

Creating and Collecting Oral Histories for the with the Converse Historic Preservation
Commission and Schumann-Scheel House Museum

Abstract: My role as an intern with the Converse Historic Preservation Commission was conducting and collecting oral histories through interviews, ensuring that best practices were being followed. In the pre-interview stage, preliminary research was conducted to ensure that thoughtful questions were being asked throughout the interview process and to also create a standardized list of questions that would be asked to each interviewee. At the interview stage, interviews were conducted with various stakeholders in the Converse community and previous residents of the Schumann-Scheel House. At the post-interview stage, video materials were edited and made shareable to all project members and the materials were transcribed to ensure the content's preservation and further accessibility. All materials were then collected into a physical repository. This work conducted from the pre-interview stages through the post-interview stages has created a product that I hope will serve future purposes for the Schumann-Scheel House Museum.

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As part of my internship with the Converse Historic Preservation Commission I created and collected oral histories following the guidelines outlined by the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) and the Oral History Association (OHA). My internship work

with the Commission in regards to the Schumann-Scheel House will serve as the basis for my capstone project.

The Converse Historic Preservation Commission is currently working on turning the historic Schumann-Scheel house into a museum. The house was originally built in 1901 and remained in the Schumann-Scheel family until 2015¹. It's important to attempt to communicate the most comprehensive story of this family in order to retell their history on this farmland that has spanned over a century's time. The focus on the Schumann-Scheel Family in the museum will not exclusively be telling a single family's history, but it also has local, statewide, and even international implications. The Schumann-Scheel Family represent a history of German immigration to the US; their story represents a facet of German-Texan culture; and their story showcases the history of Converse. In the past years, historic buildings in Converse have been replaced with new developments as Converse has expanded its population and modernized. This museum will serve the larger community of Converse and those outside of Converse as a showcase for Converse's history not only illuminating the history of the Schumann-Scheel family and their farmstead but also showcasing this broader history of Converse.

In compliance with the guidelines recommended by the AASLH and OHA, I have been conducting interviews with major considerations geared towards using standardized oral history methodology. According to the AASLH, the oral history methodology is cyclical and happens in a five stages: idea, plan, interview, preservation, and access/use.² Following the summary checklist outlined on pages 12 and 13 of the AASLH manual, we followed this course of protocol.

¹ Scheel, Clarence. "Brief History of Schumann Scheel Home and Parkland". San Antonio Conservation Society. <https://farmandranch.omeka.net/exhibits/show/schumannscheelhouse/schumannsummary>.

² Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*, 2.

For the pre-interview stage of the process, researching materials relating to the overall project was conducted. Following the example that the AASLH manual provided for conducting preliminary research³, I was able to come up with a list of broader research topics. Some of the preliminary research topics were the Schumann-Scheel House, history of Converse, and history of German-Texans. Preliminary measures also had to be conducted that directly pertained to the interview itself such as contacting potential interviewees, creating questions, determining the interview setting, and determining the technology that will be utilized during the interview. The list of potential interviewees was created using recommendations from Kathy Krnavek, a member of the Commission and our project leader, as well as Howard 'Howie' Marbach, another member of the Commission. This list would continue to be edited and added to as the project moved forward and more contacts were given to us by the interviewees themselves, especially by Clarence Scheel who is the main spokesperson of the Schumann-Scheel Family. Next, a list of interview questions that would guide the basis of the interview was created, seen in Appendix I. This list of questions encompassed knowledge gained from the preliminary research conducted. The questions were focused to gain information pertaining directly to the house to make the museum more authentic to its original form and to contribute to the retelling of the history of Converse. After creating the list of questions, potential interviewees were contacted, informed about the project, and sent the list of questions so that they can reflect on these topics prior to the interview. Each interviewee had about a week's worth of time before the interview to ensure that sufficient time was given to them prior to the interview and to also ensure that any unanswered questions about the interview process were answered this is in compliance with one of the points

³ Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*, 71.

outlined by the OHA.⁴ We wanted to ensure that the interviewees were comfortable with the process and informed.

On the day of the interview, the interviewees were briefed about the purposes of filming and about the general proceedings of the interview once more. The interviewees were asked the list of standardized questions that had been previously sent to them during the interview. Asking the interviewees the same questions in the same order ensured some uniformity between the videos. After the standard list of questions were asked, follow-up questions proceeded. After both the standard list and the follow-up questions concluded, the interview ended and the preservation component of the project began.

The preservation of the project includes processing and editing the materials as well as creating master files and placing them into a physical repository. These preservation steps will ensure that the materials for each interviewee remain intact and accessible. The processing and editing portion included ensuring that the material was able to be saved and maintained on a manageable file type that could be edited not only by us as the interns, but also future interns and project leaders. Other considerations were to protect the integrity of the video material by not over-editing the materials. After processing and editing the materials, a master file was created. The master file included any information about the narrator, summary of the interview, the interview video material, transcription, and any other pertinent information found about the narrator through research. The transcript was created in compliance with the recommendation of the AASLH by creating a cover page, identifier section, considerations for stylistic approaches to

⁴ “Principles and Best Practices for Oral History,” Oral History Association. October 2009, accessed April 2019, <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/>.

paragraph spacing, and using standardized punctuation.⁵ The final transcripts are included in Appendix II.

A major goal for this project is that these materials be professional and in accordance with best practices in the public history field so that they can be used in the museum setting of the exhibits. Another goal of the project include that the accessibility of the master files span outside of the realm of project members and that these materials can be digitized for further public outreach. As an intern setting the foundation for this particular project, another goal for this work is to ensure that future interns can use these materials and further expand on them, improving upon previous project materials as the museum becomes more settled.

Division of Work

This capstone project is a joint project done by myself along with one other intern, Pierre Gutierrez. The responsibilities for the project were divided evenly between us. Because Pierre had the best camera available and because we were unable to acquire additional cameras and camera equipment from the St. Mary's University Media Center, Pierre handled much of the technology-based steps. He filmed the interviews and edited the video files. He also had to ensure that the video files were manageable and accessible for other project members to use in the future which was a challenge at times. I handled much of the preliminary interview work and the post-interview work aside from editing the video materials. I was the primary person in correspondence with the interviewees- I made the initial contacts, sent them interview questions, and maintained correspondence with them. During the interviewing process, Pierre and I were present at every interview together except for the interview of Earl Siebold. In the interview, I was the primary person asking the interview questions. After the interview, I transcribed the

⁵ Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*, 95.

interviews once they were edited and watchable files were created and combined all materials into a physical repository.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Interview Questions sent to previous residents of the Schumann-Scheel House:

- 1) Tell us about yourself and your experiences growing up/living in or around Converse.
- 2) How has Converse changed throughout the years?
- 3) What are your fondest memories of the house and surrounding property?
- 4) What did your family do for entertainment?
- 5) Did any of your family play musical instruments?
- 6) Were there any major changes to the house that you saw while living there?
- 7) What are some things you would like to see done to the house along with the museum?
- 8) What does the Schumann-Scheel house mean to you?
- 9) Do you think there are other areas in or around Converse that are also of historical importance?

- 10) What troubles, if any, has Converse faced throughout the years?
- 11) How do you feel about developments near your old home?
- 12) Why do you think it's important that future generations of Converse citizens learn about the Schumann-Scheel house and continue to seek other historical locations to preserve?

Interview questions sent to Converse residents that had not been residents of the Schumann-Scheel House:

- 1) Tell us about yourself and your experiences growing up/living in or around Converse.
- 2) How has Converse changed throughout the years?
- 3) What are your fondest memories of Converse?
- 4) What did your family do for entertainment?
- 5) What are some things you would like to see done to the house along with the museum?
- 6) What does the Schumann-Scheel house mean to you?
- 7) Do you think there are other areas in or around Converse that are also of historical importance?
- 8) What troubles, if any, has Converse faced throughout the years?
- 9) Why do you think it's important that future generations of Converse citizens learn about the Schumann-Scheel house and continue to seek other historical locations to preserve?

