

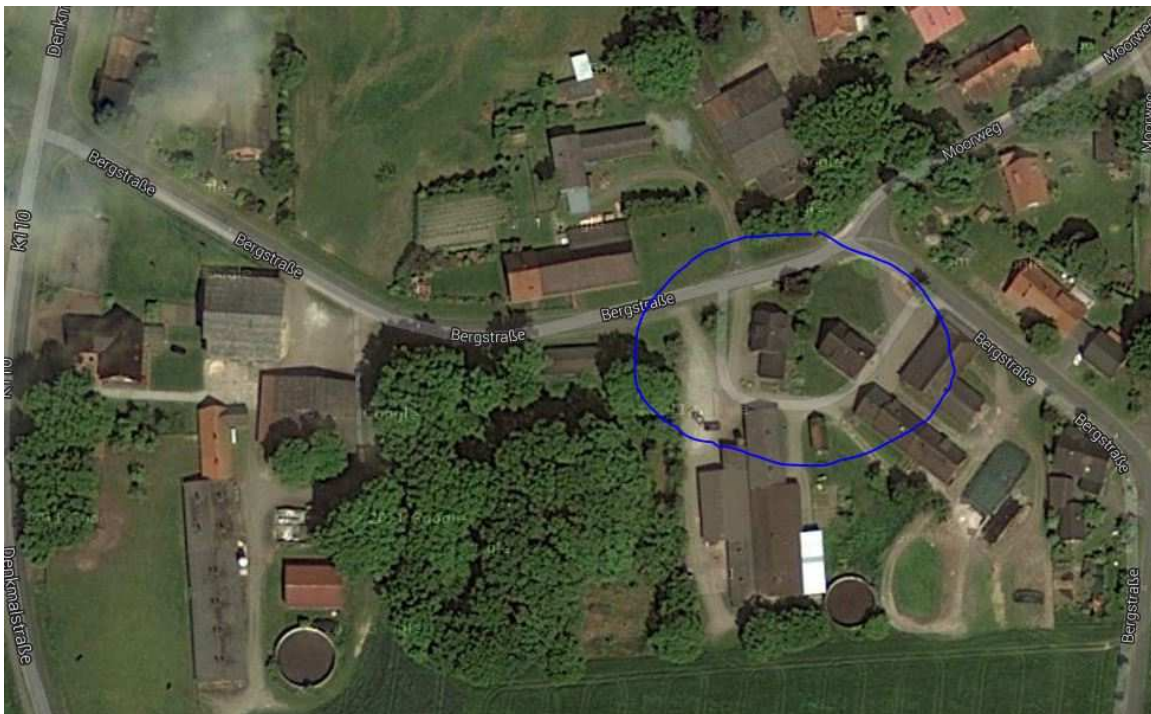
Early Pape Family Life in Germany

Among the things that were saved by our family are some letters that my grandfather Jacob Pape received from his brothers after he arrived in America. Some were sent to him while he was working in Arkansas and others after he had returned to Concordia, MO. From them (along with various family stories and some genealogical records) one gets a glimpse of the life of the Pape family in Germany during the 1800s.

Jacob's father Claus had a farm in Meinstedt, Province of Hanover, in northern Germany halfway between the city-states of Bremen and Hamburg. Agriculture was the predominant industry in the area during that period of time. Exactly how much land Claus owned is not known; however, farms in Northern Germany were relatively small (some as little as 10 morgen or about 5-10 acres). The area suffered from overpopulation in this largely agrarian society. Early church records often recorded the status of a person by the amount of land he had (e.g. *Vollmeier/-meyer/-höfner*, *Halbmeier*, or *Viertelmeier* etc. for a full, half, or quarter of a standard sized farm of about 200 morgen or 120 acres.) Small 'cottagers' (*Kleinköthner*) might typically own about 10-20 morgen.

A bit of trivia. An acre as a measure of land area is said to have originated from the typical area that could be plowed in one day with a yoke of oxen pulling a wooden plow. On the other hand, in Germany the unit of measure was a 'morgen', namely the approximate amount of land tillable by one man behind an ox in the morning hours of a day. (That was a more reasonable day's work for oxen.) The actual size of a morgen varied from one part of Germany to another but averaged about 0.6 acres. It tended to be a little larger in locations that were flat and more tillable.

The family home where Jacob Pape was born was at No. 12 Meinstedt. That property is currently owned by Klaus Pape, a direct descendant of the family. The location can be seen circled in the following overhead photo of present day Meinstedt.



