

St. Michael Historian



Official Newsletter of the St. Michael Historical Society, St. Michael, Minnesota

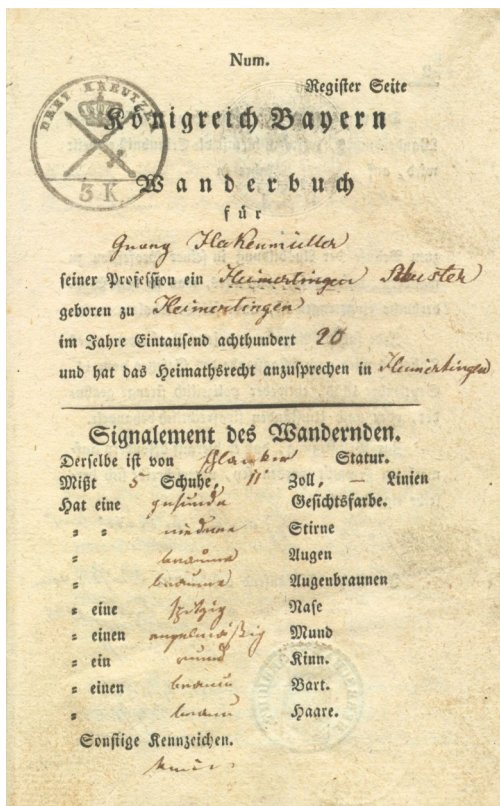
May 2019, Spring

Volume 13, Issue 2

Preserved Records Tell the Story of a Founder's Early Life

By Bob Zahler

Anyone who attempts to research their family's history knows how difficult it is to find trustworthy information, or any information for that matter. For example, it took me nearly twenty years to confirm the birthplace of my immigrant ancestor, Wilhelm Zahler. None of the descendants with whom I had contact had a clue as to the Zahler family origins other than someplace in Bavaria. The American church records were incomprehensible or listed names of villages that did not exist. Eventually, through trial and error and a shot-in-the-dark letter to a church pastor in Germany, I finally solved the mystery: Wilhelm had been born in Ettenbeuren, in the Schwabisch region of Bavaria. Sure, there was satisfaction in finally sleuthing that answer, but it was also incredibly time consuming. To this day, I still do not know how or why the family found its way to Minnesota, and I may never know that answer with any certainty; but I am not alone in having unanswered questions about my ancestors. Our immigrant forefathers and mothers generally did not keep many personal records. This is why most genealogists, both professional and amateur, rely on church and civil records. For many, that is all that exists to research.



The first page of George's journeyman book or "Wanderbuch" includes a detailed description of his physical appearance.

One St. Michael family with few unanswered questions regarding how they got here is the Hackenmueller family. Their immigrant ancestor was George Hackenmueller, one of St. Michael's founders, who kept many of the papers that other immigrants lost, destroyed, or just discarded as unnecessary. Reasonably, considering the incredibly primitive conditions in which the typical pioneer lived and the hardships they faced, keeping paperwork that no longer served a practical purpose might have seemed trivial. Besides, once they established themselves in America, most immigrants did not look back. They focused on the here and now, and perhaps the future. But the artifacts and documents that George Hackenmueller left behind indicate that he was a man intent on leaving a trail to follow. Preserving papers, personal items, and recording data was just in his nature. Additionally, his papers and artifacts show that he was both a courageous and faith-filled man. Analyzing these items reveals a lot about him, and may help us understand other founders who likely faced similar situations that led them to St. Michael.