Appendix II: Transcripts

Interview with Clarence Scheel

Interviewed at Schumann-Scheel House at 10565 Old Cimarron Trail Universal City, TX 78148

Interviewed on March 15, 2019

Converse Historic Preservation Commission Oral History Project

Interviewed by Mariana Sandoval and Pierre Gutierrez

Clarence Scheel- CS

Mariana Sandoval- MS

CS: I'm Clarence Scheel I was born on August 17, 1937 in a house about a quarter of a mile from here [the Schumann-Scheel House] on the adjacent farm. I was born at home in a three-room house; my mother was attended by a midwife. The house had no indoor plumbing; it had no electricity; it had only a wood-burning stove for cooking purposes; and we had a generator unit that provided electricity to the house but only minimal electricity to burn one lightbulb in each room and a radio- that's the only electrical parts we had. Heat was provided by a wood-burning potbelly heater that was in the middle room and it provided heat for the whole house in the winter time. Of course, we had no air conditioning. Since there was no electricity, there was no refrigerator so we had an icebox- we would put blocks of ice to keep things cool- it didn't keep them cold, but it kept them cool. We would buy the ice in Converse at Rodieus [spelling?] General Store and bring it here and put it into the icebox. Our toilet was an outdoor outhouse located about 100ft from the house. We took our weekly baths in metal washtubs. There was no heater so my mother had to heat the water up on the stove to put water in the washtub for us to take our baths. Water for household use came from a cistern standing behind the house that was connect with with rain gutters that would collect the rain off the roof into the cistern and that was our drinking water. When that ran out, we had a water line that came from my grandfather's house here [Schumann-Scheel House] through the bottom of the hill by the other house. My mother had to walk down the hill with buckets to carry water back up the hill into the house- so it was pretty crude living.

At a very early age, I along with my older sisters, we did the family chores. I gathered the eggs fed the farm animals, and started milking a cow twice a day when I was five-years-old. My dad initially farmed using a team of mules. In 1942/1943, he [Dad] purchased his first tractor from H.H. Brooks Co. in Converse and then he started farming with that little tractor. I learned to drive the tractor when I was about seven-years-old. When I was six, I started first grade at Converse Elementary/Converse Rural School which was a three-room schoolhouse located about a mile from downtown Converse. We had no kindergarten at that time. Since our primary language at home was German, I had to learn how to speak English at school. About half of my classmates were German kids and about half of them were Mexican kids- I should say Mexican-American and German-Americans because we were all American citizens. But the Mexicans spoke nothing but Spanish and we Germans spoke nothing but German so the teacher had to teach us English and then taught us how to read and write in addition to teaching us English. They tried to stress learning English so if we got caught speaking German or Spanish at school, the teacher made us write lines, "I must not speak German in school, I must speak English in school" and the Mexican kids had to write, "I must not speak Spanish in school". That's how they taught us and we all learned how to speak the language [English]. To this day, I still know how to speak German fluently and I learned how to read and write it in college too. After three years of school in Converse, my father transferred us to the school at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Selma and there I went through 4th-8th grade graduating there in 1951. After that, I went to high school in San Antonio. We had to ride the bus from Converse to San Antonio everyday in the morning and then come back with the bus in the afternoon. Since my dad needed all the help on the farm, after school we had to get home as soon as possible so that we could help him with his farm work, so we were not able to participate in any high school athletics. We did, however, participate in the band program- all four of my sisters and I and my brother and I, we all learned how to play musical instruments and were in the St. Gerard's High School band. The reason we went to St. Gerard's is that there was no public high school in this area at that

time- Judson High School had not been built yet. So we had to go out of Converse to go to school and since we were Catholic, we were sent to St. Gerard's High School and quite a few other kids from Converse went to St. Gerard's High School as well. Some of the boys went to Central Catholic High School, but again, because there was no high school in the local area.

MS: How has Converse changed throughout the years?

CS: Well, it's changed considerably. I'd say that the building of Judson High School had a big impact on the community because they would bring students in from other parts. Judson actually was built out of three of these rural schools that I was talking about- Converse was one of the feeder schools and Kirby Rural School and Selma Rural School. These three rural school districts were combined to produce Judson High School. When the school was built and the area was being developed into houses, consequently the city of Converse grew rapidly in those years and that was in the 1960s and 1970s

MS: What are your fondest memories of the house and the surrounding property?

CS: Well, I loved living here [Schumann-Scheel House] because my best friend and first cousin, Melvin Red Schumann, lived on the hill on the neighboring farm. Whenever we had free time, we would go hunting, fishing, and swimming in our family stock pond which was right in front of the house here about 200 yards from where I am sitting right now [on the porch]. We'd be walking through our farm and neighboring farms on Sunday afternoon and I enjoyed being together with my cousin. And actually my cousin, Melvin Red Schumann, has a pavilion named after him in the city park in Converse.

Well, initially the only entertainment we had was listening to the radio on Sunday afternoon. My dad's brother had a German dance band and they would play a fifteen minute program on KONO radio on Sunday afternoon- that was mandatory listening, we all sat around the radio listening to our Uncle Ben play music on the radio.

We were one of the poorer families in the area so we were one of the last families to get a television set and that was not until the 1960s if I recall correctly.

MS: You mentioned your family played in the high school band, but can you go over exactly what instruments you played?

CS: Yes, I played the trumpet in high school and played in the St. Gerard High School Band and also St. Mary's University Band as well as in the National Guard Band- so I played trumpet quite a bit. My brother, Elton, he played the trombone and he played in the St. Gerard Band and also he played ten years in the National Guard Band in New Braunfels. My sisters all learned to play either clarinet or saxophone and they were passed down from one sister to the next as they got into high school. In addition to that, my mother was a good pianist. She had learned to play piano as a kid and because she was the best of the sisters, my grandfather gave her the piano which we still had at home here [Schumann-Scheel House] while I was growing up. So all of my sisters learned to play the piano and some of the girls also learned the organ at church.

MS: During the walk through, we went over the major changes [to the house], so we will skip over this question. What are some of the things that you'd like to see done to the house along with the museum?

CS: Well, I think it might be nice to have a couple of rooms that could be used as party rooms or rooms for having meetings so these could be rented out and provide a source of income for running the museum. And these rooms I envision having antiques related to the house with descriptions of what these antiques are.

MS: What does the Schumann-Scheel House mean to you?

CS: It's a good way to honor my parents and my grandparents who spent most of their lives here in this house. They were hard-working people, they were not very wealthy. My grandfather had a family of six and my parents had a family of eleven; we always had plenty to eat, but not a lot of cash to spend on frivolous things. Occasionally my parents would load us all into a car and take us to a drive-in movie someplace. By naming the house after the Schumann's and the Scheel's, it points out the contributions of the Schumann family and the contributions of the Scheel family to the local community and also to their church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Selma and then later on, St. Monica's in Converse.

MS: Do you think there are other areas of historical importance in Converse or the surrounding areas?

CS: Yes, there are. I'll start on the main street in Converse. Otto Rodieus [spelling?] General Store- that was the grocery store. They also had the icehouse where they sold ice to the people for putting in their iceboxes since most people didn't have electricity and they had to keep their food cool with an icebox. So that Rodieus [spelling?] Store needs to be renovated and salvaged. Right next to the store, there are three family homes- one of them is Mr. Rodieus' [spelling?] and his wife's house, another one was their son Marion Rodieus' [spelling?] House- he took over Otto Rodieus' [spelling?] store after he passed away. The other of the three houses was H.H. Gold's. H.H. Gold was a brother-in-law of Otto Rodieus [spelling?] and he had a red and white grocery store, a bar, and a pool hall inside his store; and also the post office was in his store. Otto and H.H. Gold, they were partners in that store initially until Otto decided to go on his own and build his store down the street from the H.H. Gold Store. Those three family homes and the Rodieus [spelling?] Store definitely need to be preserved. The other is on the corner of where the traffic light is- there was a service station there and it was run by Mr. Bill Getz for many years. He had a service station where they sold gas and serviced cars and then also he had a garage where he repaired vehicles- so that is also historical. The other historical place would be the Kneupper House on Kneupper Street. That house is only one year younger than this house [Schumann-Scheel House]- this house was finished in 1901 and I think the Kneupper House was finished in 1902. It was owned by Theodore Kneupper and the Kneupper's were a very prominent family in the history of Converse and Howie Marbach- everybody knows Howie Marbach- but Howie Marbach was the grandson of Theodore Kneupper- his mother was a Kneupper.

