

A SHORT HISTORY
of
THE FAMILY OF JOHN JACOB SPRENG
by
MRS. EMMA D. GAMERTSFELDER
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Transcribed by Judy K. Spreng
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(Judykay7@earthlink.net)

*(Transcriber's note: I preserved most of the author's capitalization and punctuation,
and corrected only some spelling.)*

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HISTORY OF THE JOHN JACOB SPRENG FAMILY

The Pioneers.

A little over a century ago, perhaps one-hundred and seven years ago, a sister of John Jacob Spreng of Schweighausen, Alsace, France, emigrated to America. Her name was Magdalene and after being in America a few weeks she wrote to her name-sake, Magdalene Spreng, daughter of John Jacob Spreng, telling of the wonders of this great new country; of its size, of its beauties, its opportunities; that there was plenty of room for everybody and that even women could make their own way here. This Great Aunt of ours had by some good fortune found a man to suit her taste, married him and together they found the way to Buffalo, New York. It was from this place that she wrote to her niece Magdalene, who was then a young woman seventeen or eighteen years old. These letters together with an adventurous spirit, caused this young woman, Magdalene Spreng, to begin to dream dreams and build castles in the air about this wonderful America. One day when she and her sister Catherine were digging in a ditch like a man, digging what they called a rehb, a plant which grew with many roots deep in the ground and which had to be dug with a mattock (the roots were used to make some kind of dye), Magdalene stopped to rest for a minute, she turned to her sister Catherine and said: "I am not going to dig in ditches much longer. I am going to America where there is plenty of work to be had and room enough to do it in. Aunt Magdelene says it is such a big country and work is plenty, so one of these days when I hear of some people who are going to America I am going along. I have not told Father and Mother yet but in my own good time I'll tell them."

It so happened that in 1826 certain families of a neighboring "Dorf" (village) had made up their minds to come to America to better their financial condition by having enough room to raise crops with less labor, and to this group Magdalene attached herself and came to America with them.

It was not an easy task to persuade her Father and Mother and the rest of the family that this was a wise venture for a young woman to make or that it was even a sensible thing to do. Daughters were supposed to be meek and submissive, retiring and timid; but this daughter had a mind of her own, and after all efforts to dissuade her from her plan had failed, the parents reluctantly gave their consent to her going. Much advise had been given, along with caution, to this adventuress, but finally she went away leaving behind her anxious parents and friends. She was not in America very long before she found work to her satisfaction and she wrote home to her parents of her good fortune and could not say enough about this wonderful country. She said: "Es ist gut, es ist gut, es ist gut," (it is good, it is good, it is good) and urged her parents to come and share with her the bounties of this wonderful land.

As is perfectly natural for young people to do, she soon met a young German, who had also come to this country, Lewis Gelser; and after a few weeks of friendship which ripened into courtship, they decided to share life's cares and pleasures. After the marriage, they decided to go West and grow up with the country, and so they trekked West, and West, and West, until they landed in what was to them the most beautiful spot on earth. It was beautiful, there was no doubt of that, with its green clad hills and its narrow valleys, but Oh, what hard farming land it was! Perhaps their selection was not altogether because of its beauty. The pocketbook of these young people was not a very fat one and so there may have been more than one reason for their choice.

The Coming of John Jacob Spreng and Family

Five years later, just one-hundred years ago, John Jacob Spreng and Anna Catherine Knosp Spreng, only child of her family, with four of their six children (one, Magdalene, was already in America, and Catherine, who was married to Jacob Ecki, remained in Schweighausen to care for Grandmother Knosp) came to America.

It was not an easy task to tear away from the ancestral home to go to a country of which they in some ways knew so little and about which they had many distorted ideas, but they made the break. Going to America was not the simple process of deciding which line one would take and what boat one would entrust with one's life; neither was it so simple as packing a steamer trunk and a bag as we do now. Those who wanted to take such a journey as that had to provide their own bedding and their own food. They baked biscuits to be used as bread for their entire journey, these biscuits had to be baked very hard and dry because any moisture remaining in them would cause them to mold. One of the families who came over with the Sprengs was a little careless in the baking and the result was that the biscuits molded so that they were entirely unfit to eat, even the dogs on shipboard refused them.

They packed all their belongings in chests, big chests so big that they even brought a few chairs over with them, all their hoes, sickles, etc. were packed in these chests. Of course their bedding included numerous feather beds because they could not sleep without them. In Summer they kept them cool and in Winter they kept them warm. Each man had at least fifty white linen shirts. The reason for each man having so many was that the women only washed three or four times a year. Their water supply was very limited, there was only one well in the village from which all drew their water. The washing was done at the brook; a number of families going together and making it a regular washday. Perhaps gossip was the order of the day as it would be anywhere if that number of women were together for

one specific purpose. Perhaps the saying “gossip like a washwoman” came from just such occasions as this.

