

JACOB HOMMERDING'S HISTORY

Born: Feb. 21, 1828 in Nusbaum, Germany

Died: March 10, 1878 in New Buffalo, Michigan, USA

My Original Information about Jacob Hommerding

Until three years ago my ancestor and great grandfather, Jacob Hommerding, was a rather shadowy figure who appeared only briefly in family history accounts. I knew that he married Maria Anna (Marian) Butzen in Chicago, Illinois and that this was his second marriage. From my father, I had a copy of a short account of Jacob and Maria Anna Hommerding, which was attached to the will of Maria Anna's son-in-law, August Kemmerich.¹ This account states that Jacob was born on Feb. 20, 1828, in Luxembourg and came to the United States with his family in 1851, settling in Chicago. A half-brother came with him who settled near Wausau, Wisconsin. It related that Jacob's wife died, leaving one son, Anthony, and that in about 1856 he married Maria Anna Butzen who came to the United States on the same sailing ship with the Hommerdings.

The account went on to say that Maria Anna and Jacob lived in Chicago for about ten years, where Jacob's occupation was tailoring. The couple had eleven children, but only five lived past infancy and early youth--four daughters and one son.

In 1866 or 1867 they moved to New Buffalo, Berrien County, Michigan, where Jacob died on March 10, 1878, just fifty years old. After his death, Maria Anna and their four younger children returned to Chicago. Jacob's first child, Anthony, and Jacob and Maria Anna's eldest daughter, Frances, remained in New Buffalo.

My other information about Jacob consisted of one document and some anecdotal material from my father and a cousin. There is a copy of the receipt by Anthony Hommerding of his inheritance from Jacob's estate on Aug. 9, 1880 in the amount of \$20.00.² One anecdote probably came from my aunt, Clara Kemmerich Bartoz: "Jacob was a tailor by trade and during the Civil War he made cloaks for the generals." Margaret Stupfel Fromherz related information from her mother, Mary Kemmerich Stupfel: "Jake Hommerding came to the US to work on Cyrus McCormick's reaper. He sewed the drapes. We had a reaper with similar drapes in St. Paul, Oregon when I was young. In fact, my mother used to have a small sample piece from Jacob, but I don't know what happened to it. We asked mother if Cyrus McCormick paid Jacob's way over from Germany, but she didn't know."³

Later information from other sources

From Dave Hommerding, Michigan:

In November, 1999 I started looking for Hommerdings in Michigan and Illinois, utilizing the Internet America Online "white pages." A Janice Hommerding of Albion, Michigan was my first phone contact. She referred me to her ex-father-in-law, Dave Hommerding, of Jackson, Michigan. A phone call to Dave led to a correspondence and we discovered that we were both descendants of Jacob Hommerding.

Dave's great grandfather was Anthony (Anton) Hommerding, Jacob's first child. Dave added significant facts about Jacob: He came from an area of southwestern Germany that is about ten miles from the border of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and forty miles from France. The area is also near the Mosel River and the German town of Trier, on the Mosel. Dave thought that Jacob might have been from the village of "Kruchten." Dave had done research on the Hommerdings in the 1960's and at that time there were Hommerdings living in the Trier area.

Dave wrote: "Jacob came to the U.S. before 1854 with his wife, Maria (Mary, Marie). Their oldest child, Anton (Antone, Anthon, Antony, Toney) was born in Illinois about that year." Dave's next statement differed from my information about Jacob: "Their other children were: Francisca (born in Indiana), Barbara, Mary, and Mathias (born in Illinois), Nicholas, Peter, and Rose (born in Michigan). At the time of the 1870 census of New Buffalo, MI, Jacob was a farm laborer living with his wife and the first six children." Dave does not mention that Jacob's first wife died, or that the succeeding children's mother was Maria Anna Butzen Hommerding.

Dave gave me the history for his great-grandfather, Anthony, and the succeeding generations. Some of the history was sad to read: Anthony married Charlotte Tuttle, and they had four children, born between 1879 and 1887. Charlotte died sometime later, and in 1890 the Court of Berrien County, Michigan took the four children away from Anthony because he was "an habitual drunkard incapable of caring for his children." Dave thought that Anthony worked in the Chicago stockyard, either when he was living with his parents in Illinois, or sometime between the 1870 and 1880 censuses.

