

Cecelia Smith

Where: Helvetia Community Hall

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Location: Helvetia, West Virginia

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: M. Mairéad Gaffney

Length: 19:30

Project: Helvetia

Cecelia Coleman Smith was born in Buckhannon, West Virginia in 1949. Originally from Pickens, West Virginia, her family moved away from the Helvetia/Pickens community when she was seven so her father could take a coal mining job. She moved back to Pickens in 2005. Mrs. Smith served in the military and is a member of the local American Legion chapter. She is also part of the Pickens Improvement and Historical Society, the Farm Women's Club, and occasionally volunteers at the Hutte Restaurant.

This interview is part of a series of interviews conducted with foodways practitioners in Helvetia, West Virginia, as part of the Helvetia Foodways Oral History Project in partnership with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Learn more: <https://www.southernfoodways.org/oral-history/helvetia-west-virginia/>

Transcriber's note: Interviewer's interjections denoted in [ ]'s and blue.

00:00

**Emily Hilliard:**

Um, so will you, um, tell me your name and where and when you were born?

00:09

**Cecelia Smith:**

Cecelia Smith. I was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in Buckhannon, January 7th, 1949.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

What brought you to, um, to Helvetia?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I'm originally from Pickens, and I'm a member of the Helvetia Farm Women's Club, so, um, I help out in the community wherever I'm needed.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

00:30

Nice. Um, so what was it like growing up here?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I-I...

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Did you grow up here...

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I-I...

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**Emily Hilliard:**

...or did you grow up in Buckhannon?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I didn't grow up here. My dad was a coal miner and we left the area when I was seven. [OK] And I got to move home eleven years ago. [Nice]...twelve years ago.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Would you come back, um, you know, over the course of your life before you moved back...

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Come back for visits, yes.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Um, would you come back for things like the Ramp Supper?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

01:00

I was never at a ramp supper until I, um, no, uh, yes, I did. Uh, after I moved back to the area in '88, I came back for different things.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. Um, so, what sort of things in the community are you involved in now?

01:12

**Cecelia Smith:**

Well, both ramp suppers, Pickens and Helvetia, the West Virginia Maple Syrup Festival in Pickens, the Helvetia Fair. I'm a part, I'm a member of the Legion, because I was in the service

01:30

myself. [Hmm] And, um, I'm part of the Pickens, um, Pickens Improvement and Historical Society, the community...program, and, um, I volunteer at the Hutte when they need extra help washing dishes or something. [Mm-hmm] I help wherever I'm needed.

01:41

**Emily Hilliard:**

You're busy! [They laugh] Um, so what do you think, what role do you think food plays in this community?

01:50

**Cecelia Smith:**

[Laughs a little] A *big* one! [They laugh] Food,...yeah, food is an im-, very important part of the

02:00

community. 'Kay?

02:02

**Emily Hilliard:**

Why do you think that is in particular here?

02:07

**Cecelia Smith:**

Well...a part of its heritage. It's passing down the, the family recipes. And enjoying, and, and when you get together with people, you eat!

02:18

**Emily Hilliard:**

Yeah. [They laugh] What are some, uh, recipes that have been passed down in your family?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

02:30

Well, I have two cakes that I brought today. One is a German Apple Cake, which I think was my grandmother's recipe. But I know it's been in the family for umpteen years [wow]. And the other one is, uh, Molasses Crumb Cake, which my dad made when I was little. [Oh, my gosh.] And, um, I know I, I make potato soup the way my mother did. There's a lot of things that I make the way...[sounds like a bucket drops] the way my grand, the way my mother and my grandmothers made it when I was growing up.

02:53

**Emily Hilliard:**

Are they, um, German or Swiss?

02:56

**Cecelia Smith:**

03:00

On my dad's side, Swiss. On my mom's, uh, German-Swiss on my dad's side. On my mom's side it was a mixture of...of Irish...of Irish, German, American-Indian, and a couple of other things.

03:12

**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. Sounds like me. [They laugh] Um, so, uh, did your dad do a lot of baking?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Not really, no. That was, the only thing I remember him making was a Dutch Crumb Cake.

03:24

**Emily Hilliard:**

03:30

Mmmm. I'll have to try to get a slice of that. Um. So, then, what are some other things that you remember, um, your family eating, um, sort of traditional things?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Um. Swiss creamed steak was one that, uh, was my grandmother's recipe. [Oh] Some people would call it sour cream steak.

03:49

**Emily Hilliard:**

Oh, I haven't heard of that.