The men had numerous shirts and the women equaled them in the number of petticoats, and then there were the huge piles of linen sheets and pillow cases almost without number, so there was much space required and besides some of them were fearful that perhaps in the new country to which they were going things would not be as well made, not so stout as that to which they were accustomed and so they laid in a big supply of the kind of thing they were anxious about.

Finally the fatal day came, the neighbors hitched their horses together and drove them to the seaport. It was hard to say goodbye to Grandmother Knosp, whose only child Anna Catherine Spreng was, and to leave the daughter Catherine, with her husband behind. Catherine Spreng Ecki and her husband were solemnly commissioned to take good care of Grandmother Knosp, the other children, Jacob, Christian, Barbara, and George Frederick came with them.

The vessel on which they embarked was not much like the ocean palaces of our day; they sailed on a really truly sail boat and it took fifty-six days to make the journey across the Atlantic. Their ship even had none of the modern paraphernalia, it was very primitive; it did not even have a railing around the deck. The chests of the passengers were used to make a protection for the people so they would not fall off. My Father used to tell me that his Father, John Jacob, became so frightened one night when a great storm was raging, he feared that all the chests would be washed overboard and then what would he do with his family when he reached the new country? He became so agitated and frightened that he suffered from a nervous malady for the rest of his life.

They had to do their own cooking on shipboard; they had no refrigerators to keep their food from spoiling so they had hard tack, potatoes, and cured meat, mostly fat bacon, and some sauer-kraut. Most of the families were seasick nearly all the way over, so the cooking was not such a confusing thing. The son Jacob was a very good sailor; had learned the baker’s trade and so was supposed to know something about cooking and was the cook for them all.

Their drinking water became stale, the captain heard their complaints and ordered that the droppings of the chickens be placed in the water to make it fresh again. To those of us who have not a very extensive knowledge of the science of chemistry it does not seem that such a process would bring about anything very desirable, but the passengers declared it did the business and they should have known because they had to use the water.

The captain of the ship was ill most of the time and his personal servant was entrusted with the guidance of the ship. This servant of his was a colored man and was the first the Spreng boys had ever seen. One day the boys were playing some of

their German games on the deck when they suddenly espied something which looked very strange to them; it looked like a water spout. The Captain was informed of this and immediately came on deck with his German blunder-buss, he sited at it, shot at it, and it immediately disappeared. He very kindly thanked the boys for telling him and also said that if it had caught the ship they would have been torn to pieces.

During severe storms, of which they had a number, they made very little if any headway, they were often taken out of their course so that at the end of the day they were glad if they could say that they had not lost any ground or rather sea that day.

The Landing in America

On the fifty-sixth day of their journey they landed in New York and were transferred to some other conveyance, whether it was a canal boat or a Hudson River boat I do not know; however, they did not remain in New York any time at all but went on to Albany and from Albany they took the canal to Buffalo where they visited a few days with the sister, Magdalene, who was the pioneer of all the Sprengs. I have a picture of this Great Aunt of ours, but do not know her married name, only the fact that she lived at Buffalo, N.Y.

From Buffalo they sailed across Lake Erie and encountered the worst storm of the entire trip; it seemed that they would be torn to pieces before they could again reach land, but finally they landed at the little fishing village which is now the city of Cleveland. Grandfather Spreng could have bought what is now the very heart of the city with the money he carried in a leather belt made especially for the purpose of carrying money. This belt never left his person on the entire trip.

After landing and finding what could be bought with the sum of money at his command Grandfather examined the soil of Cleveland very carefully and finding that it was sandy, he decided that he wanted none of it because he had been born and raised in a country that was all red sand and had often been taunted when people at a distance knew where he came from that he was a "Sand-hase" a sand rabbit, and so he wanted nothing to do with a sandy soil not realizing that a sandy soil in America was the very best soil to be had. I have often wondered how much better off the whole tribe of us might be if Grandfather had bought what afterward proved to be so valuable a piece of ground and had had a chance to get rich in the course of time. I am satisfied that being Sprengs, we are better off as we are with our modest gains than if we were rich.

