

A Place of Gemütlichkeit: The Holden Village of Augustana German Professor Erwin Weber

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A Place of *Gemütlichkeit*:
The Holden Village of Erwin Weber

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History 482
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“My Days at Holden” Memories of Erwin Weber

In the depths of the Special Collections archives at Augustan College lie three somewhat insignificant looking items. Two three-inch binders, black other than the white labels they bear which state “Holden I Copy” and “Holden II Copy” in red ink on their spines. Within these binders are over 200 pages of text and 8x10 photographs, some photos in color and others in black in white. Many are warped; it is likely these binders were not unearthed before my encounter since the 1980s. The pictures are of mountains, wooded forests, and scenes of summertime nature. If you take some time you may see faces of individuals and of groups partaking in crafts, eating, or engaging in their daily work. Other photographs portray a town, situated in those same mountains, that radiate a retreat-like feel. Dispersed between these photographs are poems and song lyrics, often noting a place called Holden Village and the hijinks that ensue there. Also included are religious songs that one might sing at a Sunday church service. All of these photographs, poems, writings, and more can be found again in the third item of the bunch: a plastic-bound, black and white paper compilation. In classic typewriter font the front-page reads:

MY DAYS AT HOLDEN

An Illustrated Book of Holden Village,
the Lutheran Retreat
High in the Cascade Mountains Near
Lake Chelan, Washington.

by

Erwin Weber
Preface by Conrad Bergendof

Erwin Weber a former German professor during the second half of the 20th century at Augustana College wrote this book. Or what was planned to be a book. These three items, two binders and a

bound compilation represent the attempt at a publication, a publication that for reasons yet to be uncovered would never see the press.

Originally, these items were unknown by myself and many others less than a year ago. It was only by chance that I came across their existence. In the beginning of 2016 for just over a month I myself visited Holden Village, the focus of these items, as a sophomore student with Augustana College. When the time came to do a senior project for my history major I was curious to uncover Augustana's relationship to the Village. I delved into the college's Special Collections in hopes of finding more information on the matter. However, all of the individuals I knew had strong relations with the Village had little on this topic in their personal archives. When a dead end seemed eminent a last hope internet search led me to a man named Erwin Weber. He was a former German professor at Augustana and had a website full of sketches, one topic being Holden Village. I soon discovered that 50 boxes of unarchived material were filed under his name in my college's archives, three of which contained "Holden" in their label. After sifting through the binders and booklet of "My Days at Holden" I came to the conclusion that this unknown story needed to be told. And the person to tell this story was me. I had to get to the bottom of why this German professor compiled a book of mainly pictures and poems of a place few have heard of. The importance of a place that he took time to make this book but never got published.

As I unearthed these items and took time to delve into their components, I had a strong urge to get to know the author Erwin Weber. His connection to Holden intrigued me because Holden holds a special place in my heart. I wished to hear his view of the place and the story behind this book he compiled. Anyone who visits Holden and stumbles across another "Holdenite" naturally yearns to hear the story of their visit and the experiences they had.

Additionally, this man being a former German professor at Augustana only furthered my interest in the matter as I am a minor in German Studies. To my dismay, I learned Erwin Weber passed away in 2013, a year before I enrolled at the college whose German department he belonged to for so many years. My questions such as why he chose to make this book, what kind of a person he was, how Holden had or if it had changed him as a person among many others could not be answered by the man himself. Instead I turned to what was left of the German-born man who made his way to Washington's Cascade Mountains - his books, his artifacts, and the people that once knew him. These routes after all were the only methods I had to piece together how the man known as Erwin Weber was affected, if at all, by the place known as Holden Village.

The Man Known as Erwin Weber

Erwin Weber was born on April 17, 1921 in the western portion of Germany called Leichlingen, Rhineland. It was a year of change for the country in ways both good and bad. The destruction and pain of The Great War, now commonly known as World War I still lingered throughout the country. Only two years had passed since its end and rebuilding remained an issue. The value of the country's currency, the mark, dropped drastically and it resulted in major inflation. Some brightness ensued when the Treaty of Berlin was signed, signaling an official term of peace between the United States and Germany. However, this was also the year that Adolf Hitler, future leader of Germany, became the chairman of the NSDAP, known in Germany as the National Socialist German Workers Party. Only a short time later it would be known worldwide as the Nazi Party. This was a tumultuous time for Germany to say the least, but in historic terms much of the 20th century was tumultuous for the country of Germany.

For the next fourteen years of his life, Erwin Weber lived with his family in the hills of Rhineland. With his two brothers and one sister he wandered the city, playing in abandoned castles and in the area's forests and orchards. Shortly before his fifteenth birthday Erwin left his home country and boarded a boat bound for America in search for a better life. At this time, Germany had been ruled by Adolf Hitler for almost three years. One of the new regulations Hitler imposed ruled was that no boy over the age of 15 could leave the country. This was done so that these young men could train and prepare for war, something Hitler expected and explained in his "Four Year Plan," implemented later that year. Erwin barely escaped this cutoff, turning 15 while the boat was leaving German territory.¹ It was the year that Germany hosted the Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and the Summer Olympics in Berlin. And it was in this latter Olympics that American track and field athlete Jesse Owens famously won four gold medals. However, at the time of this accomplishment the German-born boy named Erwin Weber was no longer in his native country but in the land of Jesse Owens.

Alone, in a country whose language he didn't understand Erwin Weber found himself in the midwestern city of Detroit, Michigan. For six years he resided in this city finding work, learning its language, and receiving as much education as he could scrounge together. In the fall of 1942, Erwin found himself enlisted in the United States Army, fighting in World War II against his homeland. Now knowing basic English, Erwin was placed into an intelligence unit, translating between the German and English languages.² He fought against his homeland and the friends and family that he left behind. He decoded messages from a place where, at this point, had spent a majority of his years residing in. After a year serving in the U.S. Army, Erwin Weber

¹ Kai Swanson, interview with author, December 2017.