MS: What troubles, if any, has Converse faced throughout the years?

CS: You know I'm not really familiar with it. I think the main thing Converse had was they did not have a lot of funds for doing extra stuff such as putting together a museum like this. I think Converse didn't do good planning for retaining some of these old structures- most of them got torn down. Even as of the last few years, there were three or four houses on the opposite side of the street of the houses that I mentioned earlier and without doing any proper planning and using foresight, they allowed the houses on the opposite side of the street to get demolished within the last few years which was really a tragedy. The houses that I'm talking about were the butcher shop that was owned by the Siebold family, [as well as] the barber shop. There was another two or three buildings on that street- one had been a grocery store and one had been a bar which I think originally was a garage. Those buildings should have been salvaged.

I think that the developments that were put in Scheel Farms, I think we got the builders to provide a very good product so that these houses should stay in good shape for many years to come. Unfortunately, some of the houses may have been too close or are located too close to the Schumann-Scheel House, but there is nothing we can do about that now. The other subdivision that is being built as we speak is the Scheel Gardens which will be deluxe duplexes. Again, we talked to the buyer of the land and made sure that they are going to build quality duplexes. What's nice about it is that we also gave eighteen acres of land for a city park which will be called the Anton Schumann Park- it is adjacent to these two subdivisions so the people will be able to access that park and we envision that park having bike trails, hiking trails and we also envision the park extending into the neighboring subdivisions. These two subdivisions are built on land that my grandfather owned originally- my grandfather had 300 acres here and that's why I say it should be called the Anton Schumann Park. Again, this is part of planning and foresight and this needs to be done now while the builders are still building in these subdivisions and they can still work with the original owners of the subdivisions.

MS: Why do you think it's important that future generations learn about the Schumann-Scheel House?

CS: Converse had an agricultural background- it was a farming community up until the time that the high school was built. It was primarily a farming community. The town itself had a blacksmith shop, it had several groceries stores, it had a bowling alley a long time ago. It was the center of commerce for this whole area around here. By salvaging and restoring the Schumann-Scheel House, emphasizing the agriculture heritage of it, people can have appreciation for the hard work the Schumanns and the Scheels did to help with the community and to be outstanding citizens of Converse as well as outstanding members of their church.

MS: Do you like the direction that the Commission is going? Do you have any recommendations?

CS: My main complaint about what the Commission has done is that they- on the house itself- they have renovated the outside which I think is beautiful, however, above the bay windows and the living room at the front of the house, they decided to put colored tiles which was not part of the original house. These colored tiles look pretty, but they do not belong on this particular house. They don't fit with this theme of this particular house. This house was a German farmhouse built after the designs of the house in New Braunfels and many of those houses look

very similar to this house and the reason for that is that my grandfather learned how to build houses in New Braunfels as a teenager and a young man before he built this house. You go down there [New Braunfels] and basically the houses are all still painted solid white with no extra colors on it. I think these colored tiles need to be painted over in the same color as the rest of the house. The house was always solid white.

Interview with Bernice Freisenhahn
Interviewed at 407 S. Seguin Converse, TX 78109
Interviewed on April 10, 2019
Converse Historic Preservation Commission Oral History Project
Interviewed by Mariana Sandoval and Pierre Gutierrez

Bernice Freisenhan- BF
Mariana Sandoval- MS
Pierre Gutierrez- PG

BF: My name is Bernice Scheel Friesenhahn and I was born on October 6, 1943 in the Scheel-Schumann House on the School Schumann Farm, [which] at that time [was] on Converse Rd. My grandparents were Anton Otto and Ida Siebold Schumann who owned the house. I was born in the house. I am the oldest daughter of Adolph and Mary Schumann Scheel. Mary was the daughter of Anton and Ida Schumann Scheel. I am the oldest of Adolph and Mary's eleven children. My mother Mary was also born in this house.

I grew up on the neighboring house- the farm had two houses on it. My grandparents lived in the Schumann-Scheel House that we are talking about. My mother, dad, and our family lived in the second home on this 300 acre farm that they had on Converse Rd.

We were eight girls and three boys.

My grandmother Ida Schumann passed away March 3, 1947 and my grandfather, Anton, continued to live in the house by himself until March of 1949 when Adolph and Mary with their nine children moved in with him so Mary would take care of him until his death in September of 1949.

Anton was a farmer and raised cotton in his early years and Mary picked cotton with her brothers and sisters. They worked the fields with mules- my grandfather never had a tractor. They raised cows and milked cows every morning so they could make butter to sell to buy their groceries. Mary and Adolph helped them when they first got married- they would walk from their little house, [the] neighboring house, to Anton and Ida's home to milk the cows every morning to make the butter and they'd take it to Converse to sell at the grocery store. They [also] had a large flock of chickens for eggs to sell to buy their groceries.

They had hogs and butchered a hog every year so they could make bacon and ham and sausage for winter- there was no refrigeration.

Also which was unusual to me, Anton planted broomcorn on the farm and made brooms to sell.

On December 22, 1933, Mary married Adolph Scheel and they had a double wedding with her twin sister [Edna]. Her twin sister married Alfred and they got married at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Selma, TX. They had their wedding reception in the front yard of this home.

When they [Mary and Adolph] got married, they took over many of the chores from her parents on the farm and they started their own operations. They continued to milk the cows for her parents but then later on they started their own herd of cows so when they wanted to make butter. Daddy [Adolph] wanted a separator to separate the milk at their house so he came here to Converse to Mr. H. H. Gold's Grocery Store and asked him to buy a separator. And Mr. Gold asked Daddy, "Well, who are you?" And Daddy says, "Well, I'm Anton Schumann's son-in-law." He says "Well, then you can buy the separator. I'll loan it. I'll sell it to you for \$35." And they started making payments on it. We still have the separator which we are going to be giving to the museum.

Oh, something unusual- Daddy kept a journal of every penny of money they had as income the first year of marriage. It is really something to look at. He recorded everything. When they sold the butter and the eggs, he'd record it on one line. The next line he would record he bought so many dollars worth of groceries. And if they went shopping and Mama bought a dress, he recorded it. And every now and then they'd have a few quarters left over to go to the movie at Randolph Air Force Base. That was a real treat. And I have the journal at home and I've shared a copy with my sisters.

Daddy always said he made his best corn crop the first year they [Adolph and Mary] were married. He said Mama planted the first corn crop with a mule. He said it was one of the best crops he made. Also they planted cotton for the first few years but then the boll weevil came in and destroyed the cotton crops so they had to give up on planting cotton- so Mary didn't have to

pick cotton anymore, but she had to start pulling corn. And they also planted other crops besides the corn: wheat, oats, and later, grain sorghum and milo maize. At first they used mules to plant everything but in 1941, Adolph purchased a Case tractor from Bake and Brooks [verify name?] Implement Company here in Converse- that made the farming operations a little bit easier. And I remember when Daddy bought that tractor. He drove it from Converse to the farm and we were standing out in the front yard waiting for him to come to our property and watched him drive that tractor through the field to the house. We were all excited.

