put his name on all the libraries. Henry should have done the same thing. But it's, it's been an interesting project, and I, I said I hope, I hope to do more. It's just with having other responsibilities--I get on a roll sometimes and I spend my lunch hours down at the clerk, clerk's office. And then it will stay dormant for six or eight months. And then I pick it up again. Just like I did this time, pick it up again and start looking through. And I'm confident there's more information out there.