² Ibid.

was honorably discharged with the end of the war still two years away.³ For the next 15 years of his life, Erwin jumped between various jobs and college programs. Ten of these years he spent employed as an illustrator for automobile companies such as the Ford Scientific Lab in Dearborn, Michigan.⁴ Erwin discovered he had a talent for art, specifically pencil and charcoal sketches, and found it useful to help himself earn a living. However, his true calling fell

elsewhere, to the world of education. Before coming to Ford to illustrate its automobiles, Erwin graduated in 1948 from Albion College, Michigan with a Bachelor's degree. After his time at Ford, Erwin returned to school with a goal of teaching the German language. In February of 1961 he received a Masters from Wayne State with a teaching certificate from the State of Michigan to follow later that year.⁵ It was then that Erwin Weber began

introducing himself as Herr Weber. It fit his German background and his choice to teach as

Herr in German means Mr. or sir. A year later Herr Weber came to Augustana College and

became an assistant German Language Professor, staying there until his retirement in 1987.⁶ It

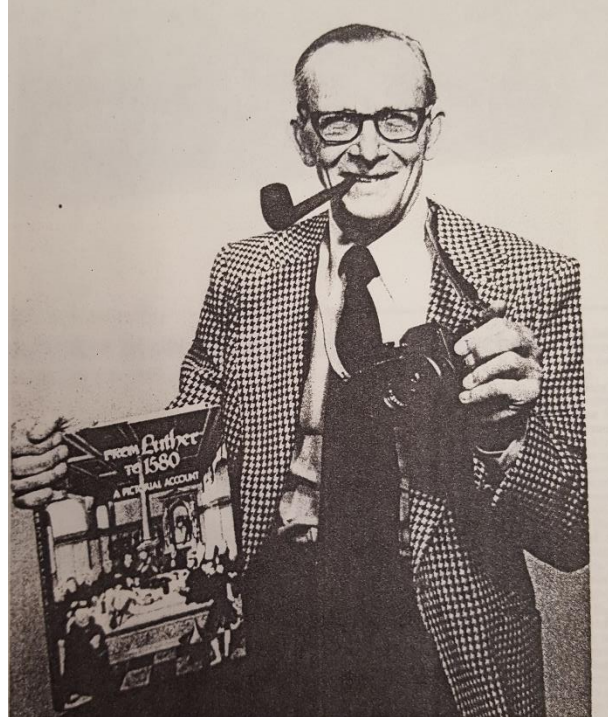


Figure 1. Photograph of Erwin Weber with his publication *From Luther to 1580*. Weber, Erwin, Unprocessed: Writing by Erwin Weber, About the Weber Papers, Misc. Folders, No. 28, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

³ Erwin Weber, "Curriculum Vitae," Augustana College, accessed September 2017, <http://helios.augustana.edu/~ew/vitae.html>.

⁴ Weber, "Curriculum Vitae," Augustana College, accessed September 2017, <http://helios.augustana.edu/~ew/vitae.html>.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

was through Augustana and his love for German history of Martin Luther that the man known as Erwin Weber came to visit, know, and appreciate the place known as Holden Village.

The Place Known as Holden Village

The year is 1977, the setting Holden Village, Washington. The color photograph is taken on a slight incline from a place I recognize as the yard of Chalet 1, the place Weber resided during his visit that summer. In the distance is a mountain range, the tallest grey peak surrounded by a wispy white cloud and a pale blue sky. Coniferous trees dot the mountainside and continue their domination into the middle of the picture, where buildings lie. On the left of the picture are three long buildings which sit at the base of the mountains that surrounds the Village. All three are multiple levels, the nearest appearing to be forest green in hue and the other two taking on a



Figure 2. View of Holden Village Main Street, 1977. Erwin Weber, Holden II Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 113.

more natural tone from their log-like structure. Surrounding these buildings are a blanket of green grass and a dirt road that look as if to run straight from the left corner picture into the trees and eventually the mountains. To the right of the picture is another pathway, a curve that leads in front of an additional building with a similar structure to the rest. On this path there is a couple walking past a small tree and a blue colored hut. This is a view of the main street of Holden Village on a clear summer day in 1977 (Figure 2). This is the view Erwin Weber saw

when walking out his front door every morning during this summer visit, one that he placed into “My Days at Holden” for all to see.

Although this may give one an idea of what Holden Village looks like there is truthfully no great way to describe this place as Erwin Weber understood and many others now understand. It is a place that can only be effectively characterized by visiting and experiencing the place in person. Nevertheless, in order to understand the relationship between the professor and this place in the mountains both sides must be explored. Holden lies in north-central Washington State, in the midst of the Cascade Mountains and on the edge of the Wenatchee National Forest. If it sounds like a remote destination, it truthfully is. The most common route to get there is a 3 ½ hour boat ride from nearby town Chelan and an additional 40-minute bus ride up a steep, seven switchback-filled road.⁷ Although the trip to Holden likely was not as long as the boat ride Weber took across the Atlantic Ocean many years prior it was still quite a trip.

Holden Village as the place Erwin Weber visited traces its roots back the discovery of copper in the mountain range that surrounds the Village. In the early 20th century the Howe Sound Company mined copper ore from the rightfully-named Copper Mountain for a span of over 20 years. The mining town boasted many amenities common to American towns at the time - a bowling alley, pool hall, and a gymnasium to name a few. It was a bustling mining town and like all other mining communities it would experience an end to its boom. With the price of copper declining in the post-World War II America, Holden Mine could no longer profit from its operations (Figure 3). Its closure and abandonment in 1957 caught the eye of a student at the Lutheran Bible Institute named Wes Prieb.⁸ Over the next three years Prieb attempted to obtain

⁷ Lutz, Charles P. *Surprising Gift: The Story of Holden Village, Church Renewal Center*. (Chelan: Holden Village Press, 1987), 11-12.

⁸ *Ibid*, 36.

the former mining site from the Howe Sound Company with the idea that its land and buildings would make an ideal Lutheran camp or retreat center. In the spring of 1962 Prieb got his wish

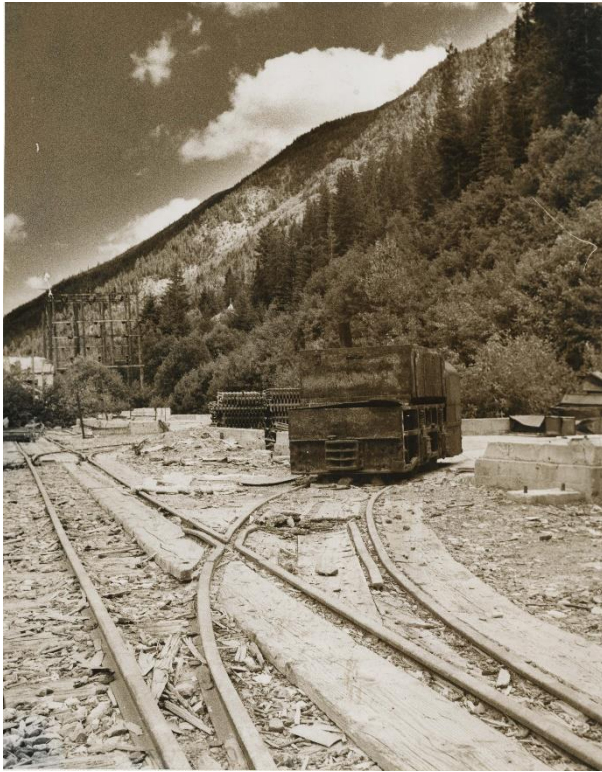


Figure 3. Abandoned railcar and equipment left from the Holden Mine era. Erwin Weber, Holden II Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 207.

and the Howe Sound Company “gifted” the camp to the Lutheran Bible Institute, asking only for a single dollar in return. More than 60 years later Holden Village has grown into a faith-centered community that welcomes all people of God into the Cascade Mountains to share experiences of faith, learning, and healing.⁹ In return its visitors, numbering up to

500 at a time, do their part in helping make the former mining center function. Whether you

came to Holden to learn (as I did) or to teach (as Erwin Weber did), it is a place to find oneself

and to learn more about the world we live in. It is a place of beauty and of wonder with as many mysteries to it as it has of joys that countless individuals, including Erwin Weber, came to enjoy.

