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Eleanor Mailloux

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ORAL HISTORY

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Date Apr. 30, 1976

Eleanor F. Mailloux
(Signature - Interviewee)

Helvetia, W.V. 26224
Address

Date April 30, 1976

John Harmon A.
(Signature - Witness)

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The following is a conversation with E^ananor Mailloux of Helvetia, West Virginia; recorded on April 30, 1976.

J.H: Uh, just a little bit of background first. Uh, were you, you were born and raised in Helvetia, right?

E.M: No, I was born in Virginia.

J.H: Oh, sorry.

E.M:.... came to Helvetia when I was six, but my father was born here, and raised here, so....

J.H: Um hm. Is he of Swiss background?

E.M: Yes, my grandfather came from Zurich. So, actually Helvetia's my home. But my mother was a Virginian, that's why, my father was in the South at the time, and married my mother and then they came here.

J.H: Um hm. Any brothers and sisters?

E.M: Yes, I had-- what---uh, three sisters and two brothers.

J.H: Uh, what kinda' occupation did your parents have?

E.M: Farm.

J.H: They were farmers..

E.M: They were farmers, uh huh.

J.H: How were the, uh, when you were raised on the farm how were the duties divided up? Did the boys and the girls have the same type jobs or were there pretty much well defined roles?

E.M: Uh, no; we did, um, not so defined; we did pretty much the same thing, because when it haying, haying time everybody had to get out in the fields. Uh, now I should say that my brothers weren't so good in the kitchen, but we girls had to hustle in the hay field. Uh, but I chose the outside rather than the inside, and my sister did the, liked the inside work better than I.

J.H: Now did you and your brothers n' sisters attend the local schools?:

E.M: Yes, we went to Holly Bush Run which was a one room school, which is of course now closed.

J.H: Yeah. Um, um, Mrs. Betler was tellin' me one of the schools was to be brought down an' placed next to the museum?:

E.M: Yes, for the, we have a... where you saw the museum? That's, uh,, our historical square and we hope to bring down a one room school; we've purchased it, the Helvetia Restoration Development Association has purchased the one room school, and we want to bring that down and we have dwsks and, uh, we want to set it

up hopefully like the original school was here, which of course they did teach in the Swiss language and we have Swiss textbooks and maps and that kinda' thing to, to put in the school; plus the uh, original school bell, to go into the school building.

J.H: Do you know if any of the children are taught Swiss at all now in the homes?

E.M: I don't think so. Uh, one of the teachers does speak Swiss at the high school and I think he's taught the kids some of the language but that, my generation was the last generation that really.... now, we've tried to revive it with the Helvetia Folk Dancers; they do know some Swiss songs, and consequently they do know a few words; but, uh, the kids of this generation, no, the language is lost.

J.H: (Uh, Mrs. Mailloux commented that some of the younger people who've left Helvetia are in the process of returning, and she's expressed a... a concern for the environmental protection of the area, which, uh, maybe now she can explain some of her sentiments on that, and her, why she feels that the younger people are returning.

E.M: I think the younger people are returning because.... they have a great love for this place. And most of the people who leave here... as a matter of fact I know a man who gets physically ill if he can't get back to Helvetia to get recharged! So every once in a while... Frank Daetwyler's uh, it's a nephew of his... every once in a while I'll see... Bill's car down there, and maybe he'll come in it's only for a day and I'll say 'Oh, I see you're here to get recharged, Bill', an' he'll say 'ja', and then he goes back; very busy, he works in a plant, someplace in Ohio; has eight children and hopes to retire here. But about the, the younger ones coming back which is so great; and these are the doers, usually.... well, after World War II, uh, we had the doers leave the community. These were the kids that were sort of up and going, and, and wanted, were on the move; and we were left sort of with some, some of the non-doers, the people who weren't too active in community affairs. Uh, now this was a generation younger than, than myself, slightly younger. But, uh, now today these young kids are coming back. They've been off to school, or they've been off to.. to Washington and worked at various jobs, or Richmond, or... West, an' they're coming back because this is home; they're building homes, which is nice, here, and they wanta' be here permanently.

J.H: Will they come.... come back at the slightest opportunity?

