

## **The Hohmann Family From Weiperz In America: St. Joseph's Settlement**

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As the hunger year of 1846 was ending in the Bergwinkel region, many of the inhabitants had decided to emigrate. A persistent drought the year before had withered the grain fields for people and the meadows for the animals. The potato sickness had destroyed the main food source. There was not enough acreage or meadowland to feed one family. The poverty of the people in the 19th century has been described in detail in the Bergwinkel books of Alfred Kuehnert.

The emigrant Johann Hohmann was born February 2, 1795 in Weiperz. His father was also named Johann, a name that frequently occurred at that time in the "Land of the Poor Johns." The mother Katharina was born Larbig. The grandfather's name was Konrad Hohmann, the grandmother Elisabeth Schreiber.

It is not known if Johann Hohmann, the son, had other siblings. He married (ca. 1818) Eva Elisabeth Mueller, born August 15, 1794, the daughter of Johann Mueller and Katharina Jahn.

Four children were born to the young couple in Weiperz:

Johann Peter 1819-1886 Conrad 1821-1900

Anna Katharina 1822-1900 Georg 1829-1926

HESAUS (Hessische Auswanderer 1840-1850, Archivschule Marburg, 1988) lists the emigration petition of the Hohmann family for February/March/April/1847. North America is given as the destination. To gather up the traveling money for several persons, the family father often sold all possessions; the adult children saved the money they might have earned as hired hand, day laborer or servant. Of Johann Hohmann it is said, that he sold his house to the parish of Weiperz. This house was located where later the Weiperz Catholic Church was built. The framework and possibly other usable parts of the house were transported to the village of Schweben, a not insignificant distance. There the house was rebuilt, as can be read in the 1921 letter of a Weiperz neighbor to the Hohmann family in America.

A second Hohmann family from Weiperz emigrated together with Johann Hohmann. This family sold their home to the Price family; it is still standing today and is called "Hohmann House", as the author (Isabelle Hohmann Parikh) was told during a visit to Weiperz in 1993.

The few belongings the Weiperzers brought, they stowed in seaworthy chests, clad with iron bands: clothes, simple tools, blankets, prayer books, rosaries, crosses, small souvenirs and possibly un-spoilable provisions. According to the tradition in the family, Johann Hohmann brought a vine shoot with him from Germany and planted it in his new homeland. On every Hohmann farm in the St. Joseph Settlement a grape vine grew which spread its shady leaves near their homes.

The difficult trip to Bremen, the miserable conditions in the harbor and on the sailing ships have been described in other Bergwinkel publications. On December 15, 1847 the Weiperzers landed in New York. It was on the 18th birthday of George Hohmann. From New York the family traveled, probably by boat, up the Hudson river, and then on the Erie Canal to Buffalo. How long they stayed in Buffalo or it's surroundings, or if relatives were there to welcome them, cannot be ascertained anymore. From Buffalo they traveled southward, through Pennsylvania, to Wheeling which at that time still belonged to Virginia (now West Virginia).

In Wheeling the immigrants could earn money in the glass factories, brick yards and other companies, so that finally they could buy the desired land. These properties were situated in Marshall and Wetzel counties, south of Wheeling. The price per acre was 3 Dollars. Most farms were about 100 acres; some settlers could buy only five acres and bought more land when their finances allowed it.

For shelter the Bergwinklers first built their log houses. Barns and stables followed. The wooded area supplied the raw material. Logs of about 10 to 12 inches were laid on rubble stone foundations. These practical homes stood primarily near a spring or a creek. Later, when pumps were available for the water supply, homes were built also on higher lots. Although the farms were far apart and so did not constitute a village (in the German sense), the Bergwinklers and other settlers helped each other. Everyone knew that he was dependent on the help of his neighbor in the hilly wilderness.

Whetstone Creek flows through the land that Johann Hohmann bought for his family. He built a block house which he replaced later with a roomy 2-story frame house. He and his family worked the land, took care of their children and grandchildren and were content with their lives.

Johann died in 1875 in his 80th year, Eva Elisabeth passed away in 1871 at age 77. Both found their eternal rest in the cemetery of St. Joseph, together with many relatives and neighbors.

Johann Peter, born 1819, lived and worked all his life in the seaport town of Baltimore. He died in 1886 at the age of 67 years and was interred on God's Acre in his homeland Settlement of St. Joseph. On his grave stands an old black iron cross. It is reminiscent of the grave crosses that in earlier times also stood in the Bergwinkel.