From Cleveland they continued their journey by canal boat. And on a certain Saturday morning early, landed at Massillon, Ohio. The next morning Grandfather

and Christian started out to walk to Loudonville, Ohio, where Mr. And Mrs. Lewis Gelser had made their home. They walked from Massillon to Wooster, a distance of many miles before breakfast. Most of us today would think that too great a distance to walk in a whole day. At Wooster, Christian, who was a boy of sixteen, became too hungry to go any farther and frankly told Grandfather that he wanted something to eat. They finally stopped at a tavern that did not look too prosperous and asked for breakfast. The landlord was very friendly and asked where they were going, etc., and at the same time busied himself setting before them a real country breakfast, all of which looked very good to the boy Christian, who proceeded to eat heartily as any hungry boy would, but Grandfather got scared when he saw the abundance of food and, thinking he would have to pay for only what he ate, ate very sparingly and when opportunity afforded he whispered to the boy "Christian da habe ich nich genuch gelt zu bezallen." (Christian I'll not have enough to pay for all this.) Whether he thought to curb the boy's appetite by this statement or whether he was just plain scared about it I am not able to judge, needless to say, Christian did not let it keep him from eating all he wanted and then when Grandfather asked for his bill the landlord said, "Twenty-five cents for the two," Grandfather felt sorry for himself because he had not eaten enough to strengthen him for the rest of the journey.

I do not know why Grandfather should say he had no money to pay with because he had carried over eight hundred dollars in gold in a belt around his waist all the way across the ocean. Perhaps he was afraid to let anyone know he had money on his person or perhaps he had grown tired of carrying so much money and had given the belt into Grandmother's keeping; at least he feared he had not enough cash available with which to pay for so bountiful a breakfast.

After breakfast they started on their way Westward to find Loudonville. About noon they came to the home of a man by the name of Rotter, who owned the farm which afterwards became the home of Jacob Ecki, who married Anna Catherine Spreng; and here they were joyously greeted as old friends, for these people had come from Schweighausen some years earlier. They were invited to dine with these friends but things were not as inviting as might be, cleanliness being next to Godliness had not been taught them and so it was rather hard to eat so heartily although they made a desperate effort because they needed nourishment for the six or seven mile journey yet ahead of them.

Near sun-down they reached the home of the daughter and sister who had come to America five years before. To say that they were gladly received is stating it mildly. Their home was primitive but pleasant and the spirit of loyalty to country had already possessed the Gelsers so that they were full of praise and had nothing but good to say for America. Grandfather Spreng could hardly understand why this daughter of his had settled in such a rough part of the country when there was so much land that was available which was more level.

Buying a Home

After a day or two of rest, Grandfather started out to find a place which could be made into a home for himself and family, and after looking at a number of places he was most attracted to the farm in Clinton township, Wayne County, Ohio, a farm of one hundred and sixty acres all in one piece, with only about twelve acres cleared, all the rest was woods. There was an old one room log house, the roof of which leaked so badly that when it rained they had move their beds from one place to the other and when that did not keep them dry they took their old sixteen rib blue cotton umbrellas to hold over them to keep dry. There were no conveniences of any kind at all except that they had a wonderful well of clear fresh water all to themselves. The barn was only a shed, they were given a horse, two oxen and a cow and a few sheep with the farm and thus they started life in a new country. In the old country the house they lived in was built of stone and is yet in use, so it must have been a good house but they were undaunted. Grandfather used to stand in front of his log house and say to his boys: "Bueba, so weit wie ich sehen kan ist alles mein." (Boys as far as I can see everything is mine.) Of course he could not see very far because the woods was dense, but he knew that he would not have to travel from one little half or quarter acre to the other as in the old country and that had a tremendous appeal for him. And besides the ground was very fertile so that if they only scratched it a little on top and put seed in it, it would grow, a very different soil from the red sand of the old country.

They were a thrifty people these ancestors of ours and were not afraid of hard work, they knew how to make a little money go a long way. Their mode of travel was slow and tedious, oxen not being built for speed, so that many times they preferred to walk long distances to riding in the springless ox-cart. The women as well as the men had learned to carry heavy loads on their heads which helped them to have an erect carriage, there was no stoop in their shoulders in spite of the heavy work they did. Some of the women used to take a basket of twelve dozen eggs swing it to their heads and walk the twelve miles to Wooster, trade the eggs for groceries, swing the basket to their heads again and then walk back the twelve miles all in one day.

Lack of Religious Training

In the village from which they came they had certain advantages which they missed very keenly in this new country. They had a very wise pastor, and his wife was a very refined woman who helped to train the young people in religious work.

Also their school teacher and his wife were cultured people and had helped to give the young Sprengs rich ideals of life. When they came to this country they missed these refinements for the preachers here were not of that fine high type they were used to, and it worried Grandmother Spreng not a little to have her children grow into negligence in religion, and she did what she could to keep them in the straight and narrow way.