Holden as a Place: A Unique Community

One of the most important characteristics that makes Holden Village unique is its sense of community. This word “community” is one of their fourteen Core Values that help to define Holden as a whole. In order to make the community run, those who belong to the community are

⁹ “Holden Village: Mission & Core Values,” Holden Village, accessed January 30, 2018. <http://www.holdenvillage.org/about-us/mission-core-values/>.

expected to help pitch in. Whether it be chopping wood (Figure 4), giving lectures like Weber did on Martin Luther, making dinner, leading a worship service, or shoveling snow as I did during my winter stay the members of the Village help it thrive. Two individuals Erwin Weber met during his stay, Edna and Howard Hong,

say that the hard work required for the community of Holden “is never easy, but somehow it is easiest of all when we are bound together in Christ in our weakness and imperfections rather than solely in our strengths and perfections.”¹⁰ This sense of

community is strong by the individuals and the bond they share. Through daily worship and by following the fourteen Core Values, the community is able to prosper. Although one does not have to be religious to attend,

religion it is an integral part of the community and of everyday life. Daily meals are enjoyed together in a dining hall with grace before eating. Morning and evenings include religious services. Core Values center around religion – worship, theology, grace and shalom just to name a few.

It is because of these traits that some people view Holden as a type of intentional community. These intentional communities center on a sense of common values and interests and require all who live there to join in caring for the community and those within it. Although



Figure 4. Villager of Holden Village cutting wood shakes for a roof. Erwin Weber. Holden I Copy, No. 4, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 91.

¹⁰ Weber, “My Days at Holden” (unpublished manuscript), 41.

such characteristics are true for Holden, placing it into the specific category of an intentional community is difficult to argue. According to Calvin Redekop, a sociologist who focused in religious societies, intentional communities with religious ties have four main characteristics. They form around a common religious belief, they commit to these beliefs, they desire to attract others to their community, and they have a long life.¹¹ Holden does not always follow these rules laid out by Redekop. As Holden does not require everyone to have the same religious belief that they value (Lutheran) but asks that its visitors respect it. They understand that togetherness and a relationship with religion, not a forceful but agreed upon matter, is what helps what makes the community run. Additionally, Holden also does not ask people to commit their whole lives to staying within its confines. Rather it prefers that individuals only give only a few weeks or a year at a time to the Village. Holden understands that there is an outside world and it does not want to completely separate its visitors from it. From this, one can understand that Holden encapsulates characteristics of an intentional community without actually becoming one.

Learning about Holden and its seclusion in the beautiful mountains of the American northwest can also unearth another view: that of a utopia. If you imagine the biblical place of Eden, this image what you have created is probably similar to a utopia, a place that is good, moral, and beautiful. It is your ideal society. To some, Holden is such a place. The Village carpenter during Weber's visit, Mark Tesch, would agree with this utopian label. Weber noted multiple times in his book that Tesch believed Holden to be the Utopia of Utopias of the Pacific Northwest.¹² As much as I have come to admire the photograph of Tesch that Weber includes in his book (Figure 11), Holden does not fit this ideology (and one may find it hard to argue that *any* society has come to fit this ideology). Former employee and visitor of Holden Kaethe

¹¹ Calvin Redekop "Religious Intentional Communities," 53-52.

¹² Weber, "My Days at Holden" (unpublished manuscript), 88.

Schwehn stated in her memoir “Holden is not Eden. It never will be.”¹³ Physical characteristics of the mountains and the wilderness (Figure 5) may make Holden appear like Eden to its visitors. Those who have been to Holden often leave in awe of its natural beauty and this is rightfully so; Holden is a remarkable wilderness retreat placed between mountains, on the edge of a picturesque lake, and bordering a National Forest. Although this may sound like a realistic Eden,



Figure 5. View of Copper Mountain, near Holden Village. Erwin Weber, Holden I Copy, No. 4, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 67.

in reality Holden is quite the opposite. Holden is not perfect and it never will be. It is a place damaged from the toxic waste hidden in tailings piles from its days of mining. The forest that Erwin Weber knew as a visitor in the 20th century was badly damaged in the fall of 2015 from the Wolverine Creek Forest Fire. The perfection that everyone strives to find, their Eden, does not exist. Eden although known to be beautiful and plentiful was the wilderness that Adam and Eve were thrown into as a punishment.¹⁴ Holden itself

understands that Eden will never be found in the mountains and buildings of its boundaries because everything, including its awe-inspiring wilderness and the friendly village itself has flaws. Rather, Holden sees itself as a place of regrowth, attempting to help restore and recharge

¹³ Kaethe Schwehn, *tailings: a memoir*, (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 20.

¹⁴ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 15.

the lives of its visitors. It is a place where people give their lives over to the wilderness and to the unknown that lies within Holden Village.

Holden as a Place: A Campside Retreat

This sense of regrowth that Holden encapsulates gives its visitors a break from the busyness of the outside world. Erwin Weber stressed this characteristic of Holden in the introduction of “My Days at Holden.”

In this town there would be no telephones, no television, no pollution of air or water; no traffic jams or automobiles, yes, not even a motorcycle. It is a place free from the many noises and stresses of our twentieth century. It is a retreat that belongs to the Lutheran Church and devoted Christians celebrating spiritual renewal and the proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁵

Holden acts like a retreat and a camp to its visitors, allowing them to interact with the world in a different way. It is a camp for children of all ages who are questioning their life, want to reconnect with themselves or religion or for those who want to partake in the learning experiences Holden provides.

Before the seven switchback-filled ride to Holden Village was complete, Erwin Weber encountered a large wooden sign signifying the entrance into the mountain’s civilization (Figure 6). “Wenatchee National Forest, Organization Camp” is carved in white letters onto a brown background with “Holden Village” in brown letters on a white background beneath. Holden is just as much as camp as any other, and this sign proves it. When one passes this sign they are entering the camp and leaving the “regular” world behind. Holden is not the only place where individuals “abandon” the outside world. Environmental historian Michael B. Smith argues that

¹⁵ Weber, “My Days at Holden” (unpublished manuscript), 15.

summer camps embody this characteristic as well, stating that our lives have become controlled by “radio, television, film, and more recently the Internet” which thus strengthens “the appeal of the idealism and romantic view that nature embodies in summer camping.”¹⁶ The environment of summer camps allows individuals, mainly children, to know the world in a way that they are not accustomed. The wilderness and the unfamiliarity of a place that is not one’s own causes them to react and respond in ways that they are unfamiliar with. For example, imagine an American summer camp – one pictured in movies, books, and TV shows. The campers live a cabin or tent, oftentimes forgoing modern amenities like television, microwaves, or even contact with the outside world (in current terms, no cell phones allowed). But in the modern 21st century the summer camp design has changed. It appears that a majority of modern camps give visitors “a change of scenery but not of lifestyle.”¹⁷ The difference with Holden is that it retains much of the “classic” camping ideals, a trait that attracts many to its own unique lifestyle.



