

Migration from Schweighofen in the 19th Century

The Palatinate was known already in the 18th century to be a source of emigrants. More than twenty years after the settlement of the first Germans in the vicinity of Philadelphia (1683) and the founding of Germantown, the first mass-migration from the German southwest to North America took place in 1709. Thousands of Germans followed through the port of Rotterdam in the 1730's and 1740's, above all, Palatinate emigrants who established themselves in the English colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. The American emigration from the Palatinate continued until the beginning of the American War of Independence (1775) and then receded, especially as the Palatinates now preferred other destinations such as Prussia, Hungary (Banat and Batschka), Russia, Galicia, and Bukovina. The emigration to Russia began under Czarina Catherine II ("The Great," 1762-1796) a German Princess from the house of Anhalt-Zerbst. In two manifestos published in 1762/63, she granted immigrants generous privileges, the ceding of lands as "an untouchable and hereditary possession for eternity," free exercise of religion, the exemption of taxes for a certain period, freedom from military service, and the right to community self-government. The czarina pursued several goals with the settlement of German colonists, "partly to help the agriculture of the country and in many parts to highlight to the neighboring Russians an example of good agriculture and horticulture, and in some cases to provide wastelands with inhabitants and to enhance the kingdom with useful and good subjects."

Among the thousands of immigrants who subsequently settled in over 100 colonies in the Volga region and in the ten colonies near St. Petersburg were many from the Palatinate. A number of settlement names indicate the origins of many immigrants: Karlsruhe, Landau, Mannheim, Worms, Speier, Rohrbach, or Kandel near Odessa. At the beginning of the 19th century, Tsar Alexander I advertised in a further manifesto for German settlers, "good farmers and people...who know how to produce wine, cultivate mulberry trees and other useful plants, and who are also experienced in livestock breeding, especially in keeping and multiplying improved breeds of sheep..." Again thousands followed the call of the Tsar. At the time, more than 200 colonies were created in the Black Sea area, of which 92 were Protestant, 68 Catholic, and 44 Mennonite. For generations, until the deportation of the Germans under Stalin, the language and customs of the German homeland were preserved in the Russian German villages.

Many a Schweighofen family followed the Tsar's invitation in the first decade of the 19th century. Johann Jakob Aschbacher left with his family in 1809 for Speier by Odessa. Jakob Dilger settled with his family in Katharinental, Jacob Wanner, Johann Wilhelm, and Michael Wolf in Landau. Georg Friedrich and Peter Schaaf left in 1809 for Taurien in Russia. Thus far, little is known about their fate and that of their descendants. We know more about the fate of the Schweighofeners Friedrich Kieffer, his wife Elisabeth (nee Aschbacher), and their son Martin (born in Schweighofen in 1800) who also emigrated in 1809. The family was settled in the Beresan area near the Russian Black Sea coast. Their son Martin Kiefer later lived in the village of Landau in the province of Kherson, a place inhabited exclusively by German settlers who celebrated and maintained their festivals and customs as in their homeland. When the Russian state also demanded higher taxes from the German settlers and the young men were drafted into military service, many families left their homes. At the end of the 1830's, the Kiefers embarked on a long journey towards the west. They finally stayed in the Turkish Dobrudja, an area that today includes the Danube delta and border region of Moldova. In the vicinity of the city of Tulcea the Kiefer family and 24 other families were allowed a larger land area for colonization and cultivation by the Turkic Pasha. Their settlement received the name Malkoch. Here

in the later Romanian Malcoci, the Kiefers lived for almost 100 years. In November 1940, they were brought with the other Germans of Dobrudja “home to the Reich” and housed in a camp in Aschaffenburg until July 1942, when the Nazi government placed them on vacant Polish farms whose owners had previously been expelled. In January 1945 the Kiefers, along with many other families, sought refuge in the west from the approaching front.

In the first third of the 19th century, emigration to North America continued on a large scale. Also, more than one family from Schweighofen set out for the USA. On February 7, 1831 Mayor Fischer wrote to the land commissioner of Bergzabern:

“In the local community several heads of families have been enticed to emigrate to America, namely:

Nullet, Jakob
Biehn, Johannes
Heyl, Sebastian
Holler, Sebastian
Heyl, Johannes
Güll, Jakob and
Holler, David

The illustrious instructions printed in Circular Nos. 22 and 37 of 1830 were clear both to these individuals and to the whole citizenry. Convinced that they would continue with their emigration and expecting it to happen secretly, therefore it was brought to their attention: “The reason for this emigration is a certain Schwamm, a bricklayer from Riedselz. He had already moved to America about two years ago, and is passing time in the area trying to encourage everyone to emigrate.”