On Sunday mornings the boys were each required to read a chapter from the Bible before they could go anywhere with their companions in the neighborhood. There was religious service in the little log Church only every two or three weeks so that the Sundays between were always rather a trial to Grandmother, she did not always know where her boys were nor what they were doing. Perhaps it was a good thing she did not know. On one particular Sunday morning the boys Jacob and Christian after having done their daily chores, came into the house and dressed in their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes and then dutifully sat down and then read a chapter in the Bible, then started to go to one of the neighbors some distance away and George Frederick or Fritz, as he was familiarly called, saw them starting and ran after them calling to them to wait for him to catch up. He had not reckoned with his Mother, had not dressed as he should be for Sunday and had not read his chapter. Fritz could be very fleet in his movements when the occasion required and since taking a bath was a matter of short order, so he started to run after the other boys but his Mother called him back to read his chapter. He took the Book from the shelf and opened it and thinking that luck was with him because right before his eyes was that shortest of all chapters, he read it, put the Book back and started to run; again his Mother called him back saying he had not read his chapter, but he insisted he had, finally she told him he would have to show her what he had read, knowing his Mother as he did, he knew there was no respite for him but to find what he had read, if only he had looked to see where that chapter was, but since he had not done so it was up to him to find it again and it took him half an hour to find what he had read. It was quite an ordeal not only for Fritz but for the other boys to have to wait like that.

One day the boys heard that a Methodist preacher was to preach in the Tryon School House some three miles away and of course they wanted to go with the other boys of the neighborhood, but Grandmother somehow did not want them to go, but finally she was persuaded to let them go this once but she impressed it upon them very emphatically that they must be able to repeat the text when they came home or they could not go again. The boys were a little late in starting and the path through the woods was a rough one so they were late in getting there. They could hear the preacher a long way off and Christian was very much concerned lest they be unable to find out what the text was. He knew his Mother was a woman of her word and that the text would have to be forthcoming or they would not dare to ask to go again. However, they were not in the house very long when the preacher gave his text again which was Job's statement, which has been an inspiration and a comfort to countless thousands, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and the preacher

was so in earnest that the boys had no trouble in remembering the text and when Christian was about to cross over into the better land at the age of ninety-two, repeating this text was the last word he said.

The Churches of that day in America were not stately edifices but just little log buildings such as the people lived in themselves but as soon as they could build better for themselves they also built better Churches of logs. When their first new log Church was ready for dedication, one of the Spreng boys, who happened to be my Father, was sent to the distillery with a bushel of corn and a bushel of rye to have whiskey made out of it for the dedication. This seeming to be the way to celebrate so sacred a thing as dedicating a Church to the worship of God. There were many things which were considered right and proper by those who were the natural leaders of the people; the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which grieved Grandfather and Grandmother Spreng deeply. When one of the grandchildren was to be christened the ceremony took place at Grandfather Spreng's home. A great feast was prepared, among the viands there was one thing which was considered very appropriate to be served at a Christening and that was a dish of cooked horseradish. When the dinner was all ready and the guests were asked to surround the table, the pastor, who had been ministrant at the Christening, sat down and without any ceremony whatever began to eat with great gusto. Grandfather Spreng was astonished at this lack of reverence and said: "Herr Pastor, wir haben ja nicht gedankt." (Reverend Pastor, we have not given thanks.) The pastor replied "Nun wir lassen es uns guht schmecken das ist auch gedankt," (We will allow ourselves to enjoy the meal. That is being thankful, too).

The religious life of the Sprengs was being sadly neglected and had not the Evangelical preachers come into the neighborhood, who preached the Gospel of repentance and faith; and who by example as well as by precept preached total abstinence from strong drink and who urged active participation in the study of the Bible and in a changed attitude of life; the story of these ancestors of ours might be a very different one.

Schools

The schools were also very primitive; both buildings and teachers, as well as their methods of instruction. The teachers evidently thought that methods of punishment were of more importance than methods of instruction. My Father used to tell about one teacher who either had a special grudge against Fritz or a special liking for him, because he was always devising new ways of punishment for him. One of the punishments was to borrow all the knives of the school boys and fasten them on his hair and then for the very last he would ask Christian, who owned a great big rough handled German knife, for "the great big messer," which he always

fastened directly over Fritz's nose and then made him shake his head with a vengeance. Again he dressed him up in shawls and bonnets which belonged to the girls and made him sit between two girls; the teacher never dreaming that this particular form of punishment was a special delight to the mischievous boy. But in spite of all the nonsense and the crudity they did manage to imbibe a little useful knowledge. They learned to read, write and spell—the latter art was more than some of their descendants learned. I had a letter from one who used a typewriter a few years ago and just before he closed the letter, he discovered mistakes in his spelling and added this note: "This typewrite will not spell right nohow."

Difficulties in Farming, etc.

