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Nancy Wendell interview, 19 October 2003

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Wendell19102003

Interviewer: Robin Schloss

Subject: Nancy Wendell

Date: October 19th, 2003

3: 15 P.M.

Parma Residence

Robin Schloss: Testing, Testing, one, two, three. Testing, Testing, one, two, three. This is Robin Schloss, and I'm interviewing Nancy Wendell. This is for the Tremont Oral History project. Nancy, can you, um, spell your name for me please?

Nancy Wendell: N-a-n-c-y W-e-n-d-e-l-l.

RS: Would you mind reading that paper?

Nancy Wendell: Before we begin this interview, let me just say something in memory of those who have gone before me and made me who I am. All of my ancestors were of German descent and came from either Germany or West Prussia. I am proud and have great respect for all of them who left family and friends forever to cross the Atlantic with little more than a steamer trunk or suitcase filled with personal belongings and a dream for a better life in America. Here in Cleveland, they struggled to learn English language and customs so as to fit in, while still trying to hold onto their native language and traditions. I – I never lived in Tremont area, so of course, I can give you no first hand memories. I can only tell you what I have learned, or what I have been told, from the last twenty years or so as I go back in time, to walk in the footsteps of those ancestors who were Tremont residents during the mid and late 1800s and early 1900s. They were the Rauscher and Goebbels branches from Germany and the Pollakowski and Schadowski branch just from West Prussia.

RS: OK, Thank you. Um, Nancy, what are some of your early childhood memories?

NW: [Pause] Early childhood memories, uh, pertaining to be my grandparents would probably be uh, sitting on the front porch on Trobridge Avenue, which is a little bit removed from Tremont, but my grandfather Polk, his original name is Pollakowski, it was shortened to Polk, had come from West Prussia originally living on Jefferson, and then eventually, you know, he moved up to St. Michaels Parish and married and now lives on Trobridge across the street from me. So I spent many evenings, I used to spend many evenings, I loved, enjoyed spending evenings and times on their front porch, talking with them both.

RS: Um, did your parents grow up in Tremont or did your grandparents grow up in Tremont?

NW: My great great grandparents, my great grandparents, and my Grandpa – Grandfather Pollakowski, Polk, grew up in Tremont. Not my parents.

RS: Um [pause] I'm going to stop it. [Recorder is turned off and then back on].

RS: Nancy, could you please tell me where your parents or grandparents immigrated from?

NW: Um, my grandparents, my great-great grandparents, um, by the name of Rauscher, came from Germany, a place called Hauschenwerder, and Goebbel line came from, um, Hilderschawn, Germany and the Pollakowskis and the Schadowskis came from Prussia.

RS: Um, what languages did they, and you, speak?

NW: Well, unfortunately, I speak no language other English, but they were all of German descent, and spoke German.

RS: Um, where did your parents and your grandparents work?

NW: Uhhh, my grandfat – my my Rauscher, great-great grandparents and great grandparents and grandfather and great grandfather all worked for the railroad and my great grandfather – my great-great grandfather – Louis Goebbels, was a tavern owner, on Professor Avenue, and uh, I don't know the name of the tavern unfortunately, but he was a tavern owner, for thirty years from 1870 to 1900. Previous to that, he had come to this country in 1867, and had been a known oceans peddler, whatever that was.

RS: Um, where did you work?

NW: Well, I carried the tradition, and before, um, I married, I worked for four years for the railroad. [Pause]

RS: Um, did you work with your neighbors any?

NW: [Pause] Pardon me?

RS: Did you work with your neighbors any? Did they work on the railroad, or --? No?

NW: No, mostly I would say, let me just say that on my fathers side, his father worked forty-seven years for the Nickel plate, my father worked forty-seven years for the Nickel plate, and I worked four years for the Nickel plate.

RS: Um, can you describe a typical work day?

NW: [Pause] I, for their typical work day – you don't want my typical work day – I'm speaking more for them.

RS: Either yours or theirs, whatever you can recall.