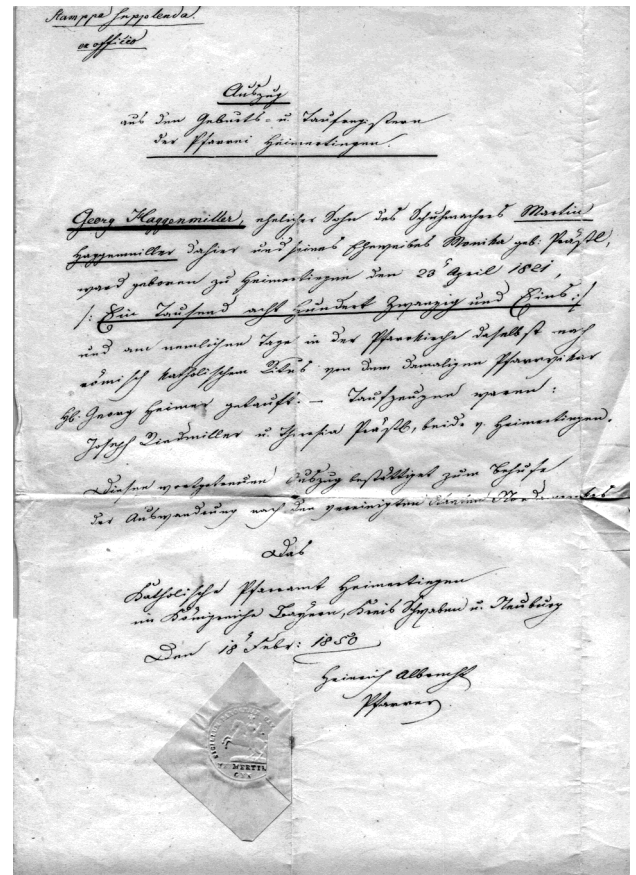
Among the oldest of George's (spelled Georg in the German records) documents is his Wanderbuch (travel book), a record of his journeyman years. George apprenticed as a shoemaker, probably with his father. Shoe making was a craft that was regulated by a guild, which was similar to a trade union in the United States. After his apprenticeship, George had to fulfill his "wander years", which required him to leave his home and practice the shoe-making craft in other villages for at least three years. An official had to record and certify each experience in the Wanderbuch. Following three years as a journeyman, he could submit to the guild a "master work", something that demonstrated his skill as a shoemaker. Then, he could call himself a Master Shoemaker and set up his own shop. George started his journeyman experience in April 1839, working under several shoemakers in villages near his

home in southwest Bavaria, but also in villages near the eastern border and in the cities of Munich and Augsburg. He completed his journeyman years in 1842.

The next phase of George's life is documented in his military discharge papers. This document indicates that George began his obligatory military service in the Bavarian army in April 1843 serving in the infantry and rising to the rank of corporal. When he completed his six years of service in April 1849, he was reminded in his discharge papers that he was not allowed to move out of the district, and that he could be re-called at any time to serve in the 4th Royal Bavarian Chevau-légers (a cavalry unit). An oral tradition passed down in the Hackenmueller family is that George, as a part of the military, did not want to be used by the king to persecute Catholics, and that this was a major reason for his emigration. This, however, is unlikely; but there were other reasons for George to be concerned about what was happening to Catholicism in Bavaria.

The king of Bavaria during George's military service was King Ludwig I. Ludwig considered himself a devout Catholic, but he was tolerant of Protestants partly because both his beloved step-mother and his mistress were Protestants. What was likely bothering George the most were the real and perceived attacks on Catholicism in society. In 1848, during George's last year in the military, there were revolutionary uprisings throughout much of Europe. Pro-democracy liberals challenged the rule of monarchies. Economic depression and crop failures prompted protests by the poor against the landed aristocracy (which included the Church), and nationalists promoted unification of the German principalities, which meant that they wanted the powerful, largely Protestant Prussia to merge with Catholic Bavaria. Prussia would likely dominate that union, and George may have feared forced service in the Prussian army. Additionally, there was pressure on the pope to concede temporal power over the Papal States. While revolutionaries did not share all of these goals, the general theme was an attack on the old way of life, which George Hackenmueller likely interpreted as a move against his deeply-held Catholic faith. The revolutions largely failed; however, King Ludwig, not wanting to serve as a constitutional monarch, abdicated his throne to his son in 1848. Later that same year Pope Pius IX fled temporarily into exile due to a violent attempt to establish a Roman Republic in the Papal States. The new Bavarian king, Maximilian, was nominally Catholic, but he definitely steered a more moderate course in terms of his religiosity. By 1849 George Hackenmueller may have truly felt that life in Catholic Bavaria, as he knew it, could soon be changing; and so he and his brother Johann (or John) decided that they did not want to stick around to see how things were going to turn out. Like millions of others, George and John looked to America as the place where they could escape the severe economic, religious, and political challenges then occurring in Europe.