Figure 6. Sign noting Holden Village and the Wenatchee National Forest. Erwin Weber, Holden I Copy, No. 4, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 68.

The escape from modernity into the rough and tough wilderness camps is one of these “classic” camp ideals. However, such ideals have only been around for little over 100 years.

¹⁶ Michael B. Smith “Ego Ideal of the Good Camper and the Nature of Summer Camp,” *Environmental History* 11, no. 1 (2006), 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 71.

Americans produced the idea of camps because of their need and desire of more land in the 1800s. It was a time of Westward Expansion, when Americans moved westward to expand their hold over the ever-decreasing amount of available land. The more land Americans settled and domesticated the more they decreased their access to wilderness. This idea introduced in *A Manufactured Wilderness* portrays the United States comprised of inhabitants who desired to “bring the landscape firmly under human control and make it visibly productive” so that this expansion could be conquered.¹⁸ It was only after the completion of this expansion and settlers had reached America’s western edge that the wilderness became cherished. As little land was available towards the east coast and population density increased, the amount of available wilderness decreased. Thus the introduction of the 20th century brought in the likes of John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Stephen Mather who propelled the preservation of America’s wilderness. This new appreciation for the wilderness and the newfound worry about the loss of nature’s wilderness brought about the creation of the national parks and forests in the west and promoted the appearance of summer camps out east.¹⁹ It was because of the growth of urbanization and modernism that people of the United States began to yearn for a return to the simplicity of nature. With the presence of these retreats and camps, individuals could escape from the hustle of everyday society, something that remains with us today, especially in the form of summer camps.

Fast forward about 50 years to the mid-20th century. The traditional camp feel was still intact throughout much of the United States. It was a time of peace and the environment was on everyone’s minds – the wilderness, it seemed, was the core of almost everything. Even so,

¹⁸ Abigail A. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

traveling to the newly-created Holden Village was probably still an inconceivable task for many individuals. The middle of the mountains had little to no outside contact other than the few hikers of the nearby Wenatchee National Forest who might wander in the village as well as those who traveled on boat across Lake Lucerne (Figure 7). But even now this seclusion is what makes Holden like a traditional summer camp in ways many current summer camps could never fathom. Holden is similar to the outside world, it abides by similar codes of conduct and laws. Possibly the most important aspect is that the world within Holden is a world of contrasts from the outside world.²⁰ This contrast is something that not many people understand or be able to experience. However, Erwin Weber was one of the lucky. He was lucky that he was brought to Augustana College where his fellow colleagues knew of Holden and had connections to the place. Through these individuals Weber became connected to the Village and was asked two times to come share his artistry and knowledge. And he was lucky that he was willing the withstand the journey on train, boat and automobile which brought him to the camp known as Holden Village.



Figure 7. Docking of Lady of the Lake, the boat that transports visitors to and from Holden Village. Erwin Weber, Holden II Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 111.

²⁰ Idea adapted from Smith, 94.

The Place of the Religious (and the Hilarious)

Although an intentional community, a retreat, and a summer camp can all be seen in one way or another at Holden the one characteristic that brought Erwin Weber to it in the summer of 1977 was its relationship with religion. As previously stated, Holden Village is a religious community, specifically one with Lutheran ties. This was especially important for Weber because he spent the last ten years compiling a book about the life and works of Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran religion. Weber visited Germany and the surrounding area about two times a year for most of his adult life. During this period he studied, photographed, and visited places that dealt with the life and legacy of Luther. In the summer of 1977, Weber was asked to visit Holden to educate its guests on his book *From Luther to 1580, A Pictorial Account* (Figure 1) which he had recently published. This book focuses on the life of Luther through photographs

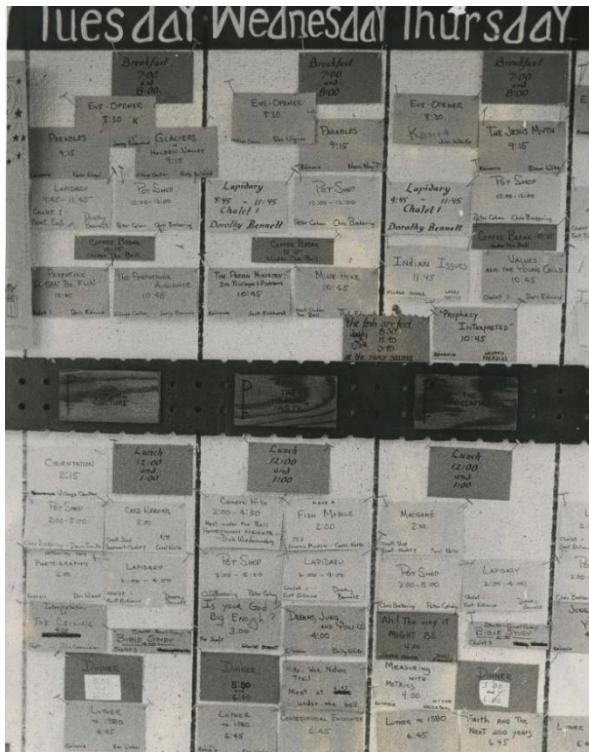


Figure 8. Weekly schedule of Holden Village with the lectures of Erwin Weber noted as “Luther to 1580” on the bottommost row. Erwin Weber, Holden II Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 111.

and artwork of Luther and the places he visited. According to the Holden Audio Archives, an online audio center that includes recordings of many of the educational sessions and seminars given at Holden, Weber gave a total of six lectures that summer (Figure 8). Each lecture is approximately an hour long and are titled “Life of Luther” with the part number of one through six behind. Some have labels, such as “Part 2: Ancestral Home & Early Years 1480 – 1505” while others do not. In his first lecture, Weber explains the reasoning behind why he created

this book as one mainly of pictures saying, “Why not a picture book? Maybe if you look at the pictures you will be inspired to read the text, particularly if they happen to be aesthetically beautiful.”²¹ To Weber, creating a book filled with pictures will inspire the reader to become more interested in the subject because they have a visual relationship to it. In this way, the topic of religion and of Martin Luther, in which some people (mainly the students Weber was teaching at the time) view as boring subjects will become drawn in and desire to learn more.

