



Mathias Weber, Civil War Soldier

At ease and hello! I'm Mathias Weber and I'm proud to be with you today. I am proud for many reasons. First of all, because I'm a Veteran of the Civil War – a member of the Grand Army of the Republic. But most of all I'm proud that I had the gumption to leave my home in Germany for America in 1843 to become one of the first settlers of Westphalia.

I was a young man – not yet 21 – when I left my hometown of Obermendig – now it is called Mendig. I was one of 12 children and life in Germany was hard --- high taxes and low wages. Many people suffered religious persecution because they were Catholic. I had read letters of Johann Fuchs, an emigrant from Langenfeld, that told about the good life in America. So I packed my bags ready to sail across the ocean. It was an exciting day, but Ja (yes), it was a sad day too. I had to say goodbye to my mother, father, and to my brothers and sisters. Would I ever see them again?

But after a long and dangerous journey aboard a sailing ship, I arrived safely in New York - Thanks be to God - but New York is not where I wanted to stay. My passport said "Michigan" and that's where I was headed by way of the Erie Canal and then on a steam boat across Lake Erie. America! What a vast land! There were many days we saw only wild animals – no homes, no people – but what a beautiful country!

After more than a week of travel, I finally arrived in Detroit. In 1844 Detroit was a booming frontier town. I found a job almost immediately as a butcher and a baker. And Ja (yes) it is true what Johann Fuchs said, "an industrious hand in America will find a good life." I found many Germans living in Detroit and I met friends at Mass in the Catholic Church on the corner of Monroe and St. Antoine Streets.

After a few years, I had saved enough money to make a return trip to Germany. I wanted to see my family again and there was a girl named Maria Catherine Schlicht who had promised to be my wife. Maria Catherina and I were married in 1849 in Langenfeld in her parish church. Again we had to say goodbye to family and friends.

Back in Detroit many people were talking about that German Catholic settlement "Westphalia". There you could buy a farm for a few dollars an acre, and many from the Rhineland in Germany had already settled there. We left Detroit for the Dexter Trail. After a few days of hard travel we arrived in Clinton County. We were welcomed by the friendly Germans – like the Fedewa, Gross, and Schafer families.

It was time to settle down. I used my savings to buy 40 acres of land on Hinman Road in Dallas Township from John P. Mueller for \$100.00. I went to work clearing the land a building a log cabin. I'm proud to say that my great grandson, Ed Weber owns and lives on that land today.



Sadly my wife Maria Catherina died in October 1855 and our little girl born in September of 1853 had died just a few months before in June of 1855. Both are buried here in this cemetery.

You might say though that I am a lucky man. I later met a beautiful young girl named Mary Carolina Ackermann and we were married in Westphalia on the 22nd of January 1856. My wife Carrie, some called her Mary, and I had three sons: Thomas, John and Michael. We lived a good life on the farm. There were apple trees, plum and cherry trees on my land. Maybe you've tasted some of my homemade dandelion wine -- you be sure to be sitting down when you drink my wine.

My Carrie was a good wife, a good mother, and she kept our log house in good order. She kept asking for glass on the window openings, and I granted her wish, but when she hung curtains over the windows I said, "I thought you wanted glass windows so that you could look out at the world. How can you see when you have them covered with cloth?" But Carrie won out. The curtains stayed on the windows.

Earlier I told you that I was proud to say that I'm a Civil War Veteran. Some might say "you were already 37 years old. Why did you enlist?" I knew from my younger days what it was like to suffer oppression. No man should hold another as a slave. So I signed up on December 1, 1861 for 3 years. The induction center was in Westphalia. I was a Private in Company D, 13th Infantry. I was taken prisoner in the Battle of Chickamauga; that battle was a victory for the southern forces. We lost many men; however, my unit went on to fight many other battles in Tennessee, Georgia, on General Sherman's March to the Sea, and the last important battle at Bentonville, North Carolina.

First I was taken to a prison in Richmond, Virginia and then to Andersonville, Georgia until the end of the war in 1865. Andersonville was one of the worst prisons in the south. It was an open field. There was no protection from the cold, the rain, or the hot sun. I have told my grandchildren that in order to stay alive I ate rats and the grain fed to the animals. So many Union soldiers died, as many as 127 every day. Also, there were raiders coming into the prison; they would steal anything and everything of value. One day I knew the raiders were coming. I had a fifty dollar bill. I hid the bill in my body -- not under my hat, nor in my mouth, but somewhere in my body. The raiders did not find my money!

At last, I was released and ordered to report at Camp Chase in Ohio. From there I walked all the way back to my home in Westphalia*. My health was bad and my clothes were tattered rags, but I made it to my home on Hinman Road. My wife and my sons were waiting for me with hugs and kisses and thanking God for my safe return. Now it's time to say "auf Wiedersehen" to you Webers and to good friends.

*Camp Chase Cemetery near Columbus, Ohio is some 280+ miles from Westphalia, Michigan