

Excerpts from the book:

Emigration from the Oldenburg Land to the USA – Individual Fates with Backgrounds, Letters and Photos

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Sophie Meinecke née Hayssen (1831-1925) of Hartwarden, emigrated to California, 1858:

It is a strange life on such a big ship. It would be too much if I told you more about it but I have to tell you about one event. A sick little girl of a German couple died. They took care of it the whole journey and almost reached San Francisco. A few hours after the child died, it was in the evening and I haven't heard about it yet, a seaman carried something on a plank all covered up into my direction. The captain appeared and read some words out of the bible. After the seaman got a sign he lifted the blanket and we saw a little human being. You more had to guess what it was because it was sewed into linen. The ship stopped for a while and the child was thrown into the sea. It doesn't matter where you are after you are dead but it is horrible if you are alive and torn apart like this from someone you love so much. The father was there but the mother wasn't. On the other end of the ship they danced and on the middle of the ship they made music at the same moment.

Bernard Wenstrup (from Wenstrup, Neuenkirchen parish), 1861:

I'd rather never have seen America. It was too precious for me to be able to leave my hometown all of a sudden. In my memory, home seems to be much lovelier than I perceived it to be when I lived there. I now appreciate where my cradle once stood, where a tender mother's heart welcomed me one day and a noble, stronger father's heart guided me, where I was in the arms of my siblings weighed where I felt my first wish and where all my wishes and plans were formed for my various careers, including the one that had my purpose here. - I had great expectations, but I found the opposite to be true.

Nobody has to look for roasted pigeons here. O the immigrant has much to endure in this country in the early days. If you think you have relatives in America, yes you will find out. Relatives or friends are the same. It's like this: If you have money, you are welcome, if you don't have any, we don't need you. Everyone's tongue hangs out for money, everyone likes to take it the easiest way; to this end, deceit renders him an advantageous service. Scams are the order of the day here. The best man to cheat is a smart man. Only those who don't trust anyone and are always on their guard can make progress here. They appear so lovingly, can receive you as gently as a dear brother. But there is the devil who bites like a knife. He claims to have paid very dearly for all of his gentle services, and he can do it if you are not careful. You have to expe-



Old homeland - new homeland
Johann Bernhard Harbers was born in 1856 and emigrated to the USA in 1872.
His father was tenant of the mill in Jaderaltendeich (photo above circa 1900).
Below: Farm of J. B. Harbers around 1890 in Waddington, California.



rience all of this. Everyone can imagine that this is not pleasant. But you get used to everything, take care and come to love the country, often better than the mother country, if you do not long for the dear family you left behind. As difficult as it is to live here at first, as easy it is to find a livelihood later with caution and hard work. That is what I want to find out and have already found out in part.

Heinrich Joseph Böhmer (1807-1868) from Vechta emigrated to Ohio, 1833:

Our between deck was a miserable small hole of about 24 or 26 long and wide, and up to the quarter beams, which on a ship are very close together, 5 ft and up to the ceiling 5 ½ feet high. From both sides at least 6 ft were taken up by the bunks, one on top of the other so that in the center about 12 ft of room remained with small chests set all along in front of the bunks. One can easily imagine what a miserable place the between deck passengers had, as there were 83 of us. No provisions whatever was made for ventilation. A small opening could easily have been made, which could be opened and closed as a means to draw out the foul air. Vinegar was supplied for fumigating a few times and at the beginning and end of the voyage. There was not a single window in the between deck and in stormy weather, when the entrance was closed, it was as dark as a walled in subterranean prison. This could have been easily remedied if we had been allowed to light a lantern, but this was forbidden us and I believed we would all go mad if we had to sit in the dark during the long evenings and the whole night on the entire voyage. And I could foresee with certainty that disorder and wantonness of all kind would break out.