03:50

**Cecelia Smith:**

Well it, it's really good. It's, uh, sour cream in the sauce. [OK] And corn bread and  
04:00

ramps. Uh... There's just so much. [They laugh]

04:04

**Emily Hilliard:**

Is your cornbread sweet?

04:07

**Cecelia Smith:**

The recipe I use is, yes. But that came from my ex-husband's grandmother. [Laughs]

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Oh, right! We were talking about this yesterday.

04:14

**Cecelia Smith:**

Yes.

04:15

**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. And how did you learn to make it from her?

04:19

**Cecelia Smith:**

Uh, I asked her for the recipe, and she said it was in her head. I asked her to, next time she made it to write down approximately how much. And she did real good, except it was, "butter the size of an egg." [They laugh]

04:32

**Emily Hilliard:**

So how have you interpreted that?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I, uh, put in about the size of a large egg. In, uh, in the bottom of the pan, or I use bacon grease instead.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. And how does, that, would you say it's about a stick, or a little under a stick, or...?

04:45

**Cecelia Smith:**

It's about maybe a third of a stick.

04:47

**Emily Hilliard:**  
OK.

[Someone in background asks for the restroom. And then apologizes for interrupting.]

04:52

**Emily Hilliard:**  
Oh, that's OK, that's OK.

04:53

**Cecelia Smith:**  
There's a restrooms right there.

04:56

**Emily Hilliard:**

05:00

Um. So what is your role with the Ramp Supper?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I help wherever I'm needed. Help clean the ramps, help cook 'em, help, you know, like set up and serve.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Mm-hmm. And how do you cook your ramps?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Um. We, we clean them good and then we boil them until they're tender. And we chill 'em, and drain 'em and let them chill, and then put them in the freezer. And, uh, a day, two days

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before the ramp supper we take them out to start thawing.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. And then do you cook them in bacon?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Fry them with bacon. And bacon grease.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Mmmm. The ones I had yesterday were really good.

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**Cecelia Smith:**

They are good! [They laugh] Yes.

05:44

**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. And, uh, why do you think the ramp supper is, um, important? I know that you and Sharon decided you were gonna keep it going.

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**Cecelia Smith:**

06:00

Well, actually, last year, it was my granddaughter, Morgan, my adopted granddaughter. [OK] She said that she used to clean ramps when she was little with her two grandmothers, and she didn't want it to fall by the wayside. And she started pushing. And we agreed to help. And then she started calling me "grandma" too. [Laughs] [Aw!] I love her! [That's really sweet!] But, it's a part of our heritage and we've lost too much of our heritage. We need to hold on to it as much as we can.

06:27

**Emily Hilliard:**

06:30

Mm-hmm. What are some things that, um, that you have lost that aren't really practiced anymore?

06:36

**Cecelia Smith:**

Uh, quilting is one big one. There's not too many people that make quilts any more. Uh, they're machine made now and they used to be all handmade. And I don't quilt, so I mean, I know that's...but it, it hurts to see things like that fallen by the wayside. [Mm-hmm] And, uh, there

07:00

used to be, uh, steak dinners and different other kinds of things going on in the community, and it's just, there's not enough people to keep things going any more.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Yeah. Um, do you think young people, like Morgan, and others will, um, carry on?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Morgan will, as long as she can get help. [Yeah] And some of the others, but, uh, most of them aren't as interested as Morgan. [Mm-hmm] She's an exception. She's a very, very smart, very mature young lady, for her age.

07:27

**Emily Hilliard:**

07:30

OK. And do you, could you point to why, um, you know, in particular she sees this value?



07:37

**Cecelia Smith:**

Well, her grandmother was Eleanor, her, her great-grandmother was Eleanor Mailloux [Interviewer's note: Eleanor Mailloux was the co-founder of the Hutte and a Helvetia matriarch who restored much of the community's Swiss traditions], who owned the Hutte and was real big on tradition in the community. And, I...I think she instilled something in Morgan. And...the rest of the family has tried to follow through with a lot of things

08:00

Eleanor did. That's... And it was things that, she would come to visit her grandmother and she did it with them and she wants to continue those traditions.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I feel that way...just the things you do with your grandmother are so special.

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Yes, they are.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. So what are some other, uh, well, I guess we, we can continue on the ramp supper. Who,

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um, who comes and how many people do you expect?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

We never know. It, it depends on the weather. It depends on what else is going on in...communities around. There's just so many factors. And it seems like it's more the older people that are coming and we don't have many of the younger people coming to it.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Hmmm. Can you, do you have a guess as to why that is?

08:57

**Cecelia Smith:**

09:00

There's nothing to keep 'em here, so they're moving away, and... they lose that background.

