

Ancestral Newsletter #9

Ahoy Landlubbers!

The year is 1894 (or '93 or '95). We are boarding the steamship, Prince Von Bismarck along with the Anton Weitzer family. George, the oldest son, has gone ahead to America and will be waiting for us in Iowa.

John, who is about 15 years old (not eleven as it says in newsletter #7), is the only son who will be traveling with us. It's John's duty to carry the rolled up mattress for his sick mother, Barbara. The rest of the group are daughters:

\*Catherine is about 16. She will eventually become Sister Donalda.

\*Anna (12 years)

\*Marie (7 years) She'll become Sr. Damian

\*Theresa (4 years) She'll be Sr. Junilla

\*and finally "old Aunt Barb" as we used to call her. She lived to be 93, but was about one year old, at the time of the crossing.

We are fortunate to be traveling the 3,000 miles across the Atlantic with the Weitzers, on this steamship, which will zip us over to America in only 8 to 14 days. If we had traveled with ~~any~~<sup>some</sup> of our other ancestors we would have been crossing in a sailboat, which would take one to three months. And, if we are traveling First Class, we will have it pretty darn good. Think of the movie Titanic (except for the part where the ship sinks). We'd dine on deliciously prepared foods while sitting in the elegant dining room. Later we'd dance to a famous orchestra, and sip champagne. At night, we'd retire to our quaint cabins with the comfortable beds and the windows for fresh air.

However, considering that John is carrying a mattress for his mother, I don't think it's likely that Anton plans to foot the bill for all of us to stay in first class. Instead we will probably bunk down in steerage with the other 1,000 or so steerage travelers. The narrow bunk beds are in rows and are stacked up to the 8 foot ceiling. A couple hundred of us will share the handful of toilets available. There aren't many showers either.

Most of the passengers on board have never been on a ship before and they are terrified of the pounding waves and the back and forth tossing of the ship. Some of these people have been seasick from day one and will continue to be sick until we reach land. Some vomit on the floor and, since we have no portholes for light or air, the stench can be overpowering.

Here's a quote from 9 year old Bessie Fingerman from Russia:

" It took my father seven years to save enough money to send for me, my mother, and sister and brother. The trip took a week and it was a horror---. My mother told me I was so sick that I threw up worms."

We don't have a dining room in steerage. We don't even have a table! Some folks brought their own food but the rest of us will need to climb up to the deck where our food, if you can call it that, will be dished out into a bucket. We will then carry it back down to our little home in steerage. It will probably be herring again because it is cheap and it lasts a long time without spoiling. Steerage got it's name because of the close proximity to the ships steering system so it's not all that quiet down here. Still, we only had to pay \$25 to \$35 per person, and, if we survive the trip, it may be worth it. All things considered, it's still better than if we had boarded the Titanic!

The story, "They're Coming to America" is a continuation of the 1907 article that was printed in the last newsletter. Happy Sailing!

Debby Klug



ANTON WEITZER

b. August 8, 1851

d. November 3, 1936

married Barbara Brantl

photo from 1896 or 1897

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THEY'RE

COMING TO

AMERICA



Most of the immigrants traveling on small ships down the Rhine River had to put up with rough food, bad sleeping quarters and sometimes ill treatment on the sailing ships crossing the ocean. Such crossings took from 30 to 100 days and even more, depending on the fair or unfavorable winds.

An old settler told me about such a gruesome journey of 130 days to Baltimore with week long calms followed by winds from the wrong direction; about the lack of water, food, and the various illnesses on board. By the time of their arrival in the harbors, most of these poor immigrants were wasted away to skeletons; many died of scurvy and typhoid fever on the high seas, and found their watery graves in the ocean. Nowadays, the traveler passes the same stretch on an elegant steamer in five to seven days.

From New York or Baltimore the immigrants had to choose either to take the long, burdensome road on land, or to travel farther on water in a very unpleasant way to Milwaukee. The short stretch from Detroit to Milwaukee required three weeks.

In addition, there was an immense shortage of money in the first years. Only very few settlers could brag about crossing the ocean with a full purse. Many of them were compelled to repay their travel expenses to their fellow travelers out of their earnings in the New World. Most of them had only a few dollars left after they acquired their land. Such German immigrants who considered the cost of land too high around Milwaukee, pressed gradually across Madison.

