

The Schmitt's - First Two Generations in Texas

Smith Reunion 1990 Ann Boyd is really our Smith family genealogist and historian, and should be doing this rather than me – besides, I'm not sure that I have anything to add to what most of you already know. Certainly, everyone knows that the Schmitt's came from Germany! After visiting this beautiful area where the family lived, I really wondered why they left. Of course, history tells us that due to the political unrest and extreme poverty of the people there, thousands immigrated to America in the mid 1800's, many came to Texas, "the land of milk and honey" as was proclaimed by Prince Solms Von Braunfels for the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas. This Society, or "Verein" as it was called, established funds and mechanisms for the immigration. Their intentions were good initially, but they quickly misused the money and poorly managed the major part of the immigration. Some of the immigrant people were craftsmen, some were educated, but most were illiterate farmers, as was Johann Schmitt. Johann applied for immigration for his family, and after the German authorities determined that he was free of debt, of good character, and had paid his fees, a departure date and ship was assigned to him. A Civil document in Koblenz was found, thanks to Jeann Bitterly, listing the names of his family, ages of his children, and his occupation. His wife's name was Maria Ruder, and his children were – Elizabeth, age 20, Teresa – 18, Henry – 17, John Baptist – 15, and Margaret – 14. Actually, the document had some typing errors, but these were cleared up for us when we found the old Church records from Budesheim, Sts. Areus and Justinus Catholic Church. Another document was found among the Verein records, showing the family to be passengers of the ship Andacia, which was to depart in November 1845, and arrive in Galveston on March 29 and Carlshaven on April 12, 1846. Carlshaven was one of the names used for Indian Point, or Old Town, which later became Indianola, a few miles down the beach. Each male immigrant, was to receive a number of acres of land, and he and his family were to be provided shelter upon arrival and transportation to the land. I'm sure they expect decent accommodations aboard ship, as well. Johann and Maria made the decision to leave their homeland, family, and friends, and prepared themselves as best they could to seek a better life and greater happiness. They certainly were not prepared for the tragedies, hardships, and sufferings that began even before they left Budesheim – were they were married and all of their children were born. Maria was also born here, but it is believed that Johann was born in the near-by village of Sponesheim. The very first Historian for this family was Aunt Alice E. Smith, one of Henry's children, whose story was recorded on a set of slates, found in the attic of her home after she died in 1937. I have made copies of this story so that each of you could have one. I won't repeat this information, but please read it if you have not already done so – it is priceless. The story tells of the tragic death of Johann, before leaving Germany, and the brave mother continuing her journey as planned. After many miserable days at sea, they arrived on the barren shell beach, where none of the promised amenities were provided – not even fresh water! The long trip on overcrowded ships with no conveniences, "defied description", as reported in the New Braunfels newspaper. Many were sick on arrival, and some had died at