09:04

**Emily Hilliard:**

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Um, and, but it was successful last year [sounds of footsteps] after, after you guys kind of decided...

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Mm-hmm. It'd been a couple of years, three years before where they might have broke even. That was about it. And, uh, we just decided that we were going to make it. And Morgan  
09:30  
got the 4-H, 4-H club involved and, uh, it was a beautiful week. A beautiful day, like today [mm-hmm] and people count, like to come out after a bad winter, you come out!

09:37

**Emily Hilliard:**

Yeah. Yep. Um. What are some of the, uh, desserts that will be served? Aside from yours.

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**Cecelia Smith:**

There's the hummingbird cake, with real violets sprinkled over it. It's beautiful. There's chocolate cake. There's, um...peanut butter cake. Peanut butter

10:00

cookies. Oh...brownies. There's just a whole bunch [Emily laughs] of different kinds of cakes.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

I actually bought a banana cake. I was gonna give it to Dave [Interviewer's note: Dave Whipp] for, um, hosting me, but he said to bring it down here, so I'll bring it down...

10:18

**Cecelia Smith:**

So there's banana cake too? [They laugh] OK.

10:21

**Emily Hilliard:**

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Um, and, uh, what, uh...what happens, um, at the square dance? It is a typical Helvetia square dance?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

You're asking the wrong person [they laugh], I'm, I'm out of here before that! [You're go home!] I go home.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

And rest after being on your feet for several days.

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Mm-hmm.

10:42

**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. So what are some other community celebrations that you're a part of that center around, uh, food or agriculture?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

11:00

Well, the Maple Syrup Festival is...maple syrup is the big thing, but there's also vendors and...all, all kinds of crafts, and there's vendors that come in and serve food. And, uh, the Legion, on Saturday morning, the Legion and the school has a Pancake Breakfast. Um, the Legion has a Pancake Breakfast on Sunday. And Saturday afternoon they have a ham and bean supper at the Legion. [Mmmm] And, uh, September, uh, the Helvetia Fair. There's food served different

11:30  
places in the community [mm-hmm], and, um, I've...my husband and I started, it's been, about seven years ago, that he and I started selling cheese in the Cheese Haus. [Oh!] Helping the community, because, you know, we don't make the cheese, but [mm-hmm] we sell it for 'em. And then, uh, Sharon [Interviewer's Note: Sharon Rollins] took over when he could no longer help me. [OK] And she helps me

12:00

now. And, uh, and in February, let me see, uh, the first Saturday after Shrove Tuesday, I think it is, that we have Fasnacht. [Mm-hmm] Which is sort of like Mardi Gras. And there's food, uh, served there. And there's family reunions and picnics and stuff going on all, year-round too. [Uh-huh] So, it's just...just about anything you want to come up with. There's going to be food at it. [Emily laughs]

12:22

**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. Does the maple syrup come from local, um, maple tappers?

12:27

**Cecelia Smith:**

12:30

Uh, we have, uh, two that are real close. And then others like from Buckhannon and different areas.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Who are the two close-by farms?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Richter, Richter's Maple House. And he was involved in getting it started [OK], Mike Richter. And the other one is, uh...Blue Ro-, it's up towards Blue Rock and it's, uh, his has been certified organic. [OK] And I can't come up with his name right now, I'm sorry!

12:56

**Emily Hilliard:**

13:00

That's OK! Um. And, uh, it's...Mike Richter, is he in Pickens?

13:05

**Cecelia Smith:**

He's just north of Pickens, or just up the hill from Pickens. He's about five miles from Pickens.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. Do other people in the community just tap a few trees for themselves?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

There are people that do that, yes.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. And, are they using, like the metal taps or the lines? Do you know?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

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Some of them use the metal taps with buckets and some use the lines. [Yeah] Both, um, Mike and the guy at Blue Rock use lines.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Yeah, most of the bigger farms these days do [Mmmhm]... And, uh, for the ham and bean supper, um, what's involved with that for food? What kind of beans, and...?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

It's, uh, pinto beans, cor-, and there's cornbread and applesauce and, uh, cold slaw, fried

14:00

potatoes...desserts...seems to me like there's something else and I'm not coming up with what it is.

14:02

**Emily Hilliard:**

Green, is there a green that's...?

14:05

**Cecelia Smith:**

Maybe they have green beans. [Mmmm. OK] I think they do, yeah.

14:11

**Emily Hilliard:**

That sounds good. Um. And what's the, uh, Community Fair like?