No. 12 Meinstedt was not always the Pape farm. Jacob's father Claus was born at No. 3 Meinstedt (the Böschen Hus) but died at No. 12 Meinstedt. So he must have acquired the latter farm sometime in the mid-1800s. Claus' father Gerd Pape was born and also died at No. 3 Meinstedt. Gerd is listed as a Vollhöfner, which would indicate that he had considerable land; but it is not clear how the land was handed down in the family. Farms were usually passed down within the family for many generations based on German inheritance law of that time. After the parents had died, the land was then owned by the oldest surviving son (or oldest daughter if there were no sons.) Perhaps Claus was not the oldest son and found another farm when he grew up. No. 12 Meinstedt, on the other hand, has remained in the family since the 1800s. Jacob's father Claus had five sisters and an older brother Gerd; but Claus appears to have inherited the family farm. Either Gerd had died or he may have owned another farm at the time and relinquished his right to it. (I have seen one case on another branch of my family where the rightful heir had another farm by the time he would have inherited the family farm.)

Father Claus (1827-1877) was listed in the records as a farmer and carpenter. Because of the small farm sizes, many of the farmers needed a second job to support their large families. The common occupation in the Pape family, including the younger sons who did not inherit any property, was carpentry. A nice photo of the family home, a classic North German housebarn, was sent to me by a relative in Germany.



It is quite likely that Pape family members built the house, which was large enough for a family of twelve. More information about that type of construction can be found in the message board topic 'Old Pape Home' at <http://concordia-memories.org/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=156>.

Farmers in the area typically grew grain crops, such as wheat, oats, and barley, along with hay for the livestock. They would have a few horses for transportation and working

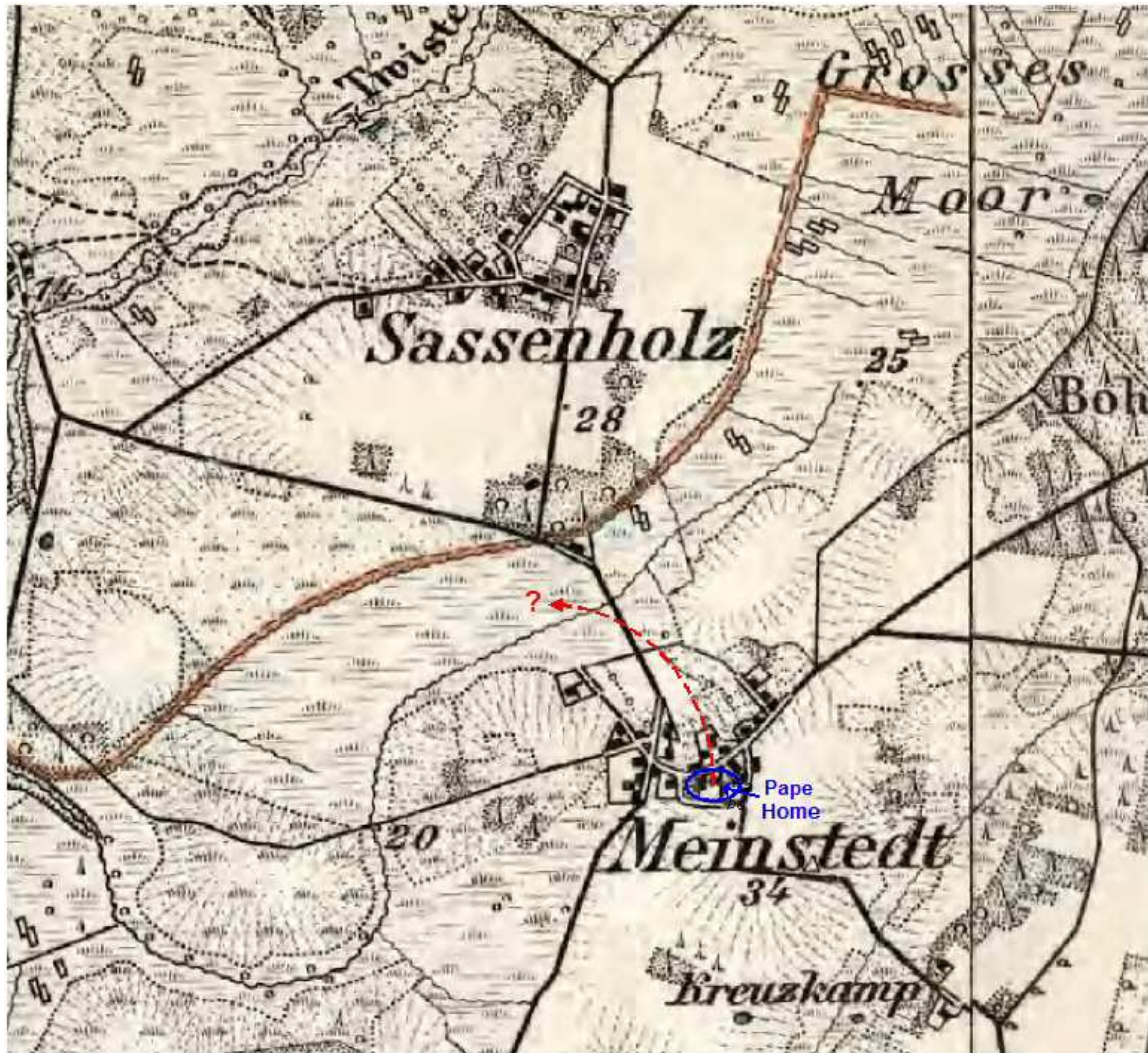
the fields, usually some cows for milk and butter, and some hogs. They would also raise some chickens and geese. The Pape family also kept a number of bee hives, selling honey and wax for additional income. (More on that later.)