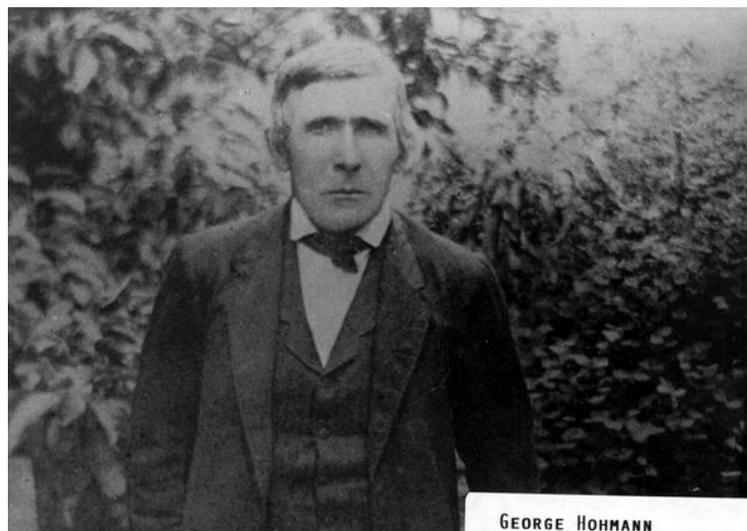
Conrad Hohmann, born 1821, is listed in HES AUS as "emigrated" for the year 1847. However, he did not accompany his family on their voyage, since he was in the army at this time. After his military service and several years later, he, too, undertook the voyage across the ocean. From New York he went to Buffalo, and from there on foot to St. Joseph Settlement, a distance of several hundred miles. His mother was the only one who recognized him when he came and found his family. The joy to see him again must have been great !

Conrad was not married. He owned a home and a farm in the vicinity of his parents. He died in 1900. His grave in the cemetery of St. Joseph is marked with a white grave stone.

Anna Katharina, born 1822, married George Schaefer soon after her arrival in St. Joseph. Ten children were born to this family. Anna Katharina died in the same year as her brother Conrad.

On June 5, 1853 the settlers gathered and began plans for the founding of their parish of St. Joseph. The date is significant, it is the feast day of St. Boniface, patron saint of the Fulda/Germany region. Among the 40 or so founders were seven men with the name Joseph; and for this reason they chose St. Joseph as their church's patron. The man from whom the Bergwinklers had bought their farms, Isaac Hoge along with his wife Rachel Hoge donated and deeded 2 acres of land to the Bishop of Wheeling, and so they immediately started to built their log cabin church. During the week it also served as a school building for the children. With this little church a focal point was created for the far-flung settlement. In 1888 the parishioners built a new and larger church which exists to this day.

The first marriage ceremony at St. Joseph took place on June 27, 1855. George Hohmann, who had immigrated as an 18-year-old, married Kunigunda Maria Mueller, born 1827 in Mittelkalbach. This brave young woman survived a dangerous ocean crossing. The sailing ship on which she had started the voyage from Bremen in 1854, got stuck for three months on an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean. The passengers feared that they would die of hunger. Every day they were given one potato to eat per person. Who knows, if other provisions dampened the hunger pains somewhat or if there was enough drinking water! Finally the weather changed, the ice melted and the ship continued its voyage. How Kunigunda got from the harbor of New York into the wilderness of St. Joseph, is not mentioned in the family's archive. It is certain, however, that Kunigunda had relatives in the family of Peter Heurich who had emigrated from Rommerz in 1847 and lived in St. Joseph's Settlement. Maybe through their directions Kunigunda found her way to the settlement.





George and Kunigunda were the parents of nine sons, all born on the farm. After the birth of the third child, the father served in the "7th West Virginia Infantry" in the Civil War. He was wounded and lost the sight in his left eye. His company marched from Washington, D.C. to the battlefield of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. There the soldiers helped bury the countless dead and cleaned up the devastation. George Hohmann was proud of his military service, later he received a small pension. He lived with his family on the farm in St. Joseph Settlement and celebrated his Golden Wedding Anniversary with Kunigunda in 1905. George died in 1926 at the age of 96 years; Kunigunda reached 81 years and went to her eternal peace in 1908. Both were laid to rest in the cemetery of St. Joseph Settlement.

The farms that comprise the Settlement of St. Joseph are situated on both sides of the line between the counties of Marshall and Wetzell, with an extension of about 15 x 5 miles. The church with the cemetery, the former school, the convent, rectory and community center are in Marshall county. The inhabitants of St. Joseph Settlement were all Catholics. In their old homeland, they were "almost neighbors": Peter Klug, from Rueckers; Franz Falkenstein from Niederkalbach; Johannes Hasenauer from Giesel; Georg and Kosmas Schnopp from Doellbach; Andreas Hosenfeld from Grossenlueder; Peter Heurich from Rommerz; George Jestaedt from Malkes, and others. .

These Hessian immigrants created a new homeland for themselves in the hills around St. Joseph, which resemble the countryside of Rhoen and Bergwinkel where they came from. In their new homes they cared for their children, taught them in the parish school and strengthened their faith by their good examples and lives in the community of St. Joseph. The descendants of George and Kunigunda are probably spread all over America, from California on the Pacific to Maryland on the Atlantic. All of them continue to be very proud of their Hessian/German heritage and deeply cherish it. Still other descendants live within sight of the gleaming white St. Joseph Church which "like a house of glory, gazes far over all the land."

**Archive of Isabelle Hohmann Parikh, California/USA**  
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