NW: I never had a typical work day, only for four years, um, it, it all centered around the railroad work. I worked in the office, um, my ancestors started out working the roundhouses as laborers, my grandfather worked up to be a department head, on the uh,

uh, uh, department head in the railroad, and my father worked as a secretary, a male secretary in the Presidents office, so primarily, friends, most of my fathers and mothers friends, were all railroad people

RS: Um, where did they - where did your children play? [pause] Around Parma?

NW: Well, we're all from Cleveland, so my early play days were, I, was raised over on Trobridge Avenue, which is a little out of the Tremont area, but, that's where I spent my time playing.

RS: Um [pause] where did teenagers go on dates? Either for you, or your ancestors? Do you have any ideas about that?

NW: [Pause] Well, I know [pause] that my grand, well no - that was my grandmother on my mothers side. They enjoyed the movies. My grandparents enjoyed the movies. They really didn't go on dates very many places as far as I know of. As far as I was concerned, it was the movies and to go out to dinner.

RS: Um, can you describe what dating was like when you were a teenager?

NW: [Pause] Well, like any other typical teenager, it revolved first around going to school, and then you had to do your homework, and then you did have some free time, and then, umm, when I was young, television was just starting to come into play, but it was black and white, so, I did watch a little television. But mostly, it was the radio.

RS: Um, where did you or your parents' grocery shop?

NW: [Pause] Well, Well I would rather talk about my parents, because that was a little bit farther back, and there were no modern supermarkets at that time. There were all individual proprietries. They went to a bakery shop for their bakery, then went to a little grocery shop for their potatoes and their, um, vegetables and stuff like that, they went to a uh, uh, uh, butcher shop for their meats, so there were all individual shops you had to go to. So there were all individual shops, so you had to go all individual shops, all privately owned shops.

RS: Um, [pause], uh, where did your parents go to church? Did you go to church with your neighbors?

NW: Uhh, primarily the neighborhood was mostly Roman Catholic. And, uhhh, my, my, my fathers' fathers' side was all Roman Catholic, they all went to St. Michaels for church, on Scranton Road. In fact, my grandfather made his first communion and his confirmation there. And, I went to high school there. And then, um, my grandfathers two sisters, uh, also, two older sisters, also went to St. Michaels and joined the Notre Dame nuns from the Parish. Uh, my mothers' family, uh, was not Catholic. Uh, she converted when she married my father.

RS: What language was Mass spoken in?

NW: Uhh, the mass, as far as for me and my parents, was in English, but I think my grandfather, may when he was younger, of course at St. Michaels, was still in German.

RS: [Pause] What were some of the social places you or your parents oft – often visited?

NW: [Pause] I don't think we went to too many. I don't remember going to too many places, other than going down to the Zoo. Mostly it was to visit other people and play with their children, mingle with the children, you know, have fun just doing things together.

RS: Um, have you visited Lincoln Park? What are your memories of Lincoln Park?

NW: [Pause] I – I haven't not lived in that area, I don't have any memories. Although I have visited there, it's a lovely area. I went to a restaurant down there a few years ago called, well several years ago now, called Miracles and it gave me a nice feeling to have been walking in the area where my great-great grandparents had, had lived. [Pause]

RS: Uh, um, were you, um, married and did you marry someone from the neighborhood you grew up in?

NW: The man I married I actually met on a blind date. Uh, all of my ancestors were German, and all his ancestors are Slovak. He, uh, came not from the Tremont area, but not far from that area, his par – his grandparents belonged to St. Wendellems parish.

RS: Um, where were you married?

NW: Well, I had gone 8 years to Bless the Sacrament, to school, and my family always lived in that area, so that's where I got married from.

RS: Um, if you had a reception, where was it?

NW: My reception was at St. Rocco's Hall on Fulton Road.

RS: Um, could you tell me anything, um, when Carl Stokes was elected Mayor of Cleveland and how that changed the dynamic of Tremont in 1967?

NW: I really can't speak to that, cuz, um, I don't, I never got into politics that much, I can't say good or bad or indifferent cuz I really didn't know too much about him. He didn't seem to be as good for the people or as – or maybe he just wasn't in it as long as his brother Lois. His brother Lois, was much more active as a politician in my estimation.

RS: Um, do you have any memories of the construction of the Interbelt project? Do you know anything about that? The Interbelt, you know, it was constructed in the middle of Tremont, basically.

