

German-Bohemian Heritage Society Newsletter

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H e i m a t b r i

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Louis Lindmeyer, Editor

Our Readers Write

On behalf of myself, my father and his sister, please allow me to publicly thank Mr. Robert Paulson of the GBHS for his help in reuniting a family separated by the second World War.

Nearly four years ago, I wrote to Mr. Paulson seeking help in obtaining information about the birthplaces of my paternal grandparents, Joseph **Muehlhans** and Marie **Theisinger**, born in the villages of Golddorf and Ebmeth (Falkenau, Bohmen) who emigrated, respectively, in 1903 and 1921, both settling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (they married that same year). As I had already begun the genealogical research through the Czech Archives in Pilsen (Plzen), I was more interested in learning about their country of origin. Mr. Paulson directed me to write to Lois Eisner of the Falkenauer Heimatstube in Schwandorf (Germany), which, in my poor German, I did.

Some months passed before I received a response, not from Mr. Eisner, but from Rudolf Gotzl of the Heimatverband der Falkenauer e. V. (Schwabach, Germany). Mr. Gotzl and I exchanged many letters and he, of course, requested me to send him a copy of my "Stammbaum" (family tree). He sent me maps and other written material about the villages of my ancestors and also corrected some of the spellings of my surnames. In one of my letters to him, I mentioned that my father might still have surviving first cousins, however, after the war and ensuing expulsion of the Sudetendeutsche from their homeland, contact with his family in Europe was lost. The last letter we had was dated 1946, from his Uncle Emil Beitlich; sent from an English POW camp in Essex, England. In it, his uncle explains that he fears for his family, as he has not heard from them in 18 months, and that he has heard terrible stories of the expulsion of those in his homeland. After this, to our knowledge, my grandfather received no more correspondence (my grandmother died in 1944). Of course,

Mr. Gotzl had the surnames of all my ancestors.

Again, several months later, I received another letter from Mr. Gotzl. After his usual pleasantries, he wrote that he had taken my Stammbaum to an annual meeting at the Egerlander Museum in Marktredwitz (Germany) and that he had shown it to an old friend of his, Kurt Theisinger. My knees nearly buckled as I read the next line: "...he (Kurt) immediately recognized #5 Marie Theisinger, as his aunt." Apparently, Mr. Gotzl had earlier thought the surname "Theisinger" to be familiar, but had delayed mentioning the fact to me until he could further investigate. I was in shock; we had found a first cousin.

I wrote to Kurt, however, unaware that his 32 year old daughter had just died of cancer, I expected an immediate response to my letter (his concerns, obviously, were elsewhere). After some time passed, I was dismayed that I still had not received a reply to my letter and began to wonder whether there might be some animosity toward his American cousins. In the meantime, my husband and I moved to another house and awaited the arrival of our third child. Although tucked away in the back of my mind, I had little time to give thought about relatives in distant places.

One month before the forwarding of mail addressed to my former address was to cease, I received a letter with the return address of someone I had never heard of before, an Esther Kippenhahn of Kirchseeon, Germany. My heart stopped as I read (translated from her German): "...I am Esther, the second child of Anna Theisinger (my grandmother's sister) and Emil Beitlich. You have to look no more for a sign of life..." I still get quite emotional as I write about it today.

We learned that she, her brother Roland (also a German

soldier), and her sisters Anna and Christine, were all alive (most in their sixties) and living in and around Munich, where they finally settled after being reunited with their father around 1950 (no wonder nobody could correspond with one another; they, as a family, could not reunite until some years after the war!). Sadly, we also learned that my father's Aunt Anna had died in 1988 and his Uncle Emil only months earlier in the spring of 1996. We had found our family! Perhaps more importantly, however, my father learned that, as a bomber in WWII, he had not killed any one of his family during the war, a thought that nagged at him for fifty years.

Of course, we exchanged many letters, photographs and videotapes (a good way to learn that video formats in Germany and America are not the same; however a video lab can reformat the tape to American formatting). We were astonished at the strong family resemblance between my father and his sister and their cousins! Letters, however, soon proved to be not enough, and we began to plan a trip to Munich to meet our relatives. My father and his sisters, being the children of parents who were the sole members of their entire families to emigrate to America, never had the experience of having, knowing and enjoying cousins. In their seventies now, they would finally learn what it was like.

At 9:00 A.M. on August 11, 1997 at the Munich airport, we all met for the first time. We spent many days together, talking about each other's lives for the many years the family was separated, looking through old photograph books, reading my grandmother's diary and just enjoying each other's company. My father, aunt and his cousins sang, together, the songs they had all learned, as children, from their mothers. We were showered with gifts of appreciation (for searching for them after so many years) and heartwarming hospitality. But, of course, our visit would not be complete without a trip to their--and our--homeland.

On August 13th, we drove to Marktredwitz (Germany), located near the Czech/German border; the home of my father's cousin Kurt Theisinger. Located there, is the Egerlander Museum, a wonderful collection of artwork, photographs, Trachten, glassware, linens, the hats woven with golden thread, lace (a display of the "Dutteln" and "Kloppelsack" mentioned in the June 1997 Newsletter), woodcarvings, the furnishings of a typical Egerlander house, religious articles and, sadly, samples of the small trunks that the expellees were allowed to fill with whatever they could within the allotted weight as they were driven from their homeland. As Esther explained (she was an adolescent at the time of expulsion), they were herded "like animals" onto cattle cars and removed from their property; from their homeland where their ancestors had lived for generations. I can still picture the image of a child in a photograph on the wall of the museum, his face showing confusion and insecurity as if

wondering what they had done wrong. It was very sad and we left there in a somber mood. Later, at his home, Kurt and his lady friend Traudl Schuller showed us photographs of the old villages (she was from Falkenau), told us stories and she showed us samples of her own bobbin-lace, some still in-progress on her "Kloppelsack". They are both very involved in the culture of the Egerlander and thus, very knowledgeable about the history of their homeland. Marktredwitz is a quaint village, winding roads and window boxes laden with beautiful flowers (we learned that there is an ordinance that requires them to hang evenly and not to touch the window below!) and I recommend that anyone planning a trip to the Czech Republic, plan to stay over in Germany, visit the Egerlander Museum (many books available; although all are written in German) and drive over the border into the Czech Republic rather than a stay inside that country.

The next morning, after a hardy breakfast prepared by Traudl, we boarded a small bus that they had rented (with a driver!) that we were to drive in to our destinations in the Czech Republic. With us was Traudl's brother, Wilfred, who had not been back to his homeland since he was expelled as a 14 year old boy fifty years ago. He spoke English very well and pointed out many of his play places as a child. As one crosses the border, one is struck by the stark contrast of the two countries: Germany, clean, bright and colorful; the Czech Republic gray and dismal; old buildings in ruins and newer ones with the appearance of the tenements of a city such as Chicago or New York. The effects of losing (by that government's choice) over 90% of your population and of communism, as well, are readily apparent.

We drove through what, at one time, had been the birthplaces of my ancestors, but what are now mostly ghost towns or have been absorbed into another village and cease to exist at all: Golddorf, Kogerau (Kocherau), Kirchenbirk, Ebersfeld, Steinhof, Falkenau, Lobstal, Kloben, Maria Kulm. Anything once belonging to the former German residents is mostly either in severe disrepair or had been razed by the Czechs long ago. The church and its cemetery in Kirchenbirk, where many of my ancestors were buried, is dilapidated; the church itself was used to house cattle after the Germans were forced out of their homeland. The headstones in the cemetery were long ago removed and were, I was told, used to pave roads. All that remains is a ten-foot iron crucifix. A small boy played amid the old graves, probably oblivious as to what his play yard once was and to what it meant to those of us standing there.

We drove to the village of Ebmeth (now Rovna), birthplace of my grandmother. The place where her mother's family's hotel (Knobel Gasthaus) once stood is now nothing but an overgrown weed patch. Some feet away stands a large tenement complex; no remnants of the

villages many houses exist.

Later, we visited Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary), still a beautiful city. I am sure it was maintained because of its spas. I stood in the building (now a restaurant and spa) that once housed the cooking school where my grandmother trained as a cook before leaving for America. In a store nearby, I purchased a canister set of blue and white porcelain with the intended contents labeled in German: "Mehl", "Zucker", etc., to add to my collection of blue and white porcelain. It will have very special meaning to me as it sits in my kitchen, as I found it just blocks from where my grandmother learned to cook herself. We lunched at the "Egerlander Cafe" in Karlsbad (apparently Germans are again welcome to open up shop there), its walls inscribed with sayings in the old "Egalanda" dialect. Upon learning from Kurt that we were a group of "Egerlander aus Amerika", the proprietor's son and another man with his accordion, serenaded us with folk songs. My father and his sister remembered them to be the same as those sung by their father whenever he and his friends commenced to "Bier trinken"! They had not heard these "Volkslieder" since they were children. We signed the guest books and paged through the many messages written by other Egerlanders who had visited the restaurant.

On our route back to Germany, we stopped at Konigsberg (Kynsperk nad Ohri), where my grandfather was both baptized and worked in a brewery before coming to Milwaukee. The ochre-colored buildings, as well as the church were crumbling and what appeared to have once been a bustling city now sat idly in the heat of August. It was quite disheartening to me, as I had a much more quaint image of it in my head. The city of Marie Kulm (Chlum sv. Mari) was much the same, however restoration of the Cathedral is underway; although they are painting over what, I was told, were once murals and German script. We listened to part of a mass (being said in German!) in the small chapel and lit candles in the church for our ancestors. An elderly man potted flowers in the courtyard and I remember thinking, why would he do that at the end of summer? (Perhaps it was in preparation for the "Maria Himmelfahrt" the following day, August fifteenth?) It was all very surreal.