Another one of the documents that George saved was a certified copy of his birth. This was obtained, as stated on the document, "for the purpose of emigration to the United States" and created on February 18, 1850, just days before George and John headed out to sea. The document indicates that he was born in the village of Heimertingen to the shoemaker Martin Haggemiller and his wife Monika, on April 23, 1821. The alternate spelling of the last name was very common in records. Sometimes it was because the person writing the record just put down what they heard, or the spelling of the last name had not yet become standardized. "Haggemiller" was used for John's baptismal record as well, but since other records that George retained used the name "Hackenmüller" (German spelling), we can be pretty certain that the current spelling is at least close to how the name was pronounced. One thing that may have surprised George when he received his birth certifi-

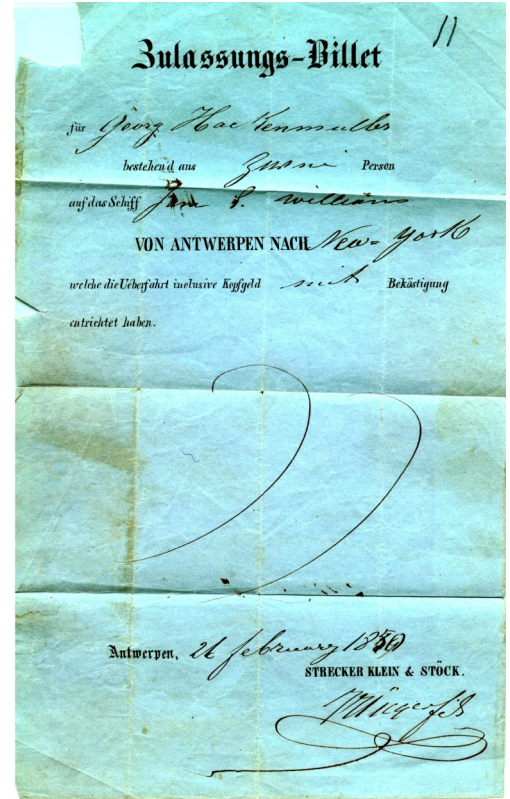


George Hackenmueller's certificate of birth. The information was copied from the baptismal register of the parish church in Heimertingen by the pastor and obtained so that George could emigrate in 1850.

cate was the listed year of his birth. On both his Wanderbuch and his military discharge papers, his year of birth was listed as 1820, a year that George probably self reported. In other words, George may have lied about his age to appear older, or he just did not know the year of his birth. Either is possible. The certificate also names godparents and the maiden names of both the mother and godmother, all very useful information to the genealogist.

Another incredibly rare piece of documentation saved by George is the ticket for his passage to America. It is a small piece of thin, blue paper that simply states "Admission ticket for Georg Hackenmuller consisting of two persons on the ship Jane S. Williams from Antwerp to New York [the paid fare covers] the crossing, including bounty (head tax) with food." It was dated February 21, 1850 in Antwerp, Belgium. This shows that George was able to obtain his birth certificate, and then in three days travel to the port at Antwerp, a distance of 390 miles, which also indicates that all or some of that journey was likely by train. According to public records, they landed at the port of New York on April 13, 1850, meaning that the voyage took over seven weeks.

From New York, George and John went to Illinois and settled near Johnsburg in McHenry County in the northeastern part of the state. Johnsburg is believed to be among the first Catholic communities in Illinois, established in 1841 by immigrants from the Eifel region of Germany. The community was only nine years old when the Hackenmueller brothers arrived. It is probable that they heard about this place before they left Germany. They likely practiced their shoemaking trade here before purchasing land in 1855. Also, it was here in Johnsburg that George met his wife Margaret Marx. Margaret had arrived with her mother and siblings in 1851 (her father, John Baptist Marx, died during the voyage); and in 1852 she and George got married. The first three of their 11 children were born in Johnsburg.



The above blue slip was essentially the boarding pass for George and his brother John, and indicated that their fare included food for the more than 7-week voyage.