Throughout his life Erwin Weber continued to work with the world of Martin Luther and of religion. Only a few years prior to his second visit to Holden he published a pamphlet on a church not far from Augustana College - the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover, Illinois. It includes a brief history of the Swedish-built chapel and sketches of the chapel and surrounding area by Weber himself. He also sketched a dozen Lutheran churches throughout the state of Illinois for the pamphlet “Lutheranism in Illinois 1816-1976.” This pamphlet focuses on the history of the Illinois Synod and the historic churches that belonged to it. In addition to these projects, Weber frequently wrote articles on Luther and his associates as well as other topics for *The Lutheran Journal*. Often these articles also included his artistry, either photographs or sketches of the article’s subjects. From these publications,

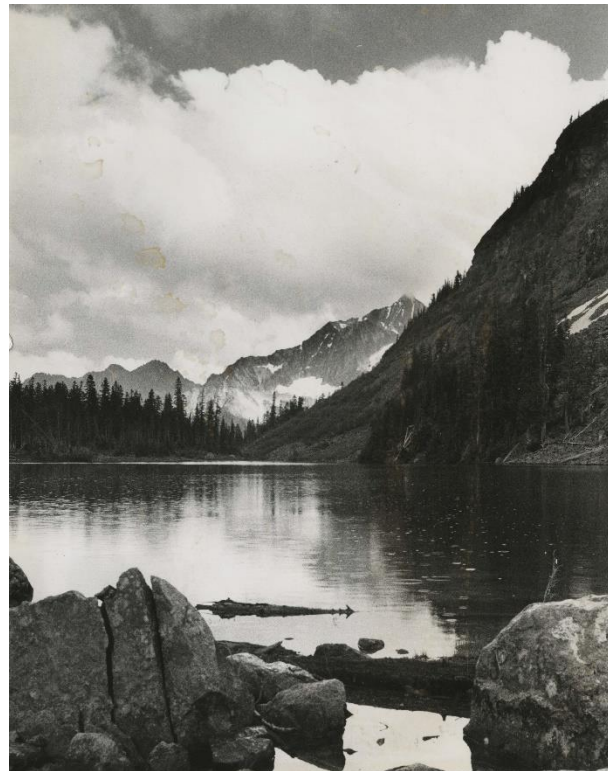


Figure 9. The beauty of Holden Lake, near Holden Village, black and white. Included in the “picture book” of “My Days at Holden.” Erwin Weber, Holden I Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections,

²¹ Erwin Weber, “Life of Luther – Part 1,” 1977, Audio Archive.

one can understand that religion was an important part of Erwin Weber's life both inside and outside of the boundaries of Holden Village.

Although the lectures that brought Erwin Weber to Holden focused on the factual life of Martin Luther, Weber's sense of humor was not ignored, often dropping in a joke or two to liven up his audience. And it was frequently met with bouts of laughter. After all, hilarity is one of the Core Values of Holden Village. Of the six lectures Weber gave the second one (which was referenced above) is probably the most hilarious of them all. Every so often Weber would go on a tangent, talking about German culture and its differences from that of American culture. During one of these stories he focused about towns Luther had visited in Germany and went on to talk about the German language in relation to foods. Weber got a bit off the subject of his lecture but got quite a few laughs out of this non-Luther related joke.

I remember a few years ago Kennedy went to Berlin and he said "*Ich bin ein Berliner.*" Aren't you glad he didn't go to Frankfurt? Or to Hamburg? *Ich bin ein Hamburger.* I'm awfully glad he didn't go to Limburger.²²

Weber knew how to keep his audience captivated during his lectures, in a traditional hilarity-filled Holden way. By making fun of former President John F. Kennedy referring to himself as a jelly doughnut *Ich bin ein Berliner* (Berliner is a German word for a pastry) and substituting *Berliner* with different locations in Germany that share names with foods (Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Limburger), Weber was able to keep his lecture lively and entertaining.²³ The aspect of hilarity is so entwined in the Village that a book called "Holden Hilarity" has graced its grounds since the 1960s and includes nonsensical songs and poems penned by visitors. Some of these

²² Erwin Weber, "Life of Luther – Part 2: Ancestral Home & Early Years 1480-1505," 1977, Audio Archive.

²³ This famous misstep of Kennedy is in fact a correct use of the German language. *Ich bin ein Berliner* is the way to say "I am with Berlin" or "I share believes with those of Berlin." The phrase *Ich bin Berliner* that many Americans believed Kennedy should have used would indicate that Kennedy was born in the city of Berlin. Although Weber most likely knew this, the fact that he chose to tease this moment in American history and the structure of his native language notes to his sense of humor.

writings can be found again in Erwin Weber's "My Days at Holden" between photographs and descriptions of the beautiful Village.

This hilarity was not kept only at Holden but remained a staple of his life back in the Midwest. There he was a German professor at Augustana College in western Illinois, known to many as Herr Weber. Among his colleagues, Weber was known to have a humor in which he could make fun of himself and his homeland. Often after his retirement from teaching he would go golfing with former colleagues. A sense of his humor would be seen here as he would yell at the golf ball in German, a common order being "Halt" in which he tried to coerce the ball into stopping.²⁴ Another story of his humor deals with the result of World War II. The story goes is that Weber said the reason the Germans lost the war is because of their way of compounding words to describe an object. According to Weber, the German word for tank was so long that by the time the soldiers were ordered to get into the tanks the war was over.²⁵ (Some sources say this word was "schützengrabenvernichtungspanzerkraftwagen" which roughly means a strong, armored, military vehicle that destroys trenches. However, it is believed that this word was made up to make fun of the German language.)

One place that Weber did not frequently portray his sense of humor was in the classroom. Here, under the name Herr Weber, he was an authoritarian figure who taught the language of his home country through traditional but yet bold methods. Classes often consisted of students translating books and pamphlets of the English language into German. His expectations were high of his students; if they wanted to learn the language they would do so via their own hard work. One occasion in which his unusual teaching methods were exemplified was when he gave his students a surprise midterm, not forewarning his students a midterm test would be coming

²⁴ Lou Belby and Doug Nelson, interview with author, December 6, 2017.

²⁵ Norm and Janet Moline, interview with author, December 12, 2017.

that day during class.²⁶ In many ways, Herr Weber was a man larger than life itself. Whenever he taught his voice boomed through the marble-topped floors of Old Main, the building in which he taught. Many sources say that it was a running joke that if you had a different class on the same floor and time as Herr Weber that you should get credit for his class as well.

