

Cemetery Walk, 2019

Johann Peter Pohl

Guten Nachmittag Freunde. Ich bin Johann Peter 'Pool'. (Good Afternoon Friends. I .. am Johann Peter Pohl) I was born January 5, 1802, the fifth of eight children born to Johann Joseph Pohl and Anna Margaretha Marx. Up until about 1820, our surname was spelled "POLL".

GEOGRAPHY:

We had relatives living in the German villages of Wimbach, Wiesemscheid and Bauler during the latter half of the 18th century and early 19th century. The villages of Antweiler and Musch were founded in the year 975 after the Duke of Aremburg donated a portion of his vast land holdings to the peasants in the area. Antweiler is located on the Ahr River in the Eifel region of the Rhineland. Musch, located on Road 257, is found approximately 3 kilometers to the southwest of Antweiler. Together these two villages shared the Catholic Church located in Antweiler. My ancestors can be found as far back as 1650 in the parish records.

FAMILY AND LIFE IN GERMANY:

I married Maria Hellenthal on March 3, 1829 in Antweiler. During our early years of married life we and many from our area of the Rhineland experienced the effects a growing population had on our well-being. Land that was available to farm had already been divided and subdivided through generations. A large number of the population in the Rhineland - as well as other areas of Germany - were going hungry as the size of the family farm decreased. We could see that the future for young families trying to make a living on low resources, barely able to support themselves, looked bleak.

[In summary, economics and the transfer of this area to Prussia seems to have been the most important reason for emigration of people from this region - and can probably be applied to Johannes Pohl and his family. With two sons to sub-divide the family plot - the future must have seemed bleak for the Pohl brothers.]

My older brother Nicholas and I agreed to leave the Rhineland together in search of a better life. Nicholas and family left traveling with Johann Fuchs (Fox). Nicholas and his family arrived in Westphalia on May 29, 1841. I so wanted to travel with them but could not as I had to finish my military service. At the time men had to remain in military service until we turned 39.

Johann Fuchs (Fox) was instrumental in telling family and friends of what he found in America. He sent at least two letters back to his brother Anton. He is now known as the "Father of Immigration" in the Eifel region of Germany.

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As soon as my military commitment was finished, we began our immigration journey from our ancestral farm on the bank of the Ahr River. Unfortunately our farm no longer exists as it was used by the German army in World War II as an ammunition dump supporting their efforts during the Battle of the Bulge.

Maria and I, and our four surviving children: Maria Anna, Nicholaus, Anna Katharina, and John Michael (11, 8, 5, and 1 at this time) traveled to Koblenz on the Rhine River to obtain our emigration documents. Our first two daughters died in infancy and we were very sad to leave them in Antweiler.

LIFE IN MICHIGAN

Once here, we began quickly to clear enough land for a house. This house took around 14 days to finish and was built near the south end of the present village limits on the east side of Grange Road. Everyone including neighbors worked together to clear enough land to build the house. Neighbors helped neighbors not only to clear land but to plant and harvest what crops we could grow. Time went by quickly but it sure was a tough life. Just like today we were at the mercy of the weather. We also had to worry about wild animals too.

We had built a small hut with a roof made of straw for our one and only pig. One night, we were startled awake by the sounds of squealing. Something was after our pig! I handed Nicholaus (nine years old at the time) a large club and together we went outside. I told my son to stand at the door of the hut because I would go in and chase out whatever it was that's after our pig -- "When it comes out you hit it over the head." Well he didn't have to do that as a very large bear with the pig in his mouth jumped out through the straw roof. This happened during our first year in this country.

In the ensuing years, we were blessed by the arrival of two more children. Peter Joseph was our first child born in this country in 1842. Our youngest, Anna Christina came to us in 1845.

In 1847 the Klein family wanted to leave the area. Maria and I purchased their 54 acres. I am thrilled that this property remains with the Pohl family to this very day.

Maria did a great job providing the children and I with a home life. She struggled at times with the hardships that were afforded us as we worked to provide a better life for our family in this great country.

In 1848, our Maria married Joseph Fuchs (Fox). Joseph was the son of Johann Fuchs (Fox). Fr. Godez performed the ceremony in what was then our third church building. John and Maria lived on the west side Grange Road, just south of Taft road. Together they had 8

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children.

