

July 2012

Ancestral Newsletter #8

Ser geehrte Fraus & Herrs,

It's been awhile, but now I'm back with more tales of intrigue---or at least a little more info. from the time period when the Weitzer family was considering leaving their farm in Stockarn, Bavaria and moving their family to America. The newsletter begins with a photo of Barbara (Brantl) Weitzer, taken a few years after she, her husband Anton and seven of their children left Germany. The author of the article in the last newsletter, said they came over in 1890, but we know that their daughter, Barbara, was born in Germany on Jan. 6, 1893, and the next born, (my grandpa) Alois, was born in Plain, WI on Feb. 24, 1896 so they had to have traveled sometime between those two dates.

It's easy to understand that difficult conditions in Europe motivated people to leave their homeland, but for the Weitzer family, life was probably fairly good. Although not a great farmer, Anton had inherited the family farm, which gave him some financial security. He also chose the newer and faster steamship, the Prince Von Bismark, to transport his family to America which also suggests he was not penniless. Anton did, however, want to protect his sons from mandatory conscription into the Prussian military and that was most likely his main motivation for emigrating. But, no matter why Anton or anybody chooses to leave their homeland, they still need to decide where in the world to go.

America was still a wilderness in many areas. Remember Ferry Reider's sister, Theresa, who said they were so disgusted that they would have gone back to Germany if they had the money for the trip. (newsletter #2) At that time, Germany was the heart of European culture. Compare the beautiful home where Baptiste Brechtel lived, in Germany, to the log cabin he had in Wisconsin. (newsletters 3 & 4)

The article, "German Pioneers in Wisconsin" (written around 1907) talks about life for the earliest settlers. In the area near Plain, WI. These pioneers wrote letters back home to Germany and their words persuaded families to take a chance and come to America.

Just a couple of things to note:

- 1) The article mentions "farmer catchers" and I am reminded of Baptiste's younger brother, Adam Brechtel, who was lost in New York never to be heard from again. (newsletter #3)
- 2) The article also talks about Germans in America "who played the role of Judas on their countrymen", and I remember how Anton Weitzer bought property from "a not so honest Friend" which had lots of stones and unlevel ground. (newsletter #7)

The last two pages are the genealogical charts for Barbara Brantl's original family: dad, mom and the 7 children, and the second chart is the info we have on her grandparents.

The information for this newsletter is from the 125th Anniversary Book of St. Joseph Congregation, East Bristol, WI 1972.

Although this newsletter isn't about our own relatives, it does give us some insight into what they, especially the earliest arrivals, had to deal with. I sure don't envy them but I love reading about it. Hope you do too.

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*See you at
the Weitzer picnic!*

Barbara Brantl Weitzer b. 1/20/1854
married Anton Weitzer d. 10/23/1903
photo from 1896 or 1897



German Pioneers in Wisconsin

Restricted marriage laws in Bavaria in those times, needy conditions in overpopulated villages of German provinces without any prospects for improvement, bad harvests at the beginning of the "forties", and other social reasons were the motives for the mass migration to the New World. The excellent reports of the first arrivals that were reaching their friends and relatives in the old country produced action, igniting all those who wished to improve their position. Their reports of the virgin land and the uncomplicated acquisition of homesteads that were sent by them to the old country promptly brought many colonists across the ocean.

"Inasmuch as we, at our arrival in the New World," said an old settler, "did not receive monthly milk checks of \$25.00 or \$50.00 from the cheese factory, and did not have any bank accounts either, the majority of settlers acquired only 40 acres of land at the beginning; only in the course of years was the property enlarged by purchases.

"The cost of federal land at those times was \$1.50 per acre. Today, such a farm of 300 acres represents a princely fortune. The price increased just about over a hundredfold."

The first concern was a primitive dwelling, made of crude logs. For the beginning the immense trunks of trees provided ample material for a scanty log cabin. The skillful Yankees and also Germans who resided here prior to the arrival of the "greenhorn" newcomers, became their teachers. Our "Green" German was catching on rapidly, yes, even faster than some of the profit seeking Yankees desired. Because wherever he settled, he and his descendants stayed, while the Yankee sold out and moved westward.



The exterior of the log cabin was barely under roof when man, wife and child settled in their home, even with storm and weather singing through the joints and cracks. Straw and loam served as filling later. The interior of such a log cabin was very modest, mostly only one room, here and there an additional chamber, maybe separated by a wall of its own, or if not, then by a cheap curtain, that served as a "wall." Frequently, beds were situated in the attic.

How needy do these log cabins appear alongside our modern homes with several stores! And still, what a satisfaction, what a happiness and what a peace prevailed in these log cabins!

The first articles of furnishing were also primitive: simple stove, if not an open hearth built of stone with a chimney through the roof or through the sidewall as a fireside; a rough hewn table without paint or polish; a few boards as seats, and at the beginning, the boxes that were brought along from the old country; and the couch or bedstead on Mother Earth!