14:19

**Cecelia Smith:**

The Helvetia Fair? [Mm-hmm] It's, uh, there's folk dancing, and, uh, in traditional Swiss

14:30

costumes. There's, of course, food and there's a lot of people come in just for that, to visit. And the singing and the dancing is really nice. I still never get to see it, because I'm down at The Cheese Haus. [Emily laughs] But there's a parade in the afternoon. And a lot of different people do different things for the parade. And we close The Cheese Haus and a couple of other places so we can be there to watch the parade. [Cool] And the Har-, Helvetia Farm Women,  
15:00

which Sharon and I are both members of, we have a float in it. Every year [oh!] and oftentimes one or both of us is on the float. [Cecelia laughs]

15:05

**Emily Hilliard:**

What was the, this past year's float?

15:06

**Cecelia Smith:**

It was a tea party. [Emily laughs] Because we had gone out for tea, uh, the fall before. So we used that as our theme.

15:14

**Emily Hilliard:**

That sounds fun.

15:15

**Cecelia Smith:**

It was fun! [They laugh]

15:17

**Emily Hilliard:**

Um. Who's making the cheese that you're selling?

15:21

**Cecelia Smith:**

It's from, uh, Ohio Amish country, Guttensburg.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

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OK. Yeah. Someone told me, they sell it at the Flatwood's bulk store?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Flatwood's, and Stonewood both sell it.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. Maybe I'll try to get some on the way home. Um, is anyone still making cheese from time to time here?

15:44

**Cecelia Smith:**

Linda Smith. She goes by Bunch, but she lives at Hilltop, which is about halfway between Helvetia and Pickens. [OK] And she makes it in the summer time.

15:53

**Emily Hilliard:**

Oh. I might have to see if she'll call me when she makes it [Cecelia laughs] next time. Um, 16:00

because I'd really like to watch that. Um. Do you think, uh, the food traditions and what people make at home here, do you think that's changed?

16:12

**Cecelia Smith:**

Yes, it has. It's a lot more...a lot more canned goods bought...than, when I was a kid, most of the canned goods were ones that you raised in your garden, and canned yourself. [Mm-hmm] Now, 16:30

uh, I don't have a garden [mm-hmm], so mine comes from the grocery store. So a lot of it's changed.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Do you still can grocery store vegetables?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

No, I just, uh, I buy the canned goods *from* the grocery store.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Yeah! [Emily laughs] What were some of the things you grew up growing and canning and making?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Uh, corn and beans and peas and cabbage, uh... Oh...what other

17:00

vegetables? Tomatoes. Carrots. Just about any kind of vegetable. [Mm-hmm] Dad always had a big garden, because there was a lot of us kids. [laughs]

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**Emily Hilliard:**

How many?

17:11

**Cecelia Smith:**

Eight.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

Oh yeah! [They laugh]

17:14

**Cecelia Smith:**

They're all younger than me. [Laughs] [So you're the oldest—wow!] Seven of them!

17:17

**Emily Hilliard:**

Wow. Um. Oh, uh, did they, uh, do they make, uh, pickles or kraut?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

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Pickles, kraut, um, apple butter, um, jellies and jams.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

How would they make the kraut?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Um. It, you slice it real, um, fine. And then, um, there's sauerkraut crocks, and you would actually put it in a crock with this, um, broth, or, um, sauce over it. [Mm-hmm] That's not quite the right word, the vinegar [“brine?”] br-, brine, yeah. And let it set in that for a  
18:00

while and you had the top, there was a wooden top that you weighted down and then after a certain amount of time they would can it [OK]. And I don't know how long they did it, because I've never made sauerkraut.

18:07

**Emily Hilliard:**

And would they keep it in a dark place, or?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

Usually in the cellar.

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**Emily Hilliard:**

OK. And, you think that was, uh, I mean, I know it has German roots and Swiss roots, but also pretty pervasive [sounds of footsteps] across the region. Um, do you think their sauerkraut was particularly of a certain tradition?

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**Cecelia Smith:**

I thin-, I think it was the, one way of preserving the cabbage for winter use. [Mm-hmm] And, um, before refrigeration you did what you could to preserve everything. And it wasn't something

that you could start it, and it didn't have to be canned right away. Where most of the vegetables, when you picked them, gathered them, you had to can it right away. [some men talking loudly in the background]

18:55

**Emily Hilliard:**

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Um, so there's a little bit of a delay? Maybe a little less

19:00

labor or something? Um. Well, uh, do you want to share anything else about, um, you know, your family's traditional food or traditional life?

19:16

**Cecelia Smith:**

I don't think so [they laugh], I think I'm about done! [they laugh]

19:23

**Emily Hilliard:**

Well, thank you very much! [Cecelia laughs] I'm going to have you sign a, um, sign a release, so we can-

**END TAPE 19:32**