NW: Not really, no, not really.

RS: Um, do you know anything about the bridges that were built there? The Abbey Road bridge, the Clark Road Bridge?

NW: No, but, not first hand, but I know that my great great grandfathers son Christian was a bridge tender, so at that time, they were probably manually operated, and there was a position for him to move the bridge. But I don't have any knowledge.

RS: OK. [Pause] Um, I'm going to ask you information about your ancestors. Um, how did you find out information about your ancestors? Did you start by doing a Web Search, um, did you visit archives, how did you, um, get involved in it?

NW: I have always been interested in family history. Many, many years ago I used to save the memorial cards that were given at funerals, just to remind me of who had passed. It wasn't until 1989 that I really got active in genealogy. It was when my father died and I ran across, uh, items that were from long ago, that could have either been shoved back in the drawer, or, put into an album to be made available to future generations.

RS: Um, [pause] so how many years have you been doing, uh, research for?

NW: Really actively, since 1989 [pause] really actively, since 1989, what is that, fifteen years or so? And I have been to Western Reserve Historical for census reports, I've been to archives down on Franklin Avenue for, uh, death, birth and marriage certificates. I've written all over the United States, I have written to Germany for documents. Um, you name it, I've done it, before I even started on the computer.

RS: Um, what propelled you to search for your ancestors roots? What attracted you to genealogy?

NW: I wanted to know. I wanted to know all I could about where they came from, why they came, what ships they came from, [pause] what they did when they came over, anything I could learn, I wanted to know about them.

RS: Um, do you have oral and written accounts of your ancestors, such as your grandparents, um, did your grandparents ever talk about, um, what it was like growing up in Tremont, or --? What can you tell me about that?

NW: Yeah, well, I can tell you a little bit about my grandfather wrote memoirs about when he came from West Prussia, evidently they came to the United States for a better life because in Germany they lived in a little unfinished cottage with four families in one cottage and they room they lived in, had only stamped clay for, for the floor, and so, they decided they would follow other ancestors who were already over here, and come to Cleveland, for a better life. What else?

RS: [Pause] So you think they came over here for a better life, um?

NW: In the case of the Pollakowskis, yes, they did come over for a better life. And, also, I understand that my great-great grandparents had several young boys, and at that time it was Prussia, there was a bad war situation. They were Germans living in Polish land, and, they, there was trouble, there was, there was war, and they did not want their younger boys to be serving in the military. So, that was another reason why they came over.

RS: To avoid inscription?

NW: To avoid inscription, yes, yes. And, uh, to give, you know, they had heard from other people that had come to America that it was a better place, and they, they saved their pennies, and, and came over to (America).

RS: Do you have photographs of your ancestors while they resided in Tremont? And, um, if so, what impression did you take away from these photographs about Tremont?

NW: I don't have any photographs of them, unfortunately. Supposedly there were many, many photographs of the Rauscher family, that were the down in the Tremont area in 1867, so I'm sure there were a lot of photographs, but over a period of time, they were put into albums and when the people moved away from the Tremont area, they forgot the albums in a window-seat of a house in the Tremont area, (and) never went back for the photos. So I have no photos of either the, the Goebbels or the Rauschers. Actually I have no photos of any of the people from down there, only a couple of photos of the area where they lived.

RS: What did you think about the area where they lived? Did you, have you gone, um, have you looked at the area where they lived and compared it to today, to contemporary times?

NW: My understanding is that years and years ago, say in the 1860s 70s, Tremont was the place to live. It was supposedly the Euclid Avenue of downtown. It was supposed to be a very nice area, uh, upscale, but, but of course, they were a lot of, uh, probably rental properties that uh, immigrants came over to live in, you know, temporarily. But, nonetheless, it was, it was a different – an altogether different area from what it is now. I assume maybe a little bit more peaceful.

RS: Um, what outstanding stories can you tell me about your forebears? I know you said one of your ancestors was a locomotive engineer, could you uh, tell me about that, uh, in more detail?