Around 1850 we formed a township and named it Westphalia in honor of the area in the Rhineland we came from. Shortly after, the State of Michigan ("we are the government and are here to help you") informed Fr. Godez that the community was going to be visited by a census taker. We felt sorry for whoever had this job as Father was one of the few of our community who could speak English! This poor man was really confused when visiting our homes. Not being able to speak nor spell our German language, he could only spell the names the way they were pronounced to him. In this case our surname was spelled "Pool" for both our family and my brother Nicholas' family.

In 1854, our son Nicholas left us to start a new life with Anna Herr (Harr). They took up residence a mile and a half south of us and a half mile west on what is now Pratt Road. Together they raised 4 wonderful children.

Soon after, Katherine left the farm and moved to Detroit. She soon met a good boy and married George Brutsche in April of 1856. Together they owned a grocery store and raised two children, one of whom came back to the area to marry a local boy named Peter Platte.

1856 was also a memorable year for Maria and I, and our son Michael. Two years earlier I had petitioned the Circuit Court of Ionia County to become a citizen of this great country and proved to the judge that we had been residents of the United States for five years. On September 10 we traveled to Ionia to do what immigrants to the United States are still doing to this day. We became US citizens!

Peter traveled southwest in 1861 and was working for a farmer in the Schoolcraft area. Christina, the youngest, stayed at home.

At the same time we were hearing about the politics of the day regarding slavery and the possibility of a war between the Northern states and the Southern states. Both Michael and Peter served in the war. Peter enlisted in the 2nd Michigan infantry in 1861 and served until 1864. Michael enlisted in the 27th Michigan infantry and served until the end of the war. Both were wounded. Peter at the Battle of Malverno Hill during the Peninsula Campaign in Virginia on July 1, 1862. Michael was wounded in Petersburg Virginia in 1865. Both suffered the rest of their lives from their injuries. Both boys had seen enough adventure for the time and returned to help us expand our farm after mustering out of the service. By the time they returned we had cleared our original 26 acres and were working to clear another 65.

We lost my loving wife Maria on Christmas Eve, 1865 at the age of 61 from typhoid. This was

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a big loss for me and the children but we kept busy. These years of hard labor were taking a toll on all of us. The following February, I prepared my final will. At the time there was a Rhineland custom that the youngest boy would be given the farm in return for taking care of his parents the rest of their lives.

Our daughter Anna married Andre Huck, a Canadian born blacksmith who was living in Dallas Township in 1868. Their first home was in Portland Township. Less than a year later Anna left us due to complications of childbirth. My grandson Joseph passed away less than 3 months later.

Our youngest 3 children were growing up fast. The boys had the itch to explore their new homeland. Michael was the first to do this. He traveled north to the Upper Peninsula in the German community of Eagle Harbor.

Peter was trained as a blacksmith and continued to do this while expanding the farm. In 1869 he married Mary Hanses the daughter of John and Elizabeth Martin Hanses in the newly finished brick church. Together they had 12 children and built the house now owned by Marie Schafer Pohl 3/4 of a mile south of the 4 corners.

Michael stayed here with us until I passed away. He moved to the Westphalia, Missouri area to farm and raised a large family. Descendants still live in the area to this day. My family here never heard from Michael again.

On April 22, 1872 I passed away of heart disease. I had lived on this earth 71 years. The last 30 were the best of my life as I was able to spend them in this great area!

The best story of all though, tells of how I came to emigrate to America. The story, as told by Carl Pohl, my Great Grandson goes as follows:

"My Great Grandfather, your Great-Great Grandfather John Peter was taking sword dueling lessons from an instructor (name unknown) in Germany. He got to be very good at it. One day the instructor said to John, 'You are getting too good at dueling so I challenge you to a duel to the death. Not trusting this challenge, he asked another friend about this. The friend asked John if the instructor had taught him such and such a move. When John answered no the friend said, 'this is the move he saved as a surprise to get you, be on your guard and block it.' As the story goes this so surprised the instructor that it caught him off guard and he paid with his life John Peter had won the duel. Shortly after that he left for America.