

THE LAWRENCE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BULLETIN

Principal Immigration in 1880's and '90's:

The Germans In Lawrence County

THIS IS THE TEXT OF A PROGRAM PRESENTED BY OUR PROGRAM CHAIRMAN, REV. FRED FIEKER, IN MARCH

Reading history of Germany, one becomes much aware that this country was constantly at war, either among themselves or with neighboring countries. Because of its central location in Europe, armies of other countries passed through, destroying homes and crops. Germany was also subject to droughts.

During the nineteenth century the German people were experiencing very difficult times. The economy was poor, the farms were small, and the peasant people found it very difficult to survive.

In a letter, dated Feb. 15, 1903, from my great-grandmother Weltge, times didn't seem to be much better. She states in her letter that she didn't know where her strength had gone, as "I never starved. I would like to sell (my land) because it is getting too hard for me. The barn needs repair, the back wall is all broken. We noticed that in the fall already hoping that it would last through the winter. Now I have only one goat, but have so much feed. I have decided to buy a small pig, since there is enough feed. If I give the feed to others I receive nothing for it. To sell it you have no chance to talk it over with someone. If you say a word, they exaggerate so much, that it is better to keep quiet.

Today it snowed all day which makes it bad to have wet feet and you do not get rid of the cough (end of letter).

In 1848, the poor people started a revolution. The liberals wanted more freedom. The revolution failed. Many began immigrating to the United States. They had read in a book written by Gottlieb Duden in the 1820's. He had come to America to the state of Missouri. He explored St. Charles, Montgomery and Warren County and found it so much like his homeland that he encouraged his people to come to that area. He had a dream in which he visioned Missouri becoming a German state. Because of the deplorable conditions in the German homeland, tides of immigrants came to the St. Louis, St. Charles area, in the hills along the Missouri River. Most of these immigrants came from Hanover, Lippe-Deimold and Westphalia, all located in the Northwestern part of Germany.

The very first German immigrants came in the seventeen-hundreds and settled in Pennsylvania, now known as the Pennsylvania Dutch population. They came through New York port.

The Missouri German population came either through New York, or New Orleans. From New York they crossed land into Pennsylvania to the Ohio River. From New Orleans they came up the Mississippi River into Illinois and Missouri.

The German population of Wisconsin and Minnesota came through New York harbor and from there on the Hudson River to the Great Lakes region.

German-speaking people formed closely knit communities of their own. But the main thing which held the settlers together was their "one faith." Together they were determined to establish a church and school in the center of their newly found communities.

Families from Washington County, Illinois, came into Southwest Missouri in the late 1870's having heard that land was cheap here; also, it was the western frontier at the time. Oklahoma was still a territory of the Federal Government. The Frisco railway system was selling excess land they had purchased for \$6.00 an acre.

In 1874, a small group of German settlers in Minnesota found the weather too severe and having heard about cheap land in Lawrence County, came to purchase farm land on what was known as the Spring River Prairie. Unfortunately, many areas on Spring River Prairie turned to "Stone Prairie." In the history of the Donning Family, the following notation was made.

Germans In Lawrence County:

These settlers had one thing in common and that was they wanted new "untouched" land. By September, 1894, the community began to develop and expand. It seemed fitting to name the new town Freistatt, which implies a "place of refuge", since this community did represent a refuge for many of its inhabitants. That same year a Lutheran congregation was established and its first pastor, the Rev. H. G. Grupe, was installed. By 1877, families were arriving from New Minden, Illinois. On April 11, 1878, the first Lutheran church, Trinity Lutheran, was dedicated and soon afterwards, a Lutheran Day School was established.

Of the original families from Minnesota, there were two sets of brothers, August and John Fritz, and Ernest and William Schoen. The little community grew to fifty families by 1883.

New Minden, Illinois, was predominately Lutheran; the Lutheran church still stands today. Not far from there is the town of Hoyleton, Illinois. The population there was predominately German Evangelical.

My grandparents (Ficker's) came through New York harbor and across land to Hoyleton, Illinois. Another Ficker family already was established in the area having come to America in the 1830's. It is assumed that grandfather worked as a hired hand on the farm that the already established Ficker family had in Washington, County.

Having heard of the cheap land in Southwest Missouri, Grandfather came to the area in the early 1880's, and lived at Pioneer, Missouri, and again assuming he was a hired hand for a farmer there. He bought a farm west of Stotts City in 1884.

One of the first concerns of these German Evangelical families was to establish a church in their community. In 1879, the German Evangelical church was born in Southwest Missouri, near the community of Freistatt. The church site and cemetery was bought for \$1 00, with the stipulation that if it was not used for a church they would deed it back to the original owner.

The first church was built in 1880, a 20 X 30 ft. building which was used for worship and a parochial school. The Landrum Missouri post office* made mail deliveries once a week. In 1885, a larger church building was built and stood until destroyed by a tornado in 1944.

Other German groups moved into the area establishing other German churches. Hoberg had a German Episcopal Methodist church founded in 1881.

A German Methodist Episcopal church was founded here in Mt. Vernon, in 1896, by the Rev. W. F. Salzwedel.

In the Verona vicinity a St. John German Evangelical church was founded in 1885.

The German Catholic group chose railroad towns of Pierce City and Monett to establish churches.

In the history of Freistatt, Missouri, we find that the town operated without a formal city government until June, 6, 1916, when the village was incorporated, by order of the county court in Mt. Vernon.

Some of the family names mentioned were Broeckschmidt, E. G. Stellwagon and William Doenning. Other family names are Biermann, Helmkamp, Wendler, Schoncr, Fritz, Schoen, Frederking, Roedemeyer, Meyer, Kahre, Rathmann, Buhrmann, Schnake, Klein, Rahmoeller, Kleeman, Wuelner, Jung, Ottensmeyer, Moenkoff, Backsmeyer, Tiesel, and Kruger. I could go on and on!

In 1920, the first automobile tax was levied in the town at .50 cents per year per car. Later it was \$1.00 for the first year and .50 cents annually thereafter.

In 1919 John E. Groh put in a Deleo Electric plant, the power plant operating from 5 to 10 p. m. each day. Monday and Tuesday were ironing days so the power plant operated from 1 to 5 p. m. on those two days. Eight years later Ozark Power and Light Company bought the plant.

In 1937, a Dr. Rholeder built a small hospital in Freistatt and he named it Das Klein Krankenhaus. Translated to English it means "The Little Sick House."

It was indeed difficult for our forefathers be they of Irish, English, German, French, or any other ethnic descent to just survive and be able to transplant their values from one side of the world to the other, but with their perseverance and their "one faith," they were able to endure and leave to you and me a rich heritage.

*Editor's Note: The old Landrum Post Office was established in May, 1899, with William Koenebann as postmaster. It was discontinued in March, 1903. The store and post office were located at the crossroads, where the Zion Evangelical Church, Cemetery, and parsonage are now located.