F. D. AUSTIN, Printer, Democrat Office, Woodstock, Ills.

STATE OF ILLINOIS, }
 McHENRY COUNTY, } ss. *Jan 24th A. D. 1854.*

RECEIVED OF *George Hackenmuller* *2 94/100* in full for all taxes assessed for the year 1854, on the following described Lands, situate in said County, viz:

DIVISION,	Sec.	Town.	Range.	Acres.	Valua-tion.	State Tax.	County Tax.	Town Tax.	School Tax.	Delinq. Tax.	Road Tax.	Total.
<i>Sh 84</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>.50</i>	<i>.40</i>	<i>.25</i>				
<i>Sh 64</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>.50</i>	<i>.40</i>	<i>.25</i>				
<i>P Property</i>					<i>57</i>	<i>.28</i>	<i>.22</i>	<i>.14</i>				
						<i>1.28</i>	<i>1.02</i>	<i>.64</i>				<i>2.94</i>

R. H. Matthews COLLECTOR.

The receipt above shows that George paid the property tax on 80 acres of land in McHenry County, Illinois. He also saved his copy of the deed to this property which he purchased from Abial and Elizabeth Walker for \$500. Obviously, George decided to farm in America while also likely using his shoe-making skills. Doing both was also common in Germany.

In the spring of 1857 George and Margaret, along with her mother and her Marx siblings, headed for Minnesota, likely to take advantage of cheap land prices. George's brother John remained in Johnsburg. The Marx and Hackenmueller families selected claims on the south side of what would become Frankfort Township. It was on May 2, 1857 that George and his

brother-in-law Andreas Marx were clearing trees on their claim when they encountered a man by the name of John Brenner. Apparently Brenner believed that the Marx family had settled on his claim. A claim did not represent ownership, only the right to buy the land when it came up for public auction. A claim was "proven" when the settler built a cabin, took up permanent residence, and improved the land by clearing trees and planting a crop. Sometimes, however, people ventured out from St. Paul to look over a piece of land before returning to actually settle on the claim. In the meantime, someone else might settle on your land. The specifics of the confrontation between Brenner and Marx were never made clear. At any rate,

**St. Michael
Historical Society**
11800 Town Center Drive
St. Michael, MN 55376

Phone: 763-416-7967

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.saintmichaelhistory.org

Like us on **Facebook!**

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at the St. Michael City Hall in the Gries and Lenhardt Public Meeting Room adjacent to the library.

This newsletter is published quarterly for the benefit of the members of the St. Michael Historical Society.

Reprints of this or any other newsletter by the Society are not permitted without the express written consent of the St. Michael Historical Society.

Publisher: Bob Zahler

Editors: Sheldon Barthel
Stephen S. Barthel

both parties claimed the right to the same land. According to the story that George passed down through his descendants, Mr. Brenner made some sort of warning to Andreas about not taking another step, which Andreas ignored. Brenner then shot him and ran off through the woods never to be seen again. The details of the first murder in Wright County cannot be verified, but the death record of St. Michael's Catholic Church clearly states that 22 year-old Andreas Marx was "killed by his enemy Johannes Brenner." George Hackenmueller's story is very probable since disputes over land claims were common during the mad rush to obtain land in Minnesota in the years 1856 and 1857.

From this point, George Hackenmueller's life is much like that of other settlers in St. Michael: a lot of work and a lot of prayer. Of the eleven children of George and Margaret, the first two died young: Albert at age 25 and Barbara at age 3. The oldest surviving boy,



George and Margaret Hackenmueller in a photo from the mid 1870s. Photos such as these were often mailed back to Germany to prove to family that they had not only survived, but had succeeded.

Martin, became a successful farmer; and the youngest boy, Alois, became a shoemaker like his father and grandfather, operating out of a small building behind his house on the corner of Main Street and Ash Avenue across the street from the old cemetery. Later, Martin's son George (the immigrant George's grandson), also learned the trade of shoe and leather repair operating out of small building just west of what is now Ditto's Bar on Central Avenue. The remaining children of George and Margaret Hackenmueller, seven girls, all became Notre Dame nuns; a tribute to the deep faith instilled in them by their mother and father. Margaret passed away in 1898 at the age of 75. George lived to be 92, passing away in 1913, and leaving behind a legacy of devotion to God and a family that still embraces the value of hard work and sacrifice.

Upcoming Events

All events and meetings held at the Gries Lenhardt Allen Library Room at City Hall

June 10, 7:00 PM	Regular Board meeting
	No meeting in July
August 12, 7:00 PM	Regular Board meeting