Instructing his students did in fact go outside of the classroom, but in ways other than double credit. Herr Weber was known for taking his students to Germany for summer programs at Augustana College, in fact starting a program to the German city of Passau that continues today. On these trips he would take a group of students and lead them around Germany, showing his students the culture, architecture, and much more of his homeland. When he took his students to visit the historic cathedrals and churches of the country, Weber would instruct his students to sit in silence for a period of time and not say anything. This way they could understand the significance of the place and, after the period was done, would have questions to ask their professor.²⁷ He made his students to focus on the details of everything they saw and to pay attention to the little things that others may not recognize. On a certain trip he forced his students to be absorbed in this mentality for an entire afternoon. Before letting them go, Herr Weber gave his students a pad of paper and a pencil, telling them to sketch a sight of their choosing. According to one of those students this was a brilliant way to teach because everyone had to see the sight in such an intimate way that the image was engrained in their brains.²⁸ Weber understood the importance of artistry and detail in all of life, which can be seen through the stories like these, by viewing his sketches and watercolors (Figure 10), and through the

²⁶ Swanson, interview with author, December 8, 2017.

²⁷ Belby and Nelson, interview with author, December 6, 2017.

²⁸ Swanson, interview with author, December 8, 2017.

photographs and descriptions of “My Days at Holden.” Although Weber was brought to Holden to lecture, I believe his visit as an artist displays the true joy he experienced there.

The Place of the Artist

The setting remains summer. A lone, shirtless man is staring into the distant landscape in front of him. His hair is relatively long, the curly locks nearly touching his bare shoulders. Part of his hair is held back by a striped woven headband. A beard covers the bottom of his face, not wild like his curly hair. Much of his peaceful stare can still be deciphered. Leaning into the camera, this rugged, woody man

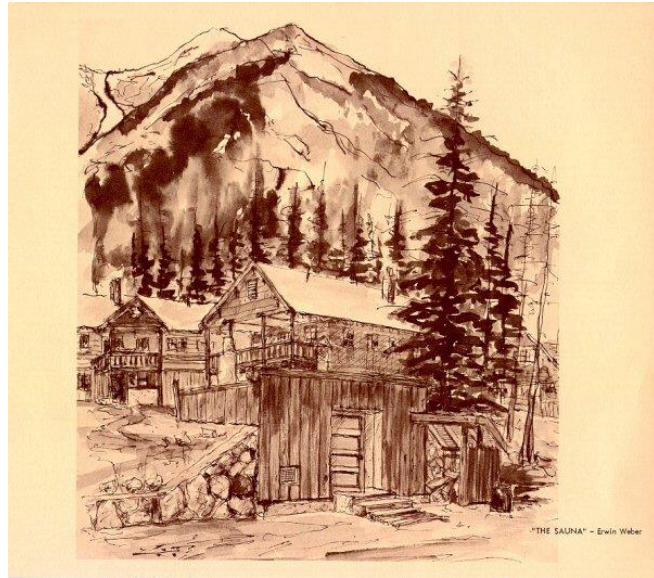


Figure 10. Sketch of “The Sauna” at Holden Village by Erwin Weber. It was featured alongside other Weber sketches in a print of the Holden Village Calendar. Erwin Weber, “Holden Village Chalets and Sauna, Erwin Weber’s Home Page,” Augustana College, accessed September 2017. <http://helios.augustana.edu/~ew/des/published-art-works/su03.html>.

with thick suspenders holding his shoulders down draws the viewer in, making them ponder who this man is and what might he be thinking. Without the label beneath the black and white picture that cuts the man off at his chest, one would have no idea that this lumberjack looking fellow hails from the state of Texas. His name is Mark Tesch, who was a carpenter for Holden Village during the summer of 1977. Mark was one of the many individuals and sights that summer that became the focus of Erwin Weber’s “My Days at Holden.” Of all the photographs Weber placed into his book, this picture featured on page 88 is my favorite (Figure 11). The simplicity of the picture gives it an utter complexity. It is a picture of a person but it contains so much more. Here is a man who came to work at Holden Village for reasons unknown to the viewer and whose striped suspenders will never reveal their color. However, the most intriguing part of this

photograph are his eyes. One cannot tell if Mark is staring into the camera or into the distance as they are two dots of darkness in this black and white photocopy. His eyes tell a story, and they appear as if they can stare into my soul and that they know the truth that Holden holds.

These eyes hold much more than the story of Holden. They hold its feeling as well. Along with the photograph of Tesch, Erwin Weber describes the feeling Holden Village evokes in his book “My Days at Holden.” Within its pages he attempts to portray the essence of the Village through photograph of its visitors, the surrounding landscapes, and through the use of his German language. This feeling of Holden is best described by Weber himself.

There is a feeling here that cannot be described. You can sense it when you look into the eyes of the people who have been here. You can see the glow in their eyes. It is what the Germans call *Gemütlichkeit* a word that defies translation, for it has to do with a feeling, a mood, a spirit and being part of that mood and spirit.²⁹

These few sentences may be the most important part of Weber’s Holden compilation in terms of describing his relationship to the place. *Gemütlichkeit* is a word all native German-speakers know well. How to portray it to others who do not speak German is a challenge. In my personal knowledge, this word means a coziness, comfort, and relaxation that is felt through the atmosphere and nature of a place. Weber pairing *gemütlichkeit* with Holden is a move that only a German would do. A word that defies translation truly belongs with a place that is difficult to define. Both cannot be successfully explained to others who are unfamiliar with its language. Whether it be through words or pictures the essence that is Holden can be challenging to portray to someone who has not experienced it themselves. However, that did not stop Erwin Weber from attempting to tackle such a hurdle. As a man whose native language was German, Weber understood that words can only go so far. He was lucky that he knew another language other than

²⁹ Weber, “My Days at Holden” (unpublished manuscript), 41.

German and English - that of the arts. He knew that with art people can tell a story that words cannot portray. Art is a universal language and thus through art he was able to show the magnificence and the complexity that is Holden.

It is not surprising that Holden asked an artist and educator such as Erwin Weber to visit its community. Holden is known for its acceptance of creativity, whether that be arts and crafts, literature, or musical. It is a place for artists of all walks of life. In fact, current Executive Directors of Holden, Chuck Hoffman and Peg Carlson-Hoffman are both artists themselves. In their first season at Holden they described art as a way to “allow the unseen to take shape, giving form to feelings that cannot yet be articulated, and are often too deep for words.”³⁰ This is definitely true for the book Weber compiled of his time there and the artwork he created during both visits.