To farm was not an easy task for they had to fell trees and grub stumps before the ground was fit to cultivate. My Father used to tell of the wonderful log rollings they had when all the neighbors came together and rolled one day for this one and the next for another and in the evenings they had glorious bonfires. There was no discrimination made about the kind of wood a tree was; to them curly maple and beautiful grained walnut and cherry and oak were all the same; they were trees that must be cut and rolled out of the way and burned to make room for wheat and corn and rye, etc.

The women were just as busy as the men, besides keeping the men fed they also had to provide their clothing, such a thing as buying a suit of clothes at the store was unheard of. The wool from the sheep's back was picked over and sent to the fuller to be carded, then the women spun it into threads even and fine; they dyed it with what to us seems very amusing; they could not buy dyes such as we can, so they used roots and barks and other things best not mentioned. The weavers were kept busy weaving cloth and then there was the task of transforming the cloth into suits and overcoats. Such a thing as buying a pattern for any garment was impossible and so when somebody had achieved a good looking suit, the pattern evolved, was in demand; it was handed from one to the other. The women who had a little more skill than others would change their pattern to suit the wearer, others simply cut according to pattern regardless of shape or fit and the results may be imagined. There were some then as now who never could tell which way a sleeve should be sewed in and always had to go to their neighbors to have help. There were no sewing machines; everything had to be sewed by hand and when one thinks of making coats and overcoats out of heavy cloth all by hand it seems all but impossible to us of the modern day. These women ancestors of ours also spun and dyed the yarn for the wonderful coverlets we prize so highly these days. They also knit all the socks and stockings for the family. Hemp and flax were raised so the women could spin the fine linen threads necessary for the weaving of linen for towels, chaff beds and the table cloths as well as more linen for shirts for the men. It was a strange thing that the men were so slow to realize that it meant a great

deal more work for the women than they already had, to keep them in white linen shirts; it was a hard concession for the men to consent to wear colored shirts in which to do their grubbing, but finally they were persuaded to wear white shirts only for “dressup”.

The women wore quilted petticoats and quilted bonnets in winter, and in the summer they wore dresses made from calico for which they paid six cents per yard. They wore wide voluminous skirts and tight fitting waists, their head-dress was either a flat sun-bonnet or a shaker with a frill across the back and ties under the chin, and if there ever was invented a more uncomfortable torturous head-gear I have never heard of it. These shakers were made of straw, and fitted closely to the head and one’s hair always managed to get caught and then there was a grand pull to get the shaker off and it was necessary to make much adjustment as to hair, in order to be presentable. The women never thought of going to any public gathering without wearing a black shawl regardless of the heat, and as soon as a woman was married she had to wear a cap whenever she appeared in public. To be seen without it was a disgrace.

Men and women alike got one pair of shoes a year and they were made of cowhide. They were made by the neighborhood shoemaker who often came to the house and made complete outfits for the whole family in the fall of the year. They were worn new in the winter so by the time summer came they were not so heavy. They did not have shoe blacking so they used soot from the chimney. Everybody did it, and so it was all right.

There were not many fruit trees on the farm in those early days and so every little apple was made use of. If they had enough apples to make some cider, they considered themselves fortunate. The cider was boiled down and because there were no apples to fill with, they used pumpkins for the filling thus making apple-pumpkin butter, which was not very good but better than nothing.

Canning fruit and vegetables had not yet been discovered and so they dried everything in sight. Strings of onions and peppers decorated their one-room house ceilings. The fall evenings were devoted to the “schnitzing” of apples for drying. As soon as cherries, pears and peaches could be made to grow, they added these to their list of dried fruits. Some of their neighborhood good times were “schnitzings” and “corn huskings” and perhaps they had as good a time as we do in what we think is much more refined.

A Glimpse at the Personnel

The things I have spoken of concerned the family and neighborhood. Let us look at the individuals—these men and women whose blood we carry in our veins.

I was born too late to have had the privilege of seeing Grandfather and Grandmother Spreng. What I know of them is what has been told me by those who did see them and know them. They were not tall of stature and my Father always told me that his own hair was like that of his Mother and that was a light brown, silky and curly, and their skin was very fair. They were quiet, reserved, courageous and of strong convictions of right and wrong according to which they ordered their lives. Not having seen them I feel rather diffident in trying to describe them. They were not really old when they died. They had been to visit some friends who were ill, took cold on the trip which developed into what we now call pneumonia and in a few days, on March 23rd, 1856, Grandmother died and in just one week later, on March 30th, 1856, Grandfather too went to be with God. When they carried Grandmother out to lay her to rest, Grandfather said, "Goodbye, I am coming soon." How beautiful that both could go so near together. They were laid to rest in the old "Hope" cemetery which was then a well kept place but in later years the place was abandoned and in 1930 their bodies were removed to the Fairview cemetery where they lie side by side with their old time neighbors and friends, John and Catherine Grimm.