NW: He was a locomotive engineer, he, um, was widowed very young and he went to live with his, uh one daughter, he had one daughter and it was told to me that every day, uh, a lunch was packed for him in his lunch pail, he would walk down Starkweather Avenue, all the way down Starkweather, to the bottom of the hill, to the west third B&O yards. He was a locomotive engineer, and evidently, when his day was done, he'd come back up the same route, but, he kind of managed to stop up in any number of taverns on the way home. So, then he had a few in 'em by the time he got home and he also brought

home his lunch pail with the lunch in it. So, he, um, did his job, but he kind of liked to imbibe a little bit, too.

RS: Um, [pause] from your research, what was your overall impression of Tremont, based on your predecessors accounts? Can you give me maybe a synopsis of what you think, uh, a general idea of Tremont?

NW: Well, overall, when they moved in there, I would say it was primarily, uh, being developed by people who had come from the, uh, East Coast, from Connecticut or wherever, you know, English people. They were the new wave of immigrants, primarily, at that time in the early times, it was German and Irish. Later on, I'm sure, uh, other students had interviewed any number of ethnic, ethnic groups that eventually came there. It seemed there were sixteen different churches, in that uh -- sixteen different ethnic churches. When they were there, it was primarily the Germans, Polish, than the Polish came too. But, other than that, I can only surmise, you know, what it must have been like.

RS: Have you, um - Do you think that Tremont has changed as far as minorities coming in, the housing situation, they want to build a womens' shelter down there, can you give me your opinion on that?

NW: There's always change. You hope the change is always for the better, and, if there is a change that can better humanity, while, in my estimation, while still holding onto the traditions of the old, or the way it was, such as um, trying to keep up the homes, not modernizing them, restoring them to the way they were. Trying to make it -- keep it as it was, such as making a new use for the bath houses, that I understand my ancestors were given pennies to go down and bathe in those bath houses, because in the early times, houses didn't have bathtubs, but they kept the building and made it serviceable now, I understand. And for upscale apartments, or whatever, you know. But, as long as its preserved, as long as its not destroyed, that's, that's history.

RS: Um, were you able to confirm these impressions by physically, um, visiting Tremont?

NW: I love visiting Tremont. I love going down there. I only wished that I could have a better picture of how it was when they were there. I can only surmise what it was like, I can only go to the, to the house number of where they lived, and wonder if that's the original house, or what it was like when it was lived in there, you know, but um, to me, its its my heritage, and I, I hope it never goes away.

RS: When was the last time you were physically in Tremont, and you walked around, maybe you had dinner, or just relaxed?

NW: I would say a couple years ago. I have a brother that lives in Houston, Texas and he came up, and, we went over to that area, and, um, walked around the, uh, Lincoln Park, and it was on a Sunday morning, and, uh, had lunch over there.

RS: Can you tell me about the neighborhood, was it friendly, was it well kept? Did you see any, uh, dilapidated houses, were the houses pretty, you know, nicely renovated? What impressions did you take away?

NW: I took, I took away good impressions that the people who are living down there, uh, want to make it – want to improve it. It was, it was a very friendly neighborhood, in fact, uh, there was a little lady that came out of I think it was Our Lady of Mercy Church, and, with her little black hat, black coat, black shirt, uh, purse and said good morning. Kind of caught me off guard, because you don't hear that too often, somebody walk by you and saying good morning. And there was any number of people strolling through Lincoln Park, it was really very nice, it was in the fall, and the trees looked beautiful. It was nice.

RS: What did you think about Lincoln Park itself?

NW: Lincoln Park at that time? Was nice, I mean it. I can only imagine, you know, my ancestors having played in that park, or whatever. I understand for a short period of time, it was used as a, uh, some kind of a military barracks during the Civil War. I don't – I'm not too sure about that, maybe somebody else knows, but I, I hope they never never ever ever put a high rise or apartments there, that they keep it the way it is, and that they, I understand, that they, um, um, have a guideline where you buy a home, or do any type of renovating, you're supposed to renovate in the period of which it was built. That's my understanding which, to me, is (just) wonderful.

RS: Um, do you have any accounts, uh, um, you talked about memoirs, um, your ancestors detailing what it was like to come over from Prussia (to) Tremont, what they thought of the neighborhood when they came over? Um, you know, like, uh, um, maybe first hand -?

