



A Day in the Life

Stephen L. Ricker

Life Experiences from Those Who Came Before Us

April 2005

Frank H. Brinkman and Mary Elizabeth Winkleman sat on a bench in a park in Westphalia, Germany. The gloomy weather that fall day in 1845 reflected the feelings in their hearts. Mary Elizabeth was moving with her family to America, to a state called Ohio, to a county called Putnam. A place they had not known about until Father Horstman, former chair of the Gymnasium Carolinum at Osnabruck, The Kingdom of Hanover and Father John Otto Bredeick, former rector of the Cathedral of Osnabruck began speaking to their flocks about moving there a few years earlier. Father Horstman and a few others had left in 1833 to found a village called Glandorf, Putnam County, Ohio. Father Bredeick and his brother Ferdinand moved in 1844 and 1842 respectfully to form Delphos, Putnam County, Ohio. Following these two pioneers, people began moving in greater and greater numbers from the towns and villages around Osnabruck to the growing towns and villages of Putnam County, Ohio. Matthias, Mary Elizabeth's younger brother by two years, had moved to Ohio in 1842.

Frank, whom was twenty-five and Mary Elizabeth (she preferred Elizabeth), whom was twenty sat on the bench and discussed the possibilities of

their future. They had met several years earlier and fallen in love. But now Elizabeth's parents, Bernard and Annie M. (Arens), were taking her family to the new world. Frank's parents, Leopold and Elizabeth (Pitzes) had also considered moving. But they felt that they were too advanced in years to endure the rigorous journey. Frank couldn't go to America without his parents because they needed his help. And Elizabeth had to go with her parents to help them start a new life in America. Elizabeth's bitterness toward her parents grew as she thought about her future life. The only possibility that she could see Frank again is when he would join her in the Ohio after his parents passed into the next life. She did not know when or if that would ever come.

After sitting silently on the bench for what seemed like hours Frank and Elizabeth accepted the lot that the Lord had given them. They promised that they would write, got up, embraced, and parted ways.

Elizabeth stood on the deck of a high sail ship called Burgundy as the port of Bremen faded from view as it sailed down the mouth of the Weser River. It was a beautiful scene, but only sadness and anger crept into

Elizabeth's heart. As the ship heading into the Nord See (North Sea), she and the other passengers on deck were instructed to go below. There they were required to stay for most of the two month journey to the port of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Below deck each family was allotted a small space which was separated by curtains made of clothing. "The conditions are sub-human," Elizabeth whispered just loud enough for her parents to hear.

The ship turned southwest and passed through the English Channel which eventually led to the Atlantic Ocean. The English Channel was like the rift that had grown between Elizabeth and her parents since the announcement of relocation. Annie saw the sour look on Elizabeth's face. "Two months of traveling in these conditions is a fair price to pay to leave a lifetime of the poor conditions and persecutions a life in the Kingdom of Hanover would bring you."

"Leaving Frank is too high a price," Elizabeth barked. In her heart she was ashamed of the words she blurted out. She knew this was not the proper way to speak to her mother. But she did not show shame, nor did she apologize. She only



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looked away. Annie looked at Bernard and sighed.

A day into the voyage the English Channel became rough. It seemed to Elizabeth that her feelings of turmoil toward her parents and herself were transferred to the weather. The weather became worse as the ship bolted up and down and rocked back and forth. "I have become Jonah," Elizabeth said to herself. She and her family had never experienced anything like this before. They huddled together and prayed to Mother Mary and her son Jesus. "Lord Jesus, forgive me as you did Jonah," Elizabeth cried.

Many of the other families were also praying. The young cried and some screamed. Outside the storm raged as if the Lord has caused it to consume Mary's anger. On the deck, footsteps and orders were heard as the crew frantically struggled to keep the ship afloat. A crewman yelled, "The shore, the shore!" A loud crashing noise ensued. "Everyone on deck! Women and children first in the dinghy! We're going ashore!"

The ride in the small boat was not pleasant. But relief was soon found on the shores of England where Elizabeth repented of her anger and thanked God. She had learned the way Jonah did. When the time was right she resolved to

apologize to her parents. Elizabeth remembered the Bible's words, "Fear of the Lord is the begging of wisdom. Repent and you will be saved, you and your family."

The families that were on the Burgundy stayed in London only a short while. During that time Elizabeth prayed with her family for the Lord's guidance. This was the first time that Elizabeth was outside of the Kingdom of Hanover. London was a stinky, dirty city. She hoped the cities of Putnam County, Ohio were not as London. Her brother had written telling of the beautiful of Ohio. She hoped he was not e x a g g e r a t i n g .

After seeking the Lord's guidance Bernard said, "We're going to continue to go to America. It is too late to turn back. The cost of the voyage can not be refunded. We must continue, trusting the Lord Jesus to do as he sees fit, asking for his blessings." When the time came they set sail for A m e r i c a a g a i n .