Our last stop was to the city of Falkenau (Sokolov), the birthplace of Traudl and Wilfred Schuller. We went to what had been their childhood home, still standing, its once beautiful half-timbered facade crumbling. Nobody seems to care that it is there or do anything to repair it (no money?). I express my disbelief that the former owners of the house cannot reclaim it. I took a photograph of the brother and sister standing in front of what once was their beautiful home; their smiles incongruent with what stands behind them.

Our tour ends and we head back to Marktredwitz. Soon

after we cross the border, we are refreshed once again by the beautiful colors of Germany. To think that the places we had just left were at one time as picturesque as this is disheartening. We had seen road work and the beginnings of restoration underway in the Czech Republic. Perhaps, one day, it will look as it once did; like the images in my mind.

We say good-bye to Kurt, Traudl and Wilfred, as we are heading back to Munich. It is sad, as we wave good-bye from the car window, to think that we may never see them again. As we leave, I think about how glad I am that we made this trip.

For the next several days, we enjoy our visits to every cousins home and our sightseeing around Germany. I met my second cousin, Gunther, and we spend a few days together. It strikes me that we are all so much alike; how much one's parents (my grandmother and her siblings) impart onto the next generation and that, even separated by a war and an ocean, we all seem to "turn out" the same.

Leaving them for our return to America is very sad and we are all quite emotional. It seems that ten days together hardly makes up for fifty years, but it is better than no time at all. Watching my father and his sister, together with cousins for the first time in their lives is very heartwarming. There is an old joke amongst genealogists: "The only good relative is a dead one." As much as I've laughed at that in the past, I realize at this moment, that it could not be further from the truth. My ongoing quest to research my ancestors seems less important to me now (though the curiosity of names and dates remains) and I realize what I had really been searching for before: an extended family that my father never, until now, knew. And with that thought in mind, I return to the real purpose of this lengthy letter: to thank Mr. Paulson, from the bottom of my heart, for his help in reuniting a family separated by a war's aftermath. He cannot know how much joy he has brought to many people.

If anyone should desire information about the above-mentioned villages, they may write to me at my home address.

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A Remarkable Trip

by **Jack Schaefer**

This past August, my wife and I, our two grown children, and my parents took a remarkable trip to Europe, a trip back to our roots; although this time not so much a trip to see places, as to see people. Last fall we were able to discover where we came from, with the help of a baptismal certificate. Last winter we were able to discover living relatives, with the help of Bob Paulson

and a note left on a gravestone. This was a trip focused on meeting the people I had been corresponding with since then.

It was a deeply moving experience for all of us, but a difficult one to describe. Thus, this is not a comprehensive overview of our trip, but an impressionistic account.

I had some anxieties about the trip. I had made arrangements to meet with six families. What was the probability that all of them would be as interested in contact with us as I was with them and that we would be personally compatible with each other? As it turned out, the reality was much better than the statistical probability. There was a great deal of eagerness and acceptance by all of them. To put it simply, they were wonderful people. They were as surprised to learn about us, as I was thrilled to discover them. They were also enthusiastic in part because our name is dying out in Europe. In the last few generations, most of the children were girls. Three male family members were killed in WWII. One died about 10 years ago without children. The one remaining male has only daughters. Therefore, they were thankful that the name continues to exist in this country. As a result of this and whatever other factors, we could not have been received with more graciousness, friendliness, and hospitality.

I was impressed with the degree to which their lives continue to be shaped by the expulsion 50 years ago. To be fair, I also ought mention, that my interest on this trip was primarily in their experiences in Bohemia, so that was a major topic of conversation. However, my impression was that that experience was such a powerful one for them, that it has continued to shape their thinking ever since. In certain ways, the influence has been negative. They experience a deep sense of loss, of their homes, of their pasts, of their sense of connection to their ancestors, and of their childhood. One of them spoke in very emotional and nostalgic terms about how wonderful their lives were back in the village (Auherzen/Uherce, just west of Pilsen/Plzen), as she recalled her childhood. Another spoke of her one and only experience of visiting her former home. She was deeply saddened by the condition of the buildings, which her (our) family had worked to preserve and maintain for 300 years. However, when she went into the house and saw her mother's furniture, she "lost it," to quote her.

The expulsion also had some positive elements, when one looks for silver linings. While their lives were exceedingly difficult for much of the first decades after WWII, because they were forced to start over with nothing, I suspect that, at least in some ways, their lives turned out better than had they remained, especially under the burden of collective farming. A cousin who grew up in Austria and who now lives in England said that had her cousin remained in Bohemia, she would have married

a farmer and worked herself to death by now.

One of our relatives spoke at considerable length, and with considerable emotion, about her expulsion experience, which in her case took place before the Potsdam Agreement. She and her family and many others (from Aussig/Usti) were crammed into a railroad coal car, where they spent the next two weeks, without facilities and little or no food or water, while the authorities decided what to do with them. After telling this very moving story, she said that when she has had hard times since, she remembers what she experienced back then. That reminds her that she can cope with anything life throws at her.

We ended up spending the better part of four consecutive days in Auherzen, so I was able to develop a much better sense of it than in my brief, two-hour visit last fall. It was not as depressing this time, perhaps because I had gotten used to it. However, although many of the buildings are in a very sad state of repair, there is also some renovation occurring, as well as new construction. There is a great deal of work to be done, but the situation does not look hopeless to me. I think there may be a sense of hopelessness among the Czech villagers, having lived without the power or resources to effect much change during most of the last 50 years. One would hope that positive changes around them will also begin to influence their thinking and behavior.

I had one wonderful and unexpected experience in Auherzen. One of the Sudeten German families was left during the expulsion because the father worked in a coal mine in the neighboring village of Zwug/Zbuch, an "essential" occupation. Therefore, not only were they not forced out, they were not allowed to leave. A now-grown member of this family, who had been a childhood friend of some of my relatives, had been alerted that we were coming and met us in the village cemetery. She was an absolutely delightful woman, with a rich sense of humor. She proceeded to give me a detailed and private tour of the village, telling me which families lived where and something about each family, as well as what had happened to various buildings in the village. Auherzen now has a living history for me that it did not have before.

I would like to relay one experience that was fun. We had driven to the neighboring village of Blatnitz/Blatnice to find houses where people with my last name lived in 1945. Whether or how they might have been related I have no idea at this point. We did find three of the four houses, one of which had been restored and was magnificent. We decided to return by back road to Auherzen, which gave us a good sense of the countryside, but did not get us where we wanted to go. We ended up driving a roundabout way through a village called Chotieschau (Chotesov), where there was a large convent

which years ago owned the land my ancestors farmed. We had briefly visited the abandoned and somewhat dilapidated convent a few days previously. I wanted to see if we could get another view of what had been an immense and splendid building. While walking around the high stone wall surrounding the convent, we found a small church. Churches often have especially interesting and beautiful architecture, so I checked the door, which was locked. Before I knew it and could stop him, my dad was rattling the door of a nearby building, which in fact was a home. Seconds later, a woman appeared at the door. I wanted to apologize, but couldn't do so in Czech, so asked her if she spoke German. It turned out she was an extremely friendly and talkative Sudeten German. We had a 10 or 15 minute conversation. More than once I made motions to leave, but she kept talking. My suspicion is that the few German speaking people who remained after the expulsion enjoy the opportunities they have to speak their native language. During the conversation she told me there was to be a concert in the chapel of the old convent that evening, which we decided to attend. It took place in a second story room in the middle of this majestic, but badly deteriorating building. However, the room itself was covered wall to wall and ceiling with wonderful old frescoes, some restored and the rest in decent condition. The concert was an hour of classical music played by three people, a soprano, a harpsichordist, and a man who played a variety of old flutes. I felt very much like I was participating in a scene from the movie "Amadeus." Even a social faux pas sometimes has positive outcomes!

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Tracing the Grosam Family from Mariafels in Bohemia

by **Karen Kiehn Hobbs**

On May 11, 1869 George **Grosam** and his good friend Franz **Biebl** each purchased 80 acres of farmland in Severance Township, Sibley County. They had lived in neighboring villages in Bohemia and the land purchases made them next-door neighbors in Minnesota. They had both been in the Austrian army before coming to America but Franz was discharged for poor health before he served a full year. George stayed in the army for almost seven years while Franz went to America, decided he wanted to live there, and returned to Bohemia to settle his affairs. Before Franz went back to America George was mustered out of the army and he made up his mind to go to America, too.

Georg was from the village of Mariafels (now called Slavice) north and a little west of the city of Mies (Stribro) and roughly half way between the German

border and Pilsen. Franz was from Kscheutz which was only a few kilometers east of Mariafels.

The Grosam name is found in Mariafels as far back as 1654 when it appeared on the tax rolls as "Grausamb." It appears again in 1721. An ancestor of Georg Grosam was Viet Grosam who was probably born after 1750. Viet was a farmer and a "Richter" in Mariafels - a judge or Justice of the Peace - which indicates that he could read and write. During that period farmers were still serfs and few of them were able to afford schooling for their children so if there were one who could read and write in a village it was not unusual that he would be the village "Richter." He probably had a fairly large land-holding or because he married Anne **Mayerl** whose father was a "Verwalter" - an administrator or government bureaucrat. The Mayerl family lived in Damnau - a village about 10-15 kilometers west-southwest of Mariafels. Anne's parents were George Mayerl and Anna **Gollasch** (from Billin).