sea. It has been estimated that thousands of German immigrants died near Indianola during the first year or two, from exhaustion, exposure, and disease. This family survived, by the grace of God, and plenty of hard work and ingenuity. They were strong, determined people. Maria's tragic death occurred several years later, as the story on the slates reveals. It is interesting to note that this story was also told by Elizabeth Schmitt's descendants, the Hill family! The Schmitt girls married young and lived in the Coastal area, as did Henry. It has been difficult to trace John Baptis, but some of us, who have worked as family "sleuths" for several years, are fairly well convinced that he joined the Indianola Regiment to fight in the Mexican War 1846-1848. It meant clothes, food, and shelter, and the Captain was German and spoke his language. Makes sense to me! This man was stationed at Ft. Martin Scott near Fredericksburg. He married there and lived in Bexar Co. most of his life with his wife, Catherine Henke, also German speaking, and his ten children. This information came from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Most of us here descend from Henry Schmitt, who changed his name to Smith when he became a naturalized citizen in 1850. He married Josephine Ludwig, another youthful German immigrant, whose parents and siblings left Kiedrich, Germany in 1846 on the ship Diamont. Kiedrich is a beautiful old village in the Rhine River Valley, as is Budesheim. The entire area is wine country, with the River banks and valleys, beautifully landscaped by the vineyards. These two villages are about 25-30 miles apart, on the opposite sides of the Rhine. Christopher Ludwig, Josephine's father, was employed in the vineyards, but was educated, so probably was a foreman, or at least held a position of some esteem, as the prefix Von Ludwig was used in his name. He dropped it in this country, of course. His wife was Catherine Weber, born in Kiedrich, where they were married and most of their children were born. Among the Verein records at the Sopheinsbur Library and Museum, in New Braunfels, Ann and I found a letter Christopher wrote to the German authorities, requesting information on immigration, and the brief reply by the officials. This information gave us the expected date of departure for about the 10th of February, 1846, and that he had five children. These would have been Josephine, Christopher, Conrad, and Helene, whose Baptismal records were found on LDS Library film from St. Valentine's Catholic Church records in Kiedrich. Helene died in Indianola a few years after they arrived, and another child was born in the country, who died as an infant. Johann joined the Union Army and was killed in a battle near Santa Fe, N.M. Christopher and Conrad were conscripted into the Confederate Army. Military Service and Pension Records were found at the National Archives and Texas State Archives on these men. My mother (Loretta Rae) thought that neither of them were married, but Bernice had some information that there are Ludwig descendant living in Houston. Henry and Josephine were married on Matagorda Island and lived at Indianola, and later at Alligator head, which is about where Port O'Connor is today, where he had a sheep ranch. During the Civil War the family live at Old St. Mary's on Copano Bay where Henry ran the mail boat. At Indianola and later in Port Lavaca, Henry owned a small grocery store, where Mother said the "regulars" played Dominos! There were sixteen children of this marriage. It is not known if the Schmitts and Ludwigs were acquainted before arriving at Indianola, but the two family names are in cemetery records on both sides of the Rhine River, so it is an interesting possibility. Elizabeth Schmitt married William Andrew Hill and lived on Matagorda Island. William Andrew was a Danish sailor named Trawley, who was either shipwrecked or "jumped ship" and changed his name to Hill. He established a ranch on the Island where their seven children were born and most of the family died during the 1875 storm.

Only William Andrew, Jr. survived. Visiting this family at the time, was their cousin, John Smith, one of Henry's children and grandfather to most of you Seguin Smiths. He, too, survived, clinging to boards and debris, and was washed ashore on higher ground. Teresa married Samuel McBride, a ship's carpenter, who was born in Kentucky. They had six children, born at Indianola where they lived. After Sam died, Teresa married John Braden of Mentz-Bernardo Prairie, where Teresa then made her home. John had children by his first wife, but he and Teresa had no children of their marriage. He also had come from Budesheim, and the families were acquainted before the immigrated to Texas. Since so many of you are Braden descendants as well as Smiths, you will be proud to know that the Bradens were a very prominent family in Budesheim, and the Braden home still stands. There were several marriages between Smiths and Bradens in later generations, and also another Braden-McBride marriage. Margaret married Thomas Harrison and had eight children, Mr. Harrison, born in New York, was a pilot-boat captain and the family lived at Indianola and Decross Point. Margaret died in 1866 and Thomas remarried, having three children of this marriage. He and all of this second family drowned in the 1875 storm. As you can see, there were many tragedies and much suffering, but through it all, came kind, loving, and happy people. We can be proud of our heritage – these were courageous and good Christian people. Their stability and loyalty to their families was evident, and they knew how to enjoy life, as well as cope with it. Bernice asked for a brief history, and I'm sure that I have already exceeded that! There is plenty of detailed information out there for anyone who is interested. Hopefully, all of you are recording you own family histories – it is really difficult to find facts and information 100-150 years later. Do it now! Thank you. -- Betty Stevenson