

## JOHANN FUCHS (JOHN FOX)

Hello, and welcome to the Westphalia Historical Society's 2017 Cemetery Walk.

My name is Johann Fuchs, and at the age of 63 I left the land of my ancestors to become an immigrant in the United States of America. By the simple act of writing letters back to my remaining family and friends in Germany, I became known as the "Vater der Auswanderung", the Father of Emigration. I wrote those letters in the hopes of what we all hope for – a better life for our children and grandchildren. My letters were a catalyst that helped set into motion the great emigration. And it was the economic conditions that made the people ready. I witnessed it all around me, a population standing perpetually on the verge of hunger.

I was born on June 11, 1777, in Langenfeld, a village situated in the Upper Eifel region of the Rhineland. My future adopted country of the United States was officially less than one year old. The Eifel region is one of the plateaus on the left bank of the Rhine river. Through the millennia the Rhine was a natural defensive barrier and boundary, and thus the region had a long history of ceaseless warfare and the devastating aftermaths: hunger, an uprooted population, political disunity, and economic turmoil.

Langenfeld was part of the Langenfeld parish, which included the surrounding cluster of villages and hamlets of Acht, Arft, Lanscheid, Jamelshoven, St. Jost, and others. Langenfeld parish was for many centuries politically linked to the archbishop of Trier, under the jurisdiction of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Peace of Westphalia Treaty in 1648, ending the Thirty-Year War, left German speaking Europe divided into hundreds of states. The two largest of these states, Prussia and Austria, jockeyed for dominance while smaller states sought to retain their independence by aligning themselves with one or the other. And the French had their eyes on the left bank of the Rhine also.

The economic devastation of the Thirty-Year War was still being felt at the time my great-grandfather, Johann Michael Fuchs, was born in the 1660's, the first recorded Fuchs living in the Eifel region. By the time my great-grandfather married his first wife Maria and had two children, the parish was under French occupation.

My grandfather was Servatius Fuchs, the eighth child of Johann Michael Fuchs and his second wife, Catherina Servatius. He married my grandmother Anna Margaretha Wirth when he was 25 years old and the marriage produced 2 children, Catharina and my father Johann Michael. During this time, more wars took place and the French continued to be active in the Rhineland. My grandfather died at about 30 years old, when my father was but an infant. My father was raised by his mother and stepfather, Peter Nett.

My father Johann Michael married my mother Maria Haensgen in 1772 in Langenfeld, and nine children were born of this union. During our lifetime, many political changes took place. Shortly after I turned 12 years old in 1789, French citizens stormed the Bastille in Paris, setting off the revolution that would have great implications for our Rhenish homeland. By 1792, the Rhineland again became the target of French aggression. By 1797, the French acquired the Rhineland through the Napoleonic Wars, ending the centuries-long control by the Holy Roman Empire. We were then considered French citizens, and you can imagine how well that set with us. We were Rhinelanders, we were Eifellers, we were Germans.

The area remained under French rule until 1813, when Prussia, Austria, and Russia defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 divided the German territory into about 40 states.



The Rhineland was given to Prussia, and thus we were considered subjects of Prussia, of which we felt no more alliance to than we did to France.

And so, during all this turmoil, we carried on and continued to live our lives as best we could. I was 28 years old when I married my wife, Anna Maria Schueller, on February 17, 1806, at St. Quirinus Catholic Church in Langenfeld. We were blessed with the birth of 13 children, and devastated by the loss of 5 of those children as infants and young children. We buried my father Johann Michael in 1817, and my mother Maria 6 years later in 1823. We witnessed the marriage of our oldest daughter Maria to Peter Gross in 1826, and our daughter Elisabeth's marriage to Johann Daub in 1828. And just over one year later we comforted Elisabeth when Johann died. Elisabeth remarried Johann Pung in 1830. And the first of many grandchildren started coming along.

I supported my family as my father had before me by the noble occupation of farming. Farming communities like those in the Eifel were quite different from what we came to in Michigan. Everyone's houses and attached barns were located within the village. The land we worked was situated outside the village perimeter. We were landowners, but with the social and economic forces that were taking place, we had much to lose.