The foul air in the between deck, especially at the beginning of the voyage when a great many were seasick, many of them so sick they were unable to leave their bunk and in fact in every bunk night pots were used. These stood around uncovered and was almost unbearable. The vermin and uncleanness could be much improved upon. But if the passengers money is paid, no one is concerned whether they die of filth or starvation.

From mail robber to father of immigrants - Friedrich Ernst (1796-1848) from Varel (to Texas):

The soil is so rich that it never needs fertilizer. The climate is like that of lower Italy; In summer it is of course warmer than in Germany, because the sun is almost straight above our head, but not as hot as one should assume, because a constant fresh east wind cools the air, and in summer one has little to do and it's easy to walk dressed in white cotton trousers and a jacket. Now in winter it is usually the same weather as in Germany the 14 spring days in March. Up to now it has only frozen twice in strong north-westerly winds, but the sun melted it away again immediately. The weather prevents field work for only a few days in a whole month; It is always bright air and sunshine, bees and butterflies can be seen all year round, birds sing in the bushes, some of which remain always green, and the cattle look for their own food in winter as in summer.

At all I know of no fatality, other than the great distance from my friends, if I could conjure them up, I would be here in this world already in Eden.

From the above true description, you will see what advantages the local farmer here has over the one there [in Germany]; Free constitution and for the time being no and later an insignificant communal tax, light cattle breeding, hardly 3 months of real work, no fertilization of the fields, no collecting of winter fodder, no need for money, easy manufacture of houses and clothing, etc., free hunting and game in abundance, free religious practice everywhere, etc. It is all that, with the best sale of the products, what makes him happy - and prosperous in a few years, which all prove who were here four to six years. Further higher up the rivers are beautiful areas and a lot of silver has been found there, all that matters is to drive out an Indian tribe who refuses individual visits. Several Indian tribes roam peacefully like the Cossacks and hunt deer, from which they sell the skins.

On the other hand, however, his daughter Caroline Ernst (1819-1902):

After we had lived on Fordtran's place for six months, we moved into our own house. This was a miserable little hut, covered with straw and having six sides, which were made out of moss. The roof was by no means water-proof, and we often held an umbrella over our bed when it rained at night, while the cows came and ate the moss. Of course, we suffered a great deal in the winter. My father had tried to build a chimney and fireplace out of logs and clay, but we were afraid to light a fire because of the extreme combustibility of our dwelling. So we had to shiver. Our shoes gave out, and we had to go barefoot in winter, for we did not know how to make moccasins. Our supply of clothes was also insufficient, and we had no spinning wheel, nor did we know how to spin and weave like the Americans. It was twenty-eight miles to San Felipe, and, besides, we had no money. [...]. No one can imagine what a degree of want there was of the merest necessities of life, and it is difficult for me now to understand how we managed to live and get along under the circumstances.

Hinrich Hinrichs (b. 1815) of Hohenkirchen, emigrated to Baltimore, 1852:

Dear brother, I wanted you to be here with your family, so that you could break free from slavery. I consider myself lucky that I have abandoned slavery, because it is a free country here. Here is a man of 20,000 Thaler no more in respect than the poorest man.

Fifty and also 100 acres of land can be plowed and worked with a horse in the first 3 years. Afterwards everyone gets 2 horses and also several horses and so everyone has to put down on cattle breeding. Because I and my family can rightly say that even if Germany wants to let us go back to its home and want to restore all of my assets, that will not occur to me. Because I thank God that I put the slave yoke back. Here we do not need to be remedied by such unjust money [imposts/fees]. [Anyone in] Germany who only has some food will be helped so that he has to die and enjoy dry bread [...].“

Wilhelm Ostertun: the Hooksiel boy who became New Mexico Secretary of the Treasury in 1863, 1855:

There are only 2 or 3 Germans among the 12 to 14 merchants boarding here, and even they are ashamed, so to speak, to speak German. The Germans are not held in high esteem here; they are said to be like the Scots in England: they come with an empty bag and return to Germany rich. That is why the Americans do not like them and usually call them "green Dutchman". Everyone therefore strives to get rid of the German as soon as possible.