They always had sheep on the place my Dad's father, Eugene, had given him [Adolph] 20 sheep so he could start his own herd of sheep- so we always had sheep on our place. And every year in the spring the sheep had to be sheared. Daddy sheared the sheep and my sister, Alice, always had to help him shear the sheep. Also Daddy would shear sheep for other people on other farms that had sheep.

We didn't have electricity until 1938. And Daddy got a generator plant so we had lights in our house rather than the lamps we were doing our homework by. We had lights but no electricity. Our electricity came in 1938 approximately when they started bringing in electricity to the farm countries.

I started first grade at Converse Elementary School in September of 1941. And we lived north of Converse and the school was south of Converse so every morning Daddy and the neighbor carpooled and took Ruby Ann [spelling?] and Melroy Schumann to the Converse school and in the afternoon when they were in the field, we walked home.

This is a tragedy that struck our family in 1946. Our baby brother, Harvey, was born a healthy child on September 7, 1945, fell ill. We didn't know what was wrong with him. So he ended up in the Robert B. Green Hospital in San Antonio in isolation. After a number of tests, he was diagnosed with spinal meningitis and he spent a month in Santa Rosa Hospital and our mother spent a month with him in the hospital. So Daddy and the kids, we had to stay home and do the chores. Well I being the oldest, I was in charge of Angeline, Jeanette, and Gladys- my three little sisters- and we stayed with my aunt and uncle who also lived on the Schumann Farm but they lived on the western end of the property. My sister, Alice, and my brothers, Elton and Clarence,

stayed at home to do the chores and at night they went over to Anton and Ida's- my grandparents- home to sleep at night. Daddy would spend as much time he could at the hospital and then came home in the evenings to help them with the chores. The next day, same thing. So after a month, Harvey was able to come home with us around Easter time but he was crippled for life. His right side of his body is crippled and he never walked or talked. We cared for him- the family cared for him- until he was ten-years-old at which time they had to place him in the Austin State School and he is still alive today in the Clifton Texas Care Facility.

When Daddy had a job at the corn sheller here in Converse- I think it was named Simon and Boyefield [spelling?] Corn Sheller. During the corn harvesting season, Mama needed groceries- she didn't drive, Daddy had the car- so I walked from the house to Converse maybe once or twice a week and bought groceries at the Siebold Meat Market and the Rodeius [spelling?] Grocery Store and then I had to carry it back home.

We lived in this first house on the farm [the adjacent property] from 1933 when my mother and Daddy got married until 1947. They punched a 106 acre farm in Luxello with a bigger house on it and we moved there for about 15 months. That's when Daddy expanded his farming operations to operating two farms. Every morning, before school, I milked the family cow so we had milk for the family. And the other children did all the other chores like shucking corn, feed the hogs, feed the chickens, gather the eggs, herding the sheep, and herding them to put them in the pen at night so the dogs from Converse wouldn't hurt the sheep on their morning runs. Dogs like to go hunting in the morning and they make a trip out in the country and if the sheep were in the pasture, they'd attack them and possibly wound them or kill them. So we always had to make sure the sheep were in the pen at night.

Mama always had a garden so we always gardened and raised our own vegetables. The boys had- well the girls too- we had to shuck corn to feed the hogs so after-school chores were shucking corn and when harvesting time/planting time came along, Daddy needed seed corn so we had to make sure we shucked extra corn so Daddy could have corn to plant corn that year.

From time-to-time Daddy would butcher a calf so that we had meat to eat and then in the winter time we butchered pigs so we could make bacon, ham, pannas, and sausage. Then when Daddy

became a deer hunter, then we made sausage out of deer- half deer and half pork. Since Daddy was an avid deer hunter all of his life, that provided a lot of meat for the family. We butchered chickens- if we didn't have beef, we ate chicken.

Entertaining ourselves- well we played games: baseball, hopscotch, kick-the-can, red rover, hide-and-go-peek- but with the family chores we didn't have much time to have extra activities. Our activities were on the farm. And on Sunday afternoon, the girls played at home and entertained themselves, and the boys went exploring in the lower pasture with their cousin Melvin Schumann to hunt, hunt squirrels, and enjoyed outdoor time- that was their Sunday afternoon. We also participated in some of the activities at our church in Selma.

When Alice and I were teenagers, Mama and Daddy would take us and our cousin, Mary Ann [spelling?] Schumann, to dances on Saturday night in New Braunfels like Gruene Hall, Echo, and Schumannsville. They'd [Adolph and Mary] go to a movie and when the dance was over, we'd all come back home. The next week, Mary Ann's parents would take us to these same dances. When my husband and I, Wilbur, got married, Wilbur and I started taking the younger sisters, Angeline, Jeanette, and Gladys to dances on Saturday night in New Braunfels or St. Hedwig or wherever there was a dance in the local area.

My mother was an exceptional seamstress who sewed most of our dresses, uniforms for the school, prom dresses, bridesmaid dresses, and for our wedding on her treadle sewing machine which we are placing into the museum. She loved to sew and make many cute little dresses for her twenty-one granddaughters. She taught all eight daughters how to sew and the girls passed the sewing skill to their daughters.

From 1941-56 [probably meant 1946 since that's when they started at Our Lady of Perpetual Help], the older four children Bernice, Alice, Clarence, and Elton attended Converse Elementary School and we carpoled with the neighboring family to drive to school in the morning but had to walk back home in the evenings when planting or harvesting season. In 1946, we started attending Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Selma but the school provided a bus service for us. If the bus driver was sick or didn't show up, Father drove the bus to take us to school which was kind of funny or exciting in a way for the bus to stop and the door opens: "Father! You're

driving the bus this morning!” “Yes! Come on, let’s go!”. And I attended Our Lady of Perpetual Help School through the 9th grade. They were trying to start a high school but the parish couldn’t afford it so that’s when in September of 1950 my sister Alice and I started attending St. Gerard’s Catholic High School in San Antonio where we graduated in May 1956. Angeline, Jeanette, Gladys, Joanne, Madeline, and Debra started attending school in Selma but when St. Monica’s started in Converse, the younger ones attended. They all attended St. Gerard’s High School in San Antonio and Debra graduated in May of 1971 as the salutatorian of her class.

We all played instruments. We all played musical instruments in the high school band.

In 1950 when Alice and I attended St. Gerard’s High School, we had an after-school job here in Converse as a telephone operator at Mrs. Martin Lombrets [spelling and verify name?] Telephone Company here in Converse. It was a switchboard for pay phones on Randolph Air Force Base for the servicemen to make telephone calls. We did this for about a year until Southwestern Bell Company brought in a new telephone system in the area.

Our Father, Adolph, and Mary, our mother, believed in education. So he provided for us to attend John’s Business College in San Antonio for an office training business course which was about nine months. We all completed it and it gave us our careers in San Antonio. Clarence earned a scholarship to St. Mary’s so he graduated in May of 1959 from St. Mary’s University with his commission from the US Army. Bernice worked as an independent oil operator; Alice worked in an electrical wholesale business; Angeline worked for an independent oil operator; Jeanette, Gladys, Madeline, and Debra worked for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in various departments until their retirements. Joan worked for the FBI. Elton worked for City Public Service.

MS: And were there any major changes to the house that you saw while living there?

BF: While we were living in the first house?

MS: Yea, either the first house or while you were living at the main house.

Bernice: Yes, later Daddy remodeled the house. My grandfather [Anton Schumann] built the house in 1900, got married to Ida Siebold Schumann on January 22, 1901 and they lived in it until their deaths. Ida died on March 3, 1947 and Anton died September 8, 1949. Our family moved into the house in March of 1949. After a few years, Daddy had it remodeled to enlarge the kitchen and enclose the back porch and installed a kitchen cabinet and moved the washing machine into the house. The washing machine had been outside under a shed of the blacksmith shop which my grandfather had behind the house. In the house there is a stairway and they moved that stairway from one part of the house to the other part of the house. In 1976, Daddy had more remodeling done to the house and that's when they installed central heat and air conditioning and remodeled the kitchen.