The area was seeing a growth in population, more and more workers for less jobs. Arable land, already considered of poor quality, became scarce and more difficult to acquire. In addition, there were the Inheritance Laws, whereby agricultural lands had to be divided among the male heirs upon the death of the landowner. With 6 sons, these continuous divisions and subdivisions made it increasingly difficult for our land to have the capacity to support us.

Another thing came into play once Prussia took control of the Rhineland. A law was introduced that called for compulsory military service. All male Prussians, upon reaching 20 years of age, were liable for military service in various capacities for 19 years! Again, as a father of 6 sons, this was a law not well accepted by myself, nor by most of my fellow Rhinelanders.

And so, it was this multitude of socio-economic conditions that set up the perfect storm for the Auswanderung. By 1840, our plan was in motion to leave Germany. In order to emigrate, we had to secure proper authorization from local officials. I secured that authorization in a round-about way, for myself, my wife, and our six sons. I contacted the French legation in Frankfurt, a free city that was not controlled by Prussia, to get our passes in proper order and signed. At this time, I had two sons, Mathias and Paul, who still had military obligations under the Prussian compulsory service law. We left Germany and made our way to LeHavre, France. From there we arranged for passage to America, arriving in New York on October 1, 1840. We spent a few days there, then traveled up the Hudson to Albany, and then to Troy, and finally to Buffalo by way of the Erie Canal.

We stayed in Buffalo over the winter, and my sons and I worked on the canal to help cover expenses. And it was during this time I began writing letters back to Germany. I encouraged my daughters and son-in-laws to join us in America. I was honest and told them "about the difficulties and obstacles which beset our land and water journey," but assured them it would be worth it. In my second letter dated February 18<sup>th</sup> 1841, I gave them instructions on securing papers and how to book the safest passage. And I advised them on what items to bring with them, including for "each family 3 to 4 dozen knives and forks...as what is available here is 3 times as expensive." The knives and forks here "are very good...but people can just as well use German knives and forks at one-third the cost." And I told them to "leave axes and hatchets



in Germany...since the quality and durability of those here are unbelievable." And "don't burden yourselves with too much clothing, but bring enough shoes and boots for a year because having them made here is expensive." And I gave suggestions on food supplies needed for the journey.

And I described what we learned in America, that "what lays before our eyes we consider a great abundance. We are all fresh and healthy, and live so happily and peacefully, such as circumstances in Germany never allowed us to live. Ample earnings, good and abundant food. An industrious hand is riches in America."

And the letters took on a life of their own. They were passed from hand to hand, from village to village, were read and heard with eager curiosity. And it was thus how I came to be known as The Father of Emigration.

And the Prussian Ministry took notice, as they kept an eye open for letters from America which might "incite antagonism to the regime." An official in Adenau must have considered my letter of February 18<sup>th</sup> too provocative, as a copy was forwarded to Prussian officials in Koblenz. A copy of this letter is still kept in a museum in Koblenz.

In the spring of 1841, we left Buffalo, New York and traveled to Detroit, Michigan by way of Lake Erie. We stayed in Detroit for 6 weeks, and then left for the Westphalia settlement. We arrived in Westphalia in May of 1841, and settled 29 acres in Section 5.

In early August of 1841, the ship Louis Philippe arrived in New York. On board were my daughters Maria Gross and Elisabeth Pung, along with their husbands and families. My brother Anton and his family were also on board, having to bury an infant son at sea, a nephew I never saw. And a large number of cousins of both myself and of my wife and their families.

By mid-September of 1841, they arrived in the Westphalia settlement. Imagine the joy we all experienced of having our family reunited. And many more of our family and friends from the Langenfeld parish would eventually make their way to Westphalia, which we now called home.

Between 1840 and 1874, about 311 people emigrated from the Langenfeld parish and settled in the United States. Some settled in Minnesota and Wisconsin, but the largest number, some 269 people, established farms in the Westphalia area. I am certain that many of you here today can trace one or more of your ancestors to the Eifel.

I lived just over six years in Westphalia, and now this beautiful hilltop is my final resting place. I am proud that I was able to encourage a multitude of my fellow Langenfelders and other Eifellers to emigrate. And my wife and I had 86 grandchildren, so many of our descendants are now living throughout the United States. We are thankful for what this country had to offer us and our many descendants. And in our faith, we are thankful that we were escorted here safely by "the strong and merciful hand of the Almighty. To him be praise, honor, and glory."