A few days later Mayor Fischer reported another emigration case to the Königlichen land commissioner: Katharina Lauber, about 22 years of age, single, appeared before him and requested travel papers to America. Since her parents were dead, she wanted to sell and export her inheritance.

In 1834, three applications for emigration were received again at the Schweighofen mayor's office: The landlord Jakob Dietrich, who had a fortune of 3,000 guilders, stated in his request of March 12, 1834 to emigrate to the USA with his wife and his six children Carolina (b. 1819), Maria Anna (b. 1821), Jakob Nikolaus (b. 1823), Josephina (b. 1826), Frantz (b. 1828) and Karl (b. 1832). The court ratified the request on June 22, 1834. A few months later the Bavarian state association moved to allow emigration to the United States of the shoemaker Johannes Thomas (b. 1804), the son of Johannes Thomas and Margaretha, nee Frey, with his wife and three children, Jakob (b. 1830), Johannes (b. 1831), and Michael (b. 1833) as well as the farmer Adam Zimmermann (b. 1798) in Kapsweyer, son of Friedrich Zimmermann and his wife Katharina, nee Paul, with his wife and two children, Wendel (b. 1830) and Johannes (b. 1834). Both families had to first submit various papers, e.g. the birth certificates of their children, a receipt showing proof of payment of taxes and community funds which were owed and possible guardianship conditions. After all the necessary papers had been submitted, the court decided on December 24, 1834: “Considering that they have sufficient capacity to take their families to North America, there is nothing standing in the way of their emigration and may they be granted relief from these inhuman conditions.” Zimmermann had property valued at 1,400 florin and other assets of 400 florin, the real estate of Johannes Thomas was taxed at 2,500 florin, his real estate at 500 florin.

On June 10, 1836, the farmerswife, Anna Barbara Flick, nee Frey, wrote the following letter to the royal land commissioner: “The respectfully undersigned widow of Weiland Mathäus Flick from here has decided to emigrate with her family to North America. She dares to request relief from these

inhuman conditions. With deep respect to the land commissioner, your obedient servant Flick.”

The request went her way. But even before all the formalities were settled and before she had received the passport, the Flick family of Schweighofen left five weeks after the application. On July 19, 1836, Mayor Jakob Eichenlaub reported to the Bergzabern land commissioner that the 55 year-old widow had left the local community and started her journey to North America on July 6, 1836, along with her seven children: Andreas (b. 1801), Catharina (b. 1806), Joseph (b. 1810), Maria Ursula (b. 1814), Margaretha (b. 1816), Nicolaus (b. 1818), and Jacob (b. 1822), as well as with Peter Eisenmenger's married daughter, Maria Barbara (b. 1808). It is interesting that the widow Flick had a not inconsiderable fortune: her properties had a value of 6,000 florin and her furniture assets were estimated at 500 florin. Her home (plan number 75) was auctioned in 1836 to the blacksmith Nikolaus Adam Biehl for 800 florin.

During the time of the Hambach Festival (1832) the USA became the accepted model for many politically dissatisfied and economically needy people. The social situation had assumed threatening forms: the number of poor was steadily increasing, especially in the Palatinate. The prevailing real estate division in many cases reduced the land ownership of the peasants to small areas, which provided a small nutritional base. Schweighofen also showed the effects of the real estate division of the plains: the 2,819 parcels (c. 854 “ha”) total area was divided into 6,822 plots in 1843, hence the average size of a parcel was only 0.125 “ha.” Some Schweighofener men and women were temporarily earning a living as day laborers, maids, and servants. The supply of labor was low for both the larger farmers and for the Haftelhof in pre-industrial times. Many an impoverished peasant's son took up a crafting profession, of which many became soon overstaffed. Many people also complained about the strict forest ordinance of that time that did not even allow the people to collect livestock feed in the woods. So it's understandable that in the third, fourth, and fifth year in which climate catastrophes caused failed harvests and hunger emergencies, many people saw emigration to America as their only chance to improve their economic and social situation. At that time, a number of refugees were also to be found among the Palatinate emigrants who were dissatisfied with the political developments in the pre-March and after the failed revolution of 1848/49 or who were persecuted because of their involvement. However, such refugees are not known to have come from Schweighofen.

Striking also is the large number of military age young men, of which many saw a way to avoid Bavarian military service by “secretly” emigrating to North America without having obtained the legally required emigration permit. For qualified conscripts, there was only one legal way “not to go under the Bavarians,” the securing of a replacement, a costly proposition, that only the wealthy could afford. Some were also in debt and wanted to avoid bankruptcy or a foreclosure sale. Others avoided the alimony payment for their illegitimate children through emigration.