NW: I'm afraid it was -- My great grandmother Pollakowski, my great grandfather had died at the age of forty six and left her with eight children, my grandfather was the oldest, and so he had to go to work full time, he worked in the railroad roundhouse nights, twelve hours shifts, and left her at home with all the little younger - all the babies. Well, I guess one day, a policeman he was coming home from work in the morning, at the same a policeman was coming up the front door with a young man and this young man said he would like to go into the attic to go retrieve a pocket watch, and my great grandmother says 'What do you mean, a pocket watch, in my attic?' Evidently, he had no place to live, and he would sneak in a back door, unbeknownst to them, late at night when it was dark, and he used to sneak in up there, and he would live first thing in the morning, before anybody, I mean he was gone. And one night, his pocket watch wandered away from him, and he couldn't find it in the dark, he couldn't turn on any lights, and he wanted to go upstairs to look for his pocket watch, that (was) very important to him. Well, he was the same – he probably didn't have a place to live anymore, and, uh, I don't know of any other ones. I can say my great-grandmother was very religious, that, uh, in her final days, she suffered from pneumonia, and at that time, lived right across the street at Rowley Avenue, from St. Michaels, and, she was told not to get out of bed, not to go to Church, but she was a very determined woman. So um, she got up very early in the morning and

walked along the side of the house, it was during the winter, where there was no snow or no way you could see her footprints, and went to Church, and came back, and came back into bed before they even knew their Mother had gone to Church. So, that was kind of, you know, shows the strength of the women at that time. My grandfather says when they come over on a boat from West Prussia, uh, that they had to, uh, protect the women. The younger man, took a watch. There was always a man, or a young boy, awake all night, because this was several weeks. And, uh, they wanted to protect the women from ever being hurt from anybody because they didn't come in first class or anything, they were down in the steerage section, so he says, he made sure that the women were taken care of, and (we) watched guard over them. It was a long trip, but they said goodbye forever to a country that had grown to, grown in, to come to a new land.

RS: Um, as far as your grandmother is concerned, um, do you know her, um, you said she was very religious, do you know her, um, um, or can you surmise about her beliefs on the institution of marriage, childbirth, um, any of those?

NW: Well, evidently they believed in marriage, because, you know, they all, she was married of course and Marianburg West Prussia, says my great-grandmother, and give birth to thirteen children, so I guess they believed in, in, uh, having as many children as God allowed. And, my great-great grandfather Lois Goebbels, fathered sixteen children, by three wives, so evidently he believed in procreation, or, having numerous children. His oldest child became a Priest. So, um, you know, they, I guess they believed in the institution of marriage and uh, they believed in having as many children as God allowed.

RS: Do you have any, um, any family that is still down in Tremont, any cousins or aunts and uncles that you know of?

NW: Not anymore, but I know of, I know that maybe twenty years ago, a second cousin of mine got married in Pilgrim Congregational Church, that her mother and father had married in many, many years before her. But, any relatives down there now, no.

RS: Do you know, um, did you go to the reception? Do you know when she got married, were you invited to the reception or anything?

NW: No, no it was a small one, and it was a distant, you know, my second cousin, so no, I didn't go.

RS: So, um, did all of your family move out of Tremont, and can you, do you know what year this occurred and do you know, uh, why they moved out of Tremont?

NW: Well, the first ones to come to Tremont were the Rauschers, and I can document that they came into the Tremont area in 1867, and great-great grandpa died in about 1899 in Tremont, and his, um, son remained in Tremont on Starkweather Avenue until the 1920s, and then he moved up, uh, off of Lorain Avenue on West ninety-eight. The Pollakowskis, previously, they started out in Tremont in about 1885, 1884, but because uh, the German Catholic Church was St. Michaels, they wanted to be closer to St.

Michaels, to they moved up to the Clark and Scranton area. The Goebbels, he lived in Tremont, great-great grandpa, uh, Lois Goebbels, came to Tremont in 1867 and he died in Tremont in 1900. Umm, his descendant – one of his sons, many of his child-children passed away, and one of his sons moved to New York, so, I kind of lost track of that line, descendent wise.