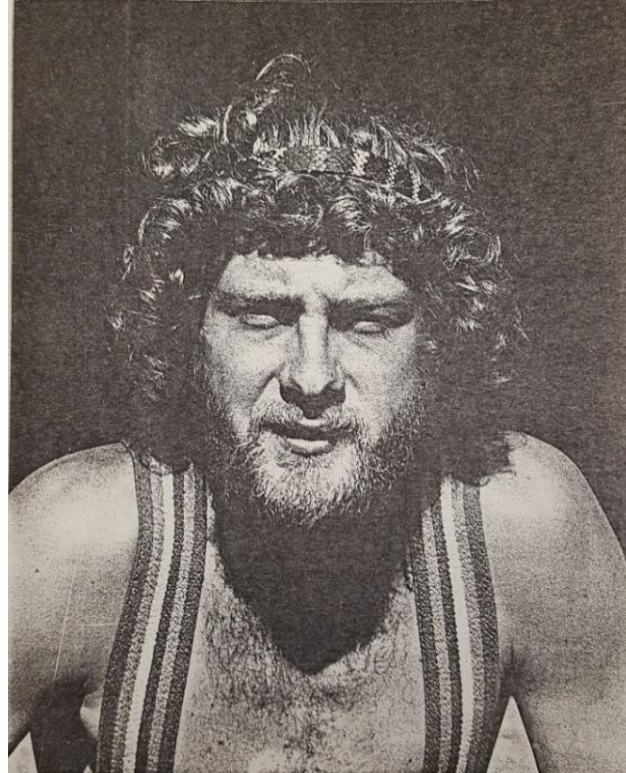


Figure 11. Mark Tesch, 1977 Holden Village Carpenter, copy. Erwin Weber. “My Days at Holden: an Illustrated Book of Holden Village, the Lutheran Retreat High in the Cascade Mountains Near Lake Chelan, Washington,” (Augustana College Special Collections, unpublished manuscript, 1977): 88.

Originally, Erwin Weber came to Holden Village in the summer of 1967 to make sketches of the Village along with giving a few lectures on Martin Luther. Ten years later he visited Holden a second time in an educational light, giving lectures focusing on the book he recently published about the religious reformer Martin Luther. However, he also managed to

³⁰ Chuck Hoffman and Peg Carlson-Hoffman, “Silence Between the Words,” *Holden Village Voice*, Fall 2015, 2-3.

make time to include his love of art, this time trading the pencil for a camera. On his personal website, Weber notes that in 1967 he was asked by the Executive Director of Holden, Carroll Hinderlie, “to come to the village to make a few sketches, and lecture on Martin Luther” for a

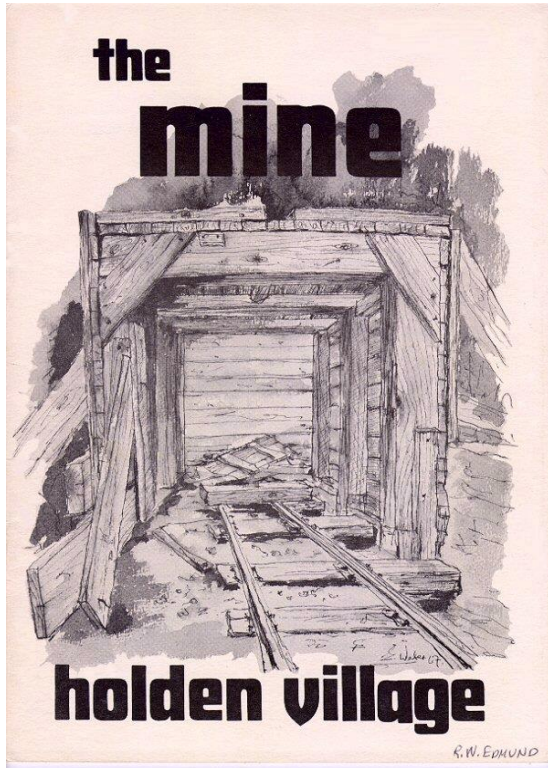


Figure 12. Copy of “The Mine: Holden Village” by Rudy Edmund, cover art by Erwin Weber. “Holden Village Mine, Erwin Weber’s Home Page,” Augustana College, accessed September 2017. <http://helios.augustana.edu/~ew/des/published-art-works/su01.html>.

few weeks that summer, which he gladly accepted.³¹

Through his colleagues at Augustana, Weber was connected to Hinderlie, the Executive Director of Holden to make sketches and watercolors of the Village and the surrounding area. Of these sketches and watercolors, some were included in the Holden Village yearly calendar while others were featured in a booklet named “The Mine” (Figure 12) which was written by fellow Augustana Geology professor Rudolph “Rudy” Edmond on the mining history of the area.³² Additionally, Herr Weber gave a few

lectures on Martin Luther whom he was beginning to research in aim of creating a book. After his first

visit he donated his sketches and watercolors back to Holden Village, some of which can be viewed on the professor’s website. It is interesting to note that not much is known of this original visit other than the few sketches and “The Mine” pamphlet found on the Erwin Weber’s personal website.

³¹ Erwin Weber, “Holden Village Mine,” Augustana College, accessed September 2017, <http://helios.augustana.edu/~ew/des/published-art-works/su01.html>.

³² Weber, “Holden Village Mine,” Augustana College, accessed September 2017, <http://helios.augustana.edu/~ew/des/published-art-works/su01.html>.

Ten years later artistry remained an important aspect of Erwin Weber's return to Holden Village. Although it was not what brought him to Holden, one can argue that through the making of "My Days at Holden" it was an important part. This visit however, he traded the pencil for a camera. Photographs included in the Holden compilation are simplistic in nature yet show extreme thought. Weber took and included pictures in this book that showed Holden as it was, a place of beauty, of people, and of exploration. Many photographs center around the sights one could see of the area, the mountains, the wilderness, and the animals. Others focus on the villages and visitors themselves, such as the picture of Mark Tesch (Figure 11). The perfectionist can be seen through these photographs in the inclusion of the smallest details, from catches of the day's fishing expedition to the warm smile on a villager's face. Somehow this man was able to capture the love and aura of Holden within photographs. For a man described as a "typical German perfectionist" this obsession over quality and detail surely showed in his art.³³ By paying attention to the smallest of details, Erwin Weber was able to capture the life and aura of Holden within photographs, something difficult to do.

Through photography Erwin Weber desired to help others see a world they are unfamiliar with. From his travels across the sea back to his homeland to the visits to Holden Village, Weber knew that understanding a place through words can only give so much information. With photography viewers see and understand a life they are not accustomed to. However, photographs are much more important than this. Photographs can offer a social and economic glimpse into the past as historian Branden Cannon found out with his research on the community of Coal Branch. A Canadian mining town in the first half of the 20th century, Coal Branch shares similar roots to Holden Village. However, Coal Branch was lucky enough to have two of its

³³ Belby and Nelson, interview with author, December 6, 2017.

worker Allan Godby and Charles Lee photograph the everyday life of Coal Branch, such as hiking outings or sporting events. This small and isolated community is similar to Holden in many ways although they are decades apart. Cannon noted that due to the isolation and short history of Coal Branch, the photographs of Godby and Lee acted as a record of the social and economic structure of the town.³⁴ Although Godby and Lee were unaware of it at the time, they were essentially historians chronicling their society so that others could understand their community decades later. What differentiates Godby and Lee from Erwin Weber is that these men did not realize they were preserving their lives for the future to see. Weber's goal was for others to see his photographs. He wanted individuals who had never visited Holden to understand the importance this mountain village has. For him photographs of everything was important, whether it be the main street of the village to a few meager fish (Figure 13).