In addition to the negative (push) factors in the home country, the positive (pull) factors in the immigration country naturally also influenced emigration to America at that time, as for example, the advertisement of favorable settlement conditions, the optimistic accounts of American relatives in private letters, and to a large extent, the news of gold discoveries in California after 1848.

According to the original registry of Schweighofen in 1843, some of the peasants emigrated and still owned some land in their hometown, as for example, the day laborer David Holler who was living in the USA, the son of Joseph Holler and his wife Maria Eva, nee Zimmermann, who had two fields in Schweighofen which he had received from his parents in 1834 and which were administered by his brother Joseph Holler, shepherd in Schweighofen. The 1843 master registry states that the butcher Sebastian Lutz, who had inherited several meadows and fields from his mother's estate: “presently in America.”

At the beginning of the 1850s, the number of emigrants from Schweighofen rose again sharply: in 1851 the cooper Michael Stricker (Strecker) applied for an emigration permit for himself and his family. But he “could not provide a single required document,” wrote Mayor Karl Masset to the Bergzabern land commissioner on May 24, 1851. “This situation can not be permitted” he wrote to his superior, especially since “he had emigrated from here several days ago.”

In the year 1853 several young men from Schweighofen filed a petition for discharge and the issuance of a passport for the purpose of emigration to the USA: the farmer Adam Getto and his wife Catharina Haar, stated he had the consent of his widowed mother. On August 16, 1853 the steamer “Helvetia” landed in the New York harbor with many Palatinate emigrants on board. Among the passengers was Adam Getto from Schweighofen. Next to him on the passenger list are the names of Michael Griesemer, Wilhelm and Joseph Vogel, as well as Martin Friedmann, probably other emigrants from Schweighofen or a neighboring village. The farmer Michael Fath (son of the farmers Franz Fath and his wife Katharina Pautler) and the baker Jakob Müller, both born in 1833, were consequently underage and required the consent of their parents. Fath claimed that he wanted to emigrate to “Holidaburg” in the USA. On January 13, 1854 Michael Fath arrived in New York on the large steamer “Carolus Magnus” and apparently continued his journey by land to Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania.

On May 16, 1853, Johannes (called Joseph) born 1836 as the son of the blacksmith Johannes Biehn and his wife Katharina, nee Monne, sought permission and a passport for emigration to the USA. He stated that he possessed a fortune of 1,200 florin. On November 3, 1853, he departed Schweighofen in the direction of the emigration harbor Le Havre.

In the fall of 1854, the teacher Franz Anton Lauber (born 1811 in Schweighofen), who for a time was a school assistant in Berg and then a teacher in Dörrenbach, set out for the USA via Le Havre with his wife Anna Maria and their children Lina, Albert, and Bertha. On November 6, 1854 they arrived in New York on the ship “New England.” Jakob Eichenlaub, born 1838 in Schweighofen, also intended to emigrate in 1854 to the USA. His parents, Lorenz and Magdalena Eichenlaub (nee Diehlmann) had given their 16 year-old son permission and an amount of 350 florin for the trip to New Orleans. In Weissenburg on March 2, 1854 Eichenlaub completed an overland contract with Franz Dessauer, the general agent based in Aschaffenburg of the house of “Barbe & Morisse” in Le Havre. It can be seen that Eichenlaub paid 50 florin for the voyage from Le Havre to New Orleans without “sea provisions.” In the following years, only sparse hints are found in the files about emigrations from Schweighofen which does not exclude that nevertheless some secretly started their way to America.

Heinrich Jakob Strohm and his wife Katharina Weiss left the Haftelhof around 1855/56 with an unknown destination. Presumably they also emigrated to the USA.

In May 1858 Jakob Getto intended to leave his home country and move to the USA. He is presumably identical to “Jacob Gette,” 31 years-old, who together with the 43 year-old “Theresia Gette arrived in New York on the ship “J. H. Ryerson.” In 1868 Jakob Diehlmann (born in 1848 in Schweighofen), son of the mason Jakob Diehlmann, submitted an application for approval to emigrate to the United States. We find him as a passenger on the ship “Nebraska,” which reached the New York harbor on March 20, 1868. He had specified Louisville in the US federal state of Kentucky as the destination of his trip.