It [Schumann-Scheel House] had two large rooms. Well the girls had one room- six of us girls shared a room- and the front room, the living room, was for my grandfather to live in.

I lived in the house until when we moved in in 1949 until I got married April 14, 1956 to Wilbur Freisenhahn. We got married at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Selma- the same church that our parents got married in. And for the wedding brunch, we had it in the front yard at this home. At five o'clock we went to Converse Hall and had a dinner and a dance. Alice, my sister, was the first one of the children to get married. She married Clarence D. [verify name] on October 29, 1955 and they had their wedding brunch in the front yard of the home. At five o'clock they went to Converse Hall for their wedding dinner and dance.

Every Sunday we had dinner with Mama and Daddy. One Sunday half of the family was there having Sunday dinner with them; the other Sunday, the other half of the family. And as we had our children, the grandkids loved to come to Oma and Opa's house on Sunday for lunch. They [grandkids] played games out in the yard, ran around- those are the fondest memories they had of Oma and Opa's house.

When Christmas time came, and the kids got older, they started bringing their friends to Oma and Opa's house for Christmas. The next year, "Can we go back to Oma and Opa's house for Christmas this year?" - they enjoyed it so much. Sometimes we'd get Santa to come and make a visit. Everybody exchanged gifts. Eventually the family got too big, we couldn't exchange gifts

so we started drawing names, but we always had a gift exchange every Christmas. We did that until Daddy passed away and now we're still doing it at my sister's house.

Some of them [the grandkids] got married at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Selma and some of them got married here at St. Monica's in Converse. And when they started having evening weddings, we didn't have the brunches at our home anymore because they had the wedding at three o'clock or four o'clock and then they went directly to Converse Hall to have their dinner and dance.

Favorite meals- My mother would rather have sewed than cook. She prepared good meals for us but whatever she fixed, we ate- she didn't run a cafe. After a while, the girls had to start cooking. We had chicken on Sunday, but not fried- she liked to stew chicken. One of the things she fixed on Fridays since we couldn't eat meat, she fixed a delicious potato soup- potatoes and onions. And we had pinto beans. And of course we had eggs for breakfast- we always had eggs because we always had chickens. And of course Daddy- we had our own meat- so we ate lots of steaks.

MS: You talked about traditions that you had with your weddings. Do you have pictures of your parents wedding?

BF: Yes, we have pictures of Mama and Daddy's wedding. And we have pictures of the reception in the front yard.

They [Edna and Mary Schumann] had the double wedding reception in the front yard of that home. And then Alice and Clarence and Wilbur and I had our wedding brunch in the front yard of this house.

MS: I think the Commission might be thinking about having a gazebo in the front to maybe have ceremonies like that in the front.

BF: I think that would be nice if they put a little gazebo in the front yard. We didn't have a gazebo, we just had the yard.

My grandmother always had flowers in the yard. My grandfather planted all of the pecan trees that are there. After many years, the pecan trees snuffed out the flowers. They always had a rose bush in the front yard which was there forever and I have propagated that rose and I have some. If they are interested in putting some of those original roses in the front yard, I'd be very happy to propagate them and let them plant some of those roses.

I think that would be special. So if they are interested, I'll be very happy. I have some at home and I've propagated a lot for my nieces- they want some of Oma's roses.

MS: Did the three boys share a room?

Bernice: Yes, they shared a room on the other side. We [the sisters] were on one side on the western side of the house and the boys were on the eastern side of the house. The two boys shared a room. However, Harvey, being crippled, he was always in a crib. And we had to lift him- he could never walk. And during the day, he loved to be outside and he would scoot all over the yard. That's the only way he could get around and then we'd bring him in the house, clean him up, and put him in his chair and he loved to eat molasses bread. He could feed himself with his left hand- his right side was paralyzed. We'd make him a sandwich with butter and molasses and cut it into little one inch squares and then he'd feed himself. He was able to feed himself but never walked or talked.

PG: Does he still not talk to this day?

BF: No. It's my understanding that that the spinal meningitis destroyed his brain that controls your talking- I don't know exactly. It was such a heartbreak but we all accepted it and nowadays they have so many things that they can do for these children with disabilities but that did not exist in our day.

MS: So you mentioned the molasses bread. Clarence also talked about how you guys actually made the molasses.

BF: Yes, we did. My grandparents had the molasses press- we still have the press and we're going to put it in the museum. The molasses press was under the tree in front of the house as you're driving in. Yes, we cooked the molasses. Daddy planted molasses cane. We stripped the leaves the press squeezed the juice out of the cane. And then they cooked it in the big pans for eight hours. All the farmers did that in those days. Not everybody had a setup so sometimes some of the neighbors would come and use my grandfather's place to make their molasses. But when by the time we moved into the house, we didn't do it very much- we maybe did it once or twice. And originally to turn the press, it had a long arm on it with a mule going around and round to turn the press. When my Daddy did it, he put one of the boys on the little tractor and they drove round and round to squeeze the juice out of the cane.

BF: Oh I just remembered we talked about the front yard and Sunday dinners. Well, Easter time we had big Easter egg hunts. Everybody came Easter Sunday to that house. We had the biggest Easter eggs in the front yard every year. Everybody looked forward to it- especially the grandkids looked forward and they made a special effort to come to Oma and Opa's house for the Easter egg hunt in the front yard.

MS: Do you guys still have big Easter egg hunts at your sister's?

BF: Not anymore because the grandkids, nieces and nephews, or those kids that hunted the Easter eggs in the front yard are all married now and have children of their own and they all moved away. So some of them do come here, but because of the long trips home, we can't have it- we tried, but it hasn't been working. It's kind of a tradition that's fading and we're losing that tradition.

MS: Clarence- I know he is fluent in German. Was German spoken at the house?

BF: Yes. Our first language at home was German and I started school to learn English. And then in 1941, of course, the war broke out and so they didn't want us talking German so we were actually forbidden to talk German on the school ground. A lot of the families quit talking German at home but our family kept it up. We all learned English, but at home, we kept the German up. Clarence was able to take it at St. Mary's so he could learn [to read and write it] and

of course with the service he learned it more, but I finally learned it [to read and write it] on my own. When I was working at Trinity, I took one semester of German I. Here I was, 65-years-old, and all these young students would laugh at the way I pronounced the words. That's when I taught myself how to read and write German. Both my husband and I- his family spoke it too- we speak it fluently and our oldest daughter, Karla, speaks it fluently and she reads and writes it. She [Karla] took it at Canyon High School and then she took one semester in college. She prides herself- she is the only one of the twenty-eight grandchildren that speaks the language.

There's a difference the way we spoke German- it's the way we were taught. So I've discovered- my husband and I have had a lot of people in our home as guests from Germany- we drop the endings of our words. In German when you pronounce a word, you pronounce every letter. In speaking like we did, I guess we can call it Texas German.

MS: Did you have any German traditions that you held on to?

BF: Yes, the Christmas tradition- we keep that. And the Easter tradition. And then we make the sausage, the German sausage, which is a recipe that's been passed down in our family. I can't think of all the traditions but we do have traditions.

In 1935 when Anton and Ida's second son, Milton, married Gertrude L. on January 22, 1935, they moved into the house with Anton and Ida for a number of years and their daughter Maryanne and son Melvin were born in the home. After a few years, Anton and Ida, my grandparents, gifted the 300 acre farm to two of their children and they gave my mother 103 acres and the son, Milton, her brother, 100 acres and Milton and Gertrude built their home on the western part which is over off of Schumann Rd. So my mother [Mary] was on one part of the farm and Milton, the brother, was on the other side of the farm and Anton and Ida had kept 49 acres which they stayed on until they passed away and then we moved onto that. And when they passed away, Mama and Daddy had bought that from the brothers and sisters and that's where we lived and that's where the house is.