From what was included in "My Days at Holden" Weber seemed to understand that pictures can show the world to those unable to see it. Since he was not the best writer (English was, after all, his second language) he used his strength in art to share the story of Holden with others. Much of "My Days at Holden" consists of photographs he took in the summer of 1977 along with poems and song lyrics. Only the introduction in which Weber describes the



Figure 13. Trout caught from Holden Lake. Erwin Weber, Holden I Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 137.

³⁴ Branden Cannon, "The Photographs of Allan Godby and Charles Lee," *History of Photography* 36, no. 4 (2012): 442.

background of Holden 45 pages of double-spaced text (sketches included) does Weber share his own words. This may have been due to his weakness of writing or it may have been thanks to his strength in artistry. Whatever the case, Erwin Weber understood that it is difficult for one to describe the magnificence of a place through words. Although it can be done, it is much more efficient to share a photograph so that viewers might at least visually see a portion of the sight. In the article “Hunting with the Camera” Finis Dunaway describes this idea by saying that a camera “could penetrate into the essence of nature and retrieve thoughts camouflaged from the human eye.”³⁵ Photographers strive to share and capture our world in a snapshot. As the world is constantly changing photographs help keep a portion of it forever, just as Godby and Lee did with Coal Branch and Weber did with Holden.

Sometimes, it’s What You Leave Out

Interpreting the significance of Holden Village is difficult. Each individual who visits this community in the Cascade mountains encounters and experiences a different type of Holden. Photographs and words can only take a person so far. They can show and describe to us the facts of what the Village looked like and what was experienced but they cannot tell us the true experience or relationship the author, writer, or photographer had. As Erwin Weber said in his final lecture at Holden in 1977 “Sometimes it isn’t what you say, it’s what you leave out.”³⁶ Although he was referencing the life of Martin Luther, the same can be said for the relationship Weber had with Holden Village. What he said and showed in his compilation “My Days at Holden” is all that can be known of this relationship. It can only be known through the facts that

³⁵ Finis Dunaway, “Hunting with the Camera: Nature Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory, 1890-1930,” *Journal of American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 214.

³⁶ Erwin Weber, “Life of Luther – Part 6: Search for Unification & Concord 1555-1580,” 1977, Audio Archive.

he left. The man we know as Erwin Weber was a German professor, born in Germany but spent all but 15 years in his life living in the United States traveled to this place known as Holden Village in order to educate others and to create art. Each visit Weber took to this Village he created artwork, the first sketches and watercolors of the Village and the second a binder filled with photographs. His second visit, although art was included, focused on his knowledge of Martin Luther which he shared with the people of Holden. Those are the facts that I know, the ones that I found are difficult to argue.

As for the parts that remained unsaid about the connection of Erwin Weber and Holden Village, I have the facts of my personal experience to decipher this unknown story. I know the layout, the make-up and the atmosphere of Holden during January and February of 2016. I know the coldness that seeps into your bones while sitting in the unheated gym attempting to play a piano and the comfort of a homemade fire crackling inside the fireplace of Chalet 3. I know the sight of Holden Village as it was in the winter, covered in so much snow that I could step onto the roof of a school bus because of the snow's height and view the magnificence of the village below me. The Holden Village I know is the same Holden that Erwin Weber visited but yet vastly different.

My experiences are different from what Erwin Weber had in the summers of 1967 and 1977. He knows the beauty of Holden Village in the summer and the delicious taste of eating fish for breakfast that he caught himself from Railroad Creek the day before. He knows the magnificence of hiking through the wilderness of Wenatchee National Forest and seeing a deer silently cross the path in front of him. He knows the inside of Chalet 1, the riverside sauna, and the warmth of the mountain's sun beating upon his shoulders. All of the experiences and memories Erwin Weber had during those two visits only he knows. I do not.

However, from my experiences and the three items I found in Augustana College's Special Collections I can understand the experiences Erwin Weber had at Holden. I can understand what was left out in Erwin Weber's trip through knowledge of my own. From these things I have been able to understand how he is connected to the village in ways that I am not. Holden allowed Weber to explore various sectors of his life: religion, art, education, hilarity and nature just to name a few. By traveling to Holden he was able to step back from the outside world, as all visitors to Holden do. Holden gave him the time and the opportunity to find the beauty in the world around him, something he truly seemed to cherish. Here he could focus on the little things, such as the intricate mountain-scape that bordered the Village to the simple gathering of individuals sunbathing around the Village's lone jacuzzi (Figure 14). He could experience Holden in whatever light he desired; a summer camp, a retreat, an intentional community, or even a utopia. And he could portray it in a light of his choosing as his visits to Holden affected him enough to create a book of photographs and words of his time there. Although his creation "My Days at Holden" does not specifically state how he was affected by Holden, it provides the means to do so. Holden Village is a place for all to find their solace in the world around them and to express themselves. Erwin Weber got it right saying Holden is a place of *gemütlichkeit*, a word that defies English translation and deals with the

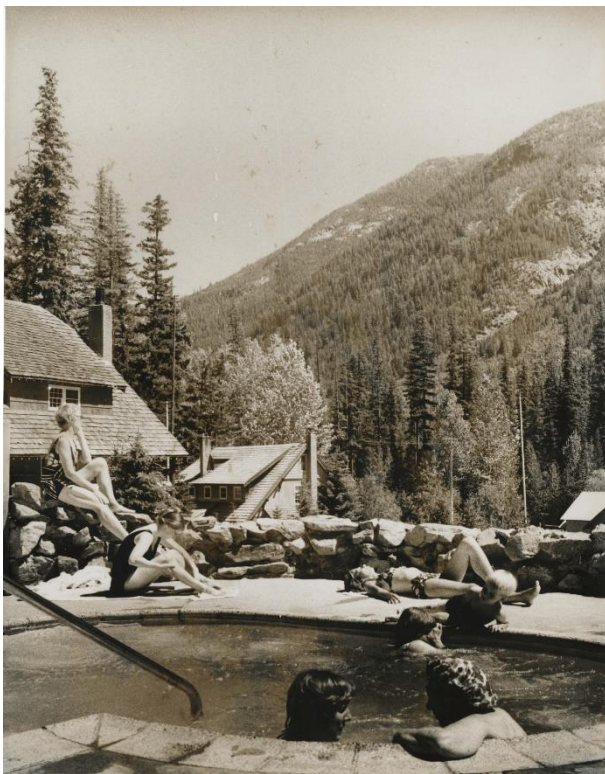


Figure 14. Individuals relaxing at the Holden Village Jacuzzi. Erwin Weber, Holden I Copy, No. 5, in MS 112 Weber (Erwin) Papers circa 1930s-2000s, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois: 185.

comfort, mood, and the spirit of a place. Holden Village embodies this word as it is a place that defies translation and a place whose definition varies upon the person, something that each individual who visits Holden, including Erwin Weber, comes to know.

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