Arriving in Milwaukee, a torturous trip began for the immigrants. Our present trains and other means of transportation make it impossible for us to imagine how it was. Over bumpy roads, riding on slow cars pulled by oxen, they crossed marshes and rivers that had no bridges, or walked on foot with a big stick in their hand. Such an ordeal of three to four days reduced the enthusiasm for the "New World" in many an immigrant to the freezing point. Had their funds not have shrunken so much by now, they would surely have walked back to Milwaukee and from there, despite all the sufferings already endured, would have returned as fast as possible to European soil.

The further they progressed from Milwaukee, at those times merely a village and now a

big city, the worse the roads were.

The rivers were without bridges and had to be crossed at the fords in the manner of the Indians. Lucky was he who did not relinquish his span of oxen or who found, nearby, a necessary extra team to pull the heavy load on the wagon across.

Only the prosperous could afford the luxury of a pair of good horses at those times, but that sort was thinly sown. Finally, after months and after overcoming all kinds of hardship, they arrived at their chosen location, where a genuine pioneer life began, the hard struggle for survival.

First impressions in the midst of wilderness were not always heart-lifting.

A respected settler from those days wrote to me humorously about the impressions he received when selecting his place along with his father. "All around as far as the eye could see, stretched very tall prairie grass, so high that one could not even detect an Indian riding on horseback, but so much grass that it would be plenty for a large herd of cattle from seven villages; we had only one cow and one ox at that time. Down in the valley a long lake; behind us a magnificent forest without underbrush, which was mainly kept down by the fires each fall. Far and wide, however, no house, no trail, no road; the next neighbor is one-half mile away. If I must stay here, I will die!" He thought it over, though, and died some 50 years later, leaving one of the nicest and richest farms to his heirs.

Luxuriant growth of vegetation greeted the first pioneers in the lowlands and on the open prairie; deer and other wild animals such as bear, and Indians made their trails through five foot tall buffalo grass.

At the beginning, our old settlers had to overcome a constant struggle with different enemies, the least being with the red sons of the wilderness. The Indians, who occasionally called upon our first settlers, were of peaceful nature. When he came, it was for the purpose of begging. Everything pleased him, especially flour and tobacco. As compensation, the Redskin brought deer meat or fine-tanned skins.

On the contrary, there was a steady struggle with the world of animals. The settler had to protect his cattle against bears and wolves; deer frequently destroyed his corn. Large flocks of wild doves, that often literally darkened the sky, arrived at the time of planting and robbed, during the midday rest period, what one or two men have seeded during the forenoon. Yelling, scarecrows and shotguns had to be used to disperse these unwanted guests. Often an ungrateful business! But lead and powder cleaned up here, too. Only rarely does a person hear the sound of a wild dove in the dark thicket. Civilization drove them, like the Redskins, to the west.

Worse enemies were the manifold poisonous snakes, especially the rattlesnakes, that made themselves at home in the tall grass and also under the sheaves of wheat during harvest time. Caution had to be practiced while making hay in the swamps. For such snakebites, an Indian remedy, the snake weed helped. It was a plant with a long stem and its root acted as antitoxin.

Certainly, the beginning was the worst. Inasmuch as there were no close-by markets available at first, it was necessary to haul all food, like flour, etc. from Milwaukee, a distance of about 68 miles, by ox carts, or even worse, on shoulders.

Our pioneers were no gourmets in regard to food and drink. No wonder that the daily menu of those times matches very few, if any of our present cards. All food had to be carried all the way from Milwaukee at the beginning.

Coffee and milk, good and in abundance; white bread; eggs; already in the second year potatoes; vegetables; also meat, mostly salted pork just as today, without much or any bakery goods.

It sometimes happened that the children demanded bread but mother could not give them any, because there was no flour at home. Good neighbors always helped out when one was in need, and even loaned money for the procurement of flour. Those were certainly hours of sorrow for poor settlers, with a rich blessing of children!

Our pioneers used their legs much, so they were not afraid of long tours by foot. Who, of the men or women of today, would even think of walking 20 miles to Madison with a basket



of eggs, to earn a few cents by selling them, or to buy the most necessary household goods? Who would cover such a distance in one day, with only a slice of homemade bread in the pocket, and a drink of Adam's ale? Who would even go to Portage, Watertown, Sullivan or Milwaukee on foot? Who would walk to Jefferson with his bride to get married and return without delay in order to begin with the work immediately?

Without any doubt, it was a great disadvantage that market places were so distant for our pioneers. The Capital of the State, Madison, was 20 miles away from here. Columbus counted merely a few houses; Sun Prairie was nothing and had only a tavern and a few huts. The first railroad engines of the St. Paul railroad pulled into Madison at the end of the year 1854. Freight rates, however, were enormously high. Thus, Milwaukee - more than 60 miles away - remained as the nearest market place to where our pioneers had to haul their products, and had to buy their groceries. Such a trip took four or five days. Usually, several neighbors traveled together, so they could help each other in case of need of a second span, because the heavy ox carts got stuck quite often in the lowlands.

