

DITTMER-HESSE

Elizabeth Mueller wrote the following story in 1941 about her Grandparents making the voyage from Germany to the U.S.

CHILDREN OF GOD

About one hundred twenty-years ago, many German families emigrated to America because they did not have the religious freedom in the old country which they would like to have, and for young people who did not have any help from their parents financially. It was very hard to start a home and household of their own. These two reasons brought many young people to the United States.

There was a young man by the name of John Dittmer (Johann Friederick Dittmer) who was a devout Christian. (Note) John was researched in Germany in 1994. He was born in the farm town of Armsen, State of Hanover). He kept company with Margaret Hesse, a nice young girl Living in the neighborhood. (Who lived about 6 km in the farm town of Verdenermoor)? . After several years of close friendship they became engaged. Margaret's parents were among those people who had decided to go to America. John and Margaret asked for advice from their parents as to what would be best for them to do. They finally decided that Margaret would emigrate with her parents and John would also go to the new country. Where the young couple intended both to work hard and save all they could and then, with the help of god, after a few years they would marry and start housekeeping for themselves.

The day for the departure from the old country came, December 23 1844. Both John Dittmer and the Hesse family boarded the ship Astracan. The Hesse family consisted of Father- Christopher, Mother- Margaretha Hohgreffe Hesse, and 6 children, Catherina Margaretha, Christian, Margaretha Elizabeth, Johann Heinrich, Anna Sophia, and Anna Metta. They spent much of their time on the Ship Knitting. They had to have plenty of stockings and gloves, shawls, hoods, etc. ready to wear when they reached the new country. They did not want to spend their time making clothes right away when they landed, but wanted to do things more worthwhile.

Our young mans heart was full of joy and good hope for the future, thinking that now before long his dearest wish would be fulfilled, to have a home of his own and have his best friend share it with him as his beloved wife. But alas, the plans of the Lord were different. After they had been on the ship for a few days, a very contagious disease, the cholera, broke out on the ship. Our two young people, being young and strong and always having a warm heart toward anyone who was sick or in trouble, went about the ship helping and taking care of the sick wherever they could. In a few days, Margaret too, had the cholera. In spite of all the care she had from her lover and her parents, She grew worse every day, and finally the Lord called her home to the Heavenly Mansions. Words cannot express the grief of the young man. The New world, as it was called, had no attraction for him any more, and he thought seriously of returning to Armsen Germany on the first ship that would take him back after they had landed. But upon advice of some older friends he stayed in America after all. And there also came brighter and happier days for him again. Many plans were made as to what they would do in the new country. One of the main objects of discussion was how soon they could build a little church and could have a minister, so they could hear the word of god, in all its purity. So they would have some one to help them instruct their children and teach them the way to Heaven.

In those days traveling was not so fast as in our days. Our friends were on the ocean seven weeks. Most everyone on the ship became seasick. Some were quite ill from it, others not so bad. Except for this and the cholera, they had a very pleasant voyage.

After those seven long weeks they finally landed at New Orleans. From here they were to go up the Mississippi River to St. Louis by boat. There was a shortage of boats, but after a few days they found one. It looked rather old, but they were told the boat was in good condition and in constant use. Not all of the people that were on the ship went to St. Louis, but for the Hesse family and several other families of their acquaintance, this was their destination. So all our friends, together with all their belongings that had been brought with them from the old country, were loaded into the boat. They were told it would take about six or seven days to get to St. Louis. How good they all felt that now in a few days they would be at the end of their long journey.

The weather was beautiful, and the boat went along smoothly for the first two days. On the third day the boat sprang a leak, and do what they could, the boat crew could not get it repaired. The boat began to sink. Finally the captain of the boat ordered that all bags and boxes and everything should be thrown overboard to make the boat lighter so that they could hold it above water longer, and possibly secure help or get closer to the shore.

The hearts of the passengers were heavy when they saw their clothing, food and many a valuable article that was dear to them which had been brought from their old home, thrown into the water, but they were willing to sacrifice everything if they could only save their lives.

Many an earnest prayer was sent to the throne of God in those hours that He would be with them and save their lives and help them in this hour of great need. The Lord heard their prayers, and helped them in this hour of great need, The Lord heard their prayers, and answered them. The wind turned and drove their boat closer to shore. They had a very small boat, which had to be rowed with oars. It could only take a few passengers at a time. With this little boat the passengers were finally all brought to land. Then, hurriedly, two of the men went back in the little boat hoping to save what few edible things were left on the boat that had not been thrown overboard. But by this time the large boat was completely under water, and it was impossible to get on it again.

Now our people were on land. The danger of drowning was over, but they did not have enough food for two meals. There were neither people nor houses nor anything to be found where they landed, and they had no ammunition to shoot wild game so they might live from that. But all of them, as one heart and soul, knelt down together and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God who so wonderfully had saved their lives. And they prayed to the Lord for further help, and they prayed with full confidence that the Lord would help them, for they said among themselves, Ò The Lord would not rescue us from the boat and let us starve to death here on the wild land. They ate very sparingly of the little food they had, but it was all consumed almost in no time.