Usually nephews and nieces designate the particular Aunt of whom they wish to speak by using the given name and so among the Sprengs it would have been Aunt Magdalene, Aunt Catherine and Aunt Barbara, but for some unknown reason all the nephews and nieces mentioned these Aunts of ours as Aunt Kelser, Aunt Ecki and Aunt Horn; using the names of their husband instead of their own. Perhaps this was intended to be a special tribute to the men whom they married. This custom was in vogue before I came upon the scene, hence I am not to blame for this rather strange procedure. However, I take the privilege of saying that to me the given names of these Aunts of ours were very beautiful and that somehow we missed something of beauty by discarding them.

As is natural we will begin with the eldest of these pioneers, Magdalene Kelser, (the name Gelser was changed to Kelser) the one who had the courage to go to a new country without any member of her family accompanying her when she was only nineteen years old. Consent for this undertaking was not easily gained from her parents, but they knew that she was naturally self-reliant, loved adventure and could be depended upon to take care of herself. Thirteen children were born to this family, three of whom died in infancy the other ten grew to manhood and womanhood, seven boys and three girls. When the youngest son was four years old, the husband, Father, died leaving Magdalene alone to raise and train her boys and girls, to finish paying for her farm and to put up new buildings, which task she succeeded in most admirably. Later she sold the farm and bought the old Spreng homestead where she lived until her death.

Aunt Kelser was a remarkable woman in many ways, a woman of courage, vision, foresight and determination, fearless of criticism and progressive in her thinking. I well remember how she used to come to our home in the evening after

supper to talk, perhaps she had read some article in the "Christliche Botschafter" which had stirred her and about which she had to express her own personal opinion before she could be satisfied. She was interested in the affairs of state as well as of the local community. I can see her yet with her little white cap covering her beautiful white curly hair which persisted in slipping out about her face to make her more beautiful as she went about her work. I am sure her children all had reason to bless her because of what she meant to them.

Her seven sons, Lewis, John, Christian, Frederick, Philip, Jack and Henry, all were great big stalwart handsome fellows, the kind a Mother could be proud of. Three of them, Frederick, Christian and Philip were in the Civil War, and Christian was wounded and carried a bullet in his side to the day of his death. John died in early manhood. Six of them were farmers and one, Philip became a minister of the Gospel in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Her daughters were Lena, Catherine and Sarah. Lena, the oldest, was never very strong but she had traits, which some of us who knew her well have not forgotten. She never married and I can see now how I must have been to her a little pest because I used to ask her some very embarrassing questions on the subject of marriage. Catherine and Sarah married and raised families of their own. Of this family of thirteen only one is yet with us, Henry, the youngest of them all.

Anna Catherine was the next oldest of the Spreng family, she was the one who did not come to America when the rest of the family did but remained in Schweighausen to take care of Grandmother Knosp the mother of Grandmother Spreng, she married Jacob Ecki and lived in the old home after her parents came to this country. Aunt Ecki was of a very beautiful disposition, calm quiet under stress, kindly helpful, understanding, an altogether lovable woman. I remember her not so much by what she said but by her kindly ministrations to the cousins of my own age and to myself. Someone said of her "Sie ist eine von den sanften und stillen im lande." (One of the meek quiet one of earth), just the kind of person to be given the care of a little old Grandmother.

About two years after John Jacob Spreng, his wife and four of his children came to America, the oldest son, Jacob, was sent back to the old country to bring Grandmother Knosp and the Ecki family to America. Jacob was a good sailor and did not mind making the trip, in fact he rather enjoyed the distinction which the trip gave him and he made the most of his opportunity to laud and magnify the superior benefits of living in America. Jacob was also somewhat of a wag and could make things seem to be "what they ain't." For instance, knowing how almost severe economy was practiced in the old country he took keen delight in shocking their sense of economy by telling them that here in America everything was so plenty that there was no need of caring so much about being "saving"; that here they fed the ribs to the dogs, which saying was true but not in the way he intended them to understand it.

It was not always possible to make calculations in those days as to just how long a journey would take. The Ecki's thought they were giving themselves ample time to make the journey to Grandfather's house in America before a certain event would transpire, but then as now "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a-glee," and so when they had crossed the ocean and were on their way from Albany to Buffalo on the canal, it became necessary to stop traveling for a few days because a son was born to Catherine and Jacob Ecki. The Captain of the canal boat was very obliging and gladly stopped and tied up the boat until Aunt Ecki was able to travel again. There was not much need of hurry in those days.