Viet and Anne had at least two sons, one named Georg and the other Sebastian. By 1822 Georg was the Ortsamtman (the highest civil authority under the nobleman who owned the land) of Mariafels. He is mentioned in J.G. Sommer's 1838 survey of Bohemia as having built a Maierhof (large farmstead), a Wirthhaus (village inn) and a "Schäferei" (sheep-shed or sheep barn) in 1822. These buildings were the property of the noble landlord and the large three-story stone barn and the elegant manor house that belonged to the "Maierhof" and the "Wirthhaus" can still be seen in Mariafels (Slavice) today although they are now in very poor condition. It is possible that once the manor farm, sheep shed and village inn were built, Georg Grosam had an active part in running them for the noble landlord. As "Ortsamtman" he would at least oversee their operations.

In 1815 Georg married Aloysia Dobiaschowsky. They had a daughter, Maria-Aloysia-Anne born in 1816 and and twin sons Adolf and Wenzel born in 1827. There may have been other children during the terrible years between 1816 and 1819 but all the records found to date do not mention other children who died.

The Mariafels Heimatbuch "Zum Grenzen Hinweg" also mentions the "Oberamtman" Georg Grosam, saying that in 1882 he built a roadside shrine - a little chapel - on the edge of Mariafels. Most of the time such shrines were built in memory of an event or a person and sometimes they would be placed on the spot where someone met an untimely death. There is no clue about why Georg may have built the shrine.

Sebastian Grosam, the brother of Georg, was probably born around 1795. Sebastian was a farmer and lived in house 21 in Mariafels which could have been the site of the

original Grosam farmstead as far back as 1654. The law required that the youngest son should inherit a farm and as long as there were sons to inherit, the farm stayed in the same family. On that basis, Sebastian was probably younger than Georg but that is uncertain. Georg may have been the younger but he was so busy with his duties as "Ortsamtmann" that he did not want to take over the family farm. Georg's wife may also have had land of her own.

Sebastian married Marie **Stengl**, a farmer's daughter from Damnau. The Stengl family is on the tax rolls of 1654 which shows that they occupied the second largest farm in the village at that time. Marie's parents were Michael Stengl (from Damnau) and Maria-Anne **Stolzer** (from Thull).

Sebastian and Marie Grosam lived in house number 21 - the hereditary family farmstead - and they had four children: Cordule, born 21/2/1809; Johann, born 4/8/1813; Georg, born 27/5/1817; and Georg, born 28/2/1824. With two sons named Georg, it can be assumed that the elder son with that name died before the younger one was born -- it was common practice to give a second child the same name as one who had died. There was an severe economic depression and a terrible famine and epidemic disease between 1816-1818 and undernourished mothers gave birth to frail infants who had little chance to survive any illness. Whatever happened it is certain that little Georg had died by 1824 when the next son was born to Sebastian and Marie Grosam. It is certain that the younger Georg survived to manhood because he also came to Minnesota and settled in Cairo Township during the 1870's where he became known as "the other Georg Grosam."

It was Johann, the oldest son of Sebastian and Marie who inherited the family farm even though Georg, being the younger, should have been the one to inherit. Perhaps "the other Georg" had a profession or trade that he preferred to farming or perhaps he married a woman who had inherited a farm of her own and preferred to live there.

Johann Grosam married Katarina **Heimerl**, the daughter of a farmer from Gronau, (also spelled Grona, Grunau - a village located about 15 kilometers northwest of Mariafels and east of Plan) Andreas Heimerl and his wife, Elizabeth **Rath**, who was the daughter of a farmer from Ottenreith. Johann and Katrina lived in house number 21 in Mariafels and it is possible that Johann also operated a forge there. There is a fairly large building with a chimney next to main gate to the old farmstead number 21 in Mariafels.

A forge would be a good reason for a farm building to have a chimney. Although Johann is called a farmer on all of the old records it was not uncommon for a farmer to also have a trade to supplement his income, in particular

during the winter. When Johann followed his son to Severance Township in 1870 the two of them built a forge in one of their barns and it is doubtful that they would have done that if they were not already experienced blacksmiths and metalworkers.

Johann and Katarina had a son, Georg, born 15/7/1840 in Mariafels house number 21. Georg and Katharina **Dotsch** - from Mariafels - were his godparents and he was baptized by Josef **Pauscher** who was the parish priest. It is uncertain in which church the baptism took place. The priest may have traveled to Mariafels for the rite or the Grosams may have had to take the infant Georg to Ober-Gosolup.

J. G. Sommer's book says that in 1838 the village of Mariafels was in the parish of Ober-Gosolup (Kosolupy), a village located to the north, and that the chapel at Mariafels had services only on special feast days -- all regular services should have been in a "parish church" at Ober-Gosolup. At present there is an old church in Mariafels, with a cemetery that contains the graves of Sebastian and several other Grosams, but it is not known if that church is the "chapel" referred to in Sommer's book. The church appears to be very old but it was untended for 40 years after 1945 so its poor condition may be from lack of maintenance rather than age.

A preliminary search of records in Pilsen failed to find any siblings for Georg Grosam although it would be very unusual for a Bohemian farm family to have only one child. Four families (**Grosam, Bregel, Frank, Biebl**), all of whom came from the area around Mies and all of whom settled near St. George in Severance Township, had at least one child born before 1846 when they came to the US. But none of them had any children (with one exception - a Biebl child born in 1849) for the seven years between 1846-1851. An explanation may be in the fact that there were two more years of famine (1846-47) which caused food riots in Mies and looting and arson in the countryside, there was a rebellion in 1848 and epidemic diseases (Cholera and Typhus) in 1849. There was another year of crop failure in 1850 and things did not get better until 1851-52. Coincidentally, children's birthdays began in all of the four families named in 1852 and continued during the following years.

Georg Grosam was eventually recruited by the Austrian army. During this period an only son of a farmer who owned and worked a large-enough farm was exempt from the draft. Georg's army record shows he did not volunteer - he was drafted. That seems to indicate there was another son at home or he would have been exempt.

The passenger list from the ship Ohio on which Georg's parents, Johann and Katrina, sailed to America in 1870 shows that they were accompanied by a 27-year-old man named Johann. What became of this young man is a

mystery. To date there seems to be no record that he ever arrived in Minnesota with Johann and Katrina. It is possible he did not survive the ocean voyage. The lists of passengers who disembarked from the ship Ohio on the date that Johann and Katrina landed in America have not yet been searched to see if young Johann was still with them.

In October, 1860 Georg Grosam was 20 years old and he was drafted into Infantry Regiment number 35, the regiment known as the Mies regiment, which was headquartered in Pilsen. Some of the regiment was stationed in Debrecen, Hungary, at the time that Georg was inducted and some units of the regiment were in Pilsen as garrison troops. Where Georg received his basic training is unknown. His military record states that he transferred to Vienna on April 16, 1862, to join the military security police there. He was selected for that duty because he was tall (5'8"), he could read and write and he was a good soldier.

The emperor wanted impressive-looking men who were bright and had a basic education to represent his army to the people of Vienna. There was a lot of unrest everywhere -- riots and pogroms in Bohemia (Prague and Pilsen) and taxpayer strikes in Hungary -- and the emperor was afraid of an uprising in Vienna. He thought that having an impressive "military presence" represented by tall men who were a "cut above the average" in the security police would intimidate the population. Georg Grosam spent his days as a military security policeman riding a white horse in a group of six horsemen who patrolled the elegant "Ringstrasse" boulevard of Vienna. He also had to ride in festival parades and appear in honor guards for important persons and on other special occasions. Life in security police barracks in Vienna was much more comfortable than living in a fortress in Hungary or a Kaserne in Pilsen. Georg was quite fortunate to have such duty during his first years in the army.

In August, 1863, George transferred back to Infantry Regiment Number 35 (sometimes called the Khevenhuller Regiment). Austria became allied with Prussia against the Danes in an effort to keep the Danes from annexing Schleswig and Holstein to Denmark. By December the regiment was on its way to Denmark, riding in cold, open rail cars to Hamburg and then marching to Schleswig. War started in January, 1864.

One history of Infantry Regiment 35 says that the regiment was put into a reserve brigade and that they were often at the site of a battle but had little opportunity to participate. There is mention of bitter cold, of marching on roads that were covered with "glassy" ice or knee deep snow, and of poor shelter against the weather and meals of hard tack and dried meat. When the Danes abandoned a fortress at Missunde, IR 35 was one of the regiments that took away all of the cannons

and other weapons and ammunition the Danes had left behind. They also participated in the demolition of the fortress at Fridericia after the Danes abandoned that stronghold. They were the first to cross into Jütland in pursuit of the Danish army and some of their patrols had little fights with retreating Danish units. Eventually they marched to north Jütland and occupied the city of Viele. When peace was declared at the end of summer, 1864, one of the battalions in the regiment went back to Pilsen while another stayed in Altona as "occupation" troops and the third went to Prague.

Georg's battalion was the one that went back to Pilsen. So, for a while, he was fairly close to home. The railroad did not go all the way, but it cut the time and expense of travel and Georg may have been able to go home to help with harvest or planting. It was not uncommon for soldiers to be given a few weeks of "family leave" for farm work during peacetime.