Converse was a little farm community with acres of farms where families all worked together to earn a living for their family. Now the farms have become housing subdivisions and no farms

left. So many memories of a quiet, simple life. In the summer you opened all the windows and there was always a southern breeze especially sitting on the front porch in the evenings.

[I] would love to see the house as a reflection of what country living was like in the early days. Also portray what living in the Converse area was like.

The Schumann-Scheel House represents the architecture of homes built by German immigrants, farmers turned carpenters- many learned their trade in Germany before they came and then passed it down to their children.

I hope they preserve the Gold and the Rodeius [spelling?] House especially the Rodeius [spelling?] Store- that is Converse history. Since the other places are gone, that grocery store is a treasure trove of historical things. I don't know what it's like now but we used to go in there and buy our groceries and when I walked to Converse to get the groceries from Mr. Rodeius [spelling?]. Before I walked out of the store, he said "Wait a minute!", he'd go over to the candy case and get a little bag and fill it up with lemon drops or some kind of penny candy that I could take home to my brothers and sisters.

It is troubling to see that many of the old businesses have been destroyed. They would be a beautiful old town of days gone by.

We gave 18 acres of wood land and I'm hoping that they are able to make nice park areas out of it and linear walking trails. I think that's their vision to have bike trails and so forth. That would be beautiful. And there's a big bluff there on the side. And that would lead them all the way down to Converse, downtown Converse.

MS: Why do you think it's important for future generations to learn about the Schumann-Scheel House?

BF: I think it's important to show what the area was like and what it has become. I know there will be more changes but it's always interesting to look back and see where we came from.

Interview with Gladys Haecker
Interviewed at 407 S. Seguin Converse, TX 78109 in conference room of Converse City Hall
Interviewed on April 17, 2019
Converse Historic Preservation Commission Oral History Project
Interviewed by Mariana Sandoval and Pierre Gutierrez

Gladys Haecker- GH
Mariana Sandoval- MS

GH: I am Gladys Haecker. I was born in October 22, 1943. I lived in the Schumann-Scheel House for about fifteen years. I am the seventh child of the eleven of Adolph and Mary Schumann Scheel.

MS: How has Converse changed throughout the years?

GH: When I was a child, Converse was just a small town nestled in a farming community in Bexar county, east of San Antonio. Main Street consisted of one blinking light, grocery store, mercantile store, post office, gas station, bar, butcher shop, barber shop, train depot, farm equipment repair shop, and a bus stop in the middle of town.

There was a day shuttle than ran from Randolph Air Force Base to downtown San Antonio and the purpose of that shuttle was to bring the workers in [from] San Antonio so they could work at Randolph. The bus would come in the morning and come back in the afternoon to pick them up- they worked 7am-4pm. That bus also worked well for the young people who wanted to attend high school in San Antonio because we didn't have a high school out here [Converse]. That shuttle would come early in the morning, drop off the workers, come pick up the high school students, and they would go to St. Gerard's High School on the east side of San Antonio. In the afternoon, school was over at 3 o'clock. The students could go back to the bus stop and wait at the bus stop there, would pick them [the high school students] up and bring them through Converse and then be at Randolph at 4 o'clock when they [the workers] got off of work and then would return to San Antonio. That was a good benefit for the children here to be able to go to Catholic high school. We took advantage of that bus service for many years- many of us traveled on that bus to and from school; it was just an advantage we fell into.

The town itself, everybody knew everybody, everybody helped everybody else out, if there was a need somebody had, everybody pitched in and helped them out.

The old, historical buildings that were on main street, they were all taken down and other businesses had moved in so none of them are available anymore- that was kind of sad to see them go because that was our history. All the farm lands around the community and the surrounding area is all covered in rooftops now- they are all suburbs. We have a huge high school right in the middle of town. All the historic Converse as I knew it is all gone. It's just been a lot of change.

MS: What are your fondest memories of the house and surrounding property?

GH: I lived here in this house [Schumann-Scheel House] from 1949 til 1964 when I got married- that was fifteen years. Some of my fondest memories were the time we spent on the front porch in the front yard. Since there were so many children, and two more were born after we moved here, there was always someone to play with.

My father was raised in the hill country and his family gathered on their front porch at the end of everyday. He said after spending so much time on the front porch they could distinguish the calls of the whippoorwills at night. The whippoorwill changed the sounds of its calls, that mean the bad weather was coming, so the whippoorwill was kind of forewarning them so they could get ready for inclement or bad weather- like a weather forecaster.

He always loved to watch the children play in our yard. He was a very busy man on the farm- they worked from sun-up to sun-down, but on weekends, Sunday was our day off. He would like to sit and be on the front porch- when we were playing he would usually come and sit. He also would like to listen at night- he would listen and all of a sudden he would get quiet and say "Listen," and you would distinguish it, "that's the whippoorwill. We're going to have bad weather in a couple of days"- it was definitely a forecaster. I had never heard of that before and nobody knows about that probably today but that was the "old-timers" way of knowing what kind of weather to prepare for.

In his later declining years, we would come take care of him and we spent a lot of time on his front porch. He would sit there and watch his cows graze on a nearby hillside. He had a deer feeder out in front of his house, and loved to watch the deer come up to the feeder- he was a big, avid deer hunter for many years and it just made him feel like that was part of him [still], the deer hunting. He would always spot the bucks and they were a little shy but when the bucks would come, he would get all excited because they were on his property. That was one of the fondest memories I have.

The front porch was always a place where we played our games and some nights we would be out there until bedtime. This was our time to be together. In the summer, Mama would buy some watermelons from a man peddling watermelons in our community, five for a dollar, and she'd buy those big, black diamond watermelons and we'd put them under the house because they would cool there. In the evenings after Daddy came in from the fields and after all of our chores were done, we'd sit on the porch and enjoy our watermelons- that was a special time. Whenever we'd have enough cream from milking our cows- we always had to separate the cream from the milk- we would get to make homemade ice cream in our ice-cream freezer. Everyone would gather on the front porch to reap the benefits of our hard work. Getting that ice cream, it would take two people- one to turn the crank and one to sit on top of the ice cream freezer because the handle would come loose from the paddle that turned the paddling inside the ice cream [maker]- it would come loose so someone had to sit on top of it to keep that connected. It took two people to make the ice cream and everybody had to take their turn to turn the crank or sit on top of it to keep the crank and the paddle connected. That was not every week, only when we could build up enough cream for that.

Another memory I have is making molasses. We made molasses and that was usually made about July or August. We had to walk the rows of cane in the field and we had to strip all the leaves off the canes and the canes just sat without leaves until the day before we were going to cook this molasses. Daddy and the boys would go out and cut it at ground level and then us little kids we had to take it and lay it on a flatbed trailer. That flatbed trailer- when we had all the cane on it- we would move it up to the house and we would cut the seed-head off of the cane stalk and then that trailer was moved over next to the molasses press and that sat there. Early the next

morning, I mean *early* the next morning, we were there and that's when the process started. Us little kids, Jeanette and I and my sister Angie, we had to carry the cane stalks from the trailer and give them to Daddy and my Daddy would put them through the molasses press and the molasses press would squeeze or press the stalks and the sap would run down into this big, huge vat. To turn those big metal wheels, it took either a horse, donkey, or tractor- well we used a tractor. There was a long post that came out from the molasses press itself and then the tractor would drive in a circle around the press- around and around- and it would turn that press to squeeze the sap out of the cane. My brother would drive the tractor. It was a dizzying chore he had because one time he got so dizzy he ran into a nearby tree because he was so dizzy from driving around in circles for all that time. We, Jeanette and I and Angie- the kids carrying the stalk over- we always had to make sure we stayed out of the way of the tractor so we didn't get run over. It was definitely a precise situation. After the vat was full, they would take that big vat and take it to what we called a stove but it was a huge, big pan that was about 20ft long and 6ft wide. That pan had handles on it. They would put it in there and they would dump the sap into that big pan and then they would build a fire. The pan sat up on a big, brick frame and they would build a fire underneath it and then they would cook that sap for six or eight hours depending on when the consistency was right and when the molasses was done then they would take that and put it into smaller containers. They would use it for our own consumption and they would sell it in mercantile or to the neighbors. That is something very vivid in my mind- the molasses cooking day was an all-day event for everyone.