On the second day, a box from the large boat was seen floating on the water. Several of the men waded into the water as far as they could and finally pulled the box to

shore. Imagine their delight! It was a filled with raw bacon. They had no pan to fry it in. They cut it in pieces with a pocketknife.

Some of them held their piece on a stick above the open flame a little to take the raw taste off, but others said that would only make the piece smaller and they ate their piece raw. A young girl of the Hesse family, Name Sophia, later on in life said that never in all her life had a piece of meat tasted so good and sweet to her as did that piece of bacon. Although the situation was getting rather alarming for our friends, they did not despair but kept on in prayer, and day and night watched for a sign of human life by water or land from whom they might get help. Finally on the afternoon of the third day they saw a steamboat coming up the river. They did everything they could to attract the attention of the crew on the boat. They finally succeeded. With hearts full of thanks to God, who had saved their lives a second time, the poor stranded people saw the boat come nearer and nearer to them. It was a steamboat hauling freight to St. Louis. However, they made room for all the people and took them along on their boat.

The boat crew did not have more to eat with them then just for their own use on the trip. However, they gladly shared what they had with the refugees. When they arrived in St. Louis, our friends were taken to a boarding house. Here they were treated to a full meal. They all had enormous appetites since they had so little to eat for several days.

One of the things that were served to them was hot biscuits. Sophia Hesse was sitting at a place at the table just opposite the kitchen door. Every time the door opened, she could look into the kitchen. She was eating like a hungry wolf, and especially did she enjoy those hot biscuits. Then once more the door into the kitchen opened, and the table waiter brought in a large platter filled with those delicious biscuits. While the door was open, Sophia looked into the kitchen. She had never in her life seen a colored person. Now all at once she saw a colored lady in the kitchen mixing biscuit dough with her fingers. This so completely upset her that all of her appetite for biscuits was gone and she could not eat any more of them. For she was almost sure that the black would come off the colored women's hands and get into the biscuit dough. Then she very likely had them in some of the other food. By that time all of her appetite was gone and she could not eat any more of the meal.

Some kind-hearted people in St. Louis, who heard of our friend's trouble on the way, kept them a few days so they could rest and gain their strength again.

Our friends were not intending to stay in the city, but wanted to be farmers. A land agent heard about them and came and showed them around the countryside. One of the main things for them was to settle where there was plenty of good water.

Finally they decided to buy land and settle down at the Big River in the neighborhood of Antonia Jefferson County Missouri. Several families, who had come across the water in another ship also, settled in the area. (They most likely settled in the Meramec TWP. Antonia was less then 5 miles in the Rock TWP, but where they lived was most likely near the township line. Dittmer Missouri is in Meramec TWP in this area there was families by the name of Bennett, Cords, and Bockelmann, Dittmers-No relation, who came from the same area of Germany. 1994).

The entire group first built a one room house in which several families lived, our at least ate and slept. Then they took turns about helping one another until each family had built a little log house on the piece of land that he bought. By that time winter came along, but everyone was busy cutting down trees and clearing ground so they would have at least a small piece of land to sow when spring came. John worked wherever he could find work to do, also among some other settlers that had lived in the neighborhood a few years already. Sundays and special occasions found him a welcome guest at the home of the families that came from Germany. Especially did he love to visit with the Hess's, for they had been good friends in the old country, and he felt very much at home there. In a few years time He became especially fond of Sophia (a sister of his former betrothed) then a young girl of about 18 years. She in return loved John devotedly, and although there was quite a difference in their ages, Sofia's parents did not hesitate to give their young daughter to their dear friend. They knew that he was a kind-hearted man and a devout Christian, for he constantly showed this in his everyday life. He also helped organize a Christian congregation in Jefferson County, at Antonia, and he was one of the first voting members. At last their happy wedding day arrived. They were married quietly in the presence of Sofia's parents on January 20 1849 in the Zion Lutheran Church in Jarvis Missouri. It was the first marriage in Zion Lutheran Church.

John had in the mean time, bought 40 acres of land in Central TWP. He had cut down trees so they could build a house.

Their first home was a little two-room log house. The living room had a floor made of split logs. The kitchen was a dirt floor. The few pieces of furniture that they had was made of rough-hewn lumber. They had no stove. They cooked their meals in the fireplace.

Though they had very few earthly good, they were very happy, for they trusted in the Lord with all their hearts. The lord blessed them wonderfully. They were never rich, but later on they had a home of their own which had several rooms and a heating stove. They had enough to live in comfort in their old age. Both were very contented through out their lives.

John Dittmer died on 4 August 1905. Sophia Hesse Dittmer died on 27 April 1921. They both are buried in the Zion Lutheran Church Cemetery, Jarvis Missouri.

The early Dittmer's were from the town of Hohenoverbergen Germany about 5-km southwest of Armsen. The Hesse's were not originally from Verdenermoor, original town unknown at this time. 1994.

John Dittmer and Sophia Hesse were Elaine Zelsman Wagner's great grandparents.

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