In June of 1866 Prussia invaded Bohemia -- they wanted to force a war with Austria to settle once and for all which German power would dominate western Europe. Georg's regiment (IR 35) boarded trains from Pilsen to Prague to join up with the other regimental battalions (they left Altona to the Prussians) and then to join a portion of the Austrian army assembled there. They marched to the northeast where they met their Saxon allies, the Crown Prince of Saxony and his army. Their mission was to delay or stop the units of the Prussian army advancing along the Iser river from the north. Near the end of June, 1866, Georg was in a bloody battle at Munchengrätz and another at Jicin (Gitschin) which the badly-outnumbered Austrian-Saxon troops lost. They made a hasty retreat towards the Bistritz river in the east - marching in oppressive heat during the day and trying to sleep at night in uniforms that were soaked through by rainstorms every afternoon. Some of the men simply collapsed by the side of the road, too exhausted to move and they had to be left behind.

During the first week of July Georg fought again at the battle of Königgrätz. Georg told his family about that battle and Daniel Grosam of Severance Township recalls the story: Georg said that he had a muzzle-loading rifle while the Prussians had breech-loaders that they could load and fire much faster than the Austrians. They could also load and fire while lying prone on the ground while the Austrians had to stand up to load. The Austrians were still using old tactics, sending their infantry marching against an enemy line in "parade formations" that had them packed together in columns of up to 300 men. These outmoded tactics only gave the Prussians a larger target and caused heavy losses for the Austrians. There were almost 20,000 Austrians among the dead and wounded after that one battle and another 20,000 were missing (deserted, taken prisoner or otherwise unaccounted for). Daniel Grosam of Severance township remembers the

story that Georg Grosam told his family. He said that his battalion marched forward against the Prussians' rapid fire and, "the first line fell, then the second line fell, the third line fell." Then he looked about and saw that only he and a good friend were still standing -- there was nothing to do so they fell down. They lay on muddy ground that ran with blood and tried to be very still as cavalry came charging over their position. The riders slashed with their sabers at anyone who moved.

A book about the 1866 war confirms that this story is quite true and the cavalry who overrode Georg's battalion were actually Austrian cavalry who were fleeing Prussian cannon fire that had just burst into their midst. They also thought they were being pursued by Prussian infantry and in their panic they slashed at anything that seemed to be in their way...including their own soldiers.

When it was safe to move out Georg ran to the rear where the Austrians were in full retreat. They were trying to reach the fortified city of Königgrätz which was on the river a few miles from where they had been fighting. When they got close to the city, they found out that the commander inside was afraid of the crowd of soldiers coming toward his gates and he opened sluices that would flood all the land around the city to keep them away without first trying to find out if they were Austrians or Prussians. The Austrians were already in near panic because they thought the Prussians were following them - those who still had weapons had little or no ammunition and there was no one to tell them what to do because most of their officers were dead or lost in the crowd of more than 60,000 men who were trying to enter the city.

When the water filled the flood plain in front of the city walls a lot of soldiers were caught by it. Others tried to wade or swim through it and many drowned. There were only two narrow roadways that were above the water and the panicked soldiers pushed wagons (even wagons full of wounded) and cannons off the road and into the water in a effort to get to the city.

The city commander refused to open the gates for almost four hours. By the time he finally did so the number of Austrians who died that day had been increased significantly by drownings and by those who were crushed against the walls of the city or under the wheels of wagons.

Some of the soldiers avoided the city, waded in water up to their throats to cross the river that flowed past the city and then spent the night in the forest on the other side. There is no way to know if Georg ever made it into the city or if he was one of those who went the other way. The regimental history says that most of the survivors of the regiment (about one half of the men who had first marched out to war) eventually made it into the city but it took all night to reorganize them and then they set out

before dawn marching toward Olmütz. As they marched the Prussian cavalry attacked them at every opportunity. Cholera was already spreading in the Austrian and Prussian camps before the battle at Königgrätz. As the Austrian army retreated to Olmutz and then to Pressburg and Vienna with the Prussians in pursuit, both armies spread the Cholera wherever they had contact with civilians. Many civilians died.

The Austrians, including Georg's Regiment, set up positions to defend Vienna at the Danube city of Pressburg. But they didn't have to fight -- a peace treaty was signed July 26. The treaty forced Austria to keep out of the affairs of the rest of Germany. The Prussians then occupied Prague and sent some forces out to Pilsen whose main duty was to force all of the towns around to pay "war reparations" to Prussia. The Prussian soldiers would collect a specified sum from each town and then they would leave.

But where there were soldiers there was always danger that they would bring Cholera with them. Civilian travelers, too, were bringing Cholera to Bohemia. The epidemic that followed was not over until near the end of the year 1866.

Georg Grosam spent his last year in the army in the Vienna garrison. On 30 June, 1867, he was mustered out into the reserves. He was supposed to remain in Bohemia as a reserve soldier until July of 1870 but he did not do so since he was in Minnesota with Franz Biebl on May 11, 1869.

Daniel Grosam also has a story that may be related to the fact that Georg left Bohemia before he was properly discharged from the army. He said that Georg received some money to help pay his passage to America from Franz Biebl and that he disguised himself as a priest while they made their way to Le Havre to get a ship to America. The only place Georg risked being identified would be at the borders between Bohemia and Bavaria and between Germany and France. Once in France he was quite safe because the French did not check the papers of Germans. So Georg would not have any difficulty getting on a ship in Le Havre without a "passport" that showed he had completed his military obligation. The ship on which he sailed is unknown. All that is certain is that he sailed on a date which made it possible for him to be in Minnesota to purchase land on May 11, 1869.

In 1870 Georg's father, Johann also arrived in Minnesota and he purchased farmland across the road from his son. Johann's brother Georg arrived some time later and he purchased land along the county line in Cairo Township. The Grosam family of Fairfax is descended from Johann's brother, "the other George" and his wife Maria.

George married Katarina **Tragner** who may have come

from Damrau. Tragner was an uncommon name in the Mies area (it was more common some distance to the north) and there was one Tragner family living there until about 1930 when they moved to Oschelin - a town in which a Grosam family also lived at the time. A descendant of that Tragner family who lives in Nurnberg has said there was no other Tragner family in that part of Egerland. Another reason to believe that Katrina Tragner may have come from Damrau is that there were other Grosam relatives in that village which gave Georg reason to visit there.

But there is not yet any documentation to prove where Katrina was born. The date of her marriage to Georg is also unknown. Katrina's brother Albert Tragner also settled on a farm (recently still owned by Ben Tragner) in Severance Township around the same time that Georg arrived and there is a possibility that she came there with him. But no marriage record has been found as yet in Sibley County or in the St. George church archives. The couple could have married before Georg departed for America.

In 1945 there were Grosam families living in Oschelin, Ostrowitz, Schontal and Wickau -- all villages that are within 10 miles of Mariafels. But the Mariafels farmstead known as House Nr. 21 where Johann and Georg Grosam were born was no longer owned by a Grosam in 1945. By then the name had entirely disappeared from the population of that village.

It is difficult to determine if the Grosams living in the other nearby towns in 1946 are descended from a common ancestor - for example from Viet Grosam, the Richter of Mariafels in 1800 or from his father. There is a story about the parliamentary elections following the rebellion in 1848 in the book, "Der Heimatkreis Mies" and it says that the winners of the election were Matthias Grohsam who was a Richter in Ostrowitz and Wenzel Frank who was a Richter in Unola. So a man named Grohsam was in parliament in Vienna for about three years until the Kaiser forced the parliament to disband. There is no doubt that "Grohsam" and "Grosam" are merely different spellings of the same name.

Descendants of the Grosams of Ostrowitz live today in Regenstauf, just north of Regensburg in Bavaria. They were among the families expelled from Czechoslovakia after World War II. They have family stories of cousins living in America and ancestors who were judges and lawyers but they have not searched their family trees far enough back to find out if there was a common ancestor between them and the Grosams of Severance Township and Fairfax.

This writer had a wonderful visit with the family of Werner Grosam in Regenstauf in May of 1997. Werner's aunt Johanna, born Grosam, has an uncanny resemblance to Kate Grosam (my grandmother) and her profile is very

much like Lucille Bregel's (my mother).

Missing Something?

Recently I received a letter from a member inquiring about back issues of our newsletter. Some of the issues she requested had been mailed to her since she joined the GBHS, but for whatever reason they did not reach her. I began wondering if this has happened to other members. Because we are a non-profit organization we are able to mail the newsletters by bulk mail at a very reasonable cost. The downside to this is that bulk mail is a very low priority in the mail system, therefore they are slow to get to out state addresses, non-deliverable newsletters are not returned to us for address correction, and they are not forwarded. So we never know when one does not reach you.

For your information we have published four newsletters per year since 1996 and three newsletters per year prior to 1996. Issues are generally mailed in March, June, September, and December.

If you do not receive an issue please let us know and we will send you a replacement. Also let us know of an address change, zip code change, or if anything on the mailing label is incorrect. Thank you. *Ed.*

Dezember

by **Margarete Kubelka**

from **Weihnachtsgeschichten Aus Dem Sudetenland**

The year has made a full turn and once again we are back where we started with snow covering the land of Bohemia. The casual onlooker could easily believe that the snows of December are basically the same as those of January. But that would be in error for the December snow known as the "Christkindischee" has special significance. Anyone who has ever actually seen first-hand the white, virtually spotless foreground shown in peaceful pictures of Christmas in the homeland will never forget the experience. The experience itself actually began weeks in advance with the smell of "Vanillekipfel" baking -- and nut cookies and, of course, Bohemian "Striezels."

These braids of at least three long rolls of dough flavored with almonds, raisins and "Zitronat" [citrus flavorings] is not tasted by watering mouths until Christmas Eve.