This America is by far not such a moral country as it is usually described, if one goes in the afternoon on the main street, which is certainly 1 to 1 1/2 hours long, one encounters almost only dressed up maids [Dirnen], even the decent American women do not please me at all, they talk about nothing but their finery and church. They don't work, nothing at all, but they are paid, quite hypocritical, that's what they are.

Siebolt Müller from Stumpens (Wangerland) emigrated in 1837:

Finally, the countless letters that we have read about America in the old fatherland did not really allow us to see the dark side of this wonderful country. G. Duden is mentioned here as one of the biggest liars, who wrote a great book about the state of Missouri and invited the whole world to that paradise. Whereupon thousands of people threw themselves into bad luck and misery, who bought immediately a stony, sterile soil thinking of it as the best land in the United States and instead of the best climate for the Germans they found in summer oppressive heat [...] and in winter night frosts, which made all winter crops and even people freeze to death, etc.

Mr. Kruse called his farm a paradise! How ridiculous: deep in the primeval forest stands his little wooden house, in which the old mystic has to think every evening that perhaps the next morning the soldier can come, who ten years ago received these 80 acres from the state as wages in order to take back his paradise. And so the lying and slicing go on here far away from Germany. And if one is betrayed, one can foresee with a fair degree of certainty that the betrayer is a German. At least we have not yet met a single honest German, except for Mr. Thümmel [...].

Anton Thie (1817-1890) of Langförden, emigrated to Cincinnati in 1845, 1852:

I did write to you that I had forgotten Germany. But I have not forgotten you. I don't think of Germany as often as the first 3-4 years, but still I like to hear news from home. Believe me, leaving home is hard. Oh, so hard. When I left, I myself did not believe that it would be so hard. I am not at all surprised that many young emigrants died of homesickness or even killed themselves, although the latter is the greatest folly one could commit.

Homesickness is terrible. It is not that one thinks of the old house and homeland today and later a month again. Oh, dear God, no! It is from day to day, from month to month, for 3-4 years only the one thought, from the first awakening in the morning until you close your tired eyes in the evening, the one thought of home and your dear

relatives. I know it was not like that for everyone, but it was like that for me.

Wilhelm Francksen (1831-1876) from Butjadingen emigrated 1861 to Wisconsin:

Everyone's principle is to make life as easy as possible and they prefer to sit on their never-missing rocking-chair and seemingly occupy themselves with reading. In reality, they do nothing and are cruelly bored. The American man, on the other hand, is always busy - he never has time; even eating is done in a great hurry. He speculates continually and has only a sense for money. This pursuit of money always keeps him in feverish motion and prevents him from getting fat. Therefore, he is always scrawny and dried up like a stick. The only thing he insists on is cleanliness, especially fresh underwear, which may at least be tattered. Otherwise, he changes everything indifferently: today he is this, tomorrow that, and buys and builds houses, farms and factories, only to sell them off again tomorrow. The German must first get used to the social conditions in America, which I do not want to praise at all. The newly arrived, the so-called Green, always looks wooden and stupid at first, even if he has seen the world outside, and therefore he seldom completely escapes the shenanigans that threaten him here from all sides. Here one must look at everything with suspicion: Private as well as public institutions: Railroads, steamships, even the smallest coin. Behind everything lurks humbug and fraud.

Helene Küchler (1834-1909), née von Bloh of Wechloy, emigrated to Galveston, Texas in 1862 and returned in 1866, 1866:

For 21 years I have lived in your house in your midst, where I have only spent a few gloomy hours, no real grief or worries, I have come to know. Only here in this wretched country have I found what it is. I do not want to advise anyone to go to America, for the greater part of mankind is so bad here that a decent, righteous person cannot get an idea of it, I have found it out.