To this family were born ten children, seven boys and three girls, Jacob, Catherine, Sarah, Christian, Mary, George, John, William and Simon. One son, Christian, was in the Civil War and died of yellow fever. Uncle and Aunt Ecki made a desperate effort to have the body of Christian brought home for burial by sending Philip Kelser (who had not yet gone to war) to go South, but he was unable to get through the lines and so the plan had to be abandoned, and so he lies in an unknown grave at Vicksburg. Two of the boys followed railroading, two were farmers and the youngest, Simon, was a physician. The daughters, Catherine and Sarah, married and had families of their own. Mary remained single and was Aunt Mary to nieces, nephews, and cousins alike.

Barbara Spreng was the youngest of the Spreng daughters. Soon after the family had become settled in their little log house, she went to Wooster to work and there found, or perhaps was found by Philip Horn to be the very finest of women, and soon they were married and began their home making in the city of Wooster which at that time was very much smaller than now.

Nine of their children grew to manhood and womanhood, Philip, John, Henry, Catherine, Mathilda, Emma, Edward, Julius, and William, and to these children Aunt Horn was the loveliest of mothers. She had a wonderful smile with which to win obedience, and was always ready to join in with any fun in the group of which she was a part. Her eyes would twinkle with mischief and her ready sympathy made her a most lovable companion. One of the things I remember her for was making the Saturday evening meal a family occasion when all the children and grandchildren sat about the family table and partook of the excellent coffeecake which she had baked in the morning in the great outside oven which baked things as no modern stove can back them, at least things tasted better than they do now. Only two of this group remain, Philip, the oldest and William the youngest.

The two eldest of her boys had a part in the Civil War, Philip and John, and after the war they engaged in business in Wooster. The other boys did not stay in their home city. Of the girls only one, Emma, married, Catherine and Mathilda remained single, Mathilda cared for her Father and Mother in their old age and was a most self-sacrificing person, giving up her own plans to make life pleasant for others.

Now as to the Spreng boys, Jacob, Christian, and George Frederick, I almost feel that I knew these better than the Spreng girls. At least I knew one of them very much better because he was my Father and I spent a good many years living with him. To have any one of his brothers come into our home meant a good time but to have both brothers come at one and the same time meant a wonderfully good time.

Jacob, or Uncle Jake, as we familiarly called him, was a most genial soul. He was the eldest of the three and also the strongest. He married Margaret Faber and to their home came thirteen children, two pairs of twins and all but one little girl twin grew to be men and women. Their home was a great place to go not because it was so grandly furnished but because there was always such a grand welcome accorded us. There were so many of them it never seemed as though one or two more made any difference. There was always fun of some kind for everybody. Uncle Jake and Aunt Margaret and their children had the happy faculty of making one feel welcome. One never felt as though it were an inopportune time to be there. Uncle Jake was a boy among boys, he could and did wrestle with the best of them. Theirs was a home of good will.

Uncle Jake delighted in using an ax—rail splitting was his delight. One day when he and his brothers were at home yet, Christ and Fred and Jake were sent to the woods to cut some trees. For some reason Christ and Fred got there first; chose their tree and began cutting. When they were about half through the trunk, Uncle Jake arrived on the scene and as he looked at the progress the other two had already made he told them that he would take a tree of the same size as theirs and that even though they were already half through theirs he would beat them and his tree would fall before theirs would and so the race began with the odds against Uncle Jake, yet his tree did fall first. Strange to say that, although he liked to use an ax, yet his wood house was always empty and Aunt Margaret would have to call him when she wanted to get dinner, to come and get her some wood. I heard him say that he knew he had used more than a hundred rails from the fences near the house in order to have wood enough to get the family meal.

The children were Philip, Barbara, Catherine, John, George and Jacob (twins), Isaac, Otto, Enos, Mary Anna and Lydia Anna (twins), Martha, and Edward.

A number of years ago I met a woman who had visited in this home when she was a young girl and had been specially attracted and impressed by the family worship which was never allowed to be interfered with by any circumstance whatever, she said: "Oh, do you remember those wonderful family worships at Uncle Jakes? How beautifully they sang morning and evening." They all seemed to have beautiful voices but two of them were superb, Isaac and Enos, with their clear tenor voices could take one to the very gates of Heaven.

And what of the smallest of the group of three, the one who was called “der weise grustle kopf,” Christian? Of course since he was my Father and since he gave me a beautiful Mother when he chose Julia Grimm to be his wife, to me he is the best of all. He was small of stature but not small in character. Because he was small he had to do many of the little jobs (odd) that others did not like. One of these tasks which was assigned to him when yet in the old country was to herd the geese and since there were no fences and the geese in France were no more intelligent than they are in America, they wandered hither and thither to find the greenest of grass regardless of who the owner was, and so it was Christ’s business to keep them in the straight and sometimes rather narrow way, not an easy task. One of the neighbors used to tease him by telling him “Chrischang, schlag em eins an den kopf dass sie nit lahm wehre,” “Christian, hit them one on the head so they won’t get lame,” is the English of it but it never can convey the same content as the “alsesser ditch” does.