After Anthony's children were removed from his care the eldest son, Daniel, who was Dave Hommerding's grandfather, was placed with Jake Lusby, a farmer in Reed City, Michigan. The second child, William, was placed with a farmer in Leoni, Michigan. Daughter Ellen Bell was adopted by a family named McPhee and the youngest child, Josephine was adopted by James and Adella Dilley.

Life did not improve for Daniel Hommerding. Dave related to me: "My Dad told me that Jake Lusby was a mean drunk who beat Dan. When Dan was eighteen years old he was released from his indenture. Jake Lusby had to give him fifty dollars and a new suit of clothes, and Dan moved to Jackson, Michigan to work for the railroad and be near his brother, Will. Eventually Dan and Will both worked for the railroad and lived at a boardinghouse across from the railroad shops. Dan and Will met their wives there.....The women all worked at the boardinghouse."⁴

From Bill Hommerding, Florida

In April, 2000 I received an e-mail from Bill and Nanette Hommerding,⁵ who had seen the surname “Hommerding” on my Family Tree Maker webpage. They were former residents of Battle Creek, Michigan and some comparing of ancestor information confirmed that Dave Hommerding and Bill Hommerding were both grandsons of Daniel Hommerding and cousins. The Internet was working its magic of bringing distant relatives together.

From Ray Atwell, Indiana

But, the Internet sometimes works very slowly! It was not until June, 2003 that another Hommerding descendant, Ray Atwell,⁶ contacted me by e-mail. Ray had found the biography of my grandparents, August Kemmerich and Barbara Hommerding, which I had posted on my personal website.⁷ He was trying to find a connection between Chicago Hommerdings (spelled with two M’s) and Homerdings who settled in Will County, outside of Chicago in the 1850’s. Ray generously shared an 1880 US Census sheet for Chicago, Illinois which listed Maria Anna Hommerding (“widow”) and her four younger children--AND it also listed Maria Anna’s father, Walter Butzen, living right around the corner with Maria Anna’s younger brother, Joseph and his family! The pieces of the puzzle were falling into place now.

From Charles Thielen, Luxembourg

Ray Atwell had also found the genealogy website of Charles Thielen⁸, a gentleman living in the City of Luxembourg, in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Mr. Thielen had Hommerdings listed in his genealogy and shared his Hommerding charts with Ray, who in turn, sent them on to me. Another cousin found! It turned out that Ray Atwell is a descendant of Mathias Hommerding, an older half-brother of Jacob Hommerding.

Through Charles Thielen’s genealogy charts, Jacob’s history really unfolds. Now we know that Jacob was born NOT in Luxembourg, but in “Nusbaum,” Germany--a little village not far from the Luxembourg border. We also now know that his first wife was Anna Maria Dauven. No wonder there was confusion about the mothers of Jacob’s children--with wives being named “Anna Maria ” and “Maria Anna“!

Mr. Thielen’s charts do not tell us any more about Jacob than his birth date, birthplace and first marriage date, but they DO give us Jacob’s ancestors--all the way back to 1708, and still living in Nusbaum, Germany or in villages nearby. However, Mr. Thielen cautioned that the earliest records may be inaccurate--much was lost due to destruction in World War II.

Charles Thielen also provided some interesting background on the name Hommerding: “The name Hommerding was written phonetically; so you may find Hommerding, Hommerdinger, Homerding, Hummerding, Hammerding and Hommertgen (which is the phonetical pronunciation of the little village Hommerdingen). The name had its origin about 1600 without any doubt from this village, located in [the] German Eifel area, near the border of the actual German-Luxembourg frontier.”

“About 1600 there was only one farm called Hommerdingen, later on there came some other farms to this spot. Later on the Hommerdinger spread around in other nearby villages, like Nusbaum, Ferschweiler, Bollendorf, Kruchten, etc.”

