

Zoch Immigration

as reported by Mrs. Walter Gersch in the Giddings paper in 1967:

Johann Zoch and his wife Anna, nee Schneider, with seven (five sons and two daughters) of their nine children left Neudorf by Burghammer, Sprewitz-Preussen in Germany on September 27, 1869 and landed in Galveston, Texas on October 18, 1869, being on the ocean 21 days. (Two sons, Mathes and either John or Christian came to America two years earlier and wrote letters telling the rest of the family how nice it was and urged them to come also.) From Galveston, Johann and his family went to Houston, Texas by a smaller ship. From Houston they traveled to Serbin, Texas by ox-wagon.

The Zoch family had a firm belief in the separation of church and state and when the state tried to dominate their church and their beliefs, they sold what they had and came to this country to make a new life for themselves and their descendants.

Apparently there was no log kept on ship, so very little is known about the actual voyage. However they faced the same perils that other immigrants faced - seasickness, naturally at the top of the list. The food was monotonous as very little could be taken along. It would either spoil or weigh too much. They sustained themselves on a food they called "hayduschka", which was a type of pancake made from cornmeal that could be fixed several ways.

When Johann Zoch first saw his son's (Mathes) newly acquired farm, it was such a thicket that he exclaimed, "A mother lion couldn't even find her young." However, he and his sons went to work and did all the clearing by hand and axe. Log cabins were hastily built out of post oak logs and with split oak shingles. At the beginning, they had dirt floors, with no window panes in the window openings. A heavy cloth was hung over the hole to keep out adverse weather until panes could be bought.

When Johann and his family moved into their home, gable ends were not closed-in, nor were the cracks filled. One night a Texas norther blew in and when they awoke in the morning there was two inches of snow on their featherbed.

Before Giddings became a town, sugar, flour and other staples were hauled from Brenham by oxcart. Sugar was bought for \$1.00 a barrel. These items were usually bought when crops were taken to the market there.

After homes were built, rails were split for fences. In those days a man's masculinity was measured by how many rails he could split in a day. The champion rail-splitter earned extra respect in the community.

Cattle were caught and tamed. Some were tied down and milked, but often without success. And where did the cattle come from? When people moved from Tennessee to Texas they often acquired a large herd of cattle. Since there were no fences, many were lost and became wild. So, if one were a good "cowboy" he could often round up a nice herd of his own.

Hog butchering was a neighborly affair with everyone pitching in to help. Several different kinds of sausages were made - liverwurst, micewurst (which had cornmeal in it), hogshead and raw sausage. Bacon, ham and bones were soaked in brine and then smoked, using oak bark. If the weather got too warm and flies bad, a little cedar was put in to chase them out.

The pioneer women loved flowers. They grew pansies, zinnias, stocks, snapdragons, roses, petunias and geraniums.

Basic medical supplies in every home were quinine for fever and Alpenkrauter for headache, loss of appetite, fever, backache, and almost every other ailment.

The social life of these early Texans were very limited because of the language barrier. Since most of the Zoch family spoke only Wendish, they were quite isolated from the rest of the community. Most of their customs were brought from the homeland.

Baptisms were a time of great celebration, often lasting three days. Birthdays were celebrated with a song fest. Weddings always lasted two days and often three. The ceremony was held at the first day. Buggies and surreys were decorated with flowers as were the horses' bridles. At first the bride wore a black gown which was later changed to gray and then to white. Those were the days of high-button shoes and long dresses which can be seen on all old wedding pictures. After the ceremony a large reception was held at the home of the bride's parents. In "good" years, wine and home-brewed beer were served to the men. The women were served "kimmel wine" which was a punch made of caraway seeds and sugar. The tables were laden with all the available foods of the day. People stayed up all night to celebrate. The newlyweds, instead of leaving on a honeymoon, were required to serve breakfast to the wedding guests the next morning, which consisted of fried sausage, pickles, bread, butter, cakes, coffee and milk. The wedding cake was made of butter and decorated with candies. It was "stolen" rather than served. This is relative to the custom of tossing the bridal bouquet. The second day, the men played tug-of-war games and also a game called "monkey Barrel". Accordions were played and there was so much merrymaking. The shiveree was an outstanding custom. It was made up mostly of young people not invited to the reception. They usually arrived after dark, banging on any noisemaker available. The bridal couple would meet them and invite them in and they would mingle with the other guests.

Feather-picking parties were the "bridge parties" of yesterday. Besides the good food served, and making someone a new pair of pillows, this gave the women a chance to catch up on gossip.

When someone died, the body was kept in the home until burial. Caskets were built of wood by local people. The bottom of the casket was lined with hay or corn husks. On this was placed a cotton sheet and a pillow edged in lace. The casket was painted black with silver clasps and handles. One year of mourning was required for the family. Attending social functions during this time was frowned upon.

We read about the first pioneers in our history books. Outstanding is the fact that everything was done as a community affair. They had to work together and help each other in order to survive. Can you picture yourself in a strange country, weak from days at sea, with only your wife and children at your

side and a few personal possessions at your feet? It would be unbearable were it not for the other families around you with the same problems.

In 1854, Reverend Johann Kilian formed a colony of Wends and immigrated to America and settled in Serbin, Texas. In this group was Johann Zoch's brother Christian and his wife. It was this church which became the church for Johann Zoch and his family.

Why were there such large families in those days? With all the sickness and no modern medicine, they had to have large families to assure themselves at least some heirs. The Zoch family was one of the fortunate families. The off-springs of Johann and his wife Anna, and his brother Christian and wife Maria today number over three thousand. This total includes the ones who married into the Zoch family. They are scattered all over the United States. If we were to draw a family tree and put in all the branches, twigs and leaves, it would make a "mighty big oak".

Since they first settled in what is now Lee County, a large percentage of Lee County's population belongs to the Zoch family. It can safely be stated that this is one of the largest families in Texas, and most certainly in the Lee County Area. Mathes (oldest son of Johann) had sixteen children of whom eleven reached old age. Michael (second youngest son of Johann), who remarried after his first wife died, had, according to church records, twenty-three, some of whom died very young.

When our forefathers left their beloved homes along the Spree River, little did they realize that their desire to religious freedom would make an impact on our lives today. Looking on the map of Germany today, we find the towns the Zoch's came from are now under Communist rule.

These daring men and courageous women were not wearing uniforms of great soldiers, but the freedom they bequeathed their descendants certainly earned the epitaph: "ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, MARCHING AS TO WAR, WITH THE CROSS OF JESUS GOING ON BEFORE."

The above was taken from a copy of a typed transcription by Elaine J Krause, Secretary-Treasurer for the Zoch's 26th Reunion July 25, 1993, obtained from the Wendish Heritage Museum, Serbin, Texas.