

# *John & Elisabeth Hanses*

## Founding Father & Wife of Westphalia



MR Hello. I'm John Herman Hanses. I am originally from the village of Hespecke in the Sauerland of Westphalia, Germany.

MRS And I'm Elisabeth Hanses, formerly Elisabeth Martin. I was born in Stadtallendorf, which is in the state of Hessen Germany. I emigrated with my parents, Nikolaus and Elizabeth to Westphalia in 1838. Our Martin family was one of the first to come here from Hessen. When I look out at all of you here, I see many of my Martin relatives.

MR Ja, and I see many Hanses relatives. We've been married a lot of years, Elisabeth and I. I think it was fate that brought me to Westphalia from Germany to meet her. You see, I was a bachelor in my home country. I worked on my Mama and Papa's farm, and when I turned 40, I decided it was time to make a change in my life. I had worked many years for my brother in the quarry, and built roads all over the Sauerland, but life was calling me in a different direction. So in May of 1836, I started walking from my village of Hespecke to the port in Bremen on the North Sea. It was an 180-mile walk and took quite a few days, but I was strong-minded – just like the Hanses are now! I had with me 300 gold Thaler, my inheritance and the local currency at the time. I was determined to make a new life.

I boarded a ship bound for New York in America. Excited was I? In New York we continued through the Erie Canal to Detroit. My traveling companions on the way were the Franz Rademacher family. They came to Westphalia, right here in Clinton County, after me in 1839.

When I got to Detroit, I was advised by the priest to look at the newly surveyed government land in the Grand River Valley. I started out on foot from Detroit on the Dexter Trail, the only road at the time, with my traveling companions Anton Cordes, Joseph Platte, William Tillman and Joseph Salter.

As we walked and explored the wilderness, we felt very lost at times in this strange land. We didn't know the language. We didn't have much money, and sure, we were homesick and hungry. But we had our faith, so we kept walking. We finally reached Lyons. In Ionia at the land office, Fr. Kopp and Eberhard Platte had bought all of Section 5 here except for one 80-acre tract. We paid about \$1.00 an acre for this land in November, 1836. As you may know, in memory of our homeland, we named the new settlement "Westphalia". I myself bought 136 acres of land just north of here, on what is known as Hanses Road. I'm proud to say that farm remains in the Hanses family today.

MRS Ja, Ja, and my Pa bought 73 acres on Hanses Road, and the Martin farm is still there today.

MR. Life wasn't easy as we worked the land with our hands and a few primitive tools. But I found good soil, which made our work worth it. For many, many months I worked clearing the land and I also worked in Lyons. I remember thrashing my own wheat with a hand flail and packing wheat to take to Portland to be milled. I used to drag barrels of flour on a hand sled and had to stop every so often to lift the flour over fallen trees that were in the way.

You know, I worked so hard, I came down with a fever and was laid up for six months. My neighbor, Nikolaus Martin, took pity on me and brought me into his home to nurse me back to health. And while I was there, I caught the eye of his lovely daughter, Elisabeth. She was a pretty little thing, and as I lay there ill, I started dreaming about her being my wife. I think that's when I fell in love.

MRS John and I were married by Fr. Kopp the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1840 and it was the first wedding in Westphalia. Everyone in the settlement came—all 26 families attended.

MR After we were married and had the wedding feast at my father-in-law's house, for our honeymoon, we walked back to my bachelor cabin – a cabin with only blankets covering the windows. I'm sure she was impressed.

MRS It was cold! It was February, remember?

MR Ja, but we stayed warm. And you were glad your parents lived so close by. You made many trips down Hanses Road to visit them.

MRS Ja, one trip I will never forget! I was coming home from my parents and there in the woods was a bear! I, of course, was frightened almost to death! I kept my presence of mind enough to climb a tree, hurriedly you may be sure. I couldn't climb too large a tree else the bear would climb up after me; luckily I chose a small tree. That bear and I stared at each other most of all night! I thought for sure John would send out a search party, but he thought I was at my folks and my folks thought I had gone home to John. My, my, it was a long night. That ferocious bear finally ran off and I was able to safely climb down the tree and high-tail it for home, scared to death.

MR We had a good life on our farm, Elisabeth and I. We were blessed with 10 children: five boys and five girls. I'm especially proud of my son, Bernard. He's the son who remained on the farm and built the big brick house. He did that in 1888. I love this land and am proud to have made my home here in Westphalia.

MRS Me too, John! God Bless Westphalia!