Mother Maria (nee Ropers, 1829-1881) spent the time when she was not caring for her large family by weaving linen cloth. That was a common cottage industry of the time in that area to supplement family income. Farmers grew flax as a secondary crop and there was a special area in the housebarn where the wives would spin the yarn and weave the cloth. The industry eventually died out when cotton was exported from America and cheaper cotton material was generated by the mills in England. This added to the economic depression of Northern Europe during the mid-1800s. Along with overpopulation and poor weather conditions which led to famine, it was one of the reasons why the flood of German immigrants to America began at that time. When Jacob arrived in New York City, one of the few things he had in his trunk was a bolt of linen given to him by his mother. He later said that he regretted selling that to raise cash.

Jacob seems to have only corresponded with two of his brothers after he came to America. One was his older brother Claus who raised Jacob after their parents died. The other was Peter, the youngest brother, who was much closer in age to Jacob. Much later (after WWII) Jacob also corresponded a niece Anna Pape Meyer. The following paragraphs include some of the insight gained from reading the letters that he received.

Brother Claus (1854-) appears to have been quite devout. He opened his letters discussing the pastor's sermon from the previous Sunday. One of the family stories noted that he had written to Jacob expressing concern about Jacob's religious devotion. Jacob had never written to him about attending any church services. Claus was also very business-like. He would discuss the current price of various grains and how the good the crops were that year. He also noted the price of cattle and related services such as *ferklen* (farrowing). So he apparently grew grain and raised some cows and hogs. Claus wrote that he was raising some chickens, rabbits and a goose. He was also a hunter and noted that he had purchased a new gun for 65 Marks that "shoots well".

In one letter he told an interesting story. He had been raising a goose for Easter dinner. When he tried to butcher it, the goose got loose and flew off into a marsh with the knife stuck in its back, neither of which he recovered. He was amazed how well it still flew. Looking at an old map of the area at that time, one can imagine what happened.



Claus also kept a number of beehives. One year he sold 2400 Marks worth of honeycombs and 300 Marks of wax. (100 pounds of honey sold for 59 Marks.) Beekeeping must have been a common occupation in the Pape family. My grandfather Jacob had a large number of beehives behind his farmhouse, next to the orchard. (I was stung a number of times by bees while playing in that area.) In later years, my father would tend to the bee hives every fall, showing me how to smoke the bees and remove the honeycombs from the hives. After Grandpa died, he brought some of the hives into town but didn't keep them there very long. (I don't think the neighbors appreciated it.) However, on a number of occasions, Dad would be called by various residents to remove bees that had swarmed under their eaves or in nearby trees.

While most people used horses for transportation at that time, Brother Peter wrote that Claus had purchased a new bicycle to get around. Peter said that he sold some type of machine(?) and also planned to buy a bicycle.

