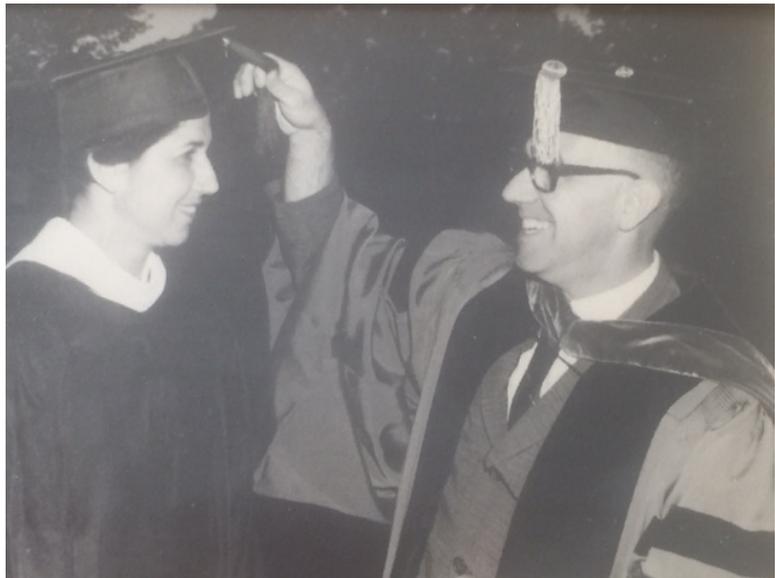


The Name Behind Sondermann Park (Cont.)

Marion (Obermeyer) Sondermann and her husband Fred were both German Jewish refugees. In Germany, Fred Sondermann quit middle school being the only Jew in a school of 500 Nazi's. The Sondermann family escaped on the last train before the Germans invaded Poland. His parents felt he should learn a trade before coming to the United States, so they sent him to cooking school. Their thoughts were that as a chef he would never go hungry. His first job in the United States was quite miserable, cleaning chickens in a restaurant.

Marion Sondermann's father (Fritz Obermeyer) owned a company in Nuremberg, Germany. Before World War II, with the rise of Hitler in the early 1930s, the government wanted to take possession of his factory. Mr. Obermeyer refused to sign it over to them and was placed in prison (before concentration camps existed). After one year, he continued to refuse, so the government confiscated the factory and released him from prison. The family then moved to Berlin where the Obermeyer name was less prominent.

Marion's mother went to the United States on a visitor's visa in 1938. She was researching the possibility of having her son come to the United States since he was close to military age. But when Marion's mother was in the United States she got a different view of things. "There's a saying you can't see the forest because of the trees. She realized it wasn't just a question of getting my *brother* out, we *all* had to leave," said Marion. She started the process of getting the family out of Germany. In March 1939 the family left Germany and emigrated to the United States. Marion's grandparents could not leave with them because they had a higher quota number. By the time their number came up, they had already been sent to a concentration camp, where tragically, they died.



Marion and Fred Sondermann

Marion was 11 when she came to the United States and met the Sondermann family. Her father found work in Indianapolis. "My parent's friends were all Jewish refugees." Marion's mom received surgery and her father needed someone to cook meals while her mother was recuperating. Marion's father met with the Sondermann family, who had just arrived from Germany, and told them if they cooked for the family, he would buy the food and they could eat with the family. That would help save money for the Sondermanns. Fred was 15 at that time.

Fred joined the U.S. Army in 1943 and was stationed on a French-speaking island in the South Pacific. He served in the U.S. Army until the war was over. He never dreamed he would go to college, but after the war, he applied for enrollment to Butler University on the GI bill. The university refused to accept him because he did not have a middle or high school diploma. He was extremely persistent, though, and they finally accepted him on a probationary status. He eventually graduated with honors. From there, Fred attended University of Indiana, also on the GI bill, where he received his Masters degree. "We were married January 1951, the week he received his Masters degree," said Marion. "He said he got two 'masters' the same week." That fall, Fred was accepted at Yale for his PhD – also funded by the GI bill. Marion and Fred moved to New Haven and lived there for three years while Fred completed his degree.

Fred Sondermann joined the Colorado College faculty in 1954 as a political science teacher, and later as chair of the department. He was a nationally honored educator and author. He served on the Colorado Springs City Council in the 1970s and was a member of the State Land Use Commission. In 1978, at the age of 54, Fred Sondermann passed away after a battle with cancer. Sondermann Park was dedicated the following year.