The temporary stalls for the few animals of the beginners were also quite original. Some simply joined split logs together and covered the structure with dry grass and soil. Others, already advanced in this kind of architecture of the New World, erected real log stalls which were somewhat breezy and cold.

Insofar as the entire herd of cattle of a settler was limited to a pair of yoke-oxen and a few cows, it was not necessary to build the barns as large as they are now. A single farmer owns more cattle nowadays than the entire settlement could call its own in the 1840's.

Pressed by emergency, our pioneers found practical and simple ways to meet many situations; the farmer sometimes was a cabinetmaker, or a carpenter, or a smith, or a shoemaker, or a mason and locksmith. All tools were of primitive construction in the pioneer years. It was still the age of hand-made things, because machines came only after the course of years. Sowing was done by hand. Today, it is done in a fast clean way and over a larger surface by the sowing machine. Because the grains was sown by hand, all of it did not ripen at the same time either; harvests therefore lasted much longer than now. Whoever was capable of swinging the scythe, had to do it heartily all day long; wheat and barley were bound with hands of twisted straw until late into the night. This was a burdensome job and required many a drink of apple cider or many sizeable gulps of corn whiskey, which was exceptionally good and above all, free of taxes before the years of the war in the 1860's.

Our German housewives, it should be noted, were not scared of any kind of work. They barely finished assisting their husbands constructing their shelter, when they already were looking for a small garden for planting of the necessary vegetables. Many of them were also familiar with the use of the plow, and mowing with the scythe.

The deep black, virgin prairie soil, as well as the humus of the forests, soon yielded an unanticipated productive harvest. Fertilizing of the soil was not necessary then because, right after the ground was broken, the wheat was broad-seeded, frequently between trees; it grew and gave rich harvest. Barley, oats, peas, beans, whatever was entrusted to the soil, gave large proceeds. The soil was very fertile. Thus, the first worries about nourishment were lifted.

It can be recognized by everybody that not knowing the English language was a great disadvantage to our first settlers. For this reason, the first arrivals depended on their countrymen, who had already been in the country for a longer time and were masters of the English language, or at least the main expressions thereof. Unfortunately one also could find among the immigrant Germans such, who played the role of Judas on their countrymen.

If the immigrants escaped the so-called "farmer catchers" in the harbors without getting cleaned out, they still had to suffer harm from the ignorance of the official language and had to pay dearly many times because of it.

This is frequently evidenced by the doubtful deeds of land purchases, or when signing promissory notes and sureties, as well as in litigations before all English judges and reckless hedge-lawyers, a really widespread ailment of those times.

But thanks to his profound education in the schools of the old country, the German immigrant knew how to work himself into the English (language) as far as it was necessary for him.

Here is Franzl, forty-eight years old, not a sissy in body, but young and strong as a bear, reading about "The Golden Mountains of America" in the weekly paper. Upon his arrival in New York, he counted his earthly treasures, and alas, they were a full 20 cents! He worked his way through to Wisconsin.

At a Yankee's place near Milwaukee, he learned one of his first lessons in the English language, which he recalled many times with precious humor. Thus, one day, instead of

bringing the mail, as he was asked, he simply fetched a sack of "Mehl" (flour) from the store, just after his boss had brought one home a few days before.

The housewife burst into laughter until her tears were rolling, when Franz put down the sack of flour near her feet.

Still, the majority of our pioneers were completely enthusiastic about the new country. Let us have one of them speak about those times.

Mr. Franz Ackermann, who had just emigrated from Unterfranken, Bayern, wrote under the date of November 17, '1845, to his relatives in the old country:

" In regard to myself and my family, we are, thanks to God, healthy and happy and now in our new country; of good spirit too. We got from Mainz to Antwerpen in two days. There we had to stay ten days at our own expense. Each person cost 42 Kreuzer. Our sea-journey on the Belgian sailship "Emmanuel" took 46 days to New York. From there we traveled to Milwaukee. From there we went with Lorenz Link of Eichenbuehl, who accompanied us during the entire journey, to his land. Because we liked the beauty of the area so much, we decided to stay. Thereupon Lorenz gave us his house to stay until we, ourselves acquired land. Next we let our families, who were still in Milwaukee, be brought over by Bonifaz Link's wagon. Our first job was to make hay for five or six head of cattle which were a surplus there. Then I helped a neighbor to thrash wheat, and earned myself in six weeks our bread for one year. The climate is healthy. The composition of the soil is as follows: five inches of black soil followed by loam. Stones are so rare that I can not even drive the wedge of my plow home with any of them, I also have a well on my land.