The experience also includes the first evening stroll at mother's side, holding her hand and going from one enticing shop-window to another. Their displays were certainly not comparable to the expensive mammoth offerings seen in today's department stores. They were limited to toys, practical and useful items and "Süssigelten" [sweets] made to decorate a proper Christmas tree. But they delighted us.

There were dolls, all with the same expression on their

faces, some with real hair, some made of wooden parts which were very expensive but also far more durable than all the plastic stuff in today's stores. They were modestly clothes with white "Krägelchen" [pleated collars] and rough "Haferlschuhe" [shoes] and had curled, open lashes. There were colorful picture books from the publishing house of the Stiepel Brothers, among which one always found the "Häschenschule" [bunny school], "Hans Wundersam" or "The Struwwelpeter." Eyes and heart took in the whole collection knowing full well that the "Christkind" [Christ Child] would make a wise and modest selection with which one would be quite content.

Only the bigger children could participate in decorating the tree -- those who, with some sad regrets, already thought of the "Christkind" only as a charming symbolic figure.

The old-fashioned glass balls and glass paradise birds were brought out and freshly banded. Nuts and pine cones were gilded. Pieces of chocolate were wrapped in silk or "Stanniolpapier" [waxed paper] around which something was strung to hang them on the branches. Chocolate coated nuts and cheerful "krenwürschtl" of Marzipan were more 'profane' and were most appropriate when coupled with straw stars and silver "angel's hair" [tinsel]. There were also decorations of gingerbread [Lebkuchen] and the snow-white, feather-light "Windbäckerei" that would be the first items pilfered from the tree because they dissolved so sweetly in the mouth.

What was considered to be the most beautiful of all? I don't know exactly but it was probably the "creche" [manger]. It was hand carved or made from clay and generally had already belonged to a given family for many generations. From time to time a new piece was added -- a camel or a figure of a deer.

And I knew one family who owned four sets of the Three Kings. But that was not to be considered a problem -- the main thing was to have a delightful display. These exhibitions did not always have to represent the biblical event with particular accuracy. That gave room for the "Krippenschnitzer" [biblical blunders associated with the creche] that allowed the birth of Bethlehem to be expanded into other eras of world history. Soldiers of Napoleon stood about and set up gun emplacements amid a

peaceful scene. Buildings from Prague mixed with the oriental architecture of Jerusalem. Adam and Eve bit heartily into a wooden apple while the snake curled in picturesque cunning around a tree, urging them on.

On Christmas Eve it was most delightful to see the Christmas tree in all its glory, thickly hung with ornaments and lit with dozens of burning wax candles. The gifts: a doll and new colored pens and material for a warm coat, the "Weihnachtskarpfen" [Christmas carp], and finally the "Striezel" with its golden brown braids glistening in the candlelight and smelling of butter.

The night that followed the unveiling was a little bit restless but delightfully so. The child, still immersed in dreaming about all these experiences, would wake up and go barefooted into the room full of gifts as if to make sure that everything was still there. The book of "Prinzessin Goldhaar" [Goldilocks], the chocolate "Negerpuppchen" [toy figures] and the thick "Malbuch" [coloring book] with the ducks and flowers in it. He relaxes for a while under the Christmas tree and looks up into the tangle of branches from below. He sees there a kind of fairy-tale forest inhabited by glass birds and in which golden stars glisten. In the morning his mother finds him there where he has fallen asleep.

His rosy cheeks glow from a beautiful dream which this one-and-only time is the same as reality. She struggles for a moment with her desire to carry her child back to his bed but gives up the idea for it is near time to go to church.

How I wish to experience once more the solemn celebration of the

morning of the first Christmas and to get back some of that burning faith in the holy child!

The snow crunches under careful steps taken in new shoes. Hands are folded into shapeless fur muffs. As soon as everyone is in the church the cool rays of the December sun bathes the land with shimmering light.

The children go slowly down the long church aisle to the first pews where schoolchildren sit and listens to the first notes from the organ. The music plays for a while and after a few minutes the community joins in a song -the old song of the silent, holy night.

After the church service everyone goes from one house to

the other to properly appraise and admire all the gifts.

Josi received a "Till Eulenspiegel" book and it is hard to resist sitting right down to read the whole thing. Ria shows off her new doll and the "Christkind" has brought Christl a toboggan. No one is envious -- or perhaps just a very little bit -- for everyone has his own personal riches and waits patiently to be allowed to tell about what he has received. Everything is still absolutely unused and shines with the novelty of newness. There is a doll kitchen with tiny pots and pans. A little girl's mother has done her child's hair in "Schneckenfrisur" [snail style] in honor of the holiday. Even the snow, which fell overnight and is still coming down has the same novel quality. And if we wait just a few more days then the year itself will also be new.

Then the "Rauchfangkehrer" [chimney sweep] will come to clean out the flue and wish everyone a "Prosit Neujah." Good wishes and congratulations are extended to all and then everything begins once more "at the beginning."

The Bohemian snows, the carnival costumes, the "Maiglöckchen" [May festival] under the Rollberg [mountain] and the "Weinblätter" [wine festival] when school starts -- which light up our lives so beautifully and then have to fade away.

But the idea that everything must end is only a silly superstition. The miracles of childhood do not have to die when one is ultimately separated from the childhood home. There need be only a certain word or perhaps a melody to remind us of such things.

The German Settlements In The District Of Taus

**At Home in the forest kingdom -- beautiful,
cherished border country**

The Germans of the west Bohemian border district of Taus called an idyllic portion of the Bohemian forest their own. Although the soil was more unproductive than fertile, they clung to this inadequate land with body and soul for the simple reason that they had invested so much hard work in acquiring it and because they had fought and struggled unceasingly to remain there. These Sudeten lands on the edge of Bohemia were at most six kilometers wide. It took little more than an hour to cross it from the Bavarian State line and to reach the Czech-language line.

Vollmau was in an especially unenviable situation: its first houses stood at the stony boundary of the German empire and the last of them were on the frontier of the Czech-speaking area. Before 1764, Vollmau (like Grafenried and Heuhof) still belonged to Bavaria and the

frontier was over the Kubitz Kínigsberg (mountain) and this was the only place in western Bohemia where the Czechs had advanced as far as the boundary of the empire. Thus the Chodish traditions of our Czech neighbors was tempered with nationalism.

The paths towards unity and cooperation

The population of the Bohemian forest districts of Neuern and the frontier Germans of Taus were joined with their Sudeten fellow-countrymen all along the border by the district highway running from Vollmau - Kubitzen - Prennet - Mazberg - Neumark - Plüss - Chudiwa - Neuern. Eventually a railroad ran in a great arc throughout the Czech neighborhood past Taus-Neugedein and Janowitz and when one wanted to go from Vollmau to Neuern (22 km as the crow flies) it required two transfers and three different trains. During the last decades the connections between Egerland and the Bischofteinitz district were still minimal. Whether coming from the vicinity of Taus to "Teinz" by way of the old Nurnberg "Reichstrasse" through Waldmünchen-Hasselbach or by way of the new Furth-Vollmau or the Eschlkam-Neumark line, the greater part of the route ran through Czech areas -- the Tauser Chodenland (Chodsko). The rail line between Furth and Taus (Neugedein) and Stankau touches almost exclusively on Czech areas. With the Taus borderland and Bischofteinitz under the "protection" of Bohemia-Moravia (1939-1945) and kept isolated by such a transportation situation it is no surprise that the German-Bohemians were oriented more towards Bavaria from which they received far more support with which they enjoyed easy connections for supplies and trade. Most of those who lived on the border had family members among the German-Bohemians and Bavarians alike.

The Bohemian-Bavarian gateway

From the beginning the Germans of the Taus district occupied a "hot spot" in a debatable area situated in the center of the wide-open Bohemian-Bavarian gateway. Some of the first were invited to settle widely in the open area that formed the wall of Bohemia. These very first settlers must have been pleased to learn that here in the Furth Senke (Sink - a geological depression) the forest mountains must not be crossed if one wants to be left in peace to spread out on the left and the right.

There is a natural pass through the mountains and it is not a mere 15 kilometers wide as some monographs indicate. Rather it is a full 30 kilometers wide by air when measured from the encroachment of the Bohemian forest in the lowland depression between Schwarzkoppe and Osser rather than from between Schwarzkoppe and Hohen Bogen. The mountain range that rises only 100-200 meters over the Mulde appears to be the sunken and eroded remnants of ancient colossal peaks. If one can believe the geologists, the Hohen Bogen (1080 meters) that sits across the gateway lands like a monumental sentry and seems to bolt it shut, rose up after the ancient

mountains had declined. The Bohemian "Pfahl" - a quartz vein - can be followed from the Hohen Bogen past Dieberg, Steinlhohe, Kubitzen (the Bohemian section) and in the eastern part of the Bohemian forest it runs as far as the Kaiserwald.

Out from Bavaria the depression made by the narrow Chamb river valley between the Schwarzkoppe massive and the Hohen Bogen is seductively inviting. It has the shape of a funnel with the broad base of the Hohen Bogen leading down to the Schwarzkoppe and then flowing out into the narrow valley of the Chamb and on towards Furth. In the Furth depression [Senke] the Chamb river divides into three arms. On the south it becomes the Freibach flowing along the northern slope of the Hohen Bogen past Neukirchen and Rittsteig and into the Chodenangel valley toward Neuern and Klattau and is called the "German footpath" [Deutscher Steig]. The lowest and broadest "Chambheid" [Chamb heath] branch is in the middle and flows past Eschlkam, Newmark and Neugedein and marks the route of marching armies since earliest times. It earned for itself the name "Kampfheid" [battle heath]. The small western branch, flows only briefly along the Pastritz which was the old main highway and was used by the Bohemian railroad as a western branch between Prague, Pilsen, Furth and then Nurnberg.