On main road crossing, insofar as one could talk about roads at all, inns (mostly block cabins) could be found, where a person could stay for the night, and get a bite to eat for money and good words.

The ox, or span of oxen, were simply let loose and watered; they found their forage close by. Such a wayhouse (inn) resembled a Babylon of many tongues; because men of all nations got together without top hats and kid gloves.

One who succeeded in getting a good bed could boast about it as a lucky person.

Because some were coming and others were going during the night, usually there was little hope for a real sleep. But, as in our times, our pioneers had no weak nerves.

In addition, there was also pastime at such places. Acquaintances met; news was spread free of charge; and then there was a good drink, which several of them had to do without for months. Stories about such way houses from those times sounded like tales from "Thousand and One Nights."

Since the railroads now crisscross the State of Wisconsin in all directions, and cities and villages with stores keep shooting up everywhere like mushrooms, the way houses have disappeared from the scene. Here and there, one can still find such a ruin from old times, but it is shaky and estranged from its purpose.

The tough hickory wood was used for the construction of wagons and their axles. The bottom parts of the giant oak trees provided the four wheels. Of course, they were not supposed to forget the grease-box; otherwise these homemade wheels screamed, squealed, complained and moaned in all tunes in such deplorable, pitiful manner that one lost his hearing. Some sensitively tuned ears purported to recognize the owner of such a wagon even from the distance of half a mile!

At first, a crossboard was used as a seat on these wagons. An inventor genius found this too hard; he nailed the crossboard on two long, tough springs that were attached to the sides of the wagon at an angle. The "Spring seat" was thereby at hand, and found general approval. Only our modern spring seats, made of steel coils, could beat out all inventions of the pioneer times in this field.

Unfortunately, no heavy loads could be moved with these clumsy wooden wagons. If somebody expected a great deal of his wooden axle, he had to pay for it with a bitter experience. Quite often, the whole wooden contraption crashed into the dust of the road, including its owner. This owner then rendered many a praise-and thanks- prayers in Bavarian or other pithy expressions.

The steel axle put an end to these "misery wagons". The oxcart also disappeared gradually from the scene and horses took the place of the oxen. A yoke can be still found on some farms, as a memento of "grandfather's time", but not really understood by the youth any more.

Women and children waited for hours for those who were returning from Milwaukee. What a loud rejoicing! There was fresh flour, coffee and sugar; materials for dresses, although not silk, but durable for young and old; shoes, not made of patent leather but sturdy boots; and when the purse has not been completely exhausted, probably some dainties for the little "nest-bunny".

**HUSBAND** Michael Weitzer  
 Born \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chr. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mar. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Died \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bur. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
**HUSBAND'S FATHER** \_\_\_\_\_  
**HUSBAND'S MOTHER** \_\_\_\_\_  
**HUSBAND'S OTHER WIVES** \_\_\_\_\_

**WIFE** Barbara Baier  
 Born \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chr. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Died \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bur. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
**WIFE'S FATHER** Adam Danstein  
**WIFE'S MOTHER** \_\_\_\_\_

SEX	CHILDREN List each child (Whether Living or Dead) in Order of Birth SURNAME (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	Georg (Johann) Weitzer	4	March	1817	Bennried	Bavaria	Germany	May 20, 1850	Anna Marie Erhard				
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

OTHER MARRIAGES

Georg Weitzer is Anton's father

ENTER ALL DATA IN THIS ORDER. DATES: 14 Apr 1794  
 NAMES: WATSON, John Henry PLACES: Sharon, Windsor, VT  
 To indicate that a child is an ancestor of the family representative, place an "X" behind the number pertaining to that child.

**HUSBAND** Michael Erhard  
 Born \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chr. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ance. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Died \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bur. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
**HUSBAND'S FATHER** \_\_\_\_\_  
**HUSBAND'S MOTHER** \_\_\_\_\_  
**OTHER WIVES** \_\_\_\_\_

**WIFE** Katharina Retzer  
 Born \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chr. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Died \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bur. \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
**WIFE'S FATHER** Georg Retzer  
**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			WHEN DIED		
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1 F	Erhard, Anna Marie	13	March	1817	Ded		Germany	May 20, 1850	Georg (Johann) Weitzer				
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													

**SOURCES OF INFORMATION**  
Anna Marie Erhard is Anton's Mother  
**OTHER MARRIAGES**