There are still plenty of unverified parts of Jacob’s history. One of those is the date when he emigrated to the U.S. The account of Jacob that was pinned to August Kemmerich’s will says Jacob came to the United States with his family in 1851 and that in about 1856 he [Jacob]

married Maria Anna (Marian) Butzen who together with her parents and other relatives came to the United States on the same sailing boat with the Hommerdings.” If Jacob and his first wife really did come on the same ship with the Butzens, then he sailed from Antwerp, Belgium on the American ship, the “*Oregon*” and arrived in New York City on December 5, 1853. I know this, because through the generosity of a Butzen relative found on the Internet, I have a copy of the *Oregon’s* Ship Roster listing Walter Butzen and his family.⁹

Next unanswered question: Why did Jacob and Anna Maria Hommerding leave Nusbaum, Germany? Were they part of the great wave of German immigrants who left Germany in the 1850’s because of general poverty, famine and lack of jobs? Probably, but I cannot prove this. Perhaps Jacob was one of the lucky ones, who had a job with Cyrus McCormick waiting for him in Chicago. Or, did he find this employment after his arrival?

Charles Thielen sent a history of the Eifel region of Germany,¹⁰ which is where Nusbaum and the other villages mentioned in Hommerding genealogy are located. It is the tale of a land much abused by war, occupation armies, overgrazing, ruinous logging to provide charcoal for ironworks, and terrible famines. A textbook case of how to ruin a once fertile countryside. Another account by Arnold Gossler¹¹ giving the reason why many villages of the Mosel River valley lost huge numbers of their inhabitants in the 1850’s cites many of the same reasons for leaving Germany--plus overpopulation and division of the Mosel vineyards into tiny plots through inheritance--ultimately so small they could not support a family. In the Mosel River valley, villages would pay the passage of emigrants if they would leave for the USA, Brazil and other foreign destinations. There was no promise of jobs at the end of their voyage--just the possibility that things might be better and could hardly be worse than what they were enduring in Germany. I haven’t been able to learn if this same practice of paying people to leave extended to where Jacob Hommerding lived, but the Eifel region starts on the north bank of the Mosel River.

With my minimal reading about Germany and the emigrations to the US, I had assumed that most of the immigrants were lured here because of the opportunities open to everyone who landed on our shores. Now, after reading several of these accounts of the desperate situations occurring in Germany in the mid-Nineteenth Century, I’m more inclined to think that these poor people were pushed out of Germany, more than they were pulled to the promises of life in the New World. And I suspect that Jacob and Anna Maria Hommerding were among those being offered a slim chance at a better life. But is this the truth? I don’t know. I hope continued research by Jacob’s descendants will give us all a more accurate picture of his life and its challenges.

Jacob's Life in the United States

From US Census Sheets

Thanks to Ray Atwell and additional copies of US Census sheets that he has researched and generously shared with me, additional blanks in Jacob Hommerding's life can be filled. Several sources (descendants, US Census sheets) tell me that Jacob's first child, Anthony, was born in Illinois and his birth date is May, 1854. So, I know that Jacob and his first wife must have been in Illinois shortly after their arrival in the US.

I have no firm date for when Jacob married Maria Anna Hommerding, but *their* first child, Frances, was born in July, 1857 in Indiana--not Illinois. They must have been in Indiana for only a short time, because their next surviving child, Barbara, was born in Chicago in 1859. Mary was born in Chicago in 1860. The last child born in Chicago was Mathias, in 1867--and then little Nicholas, (who did not survive childhood) was born in New Buffalo, Michigan in 1868. Their last surviving child, Anna, was also born in Michigan in 1873.

The Census sheets turn up other information that is intriguing. Family history says that Jacob was a tailor, but the 1870 census from New Buffalo, Michigan describes his occupation as "farm laborer." Were there tough times in Chicago that caused a change in locale and occupation for Jacob and his family?¹²

When Jacob died in 1878 it must indeed have been tough times for his widow and younger children. The 1880 Census shows Maria Anna, 47 years old, back in Chicago with her four youngest children--and living so close to her father, Walter Butzen, and her brother, Joseph, that they are listed on the same census sheet! Family history and the census records both say that Jacob's oldest son, Anthony, and his oldest daughter, Frances, stayed in Michigan. Frances married a farmer, Peter Johns, and raised four children on their farm in Lake Township, Berrien County, Michigan.¹³ The 1900 census shows Anthony and his oldest son, Daniel, living together in a rented house in New Buffalo Township, Michigan where Anthony is employed as a "saloon porter" and Daniel is an "R Laborer."¹⁴ Does the "R" stand for railroad? Dave Hommerding's history says that Daniel and his brother Will worked for the railroad in Michigan. That history also says that in 1890 the Court had taken his four children away from Anthony because of habitual drunkenness. Yet there he is, in 1900--living with his oldest son and working in a saloon!