RS: Has your daughter, um, been to Tremont? Has she visited around there?

NW: I think I did drag her down there once. She really, several years ago, and she really did not have a full appreciation of it, at that time, and uh, but, did it for me, and was happy that I enjoyed myself. Yes, she did go once. I think she would appreciate it more. And she does talk about it once in a while. We'll probably go down again sometime.

RS: What do you think, uh, her impressions were when she walked away from visiting Tremont?

NW: Oh, she liked it, she liked all the little boutiques that were there. We went in and out of the little stores down there, and bought some candy in one of the stores, and a donut in another store, a brownie or something. But we had a good time. Yes, that's right, she did go, because I remember the brownie now.

RS: Did your husband go down to Tremont?

NW: No, he didn't. I think he – I think he was working at the time. She went down during the day with me.

RS: Um, let's see . . . [long pause] As far as the neighborhood dynamic is concerned, looking back, you know I noticed you have a lot of um, research that you've done on Tremont, you know, um, looking through the pictures and then going there now, um, can you maybe give me your impression on how its changed, or, you know, have you formed any opinion on that?

NW: The only opinion I could form is that going back to the 1866 mode, 1870s, to the addresses where they lived, if they lived in frame homes, which I'm sure they did, the homes that stand there now, are probably not the original homes, so I could not kind of relate to that. Nothing lasts forever. There is one building down there where the tavern was, that belongs to some Polish legion organization now, that I think might be the original building, and I feel good about it. I feel good that something has survived all these years. And there's another house on Starkweather that my great-grandfather had lived in, that is still standing, which gives me kind of a good feeling too, to know that it's still there and not bulldozed, or removed, uh, because of the freeway coming through there. Oh, uh, you spoke earlier, I must say, you spoke earlier of what my ancestors have done, or had did, for enjoyment when they were younger. I remember now my one aunt saying she used to go visit her cousin over on Starkweather, during the summer, when the circus used to come to town, and, the circus used to set up big tents on Scranton Road. So

that was a big deal in the summertime, to come over and spend some time with her cousin, and go to the Circus on Scranton Road.

RS: What kind of, did she talk about what kind of, uh, events they had at the circus? Any special people they brought in for amusement?

NW: No, I was just shocked that the Circus had been on Scranton Road, the only circus I know of was in the old Arena in Downtown Cleveland, so she really never spoke about that, although she did say too, another thing that she did as a younger, my aunt lived to be ninety-one, so she had a lot of memories from way back in the 1900s. Uh, before there were talking movies, and one of her jobs as a youngster, she used to earn a little bit extra money playing the piano as background music for the silent movies. So I guess they did go to the movies at that time.

RS: It was a silent – silent film?

NW: They were in, in her early years, yes they were silent, because she was hired to create some sound for background music. I guess you would read the lines underneath the frames, I guess.

RS: OK, um, [pause] can you recall any of your ancestors, any other stories that stand out in your mind in your childhood that they told you? Or you've researched?

NW: No, because that's so far removed from me, um, I don't have any first hand stories that they told me. All- All the research I have is trying to piece things together, you know, to try to walk in their footsteps a little bit, and unfortunately, we can't go back that far in time, so, no, I don't have any first hand accounts with them.

RS: Um, doing your research, um, what did you come away with? Did you feel like it, it gave you a sense of your own identity by learning about your ancestors? Did it give you a sense of fulfillment, learning about your ancestors, knowing where they came from and everything?

NW: Oh, certainly. I- I think everyone should look into their heritage. You can't go forward if you don't know where you came from, and each little bit and piece I can find on them, is so – is so very rewarding. I'm into the computer now, and I've found distant relatives in Minnesota, in Arizona, throughout Ohio, that I have shared information with, and they have given me a little bit, but, if I can – I will keep doing it as long as I know there's – as long as I can find a way to find information, I'll do it. It just gives me a little bit more of the piece of puzzle that they were, and I admire their strength, their courage, to come over here and make me what I am.

RS: Um, did you visit the cemetery where your ancestors were buried? Did you have any impressions about -- ? [tape cuts off]