The large water - and the division of the peoples

The mountain ranges of the Bohemian forest make the great European Divide -- the boundary marking the spheres of influence of the North Sea and the Black Sea. Here in the Furth depression, where the Bohemian forest has sunk so deeply, this natural boundary is marked by a unique progression of very insignificant hills well inside Bohemia. Today the frontier is still marked by the ridges of the Kunisch Mountains with the Osser (1300 m), the Jaegerhubel (1100 m), and the Zwieseleck (980 m) and on towards Rittsteig (750 m) -- up and down as far as Stangenräck by Sternhof. From there the "water line" suddenly proceeds into Bohemia over the plains of Flecken and Rothenbaum to the Plattenberg (707 m) and over the Gewintzy and Silberberg to Kreuzhäbel (600 m). Between Melhut and Braunbusch - Neugedein the "Transversal-bahn" meanders some 600 km on the route Taus-Klattau-Budweis and then at the Elbe-Danube frontier it ends in an area of fields and meadows that is only 500 m in elevation at Klitsthou and Tilmitschau. At this point the "water line" turns again and passes Philippsberg (640 m), Kohlstätten, and at the Brenntenberg (670 m) near Kubitzen it again reaches the ridgeline of the Bohemian forest. It is remarkable that this divide along the line Gewintzy-Kubitzen ultimately also became the boundary of the German and Czech languages and marked the division between the Germanic and Slavic people.

The first Grenzler

Neolithic remnants [tools] found between Taus and Pilsen attest that the area has been inhabited for more than 5000 years. During the Bronze Age (1800-800 years B.C.) the people here had a more settled domestic life. This is indicated by hundreds of grave mounds on the Spitzeben (Vollmau), on the Brenntenberg (Prennet) and in the Okrouhlik forest. Unfortunately many were long since plundered by ignorant people. However there is a rich collection of ceramics (Banded ceramics and a single "Palstab" [a Palstab can be a remnant, an artifact, or similar archeological find] found near Vollmau) of this early civilization saved in the Taus museum. After this Indo-germanic people settled in Bohemia the Illyrians arrived. Around 1000 B.C. they pushed throughout and to the south from the "Bihmische Loch" (as the ancient occupants called the western portion of the gateway lands). Their descendants became the Celtic Bojer. They gave our mountains and rivers names that are still used today: Regen, Miesa, Chamb, Bihmen (Bojerheim - home of the Bojer). About 50 B.C. the Germanic Markomanni pushed into the Egertal from the areas around the Maine. They drove the Celts through the "Bojerish Gate" out of the country and into subservience to Rome. But there had to have been some Celts who remained or the Markomanni would not have known the Celtic names used by the Bojer.

Bohemia - Bavaria

The Bohemian Markomanni began in the year 166 A.D. to push against the Roman fortresses along the Danube. In 451 the Markomanni army shed much blood on the Katalaun fields while fighting on the side of Attila against the Romans and West Goths. After that the name Markomanni is never again mentioned. All indications are that the displaced Markomanni "rear guards" followed their Bojer predecessors and planted themselves in Bavaria.

Augustinian coins found at Vollmau and a Greek dish from Mirkowitz prove there was an active trade between German Bohemia and the Roman Empire. The first German Bavarians were now supplied and reinforced by Lombards who had arrived in Bohemia after the Markomanni departed. But by 568 they had again retreated south into Lombardy to escape the Hun scourge.

The Slavs come

After the departure of the Lombards the Germans remaining in Bohemia were too weak after battling the Huns to hold off the Slavic tribes now pouring into the land. It is certain that the first Bohemian Slavs found German Bohemians already there. Otherwise how would the old names that were first Celtic and then Germanic (Tein, Wulda, Elbe, Arber) have found their way into the Slavic mouth as Tyn, Vltava, Labe, and Javor?

The first influx of Slavs flooded into the Bohemian forest and when they encountered German defenses on the Naab

and the Saale they turned their attention back to the East. Around the year 600 the Slavs, with the help of the Germans, shook off the yoke of servitude to the Huns. The armed "convoys" of the Frankish merchant Samo themselves reported: "The leader of the west Slavs (those between Saale and Save) successfully opposed his Frankish Duke who wanted to incorporate Bohemia into the Franconian empire."

The first German - Czech dispute

In the year 681 the first dispute between Germans and Czechs ended at Togatisburg (Tugast-Tugst-Taust-Taus) with the success of the Slavic Bohemians. The Czechs then enlisted the Samo Franconians [merchants] to settle in the land to spread their [better] knowledge. These were later followed by Franconians and Bavarians who settled in Chodenland and among who were such names as Baar, Gangl, Weiblinger, Thomaier and Pollner.

The Franconians and Bavarians were able to hold down the influx of the Slavic element and by 595 the Bohemian forest was already respected as the German-Slavic boundary. In 805 / 806, Charlemagne was successful in joining the greater part of Czech Bohemia to his then-Frankish Empire. His army marched into Bohemia through the Furth Senke. In 845 14 Czech nobles, among whom were the Counts of the districts of Pilsen and Klattau, made a pilgrimage to Regensburg to accept the faith of the empire and to get the authority to Christianized their people themselves without interference from outside Bohemia. They had observed that establishing monasteries led to opening wide areas for settlement.

Bohemian Traditions for Mothers of Newborn Infants [Die Wöchnerin]

From: Brauchtum und volksglaube im Kreis Mies by Karl Storch

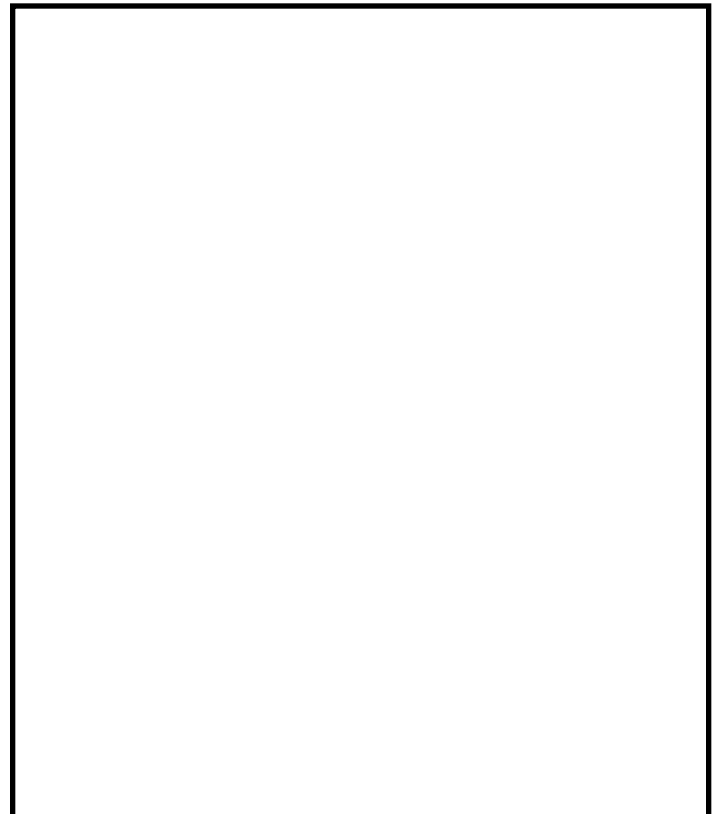
According to Bohemian folklore and popular beliefs there were many hostile forces to which newborn babes and their mothers were exposed. For that reason the young mother always spent the first few days after delivery behind the curtains of a four-poster "Himmelbett" and she dared not leave the room until the required purification rite -- "Vüagong" -- was performed. If, for some reason, she had to go out she always wrapped herself in the tablecloth. In Tchernoschin the very best protection from evil spirits was thought to be holy water first, the rosary second and third was use of blessed herbs called "Dorant" and "Dosten".

Around 1850 mothers of newborns were cautioned not to call out "Hereitl!" if there should be a knock on the door lest they should grant admission to someone or something evil.

In Dobraken a popular belief held that storms would stand for a long time over the places where the mother of a newborn might be. In Pscheheischen the folk were especially upset if a newborn's mother appeared out in the open. In Lochutzen and Sollislau the mothers of newborns could not go to the tavern or there would surely be a brawl and they could not appear at any wedding. If they did so the marriage would become unhappy. New mothers would be sent a small gift so that they would remain at home on the wedding day and would not look out the window.

(Unidentified photo of mother and children)

In Auherzen and Pscheheischen a newborn's mother was forbidden to give milk to anyone or else everyone would



have stayed away from her. In Nürschan these women could not enter the stable during milking or the cows would give very little or no milk at all. In Hradzen it was thought that if the breast of a newborn's mother began to swell it was because an evil spirit had suckled there. In Gottowitz and Wittowa the remedy was to protect her by binding her bosom with cloth containing the shells of walnuts that had been eaten on Christmas Eve. In Nürschan an "inflamed" mother's bosom was washed with the juice of boiled "Kasepappel" herbs. If a newborn's mother was taken by "Schiedla" (Schüttler, fever) her husband's apron would be thrown over her.