In his last letter to Jacob, Claus reported on the status of Jacob's investment back in Germany. As I have noted elsewhere, Jacob received a 600 Mark inheritance when the parents died. However, because he was a minor, it was invested in a trust for him. When he left Germany, he could not remove that money so it stayed there. Later, when Jacob planned to buy a farm in the U.S., he asked Claus to send him the money. Claus noted that the funds received 3 1/3% interest and had increased to 921 Marks after court and

guardian costs. He sent the proceeds to Jacob via Westel (a wire service?). Claus was happy to see that Jacob was getting married and said that, when they settled in their home, to be sure to begin each morning with God.

Brother Peter (1873-1932) appears to have been more of a “free spirit” based on the tone of his letters. He always opened his letter with the phrase “*Ich ergreife die Feder...*” (Literally, “I pick up the feather (pen)” or often translated as “I take this opportunity...”.) He kept Jacob informed about other people that they knew in the area. One person that both he and Claus wrote about was their Teacher Lemmermann who was being cared for by a brother-in-law in Kreuzkamp and eventually died in 1892.

Peter was busy working as a carpenter while still a teenager, building houses in Zeven and other areas. He wrote that he would like to come to America to visit his brother and sister when he was 18. However, when he did reach the age of 18, he was drafted into the army. He would then write about rumors of war. One Easter he visited Claus’ family on leave and sent the following picture.



In 1899, Jacob received a letter from Peter in a completely different handwriting and style. It turns out that Peter had gotten married and the letter was written by his new wife, Maria Katharina Alpers, daughter of the mayor of Wangersen. They were married on 2 Oct 1898 and were sending a wedding picture.

At a family reunion in 2012, Cousin Dorothy Dieckhoff Paul brought the following picture that was in their family memorabilia. It was the wedding picture of Peter and Maria.



The last letter that Jacob received from them was undated, but in a much more somber tone. There had been a severe epidemic in the Meinstedt area that resulted in the death of a number of people that Jacob knew. His brother Claus had died from the epidemic and brother Johann had also died. Peter reported that he and his co-workers had been spared. However, he did have an accident. He chopped himself in the right foot and had to spend several weeks next to the stove recuperating.

After all of the bad news, Peter ended the letter on an upbeat note. He had purchased a harmonica for 10 Marks and was learning to play it.

When my brother Don visited Germany a few years ago touring the area of Heeslingen, he noticed a memorial to the World War I casualties that came from the area around Heeslingen. A photo of that memorial is shown below.



He noticed that the names of Peter and Klaus Pape from Meinstedt (as well as more Papes from other areas). Our relative Claus Pape was dead by that time; however, knowing that Peter had served in the army, we wondered whether he had been killed in that war. However, he would have been relatively old by that time unless he had made a career of the army.

Further data received from genealogist Frank Bleck in Heeslingen indicated that Peter bought a farm in Wangersen after he was married. Later, after his father-in-law had died, Peter also became the mayor of Wangersen. He eventually died on 4 Apr 1932.

Besides these early letters, Grandpa also corresponded with a niece, Anna Pape Meyer, shortly after the end of World War II. Anna was living in Haassel which was in the British Zone at that time. People in Concordia were eager to learn about their relatives back in Germany once communications had been reestablished. As a youngster, I remember how eager family members were to see these letter. They were passed from family to family. Most of the people could still read German at that time.

Anna's first letter described the fate of her children. One son and one son-in-law were killed and buried in Russia. Her youngest son was injured but survived and another son-in-law had just returned from an English prisoner-of-war camp where he had been held for two years. Living conditions were desperate after the war. While many of the neighboring villages were severely damaged, the village of Haassel had been spared. However, conditions were still bad. Refugees from the larger cities filled the smaller villages. Supplies of any kind were difficult to obtain, particularly shoes and stockings. There was a shortage of coal and, because they were having a harsh winter, she feared

that many would freeze to death. Crops were poor the previous season and they were living on turnips.

After receiving a letter from the U.S. with a picture of Grandpa and Grandma's golden wedding anniversary, Anna's spirits were somewhat better in the next letter. She still bemoaned the shortage of supplies and poor growing conditions for the crops. However, she closed the letter by noting that they planned to attend the Hermannsberger Mission Festival in Selsingen (16 Jul 1947). She said that she was happy that Christianity was once again free from the constraints imposed during the Hitler era.

Finally, just before Grandpa died, Aunt Flora received a final letter from Anna and her daughter Adelheid, written by Adelheid in late 1955. It noted that Anna's condition was deteriorating (she was approaching 77 years of age) but that otherwise conditions were much better. Crops were good and they had just built a new house on the farm with government aid.