Jacob's own story ends with his death in New Buffalo, Michigan in 1878 but his descendants have flourished. From my own contacts with Hommerding relatives, I know they now live from Florida to Arizona, to Washington, and even to Alaska, with many of Jacob's descendants still residing close to where he first settled in the USA--in the Midwest states of Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana.

----Barbara Halliday, Salem, Oregon, July, 2003

UPDATE - 2004

My knowledge of Jacob Hommerding and his family has been greatly expanded since July, 2003.

Earlier this year Mr. Atwell learned of the existence of a genealogy book detailing the history of yet ANOTHER brother of Jacob Hommerding! This book, "A Brief History and Genealogy of the Hommerding Family 1821 - 1981" was compiled by S. Prior in 1981. The Prior book tells of the arrival of Mathias and Susan (Dockendorf) Hommerding and their 6 children in St. Nicholas, Minnesota in April, 1881. This Mathias Hommerding was an older brother of Jacob. (Trying to keep track of Hommerdings named Mathias can be maddening.)

So, we now know that at least THREE Hommerding brothers emigrated to the United States, but they apparently came independently, since all emigrated at different times.

- ✍ Jacob Hommerding and his first wife (Anna Maria Dauven) came to the US in 1851 and settled in Chicago.
- ✍ Mr. Atwell's ancestors, Mathias and Eva Homerding (older half-brother of Jacob Hommerding) came to Illinois in the 1852-1855 period. Their three sons, Mathias, Peter and Nicholas came with them. They settled mostly in Will County, about 30 miles southwest of Chicago. All were farmers.
- ✍ Jacob's full brother, Mathias Hommerding, and his family came to the US in 1881 when he was about 60 years old. He settled in Minnesota.

Are there MORE siblings of Jacob Hommerding who came to the United States? Perhaps. There is, after all, that note pinned to my grandfather's will, saying that a half-brother came with Jacob and settled near Wausau, Wisconsin. To date, I have no information on such a person.

Even with all the unanswered questions, it has been very rewarding to piece together a better picture of Jacob Hommerding. He has come out of the shadows and become a sharper image.

---Barbara Halliday, Salem, Oregon, September 19, 2006

Sources for my information

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- ¹ August Kemmerich's will with attached letter dated July 13, 1925
- ² Inheritance receipt signed by Anthony Hommerding, August 9, 1880
- ³ Letter from Margaret Fromherz dated Sept. 18, 1991
- ⁴ Letter from Dave Hommerding, Jackson, MI dated April 18, 2000.
- ⁵ E-mail from Bill and Nanette Hommerding, Sebring, FL May 12, 2000.
- ⁶ Ray Atwell, Indiana,
- ⁸ Charles Thielen, b. 1929. Living in Luxembourg-City, capital of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. Website:
<http://thielen.roots.lu/default.php3>
- ⁹ Ship roster of the "Oregon" American, New Castle Line, arriving New York from Antwerp Dec. 5, 1853. Captain: R. Brown
- ¹⁰ Historical Background: the Eifel District. A history and description of the Eifel written by Walter Pippke and published in "Die Eifel" a book of photographs published in 1983 by DuMont Buchverlag, Cologne. It was translated for the Diederich Family History website by Marie Luise Nazar of Virginia Beach in 1985.
- ¹¹ Arnold Gossler, of Liesenich, Germany. Letter written to the Chicago German-language newspaper "Eintracht," on Feb. 9, 2002 and placed on a website "1852 Immigrants from Senheim, Grenderich, Liesenich, Mittelstrimmig and Altstrimmig in the counties of Zell and Mosel in Germany, near Koblenz." Mr. Gossler has researched the 1852 forced emigration from the Hunsrück-Mosel area of Germany to North America.
- ¹² US Census sheets from Ray Atwell:
Jacob Hommerding and family New Buffalo, MI 1870
Maria Anna Hommerding and family Chicago, IL 1880
Jacob's son, Anthony Hommerding & son, New Buffalo, MI 1900
Jacob's daughter, Frances & her husband, Peter Johns, Lake Twp, Berrien Co, MI 1900
- ¹³ US Census sheet from Ray Atwell: Jacob's daughter, Frances & her husband, Peter Johns, Lake Twp, Berrien Co, MI 1900