In Klenowitz and Poplowitz

During 1866 all of the properties numbered from 11 to 14 burned down in Pscheheischen. Hand pumps and fire pails did nothing to bring the flames under control until an "Ausnehmer-Backkübel" [some kind of bucket containing burning material] was placed in a threatened courtyard and the sign of the cross was made over it with a wand. When the expected effect was not forthcoming a new mother of six weeks was led to the scene of the fire. The wind changed at once and the flames were extinguished. During 1888 a new mother was led to the scene of a terrible fire in Hniemitz with the same successful result.

The village smithy [forge] in Techlowitz caught fire around the middle of the last century. Since all of the neighboring houses were covered with shingled or "Schaiwalan" (straw thatch) roofs there was fear that the fire would spread. To preclude this dangerous possibility a newborn's mother, a Gypsy who happened to be staying in the village, was led around the burning building. After that the fire was extinguished within a very short time. In Honositz a "kindbetterin" [woman in childbed] was led around the scene of a fire with her eyes blindfolded during the second half of the last century.

The newborn mothers who participated in such excitement and gave their assistance often fell ill afterwards. Generally it was only their relatives who would reluctantly then assist them.

If a new mother should die, then her stockings and shoes were laid aside before she was placed in the coffin. People believed that for the next six weeks she would come to the babe's cradle every night around midnight to nurse it and to change it to dry clothing. This was a popular belief during the last century.

Generally the "Vüasegung or "Vüagong" [Vorsegnung - blessing, purification rite] rite was performed for mother and child on the ninth day after childbirth. Accompanied by the midwife, the mother rode in a wagon or walked with the newborn to the church. She waited at the door for the Priest to let her in. When he appeared the midwife held out the child to show it to him. Inside the church the priest sprinkled the mother and child with holy water and then gave the mother a burning candle and led her to the altar. She knelt there as he spoke a blessing with a special "formula" [Segensformel] after which he took the child into his arms and held it high over the altar. The mother then arose, took the child into her arms and walked around the altar. After that she gave the candle back to the priest and left the church through the rear door in the sacristy. In Auherzen if the new mother were unmarried she did not walk around the altar.

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Membership Dues Due

This notice is a reminder that 1998 membership dues are due January 1, 1998. No statement will be sent. If you are not sure when your membership expires please check the mailing label on the last page of this newsletter. Printed above your name is your membership expiration date.

We value each and every one of our members and we thank you very much for the support you give the organization by continuing to be a member. Your membership enables us to continue our work to preserve our German-Bohemian heritage and culture.

Newsletter Deadline

The next issue of the "Heimatbrief" is scheduled for publication in March. Deadline for articles will be February 10, 1998. Thank you!

Homeland Tales of Ghosts and Goblins

There are goblins, giants and other magical beings associated with the various districts of Bohemia. One is named Kobold, another is Nippel, yet another is Stilzel. Feinschl is the goblin who inhabits the dominion of Heiligenkreuz.

Some say there are two spirits -- those of Count Zucker and his first male offspring, Count Wenzel Josef Zucker von Tamfeld (1713-1729) whose brutal treatment and oppression of the district's farmers was most dreadful. When the latter died at the age of 41 and began haunting the forests as Feinschl, his estate administrator finally did away with his oppressive policies.

Wherever the two Feinschl figures might appear they spread fear and terror. Their disdainful laughter, which was their usual response to those who sought their help during their lifetimes, remained a part of their characters as forest spirits. They laugh to frighten the people who enter the forest -- to intimidate farmers, hikers and riders alike. They also use many other means to frighten travelers and workers and to make them lose their way. It is said that on lonely nights they will even shave the beards of hikers who dare to enter the forest.

Feinschl's favorite perch is in an ancient pine tree standing along the forest footpath to the village of Plüss. He crouches there and as soon as the bell for evening prayer is rung he frightens everyone with his mocking laughter and by swinging his dangling legs.

Another of Feinschl's favorite places to linger is a spring that is named after him in one of the forests in the district of Plüss. It is called the Feinschl-Brunnen. One day a servant of the noble lord of Heiligenkreuz was driving a wagon load of grain to the meierhof granary at Neuhof. Feinschl sat on the wagon tongue over half the route, holding on with his legs and flicking his tongue in and out. When the frightened wagon-driver struck him with his whip Feinschl laughed disdainfully, and jumped on the driver's neck. The driver collapsed at once and when he was found it was discovered that he had died of a broken spine.

Another tale tells of three masons who were heading home late one evening, going from Plüss to Walddorf. They had been carousing in enthusiastic celebration of "blue Monday" for several days, and they were really in no condition to finish their journey. They laid down by the ancient pine favored by Feinschl and fell fast asleep. When they awoke in the morning they found they had rolled quite some distance away from the pine tree. They knew at once that Feinschl had done some mischief with them. Horrified, they vowed that if they should succeed in getting safely out of the forest they would return to place a picture of the Mother of God in the tree. Ever since that time there has been a statue of the Madonna on the middle branch growing from the trunk of that ancient pine tree.

Once a farmer from the "Viertelsteite" of Heiligenkreuz passed by the wall surrounding the Schloss near midnight. His horses suddenly shied and would go no farther. The farmer threw a piece of consecrated chalk in front of the horses and at once they calmed down and started down the lane again. But Feinschl suddenly appeared and jumped onto the back of the farmer. In spite of all his shrieks and shaking the farmer could not dislodge the goblin. Feinschl did not disappear until they reached the farmer's home. By then the farmer was near sick from fright and had to go to bed immediately to try to calm himself down. When he took off his shirt the mark of

Feinschl could still be seen on his shoulders. The farmer never recovered his strength and within a very short time he died.

In another instance, a cottager from Droht -- a little village that is a part of Heiligenkreuz -- had a similar encounter with Feinschl. It is said that the goblin jumped onto his back and within a few days the cottager died.

The farmhands and servants from Heiligenkreuz had only good experiences associated with Feinschl. He often helped them with their work in the barn by throwing bundles of straw down from the loft.

Another Version of Feinschl

According to a different story about Feinschl, the goblin is really the spirit of a noble landlord who had killed his brother in a duel. The duel was carried out at the "Tummeplatz" on the old road to Weissensulz. The stone column with images of martyrs found there are said to have been erected in atonement for the death of the man's brother -- although some people believe it was actually erected as a plague monument or was part of a shrine dedicated to Mary. The inscription was weather-worn and could not be read.

Feinschl picked this shrine as a place where he liked to waylay those who were late returning home. After his wicked deed against his brother he had found no rest in his grave.

Feinschl sometimes appeared as a black dog running around the wall of the Schloss. All of the workers at the Meierhof were determined to avoid being there at noon or midnight because that was the time when one might encounter the ghostly creature. But it so happened that one wagon driver did not reach the gate of the courtyard before 12:00 o'clock. The huge black dog stood on the wall, fixing his awful gaze on the frightened farmhand. The horses stood as if nailed in place and nothing the man did could make them move on so, full of anger, he lashed out at the dog with his whip just as the bell rang for the twelfth time. The dog growled: "I will catch you another time!" It then disappeared as if blown away and the horses were suddenly moving along in a full trot. Some time later the same farmhand was moving the grain from the threshing floor and was in the middle of the staircase with a sack of grain on his back when 12:00 o'clock began to ring from the tower of the Schloss. He suddenly felt the weight on his back had doubled and disdainful laughter sounded in his ears. His burden did not lighten nor was he able to go on until after the last bell had rung. He swore that it was Feinschl who had been the cause.

The local pastor had encountered the spirit, Feinschl, and wanted to help his soul find peace. The grave of the nobleman was located just to the right of the castle gate and the pastor went there and had the grave opened in order to give a church blessing to the dead man. While

the priest was praying the dead body suddenly began to move. The priest quickly made the sign of the cross over it and the body of Feinschl immediately crumbled to dust. From that hour on the nobleman was truly dead and his poor soul finally found eternal rest.

Bestraftes Grenzvergehen

There was a time when the border between Bavaria and Bohemia passed through the center of the village of Plüss, dividing it in two. Proof of that fact can be seen in stones that were used to mark the border which have been found in the masonry of an oven inside a home in Plüss and in the Plüss fountain -- exactly in the center of the two halves of the village.

In the period after 1626 the proprietor of the mill at Plüss was installed as the official escort of the border survey commission because of his familiarity with the area. When the border commissioners came he led them from the peak of the Eulenberg past the so-called Jewish cemetery into Bavaria and then to the southeast and each time he was asked he swore that they were still standing on the homeland's soil. But he had put earth from his garden inside his boots and thus, wherever he went, he was still standing on his home soil. The real reason for his trickery was that the nobleman landlord of the Herrschaft had promised him a tidy sum of money if, when the commission came to survey the area, he could manage to have the Mählwald (forest at the mill) included within his holdings. But when the commission arrived at the Weissenbrunnen (where more than half the houses are now the oldest part of Wenzelsdorf) where old deeds and landmarks were available, they realized they had been led astray and they tried to shoot the miller. But the miller ran into the Mählwald and the shots missed their target. It is said that the miller could not leave the forest and even today his spirit haunts the area and often leads hikers astray. Those who have seen him describe him as a man who labors along the path carrying a heavy load of border-stones.

Advice for the "Grenzsteinversetzer"

The Prokopi Chapel lies south of Ronsperg, below Vogelherd and on the right side of the county road from Ronsperg between Wottawa and Wonischen. There is a tale about this place.