Their prayers for good sailing weather were answered. But soon they found that their troubles were not over. A fever broke out on board which overtook Elizabeth's father, mother, and sibling, Theodore. Elizabeth had to work hard with the few other women whom had not gotten sick, taking care

of the many that were, but there were not enough healthy to keep the conditions below deck hygienic. Cholera soon broke out. People began to die; among them were Annie and Theodore, Elizabeth's mother a n d b r o t h e r .

On the deck Elizabeth sobbed as the two wrapped bodies slipped off the planks into the ocean. Her father was too sick to join her. "Lord, why do you take to you those we love when we need them the most?" Elizabeth felt it was her fault that her mother and brother had died, just as the storm was her fault. "Why didn't I tell her I was sorry? Why didn't I make amends? What was I waiting for? Now it is too late." Elizabeth slipped below deck and said to her father, "I am sorry father for I have sinned against God, mother and you."

"You are forgiven dear. I am sure mother forgives you too. We came here for your benefit Elizabeth, not ours," Bernard coughed out. "We did not want you to experience the pains of life in Hanover Kingdom as your mother and I experienced. That's why we left. As your brother Matthias wrote us, 'There is hope in America. Hope for a better life. Come and join me. The land is abundant, fertile and cheap, \$1 an acre. And everyone can worship God as they see fit



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without persecution and oppression.' ”

A few weeks later Elizabeth and her father stepped off the plank into the port of New Orleans. Bernard was still not healthy and needed support from Elizabeth. Elizabeth needed help. But all they were greeted with were vendors of all kinds. Men and women selling pots, pans, wagons, horses, mules, shovels, picks hoes, fruit and vegetables. Bernard surveyed the port and decided he was healthy enough to continue to Ohio where Matthias awaited them. They booked passage on a steam driven Mississippi river boat.

On the journey, Bernard's condition worsened. It became evident that if they did not get to shore and a doctor's help he would die. When the river boat stopped at St. Louis for provisions, Elizabeth took her father to a doctor and wrote Matthias asking him to join her. But it was too late, just as Matthias arrived Bernard died. They buried Bernard in St. L o u i s .

“What will you do now Elizabeth? Go back to Frank in Germany?” Matthias asked.

“The doctor and burial cost have reduced the money to a point where I can not go back and I will not be able to make the last leg of the journey up

the Miami Erie Canal to Putnam County. The passage to Cincinnati is paid for. I will stay there, find a job, and wait for Frank. He promised to come when the time was right. Lord willing, when he comes we will be able to finish the dream that our parents began. Their deaths should not be in vain. They came here for my benefit. I will honor their decision.” Elizabeth spoke confidently only because she relied on the Lord like she had never done before. Through the trials of life she was molding her into a mature woman of f a i t h .

Elizabeth became a domestic in Cincinnati while Matthias continued the tinner's trade that he had begun. Together they were able support each other emotionally and financially.

Elizabeth wrote Frank of her perils and how she missed and needed him. Frank renewed his promise to join her. A promise he was able to keep in 1847 by persuading his parents to make the trip on the sailing vessel Antoinette which made the voyage from Bremen to New York in fifty-six days.

Frank worked at various jobs in Cincinnati until he had enough money to marry Elizabeth on June 10, 1851. “Frank,” Matthias said at the wedding, “I am glad for Elizabeth. Slowly after your arrival her pain of

loss dissipated. Now she is able to begin a new life. I am also glad because now I can complete the journey our parents began. Next year I plan to go up the canal to Putnam County, Ohio. I will settle in Delphos and look for land in the Black Swamp of Putnam County. Clearing the land will be hard work, but under the soil is rich farmland. When the time is right, don't forget Elizabeth's dream to do as I plan to do. She wants to complete our parents dream. It will be a balm for her soul.” The land that Matthias bought was in Fort Jennings Township.

Elizabeth had her first child, Mathias on March 20, 1852 while still living in Cincinnati, whom she named after her beloved bother. In 1856 Elizabeth, Frank, and children left for Putnam County, Ohio. They would have left earlier, but cholera epidemic swept various towns in the region in 1854 and 1855. Elizabeth could not risk losing more loved ones to that dreadful disease until it was cleared of t h e a r e a .

The canal boat made its way north, but Mathias was looking south pouting. “Mathias!” Elizabeth exclaimed, “Look at the tall trees ahead of us. We are coming to the Black Swamp of Putnam County. We are going to buy your Uncle Mathias' farm in Jennings



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Township. Doesn't it look
a m a z i n g ? ”

Mathias turned and looked, but
at first said nothing. ““It looks
scary and empty. I don't see
any kids. I don't see any
houses. I only see trees.”

“Mattie,” Elizabeth replied,
“There are plenty of kids there.
You'll meet them and they will
be your friends. It's different
than Cincinnati, but in a good
w a y . Y o u ' l l s e e . ”

“My best friends are that way.
I want to go home,” Mathias
barked. Elizabeth thought of
herself eleven years ago, looked
at Frank, and sighed.

*The people, places, and events
in this article are of historical
record while the conversations
and thoughts of individuals are
of folklore and legend.*

*Editor's correction: Article
titled “Ottoville” in previous
edition was by Stephen L.
R i c k e r .*