

THE HOMMERDINGS WHO SETTLED IN MINNESOTA

Mathias Hommerding No. 2



Map showing the southeastern portion of Stearns County.

It was 1881, six more years, before **Mathias No. 2** (1825-1892) and his family settled near the village of St. Nicholas, Luxemburg Township, in Stearns County, Minnesota. This would be about 5 miles south of Cold Spring and 90 miles northwest of Minneapolis. This [interactive Google map](#) can show you the location of St. Nicolas (the "A" on the map) and if you zoom out you'll see that this is almost in the center of the state. If you zoom way in, you'll be able to see individual buildings in this little village!

Unlike the Hommerdings who were early settlers in Will County, Illinois (now a suburb of Chicago); Mathias No. 2 would probably have little trouble recognizing the countryside around St. Nicholas today.

S. Prior, who did the research on this branch of the Hommerdings, said of Mathias No. 2 and his family: *"When they left Germany they had sold everything they had there for \$800 and by the time they reached St. Nicholas they were broke. They had to take out a loan to buy their farm. They settled here in the summer of 1881. According to the abstract, the contract for their farm land was signed by Mathias and Susan Hommerding on Jan. 3, 1882 so they probably rented before purchasing the farm. ...Mathias bought the land (80 acres, W1/2 SE1/4 of Sec. 9, Twp 122, Rge 30) from Mr. Maurin for \$320 to be paid in 3 years at 7%."*

St. Nicholas

The [Google interactive map](#) doesn't show St. Nicholas as an incorporated area. It *does* show the St. Nicholas Cemetery. It would appear that the cemetery is within Luxemburg Township. Per Wikipedia: *Luxemburg Township is in Stearns County. It is named for Luxembourg, whence many of its earliest settlers came. The population was 689 at the 2000 census.*" While the township may be named for Luxembourg, the major ancestry groups reported by its residents today show that 74% of them are German while only 1% say their ancestors were Luxemburgers!

Stearns County

The County Seat, St. Cloud, traces its roots back to 1853. The first large influx of immigrants, most of German Catholic descent, began to arrive in the 1850's and some settled in St. Cloud while others settled in nearby townships. Early arrivals came from eastern states as well as directly from Germany. There were craftsmen who pursued their former occupations, but the majority were farmers. Because wheat and other cash crops thrived in the rich Central Minnesota soil, the county's reputation for good farmland spread quickly, and by the beginning of the 20th century the county's population had grown to 44,464.

[There is no evidence that Mathias No. 2 had a dairy on his farm, but this article from the [Stearns History Museum, St. Cloud, MN](#) is a glimpse into farm life in Stearns County in the late 1800's -- BH.]

Dairies in Stearns County

The first white settlers, predominantly large, conservative, hard working German Catholic families, brought cows in the 1880s to Stearns County, Minnesota, to supply their families with milk and milk products. The temperate climate, gently rolling hills, numerous lakes, streams, and rivers, and abundant trees and grasses of the area made it ideal for family dairy farming.

The Stearns County dairy industry developed in three phases. The earliest, subsistence farmers, while suffering many hardships, embodied a pure form of family farm ownership and independence. Farm labor was that of the family itself, part of the Jeffersonian ideal in which farmers lived in harmony with nature, with a minimum of outside influence or control. One or two family cows provided milk for drinking, cooking, baking, churning butter, and making cheese. Oxen supplied power to till the land and harvest the crops. This phase lasted until the 1890s, longer in some parts of the country.

The second phase evolved from the first as modern technology (farm machinery) made possible increased production and abundant feed.... After 1938 rural electricity lightened their work load. World Wars I and II accelerated mass production and capital-intensive farming.

In the third phase, after World War II... Dairy cattle became more productive through advances in breeding, feeding, housing, and disease control, making economies of scale and dependence on capital necessary to economic survival. The independent structure of family farms changed forever. Farmers began to consider themselves part of agribusiness," the difference between farm families and their urban counterparts grew smaller, and dairy farming as a way of life began to disappear.

Throughout this evolution Stearns County, the top dairy production county in Minnesota and one of the top ten in the United States, has epitomized the dairy industry across the country, yet the family has remained the heart of the dairy industry there.

Views of Stearns County Past and Present



Old Farm near St. Nicholas



Pearl Lake



Powder Ridge Snow Scene

If you would like more information on Mathias Hommerding and his descendants, please contact R. Atwell at: raybarb.wlaf@gmail.com

[Next--Johann, Settling in Wisconsin](#)

Unless otherwise noted, text and photos are the property of Barbara Halliday, © 2009