One springtime night near midnight a farmer from Wonischen who was quite drunk from beer stumbled past the place on his way home. Near the Prokopi Chapel he heard the ghost known as the "Grenzsteinversetzer" call out loud and clear: "Where should I put the stone down? Where should I put the stone down?" With the courage of one who is tipsy the farmer shouted: "Legst 'n halt hi(n), waost 'n gnumma haost!" "Put it anywhere you wish!" At once the farmer heard a stone fall and at the same moment the ghost was gone. A deep stillness settled in all around. A chill ran down the farmer's back which brought

him to his senses and he set out towards home in great haste. For the next three days he spoke very little and said nothing at all about the "Grenzsteinversetzer" (one who sets the stones that mark a frontier) because he feared there would be dreadful physical and spiritual consequences if he did so.

Folk Tales

The Chair in the Wilkenau Forest

The most elevated forest area belonging to the community of Wilkenau is called the "Sessel" -- the chair or throne. It received its name from a natural rock formation there that looks like a chair. It is well known that the respective owner of the Ronsperg Herrschaft had judicial power over all his subjects and serfs. The "Sessel" was the spot where legal proceedings and courts of justice were held for the folk of Wilkenau. On such occasions this rock served as the judge's bench.

The "Sessel" was to Wilkenau what the "Galbenberg" (Gallows mountain) was to other communities. It is recorded that 1749 was very bad because of a persistent drought. But the tithe amount to be paid in grain had already been prescribed by the Ronsperg Herrschaft. The farmers saw that it would be impossible to deliver that much grain in such a year and they began to grumble. Driven by need, they mustered the courage to make a complaint to the authorities at Ronsperg. The spokesperson for the farmers was the owner of the "Schafferkonesnhofes." The proprietor of the Ronsperg Herrschaft at the time was a countess. She was known to be a very fine lady and once she heard the testimony of the farmers she could no longer believe her consultants and employees. She wanted to see for herself just how the crops on her property stood.

A July date was set for the farmers to present themselves at the castle. Then they followed as the countess' servants carried her in a soft chair past the fields of Wilkenau and then up to the "Sessel." A discussion followed with the result that the prescribed tithe for the year would be reduced by one half.

To improve their economic situation, the 12 farmers, 3 Chalupners and 34 cottagers also received the community forest located not far from the "Sessel." The countess then signaled with her right hand toward Waltersgrän as she said: "This section I keep for myself but I give you this other section behind me as far as your present private forest."

The outcome of this negotiation was a great success for the folk of Wilkenau. The countess then climbed back into her sedan chair and was carried back to her castle accompanied by the whole village. Her gift included all of 110 yoke of forest land. The people of Wilkenau were now able to meet their own needs for wood from their own

resources, to sell lumber and to use the new land as pasture for their cattle. As a monument to this event the year number 1749 was carved into the "Sessel" rock.

The Vanished Regiment

Near Trohatin at a place called Gtüss there was once a large Russian military camp and supply depot. After a great battle a whole regiment was cut down there. On moonlit nights during Advent the sounds of drums, horns and screaming men can be heard. There are people still living who swear they have clearly heard the drumming and old Mr. Stegelmaller confirms their statements.

Christmas Remembered

by **Adalbert Stifter**

As the anniversary of the death of one of the greatest sons of the homeland, Adalbert Stifter, approaches, we remember his work and his life. It is known that he died in Linz during 1868, aged 62 years, after a long agonizing illness. Many years have passed but he remains with us in his works. His life is illuminated in his stories for all time and those same stories gild our own childhood memories. In the following wonderful Christmas story we learn what Adalbert Stifter himself experienced on Christmas Eve.

...all the children in the land are saying: Tomorrow night we'll put a little Christmas tree in the main Stube, and the room will be "a splendor chamber" and the Christ child will come and hang gifts there [on the tree]! Or they say something like: "We'll spread cloth on the table, on the chest, on the chair and then we'll find there the things the Christ child brings on the Holy Eve." And finally the Holy Eve arrives. The days are so short but on this day night seemed never to want to come and daylight lasted on and on. The Christ child only gives gifts on the night of his birth. And surely he is coming on this night -- the lights are already burning in the beautiful "Zimmer der Stadtleute," "Kien" burns in the lamp in the room of the old forest cottage or maybe a "Span" [chip, faggot] held by iron tongs on a wooden stand. The children came into the room with the lights -- the burning 'Kein' or the burning 'Span.' The mother comes in and says: "The Christ child is already here." And now the double doors are opened and the children and everyone who has come to share in the delights goes into the room that had been concealed there. There stands the tree, greener than anything has ever been. Now the countless lights flicker on it and colorful bands, gold and unknown treasures hang on its branches. There are so many presents that it is difficult to remain calm. The children see their dearest wishes fulfilled and the adults and the mother and father personally receive from the Christ child because they are friends of the children and they love the children. The tension caused by expectation is now released in jubilation as each cannot wait to show off what has been given. The gifts are shown again and again and the happiness continues until the excitement is

followed by happy weariness causing little eyelids to droop and close. And then the door from the Stube of the Waldhütte open and the children go through the doors to find a tree with more little lights and hung with wonderful golden nuts and golden plums and apples and baked goodies and other favorites, perhaps a "Hölzemer," a beautifully painted cuckoo or a trumpet or two, red, incomparable shoes. And if there is not a tree in the room these things lie on a pure white cloth with a tallow candle burning there. And everything is taken out of the room, including the tallow candle which is kept burning all through the Holy Night. Then the children are supposed to go to sleep. And from delight and excitement they stay awake for quite some time, still holding tight to their gifts. But finally slumber takes command and many gifts go along into bed. It is the same for the children in cottages where there is no splendid decorated room -- the Christ child brings presents everywhere. It might be left in front of the house, in the barn or stable or wherever there is a stone on which someone sits to make lace, or a bench or stool spread with a cloth and an empty basket left there, and sooner or later it will be filled with gold nuts, plums, berries apples, baked goods, and other desirable things. And to let such children know that the basket is full, the Christ child often sends a little golden horse flying through the heavens to announce what has happened. And the little horse rings his bell by the door and then taps on the door and when the children come outside the horse is gone and the basket full of gifts is standing there. We have heard the little golden horse many times during long-forgotten "Christnacht" in the forest at the source of the Moldau.

And when the millions of children are already sleeping in their beds, still dreaming of their good fortune, then the sounding of midnight rings out from the high tower of the cathedral in the big cities, and all the bells in all the church towers join in, calling the people to the churches for midnight services.

Extract from "Weihachten" by Adalbert Stifter (1866) in "Gartenlaube für Oesterreich."

History For Sale

German-Bohemians - The Quiet

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by La Vern Rippley & Robert Paulson

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The Whoopee John Wilfahrt Dance Band, His Bohemian-German Roots

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Memorials

In Memory Of . . .

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from Paul & Janet Kretsch, Eleanor Kretsch,
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Heimatbuch

from the G-B Rootsweb Electronic Mailing List

(A question was submitted to the mailing list asking what is a "Hemitbuch". The answer printed here was submitted by Karen Hobbs.)

When the Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia they published books that documented the areas where they had lived before the expulsion. Some of the books are thick volumes full of local history, lore, traditions, practices, etc. and others are simply a documentation of each village, town, and city in the particular area about which the book is written.

The books that tell about the individual places sometimes include a layout map of how the village/town was arranged in 1945 and lists the names of all of the inhabitants of the houses at that time with each house number. Some of the lists also include the maiden name of the wife of the man with the surname listed for the house. There is also a short history of the place that describes any industry, mines or other activities around the place, the various social clubs, people who died in wars, etc. Some of the books are less detailed than others. Some are for entire counties and some are "Pfarrgemeinde" books that are about smaller community-districts which were all part of a given "Parish."

So there are a lot of these books out there - in some cases there is more than one related to a given district. For example there are "Parish Community" books for the Bishofteinetz district with one book covering only some of the communities in the greater district. I don't know if there is a general "communities" book covering the entire district of Bishofteinetz. My own interest is in Mies county and I have not done much research about what is "out there." There may be a full list in the library catalog in the library at Stuttgart.

My ancestors came from county Mies and there are two "Heimatbucher" for that area...One is "Die Gemeinden des landkreises Mies" which lists the communities and the other is "Der Heimatkreis Mies" which is the "cultural heritage" book for the same county. The kind of book that is most helpful for finding towns that still had your ancestral names represented among the inhabitants in 1945 would be the ones that list the communities. However they are generally not indexed and you simply have to go down the list of names for each place and look for the names that interest you. The lists of inhabitants are not always alphabetized and they do not always include the first name of the head of the family living there.

I found the article on which I based my little booklet about the 1654 Tax Rolls in the Bishofteinetz district,

with its index of surnames, in the "cultural heritage" book for the Bishofteinetz district. In the section on history of settlement of that district there are also names listed as being among the first settlers. I also found other references to surnames in the Mies "cultural heritage" book in the history sections - for example there was a list of men who ran for Parliament in 1848 in Mies County with the number of votes each received. The list contained two of my ancestral surnames and gave me new information with which to work.

But you have to read German to work with these books. You can teach yourself -- it takes strong motivation and real dedication, but it can be done.

I know that the St. Paul Czech Genealogical Society library has copies of some Heimatbuch but I don't know which and I don't think they will lend them except in rare cases. You have to go there, find the pages you want and ask for photocopies. Their staff are all volunteers and they don't do research for you (at least they would not help me when I asked).

The German-Bohemian Heritage Society has several Heimat books in it's library. The majority of them relate to the Bischofteinitz area of the homeland.

**Merry
Christmas
and Happy
New Year
To All**

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