E.M: Yes, they will and if there's anything at all for them to do, they will and one of the things that we have tried to do in Helvetia is... create.... some sort of, of um, climate for different jobs rather than, um, coal mining or cutting timber, because you know what.... it's too rocky to farm; we've got one dairy farm in the area, and we've got one farmer who, who has chickens, and has made a business of eggs, but other than that it's very difficult here to, uh, to make a living. So we do have, you've seen the little gift shop and the little restaurant an' that kind of thing and the

cheese house, which has kept the dairy going, and we do hope to... to kind of extend this; we've got the new clinic...

J.H: Um hm.

E.M: ... that's going to employ two or three local people; uh, I have a daughter who hopes to come back and build a convalescent home, which should employ several local people; and we have in the future a small inn which again should, you know you could have truck farming, and, and we're going to need people to work in the inn, and, so I think... it looks good.

J.H: Is the inn, uh, going to, will it utilize a building that is already here or will it be a new building?

E.M: No, it'll be a new building, hopefully, and of course done in a, very, in a Swiss manner and, not... we don't want the town to get too big, we don't want it to get away from us. We just want to keep it quiet and simple and uh... if you saw the roads when you came over I don't think there's any danger of it getting outa' hand.

But the concern about the natural resources is very real. And, uh, we became aware of really... well, we know it's been going on, but we've all of a sudden about three months ago everybody began to say 'what's happened to the water?' and, uh, my water, I... you know I began to notice that the, the iron content had, or the mineral content had changed, of the water; and I've spent a lot of money in putting a system in and I have a ninety-seven foot well. And other people who have deep wells were saying you know, the water is changing, or 'what's happened to the water?' or 'we don't have any water'; the people who have shallow water say they don't have water; so something, now, they're blasting, they have strip mines up above us, you know there're several, as a matter of fact. So, of course there's heavy blasting, and, uh, the stripping and I'm sure that it's changing,.... our water; so this has united the people;... you know, they're afraid they're gonna' lose their water supply. Then, they also, they... you'd be surprised, though, even the older people, the aesthetic, uh, impact, that they put on, on the area in which they live. Like, uh, did you come in from Buchannon or from Elkins?

J.H: No, uh, I came up route 4 through Sutton, and in this way through Alexander and Czar....

E.M: Oh, but you came and you saw down right below Helvetia where those beautiful hemlocks were cut? Right before you got into Helvetia; right by the road, the magnificent hemlocks have been cut, a whole grove of them. You know, the 'forest primeval'?

J.H: Yeah.

E.M: But anyway, many people that I never thought were aware of the beauty of the area have remarked how ugly that looked. And, and uh, what a pity it was that people did that cutting; who didn't think before they did that.

J.H: Was it done by... uh, family?

E.M: It was not done by local people. It was done by some heirs who, who were left the land, and they live out of here, and they come in and they strip and, and of course all the mining's being done by.... one of the things that I'm very concerned about and I wish that someone would investigate is the fact that the, the mining companies come in, they go to these farms, these people are very old, they're in their eighties, and you know \$5,000 is a lot of money....

J.H: Yeah.

E.M: ... and they don't understand, they don't understand what's going on. So they go in with a lot of big promises and they sign these contracts, and nobody looks after these people, nobody has their interests at all, And so there they are, and their land is being gutted and ripped, and, uh, it's a great pity, and.... you know, I don't care what anybody says, I don't think that you can ever put the land back the way it was originally; it takes, what, thousands and thousands of years to build up layers of....

J.H: 'Specially on this slope like is prevalent around here.

E.M: Yeah, the slopes are so steep, and over in one of, just about five miles from here they've got, I think it's a deep mine but the slag is just being pulled out of the mine mine and it's going down over the hillside...

J.H: Uh huh.

E.M: and in the center, is already a big gully; the water is washing and right below it is the, the Buchannon River. And Buchannon, which is below... this is the watershed for Buchannon...

J.H: Uh huh.

E.M: ... they're becoming alarmed about their water supply, 'cause we are their water supply; Parting Springs which is up at Turkeybone, is where all this water that flows into the Buchannon River starts, and all these rivers feed from there. So, I think when I talked to Mr. Hall at the, uh, who's head of the water division for the Department of Natural Resources, he said that they were working with Buchannon, on the problem, and I said, ' well, you better start here, because this is where the problem is starting, not down in Buchannon when it gets there. So we, uh, we're gonna' work on it.

J.H: That's good to hear.

(end of recorded portion)
interviewed by John Hennen