I shall barely need all the hay that I have on my meadow. I can plow and do not have to cut trees. The next year, I shall plant potatoes, corn, peas, beans, cabbage and everything that I need. Next year we shall also be able to plant 15-20 acres of wheat. I have a surplus of timber. We decided to stay with Link this winter because our cattle are there, and we have an income every day. At present we own a pair of oxen, a cow and a calf. One can not see any dark bread, all the bread is white. Coffee, as much as anyone cares to drink!
What

I always regret is that I did not move here four or five years ago. One may keep any kind of animals and as many as desired, or able to handle. I like it here in America. Because I have seen here neither a soldier nor a clerk of a court yet. One does not have the fear of anyone coming with manacles and ringing the doorbell, the only bells here are on the necks of the cows, and when you can hear them, it is a signal that they are bringing an udder full of milk. If someone wants to go to America and has some money, he will do better here than at home. There is plenty of land available except, not near the towns any more. One has to go 60-70 miles farther. I am so delighted with my land, I wish I were only 30 years old. The income is better than at home, especially for unmarried people. A hired man is given \$120 to \$150, and a hired woman from \$50 to \$60 even \$70 "

Letters like this, penned in glowing colors - yet, in regard to land and earnings conveying the truth could not fail to draw new settlers in large groups from the German provinces.

HUSBAND ANDREAS BRANTL
 Born June 2, 1792 Place Nuenberg V. Wald, Germany
 Chr. Place
 Marr. November 18, 1850 Place Nuenberg V. Wald, Germany
 Died approx. 1870 Place Nuenberg, Germany
 HUSBAND'S FATHER Kasper Brantl Place
 HUSBAND'S MOTHER Katrina Heindl Place

WIFE Barbara Dienfelder
 Born May 8, 1819 Place Nuenberg V. Wald, Germany
 Chr. Place
 Died approx. 1890 Place Nuenberg?, Germany
 Bur. Place
 WIFE'S FATHER Georg Dienfelder (approx. 1790-1865) WIFE'S MOTHER Katrina Fenk (approx 1800-1875)
 WIFE'S OTHER HUSBANDS

| SEX M F | CHILDREN List each child (Whether Living or Dead) in Order of Birth BURNAME (CAPITALIZED) | WHEN BORN | | | WHERE BORN | | | DATE OF FIRST MARRIAGE | | | WHEN DIED | | |
|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------|------|------------|---------|------------------|--------------------------|-----|-------|-----------|--------|------|
| | | DAY | MONTH | YEAR | TOWN | COUNTY | STATE OR COUNTRY | TO WHOM | DAY | MONTH | YEAR | | |
| 1 | Brantl, Barbara | 20 | Jan | 1854 | Stockarn? | Bavaria | Germany | Anton Weitzer | 23 | Oct | 1903 | | |
| 2 | " John | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | " Andrew | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | " Matthias | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | " Katharina | approx. | | 1851 | Bernried | Bavaria | Germany | approx. 1869 Joseph Roth | | | | approx | 1920 |
| 6 | Basel, George | 1/2 brother to Barbara Brantl Weitzer | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | Bred (or Brod), Marie | 1/2 sister to Barbara Brantl Weitzer | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

OTHER MARRIAGES

Barbara Dienfelder was 31 when she married Andreas (age 58). They had about 20 years of marriage before he died. She would have been approx. 50 years old. Did she remarry and have kids in her 50's? Or did she have them before marrying Andreas? Is Maria (Aunt or Brod) her married name? We don't know.

HUSBAND Kaspar Brantl
 Born approx. 1765 Place Nuenberg V. Wald, Germany
 Chr. _____
 Mar. approx. 1791 Place Nuenberg, Germany
 Died approx. 1840 Place Nuenberg, Germany
 Bur. _____
 HUSBAND'S FATHER _____
 HUSBAND'S MOTHER _____
 OTHER WIVES _____

WIFE Katherina Heindl
 Born approx. 1770 Place Nuenberg V. Wald, Germany
 Chr. _____
 Died approx. 1840 Place Nuenberg, Germany
 Bur. _____
 WIFE'S FATHER _____
 WIFE'S MOTHER _____
 OTHER HUSBANDS _____

| SEX | CHILDREN List each child (Whether living or dead) in Order of Birth SURNAME (CAPITALIZED) | WHEN BORN | | | WHERE BORN | | | DATE OF FIRST MARRIAGE TO WHOM | WHEN DIED | | |
|-----|---|-----------|-------|------|------------|---------|------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------|------|
| | | DAY | MONTH | YEAR | TOWN | COUNTY | STATE OR COUNTRY | | DAY | MONTH | YEAR |
| 1 | Brantl, Andreas | 2 | June | 1792 | Nuenberg | V. Wald | Germany | Nov. 18, 1850 | Barbara Dienfelder | approx. | 1870 |
| 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 7 | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 9 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | | | | | | |

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

OTHER MARRIAGES