Of several emigrants from Schweighofen to America, we know where they settled in the USA. Most of them went to Pennsylvania. It's interesting in this context that on April 11, 1845 the Schweighofen mayor sent the Bergzabern land commissioner an advertising brochure in German for “Sankt Maria-Stadt” in Pennsylvania. It seems that community of German Catholics in Philadelphia founded in 1844 a city in Elk County, Pennsylvania: “in order to open a religious sanctuary for its

fellow believers and people, which at the same time combines all the advantage of political freedom and industrial consequence.” Two travelers had left this advertising slip in the tavern, “To the Cross,” and tried to incite the people. Whether people from Schweighofen and the surrounding area were indeed motivated through this solicitation to settle in “Sankt Maria-Stadt,” this would have to be explored locally in St. Marys (that was the name long ago).

It is certain that many emigrants from Schweighofen and the neighboring Altenstadt settled in Cambria County which lies about 100 kilometers south of St. Marys. Georg Dietrich from Schweighofen, born in 1780 and widowed since 1822, emigrated in 1825 and set down first in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Soon after, he acquired a farm in St. Lawrence, Cambria County. He was followed by the above mentioned Jakob Peter Güll (born in Schweighofen in 1796) with his wife, Maria Magdalena Vetter (also born here in 1796), and their seven children. Magdalena Güll died in America in 1866—her husband in 1878. Their iron cross grave markers with German inscriptions stand still today in the St. Lawrence cemetery. George Dietrich also died in St. Lawrence in the year 1852 at 72 years of age. The emigrant families of Johannes Thomas and of Jakob Dietrich also settled there. Also the two Schweighofen emigrant families of Adam Schenck (married to Barbara Senn) and of Georg Friedrich Schenck (married to Elisabetha Barbara Roser) settled down in Cambria County, Pennsylvania. Members of these families lived here in the following years as well as in Allegheny, Altoona, and Loretto, Pennsylvania.

The Mennonite Maria Haury (nee Dettweiler), who was born in the Haftelhof in 1801, married the Mennonite preacher and farmer, Jakob Haury (also born in the Palatinate) in 1832/33 in Lanzenried im Dachauer Moos. As a widow, she emigrated with several children to Franklin in the US federal state of Iowa. She died in Donnellson, Iowa in 1890. A principal destination for south Palatinate emigrants was the city of Cincinnati in the federal state of Ohio. Cincinnati is where Katharina Biehl (born in Schweighofen in 1833), went in 1857. She was married to Johann F. Rink (born in Schaidt) and bore him 11 children.

In the weekly newspaper appearing in New York “Der Pfälzer in Amerika” the names, again and again, and sometimes entire obituaries of the deceased were published. There we read that Katharina Roth, nee Holler, died in New York at the age of 60 in the spring of 1890. Also Martin Wanner died in New Orleans at the age of 61. Both were from Schweighofen. On November 12, 1902, Joseph Diehlmann died in Louisville, Kentucky at the age of 45. “Der Pfälzer in Amerika,” of which Diehlmann was a long-term subscriber, wrote of his death: “He was bedridden for several weeks and the end of his life was not unexpected. He leaves a grieving widow with five adolescent children, a brother, and a sister in residence in Louisville. The deceased came from Schweighofen near Bergzabern directly to Louisville in the year 1882, where he, a brave industrious man, pursued his profession as a stone mason. May the earth be easy for him.” In 1905 the newspaper reported the death of another Schweighofener: “Before July 26, Mr. Carl Wilhelm died in Allegheny, PA at the age of 63 years. The now deceased, who was born in Schweighofen, came to America, more particularly Allegheny, in the year 1867. He was a house carpenter, but soon hung up the carpentry trade and went into the dairy business, which he ran with success until his death. His wife preceded him in death six years ago. He leaves behind six children, four sons and two daughters.”

Many Schweighofen families stayed in communication with their relatives in the USA for a long time, until the First World War largely ended the contacts. Some Americans remembered their relatives in the aftermath of the Second World War and sent them “Care-Pakete” with food.

Today, occasionally descendants of emigrants come to the Palatinate as part of the study of their family history, in order to learn about the hometown of their ancestors and, possibly, meet living

relatives here. Like Rita Kehlbach, nee Kiefer from Moerfelden-Walldorf, a descendant of Martin Kieffer, who emigrated to Russia with his parents in 1809. She met her distant relatives in the year 2009 and was received with great friendliness. Rita Kehlbach wrote an extensive report on the long migration of her ancestors to the relocation of her family in 1940, the unfortunate settlement in Poland in 1942, and finally they settled in the area of Aschaffenburg in 1949. Happy about the good reception in Schweighofen, she wrote at the end of her report: “After exactly 200 years, we have arrived back, where once our ancestor Martin Kief(f)er left his home to find his fortune in foreign lands.”