Another thing that stuck in my mind about the house and living there was our holidays. We were a farming family, we didn't have a lot of money for gifts, but we always had a nice Christmas. We did get a few gifts, but the time of Christmas was so special. Daddy would chop a cedar tree in one of the pastures and Mama would set it up in the living room and decorate it with lights and glass ornaments and tinfoil icicles and that would make it shimmer when the lights would shine. We didn't get to see that Christmas tree- Mama would decorate it behind a closed door. We never got to see the tree until Christmas Eve, so, for a couple of days, the anticipation of seeing the tree was building. Daddy would go every year to the produce market in San Antonio and he would buy a box of apples and some sacks of oranges and grapefruit and then those were put under the tree. On Christmas Eve, we all line up in our order and they would open the door and the smell of that cedar tree and those apples and oranges and grapefruits, that was just a beautiful smell and to me, that always reminds me of Christmas when I smell that. That was our Christmas. And of course, when they opened the door, we got to see that Christmas tree for the first time after all that anticipation. It would just shimmer with the light shining on it. Those foil icicles were dangling and they would move with the air movement in the room. The shimmering Christmas tree is something I'll never forget. As far as gifts, some of the gifts we got, like I said, they weren't very big, but we got colors, a pair of socks, maybe a puzzle. The little girls always got a doll- I still have my last doll at home, looks pretty old but I still have it.

Another special holiday was Easter. Mama always would make us a new dress for Easter and, for us girls, to get a new dress, that was special. So on Easter morning we always got to wear our new dresses to church. We would set up our Easter baskets and we'd get a little candy and then we would have lots of Easter eggs. We'd have lots of Easter eggs to hunt and then we'd go to Oma's house and we'd hunt eggs there and we'd come back home and we'd hunt eggs and then

if we ever forget to find any, well the dogs would find them the next week and they'd eat them up. So, there was never a left over Easter egg.

Another holiday that we had that was very special was St. Nicholas Day. It was kind of like a prelude to or a preview of Christmas. It always meant that we put our sock on the table, either the kitchen table or the dining room table. The next morning, December 6th, we would go in and find all of our stockings all stuffed up and it had nuts, oranges, apple, and a little bit of candy and that was very special to find that because we didn't get a lot of treats as we were growing up- those were some special times when we got a treat and that's one thing I remember.

MS: What did your family do for entertainment?

GH: Well, we didn't have a TV or any of those other electronic gadgets that kids of these days have so we were left to our imagination for entertainment. Day or night, after we had done our chores and homework, if there was any time left, in the winter, we would play board games, card games, and puzzles. In the summer when it was warm, we would go outside and play in the yard. The games were Red Rover, hide-and-go-seek, volleyball, baseball, and shadow tag on a full moon lit night. That was fun- out in the dark and you would play shadow tag and you could run into home base quite easily as long as they didn't see you in the dark- so that was always a lot of fun. We also liked to lay on the front lawn on blankets and we watched the stars. Since there was no city light interference, there were millions of stars and we occasionally would see a shooting star- that was exciting to see a shooting star or meteor. Every once in a while we would see a plane and we would follow it and that was exciting. We lived close to Randolph Air Force Base and it was about 20 miles from San Antonio and they had air bases there too. It was always exciting when we could find the North Star- it was a little bit brighter than the other stars and when someone could find it, that was exciting.

MS: Did any of your family play musical instrument?

GH: Yes. My mother played piano very well and she would sometimes play for us. We would dance in the living room with our dolls and we'd dance with each other around the coffee table. The children all learned to play at the St. Gerard's High School band. My brother Clarence played the cornet; Elton played the trombone; Bernice, Angeline, Joanne, Debbie, and I all played the saxophone; and Alice, Jeanette, and Madeline played the clarinet. Angie played the organ at our church for several years. We all had an upbringing in music. Several of us kids developed our singing skills in church choirs. Bernice, Clarence, Jeanette, and I all sang or currently sing in church or community choirs. Clarence sings with the San Antonio Liederkrantz, that's a German choir; I sing with the New Braunfels Core of Harmony [?], that's a German choir; Jeanette still sings with the St. Monica's choir in Converse. Clarence and I also sing with the [?], that's a traveling German singing group.

MS: Were there any major changes to the house that you saw while living there?

GH: Right before we moved in, a wood stove was added in the parlor for my grandfather because the parlor became his bedroom when the family took over the rest of the house- so, that stove was new. The western section of the back screen porch was converted to an indoor toilet room at

one time. That room was moved to the east end of the porch and it became a bathroom where we had a tub and a sink and a toilet in that bathroom. The staircase was moved to enlarge the dining area. The screen porch was completely enclosed to enlarge the kitchen for the larger family. The original kitchen became a bedroom and the original dining room became another bedroom. Many years later, central heat and air was added.

MS: What are some of the things you'd like to see done to the house along with the museum?

GH: To leave the house as it is but restore it back to its original look- color of paint and all. And open it up for Converse to see what it was like in the early years of the town's founding.

The Schumann-Scheel House means the place that I know as my home place, *mein heimplatz*. Even though I was born in the smaller house on the Schumann farm and I lived there for four years and then in 1947 we moved to Luxello farm and lived there for almost two years, this house [Schumann-Scheel House] has so many memories of my younger years and I lived there until I got married. We took our First Communion, our Confirmation, our graduation, wedding pictures in the house or on the front lawn. We also had many family gatherings here and after the children began leaving home, it became a gathering place for us to come home every Sunday for lunch and family togetherness. As the grandchildren arrived, they also enjoyed visiting with their many cousins and played together until dark just as we did as kids.

MS: What troubles, if any, has Converse faced throughout the years?

GH: At one time, there was a flooding problem in Converse but those problems were resolved with the building of the Martinez Watershed. The Salitrillo Creek- which runs through Converse and through many of the farms and through the Schumann Farm for that fact- they [city of Converse] had a project that was going to include building five major dams and it would stop the water before it got into the city and it would retain the water so it wouldn't cause all the flooding in the town. The Schumann farm was not selected for one of these dams. The Salitrillo Creek does run through the property and after the dams were built, all the flooding in town and surrounding farms subsided.

MS: How do you feel about the developments near your old home?

GH: As long as the Schumann-Scheel House and property is maintained and protected, I guess I'm ok with that. I can always come back to visit.

MS: Why do you think that it's important that future generations of Converse learn about the Schumann-Scheel House and continue to preserve other historical locations?

GH: Unfortunately Converse did not save and restore historical buildings so this will be a place where citizens and visitors can come and learn about the early years of Converse and its history.

Interview with Howard 'Howie' Marbach

Interviewed at 407 S. Seguin Converse, TX 78109 in conference room of Converse City Hall

Interviewed on April 26, 2019
Converse Historic Preservation Commission Oral History Project
Interviewed by Mariana Sandoval and Pierre Gutierrez

Howie Marbach- HB
Mariana Sandoval- MS

HM: My name is Howard Marbach but everyone calls me Howie. They still call me Howie and I'm 87-years-old. I was born and raised in this community, my mother was born and raised in this community, we raised seven children in this community all went to Judson High School, and I have been involved in this community in every area except for political office. I enjoy this community- that's why I still live here.

MS: Do you have anything that you want to expand on? Tell us more about yourself and your experiences growing up here [in Converse].

HM: I went to the old Converse Elementary School which was a mile away. Mr. Maescker (??) taught reading, writing, and arithmetic and he said the reason those were so important was because if you could read, you could become whatever you wanted to become. We need to be able to write so that you can express your thoughts properly. He said you need to learn about arithmetic so you can balance your checkbook.

