

OLD HERMANNSBURG / DUTCH MILLS

Jerry Leach - September 2000

A little over 150 years ago a German immigrant by the name of Johann Hermann arrived in Wash. Co. Ark. The year was 1850 and Johann was 27 years old. He left France in July of 1849 and the Atlantic crossing to NY took 43 days.

Here are the provisions he later recommended to his brother, Karl (3 years younger) for his voyage to join him in America: FOOD: Potatoes, 25# hardtack, 2# beans, 2# peas, 2# dried fruit, 4# rice, 3# flour, 4# salted butter, a 10# smoked ham, 2# salt, 2 liter vinegar, a few bottles of wine, 3 liters of brandy, ¼# tea, 1# coffee, 1# chocolate, 6# sugar, jar of cooking oil, pepper, cinnamon, onions, 30 eggs, & 12 pieces of citron. UTENSILS: water bottle, tin wash basin, tin plates, small bowl, cooking pot, drinking glass, knife, fork, spoon, Hoffmans drops, laxative pills, a night chamber with zinc cover, and a few other things plus **a bit of courage and as few big expectations as possible.**

Soon after arriving in NY he headed for the Missouri valley via Albany, Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, LaSalle & St. Louis. He was going there to meet up with a classmate he had met while studying engineering in Switzerland. He estimated that he traveled about 2800 miles by steamboat & train, 500 miles on foot, and 300 miles on horseback. He spent a few weeks near Gray's Summit, MO where he met the Wilhelmi family, Rev. & Mrs. Wilhelmi plus their two **lovely** daughters, Nanni & Lina, who got his attention. He told his mother he was considered an "old bachelor" by American standards. From Missouri, he came down the Miss. River and changed boats at Napoleon at the mouth of the Ark River, up river to Dardanelle or Van Buren, and over the mountain to Wash Co. He worked about a year for Herman Freyschlag at his mill near Clear Creek. Then in what is now the Dutch Mills, he bought 160 acres and an unfinished water-powered mill near where Whitaker Spring flows in to Barren Fork Creek. By then he knew he needed a wife!

Johann traveled back to Missouri and married Nanni Wilhelmi, in Oct 1850. He convinced his brother, Karl, to join him in Arkansas and told him that if he hadn't already found a wife, to stop in Missouri and check out Nanni's sister, Lina, before coming on to Ark. Karl made the trip in 1853, and did stop in Missouri long enough to meet and marry Lina.

That same year, 1853, Johann & Carl established a Post Office with the name, Hermannsburg. Then in 1855 Rev. Wilhelm Wilhelmi, his son Julius and wife Luise came to live in Hermannsburg. Their writings give the impression that they were living in pure paradise. They loved the land they

lived in and everything about it . . . climate, wildlife, fertile soil, the neighboring families, native Americans. There was a grist mill, wool carding machine, sawmill, store, blacksmith shop. They also had an interest the silk and wine industry. Annual shopping trips were made to St. Louis or New Orleans by riverboat for machinery and other items not locally available. The original mill had a wooden trough flume over 3500 long to carry the stream of water. It was converted from water power to steam in 1855.

In 1860 Ark. voted to succeed from the Union, and the Hermannsburg paradise started to fall apart, and soon became a Civil War casualty. The revolution in Europe was the main reason for the Hermann's' migration to America, and now they felt trapped between both sides in the Civil War. They wanted to remain neutral but that was not really possible. Nanni and Lina both kept diaries during the war years of 1861 & 62 that tell of the local residents being molested by bushwhackers, renegade Indians and others. The men folk hid out in caves at night and eventually ended up in Union camps. Two of the Wilhelmi family died in Hermannsburg and are the first graves in the Dutch Mills Cemetery, Rev. Welhelmi (Oct 6, 1861) and his daughter-in-law, Luise (1860). The Rev. Tennant wrote in Karl in Aug of 1866 that during the war El Leach, Whinnery & Crosier were hanged by bushwhackers, and there were several others that were murdered during the war.

On December 18, 1862, a group of 19, including 11 children left Hermannsburg with four six-team army wagons and 100 cavalrymen. The detachment was led by Lt. George Albright, 1st Ark Calvary USA (Lt. Albright later married a Miss. Stone from a very prominent Fayetteville family). They camped in Prairie Grove on the way, and reached Fayetteville on Dec 24th. Johann was sick. Karl Hermann and Julius Wilhelmi came up with a scheme to get military escort to Hermannsburg to recover the buried gold (and the piano). Found 2 locations, but not the 3rd. Had almost more gold than the two of them could carry in saddle bags supported on a pole. While fording Baron Fork, they stepped in a hole and had to retrieve the saddle bags from the creek. Must have been pretty cold . . . this was in December.

Nanni died on the trip to St. Louis. She asked her husband, Johann, to make the last entry in her diary.

Hermannsburg was renamed Dutch Mills after the Civil War. The house that I grew up in was built onto the original two room log house of the Hermann's. It was occupied by Johann & Nanni.

The Hermann's made several trips back to Dutch Mills searching for the gold left behind. There are stories and legends about it being found later. My mother corresponded with the Hermanns' up through the 1940's. Fredrick Hermann, who is a descendant of Johann Hermann, is president of the Hermann Oak Leather Co in St. Louis. This company was founded by his great grandfather in 1881. The Hermann family contributed to the Welhelmi tombstone that was erected in the Dutch Mills Cemetery in 1994.

OTHER MILLS IN DUTCH MILLS:

A flour mill burned in Dutch Mills in 1925 the same night as Austin Johnson's store burned. The mill was located on the west side of the branch (Whitaker Spring) just north of the bridge coming into Dutch Mills off Hwy. 59. The mill and store were located close together. This mill was owned by the Whitaker family, but was not originally built by them. It was later owned by the Davis family (Grover) and Con Edminson. There is a photo of this mill in the Hermannsburg book.

The last mill to operate in Dutch Mills was owned and operated by Uncle Will Sparks. This feed mill and also ground corn to make corn meal. It was still operating in the very early 1940's, and was powered by a gasoline (or kerosene) engine that had a large flywheel. Uncle Will was known to get inside the flywheel in the starting process to give it enough momentum to get it going. He'd jump out as soon as the engine fired. Uncle Will made carved hands and pocked knives for all the kids in Dutch Mills. I still have mine.

I would strongly recommend reading "The Hermanns of Old Hermannsburg" (published by the Washington County Historical Society) to anyone interested at all in the history of this area before and during the Civil War. It makes for fascinating reading, time and again!!!

REFERENCE: "THE HERMANNNS OF OLD HERMANNNSBURG"
Compiled by Prof. Lemke in 1965 (published by the Wash Co Historical Society)