The town was mainly German because the period after Texas won their independence from Mexico, 20,000 people came from Germany to this area and settled predominantly in New Braunfels and Fredericksburg. New Braunfels was the main area [these German immigrants arrived to] and as more people came, they expanded out further and further and most of the expansion was towards San Antonio and that's how Converse got started.

I don't know if you know how Converse got their name- Major Converse who was building the railroad from Galveston to El Paso bought property here. He bought it from the Allens, his uncle Sam Allens and the Allens were the ones who initially started Houston, but his uncle bought property everywhere. He [Sam Allen] had bought some property here in Converse and when Major Converse was here, he [Major Converse] bought half of that property and stayed here and lived here. In fact, my Grandma and Grandpa Kneupper lived in the house that he built until 1904. A year after the Schumann-Scheel House was built he built his other home for his new bride.

There was a few Spanish-speaking people here. I couldn't speak English when I started school, I could only speak German. I could speak a little Spanish, not too much. We taught the Spanish boys how to talk German and they taught us how to talk Spanish. In the first grade of school, here's this lady speaking a foreign language called English.

The town had four general stores, two cotton gins, a dance hall, a blacksmith shop, and telephone dispatch office which dispatched all the telephone lines from Schertz, Marion, all that. The dispatch house, in fact, if that house was still here, I think it would be the house to save. That's kind of what the town was.

MS: You mentioned there was a dance hall. What was the other stuff your family did for entertainment in the area?

HM: Probably the biggest thing was visiting with the neighbors. We had relatives right across the street- we ran a lot around with them. And Grandma and Grandpa lived right around the corner.

They [Converse Hall] had dances on a monthly basis, in fact, it used to be right over where the Justice Center is- I tried to keep them from tearing it down but I didn't succeed. It was an interesting dance hall, not like they are today. They had a bullpen- you had a fence and then you had an area. They [Converse Hall] had a monthly dance and that was one of the big things. Also that same dance hall was also where the German singing club was. We played a lot of checkers and a game called Mill and cards. We played Skat which is a European game that came over from Germany in the middle of the 1800s. We played another game called Sixty-Six .

The biggest entertainment was visiting with the neighbors and us boys figuring out what we could do to get into trouble.

MS: What are your fondest memories of Converse?

HM: Bunch of them. Playing marbles in the middle of the street. Playing street baseball. Playing in the creek which was exciting for us, still exciting for me because I've been walking in that creek for seventy-eight years now and when I was a young kid, I used to play in it. We used to be able to spend the night with friends- no one really worried you were gone. We didn't have any cell phones in those days, they just knew you were at somebody else's house or across the street. One of the fondest things for me, and it seems like we've lost it but we're starting to regain it again, was that people were willing to help each other- you didn't have to ask, they just automatically knew that you needed help. I guess also getting a nickel or ten cents for soda water, ice cream, or candy.

Howie went to H.H. Gold's Store when he got the nickel or ten cents. This is Howie's description of the store: H.H. Gold store had a general store, post office in the middle, right behind the post office was a candy area, and then they had a bar and a pool hall.

MS: How has Converse changed throughout the years?

HM: Tremendously. I guess after they built Randolph Air Force Base- I think it was dedicated in 1932- that created a little more commerce in this area. In 1949, we established a lions club which was not just Converse; it was Converse, Schertz, and Cibolo. When they had a meeting, they changed [the location] back and forth. Several years later, Schertz and Cibolo dropped out and Converse took the charter- that was back in 1949. We started a volunteer fire department in 1950 which I was the instructor for sixteen years. In 1961, the city began and I started organizing things. We built a Catholic church in 1960. Judson High School started in 1959- that was due to some of the growth we were having here.

One of the things that people don't remember that the first Bexar County Stock Show was held right here at the old dance hall, Liederkrantz hall. We had a big tent and big covered pavilion; they built all the pens around that and that was in the 1940s.

One of the sad things that changed when we became a city, the people volunteering to help kind of went out the window.

MS: What troubles, if any, has Converse faced throughout the years?

HM: First of all, we lost all of our stores as we grew. The only reason we incorporated was to keep San Antonio from telling us what to do. In fact, a lot of people were even against that two years later. We had an election to see whether we wanted to remain incorporated- it won by two votes so we remained incorporated.

Sad part is most people had to do their shopping out of town. Most of our historical buildings were torn down- I fought it tooth and nail. The city finally established a historic preservation commission.

There was a planning commission in the early 1960s that got together and decided what was the historical buildings in the area and that report was given to the city. The city approves all commission reports and they approved those historical facilities, but they tore them all down anyway.

MS: What are some of the things you'd like to see done to the house along with the museum?

HM: We've given that a lot of thought- some of us even before there was a commission for that. A museum, an educational farm. We've had quite a bit of support for that [educational farm] in fact, we had the chancellor of Lakeview college that was really in favor of that. Also an agricultural theme park. The Scheels and Schumanns were all farmers and ranchers so it would be great to develop a theme park. We thought it would be great to be able to have a community development institute which kind of got thrown out for a while but the mayor and some others think it's a great idea- we think it's a great idea. Also have an area for citizen gardening plots where they can plant their own gardens. I don't know if any of y'all have been to the Seguin Museum- they have a great facility. They have a big, red barn which is a fundraiser for birthdays, weddings, things like that. Behind that they have a church, blacksmith shop, general store, couple of residential homes, and it's just like a little community like they were in those years. Because of that, they [Seguin] were fortunate enough to get the Texas Pecan Museum that's located there.

I think the house should be kept just like it is- no changes should be made to it because we are trying to do a history that shows what that house was like at that time not after a big remodel. At that particular time, the Scheels had eleven children, their neighbors, the Marbach family, had thirteen children so when they invited the neighbors over, they had a crowd of 25 children. I thought it should be left as much as it can be as it was because that's the part of real history, not manufactured history, what actually happened there.

One of the things I harped on for years because I love the creek, I walked there for thousands of miles in these two creeks, and I thought it would be great to have a linear park for each one especially with walking trails- now it is starting to come to pass.

That's what the house means to me- it was part of real history.

MS: Do you think there are other areas in or around Converse that are of historical importance that we should look at?

HM: Yes, those that we haven't torn down. The Lions Club was pretty successful at almost getting [saving] the old train station. It's moved to out on Bulverde Rd where the transportation museum is, in fact, it still had Converse on it but they changed it. The general store- the only store that is really left is the Rodieus [spelling?] Store- it was closed up many years ago but it still was a general store and the building is still there. The Rodieus' [spelling?], their home is right next door to it and right next door to them is the H.H. Gold home who had the general store plus the post office and the pool hall and beer joint all in one. That home is still there. In fact, the lady that lives there has fixed it up again- it looks really nice. I think the telephone dispatch home which is over on Kneupper [St] is still there. Also, my Grandma and Grandpa Kneupper's home on Kneupper St. The old Simon and Boyfield [spelling?] cotton gin- the building is still there. My grandpa's cotton gin was located right here, but has been torn down for many years.

The new animal care facility is built where the Old Converse School was where I went to school and where my mother went to school.

MS: Why do you think it's important that future generations of Converse citizens learn about the Schumann-Scheel House and continue to seek other historic locations to preserve?

HM: I think it's visual history- you can see the construction that was put into the house, how it was built, what it was used for. You can visualize the history instead of reading about it. I think visualization is better than being able to read about it. I think it's a real history; a visual history.

MS: Did you go to St. Gerard's high school?

HM: No- I went to Central Catholic. We had to ride the Randolph Bus into town and of course they went down Commerce St and they'd drop them [Schumann's] off at Geever's [spelling?] and they'd have to walk about 4 blocks to St. Gerard's. We rode the bus all the way in to the bus station on 3rd St I think it was and then walk to Central Catholic. Some people caught the bus in Brackenridge. Some people also went to a technical school. Some went to Schertz-Cibolo- that's where my wife went.

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