Christian had very strong convictions as to what was right and what was wrong and nothing could induce him to do what he thought was wrong no matter how much suffering it would mean to do the right, he was a man of courage and strength.

Three children came to his home and to each of us he was the very best of Fathers. There were only a few of us and sometimes we felt almost defrauded because all the cousins had so many to live with and we so few. We could not have nearly so much fun as they could. The oldest of the family, Samuel Peter, cared more for reading and speech-making than for play, and so John Ezra and I would sometimes hire him to play ball with us by agreeing to sit still on the chopping block and at least pretend to listen while he made a speech, then when we thought it time we would say “it is time to play ball.” We lived near the Church and our home was open to all the Uncles, Aunts and Cousins and many were the happy times we had together. I think the highest tribute I can pay to Father is to say that he was a courteous Christian gentleman.

The oldest son, Samuel Peter, became a preacher and today holds the honorable position of Bishop Emeritus of the Evangelical Church. John Ezra has been connected with a business firm but is no longer able to do any work. As to the daughter, she did what she always declared she would never do and that was marry a preacher or a man with red hair and then did both. Her husband was a preacher and had red hair and she never had any reason to regret her action.

George Frederick, always Fritz to all the family, was the youngest and the tallest. I do not know whether to say he had the best educational advantages of them all because he did not have the training under competent teachers in the old country, for he was only eight years old when he left; but he did have a better chance at an English education than the rest of them. He was, as a lad, full of mischief and fun. At an early age he was converted and had a very deep conviction

that he must preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He fought this conviction with all his might feeling that he was not worthy and had not the proper preparation. He was one who talked in his sleep and often his family heard him weep and plead with God in his sleep to be released from this conviction, finally he yielded to what to him was the inevitable and became a preacher. He held many important positions in the Church and was a man of great influence.

He was a capital story-teller, could make things so vividly alive that those who listened were simply spellbound. Well do I remember seeing and hearing him in our living room at home when he and Uncle Jake were present, supper was over, the "seibecke" (colander) was full of rambo apples and all three of them had their pipes lit, and the air was blue with smoke; then Uncle Fred would begin to tell a tale that Uncle Jake and my Father had heard many times before but because Uncle was so clever in the telling they would sit on the edge of their chairs like we youngsters did and listen and chuckle as though they had never heard it before.

He married Christina Bentz and to them were born thirteen children, eleven of whom grew to be men and women. The youngest, George, became a preacher and Theodore, a Physician. I think I can name them in their order: Maria, Anna Catherine, John, Theodore, Simeon, Martha, Lydia, Seth, Julia, Benjamin and George.

Among the descendants of John Jacob Spreng and his wife, Anna Knosp Spreng, there are preachers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, jewelers, opticians, salesmen, insurance men and farmers. Some have gained distinction along their particular lines of work but for the most part we are just plain, honest, God-fearing citizens of the United States, interested in raising boys and girls into manhood and womanhood with clean healthy minds and bodies, having wholesome and high ideals of life; teaching them to be good Christian citizens of our country.

For the most part we belong to the common people, the kind Abraham Lincoln said he thought God loved most because he made so many of them.

These ancestors whose blood we carry in our veins are worthy of our remembrance and because of their integrity, their steadfastness, their loyalty to truth and right, their heroic efforts to make the world a better place for us to live in they have become to us a rich heritage.

Other Sprengs came to America a few years later who were relatives of John Jacob Spreng. Some of them settled in the near neighborhood, however, they for some reason unknown to us spelled their name with an a instead of an e. All the Sprengs originally came from Switzerland and my brother, S. P. Spreng, when traveling in Switzerland, was told that there were whole villages of Sprengs in some of the Cantons of Switzerland.

Uncle Fred used to tell us a story of the supposed wealth which belonged to the Sprengs but had in some way been absorbed by the Swiss Government. It sounded like a fairy tale. He said that Bishop Escher of the Evangelical Church, used to tell him that if he could or would procure a certain "wonderbuechle" journeyman's diary, he (Escher) could procure this fortune for the Sprengs, but no "wonderbuechle" was ever found and so the fortune remained a fairy tale.

My father used to tell us as children and also his grandchildren of an Uncle who had a tin nose because his nose of flesh and blood had been shot off in one of the battles of Napoleon's army in Spain. This great-Uncle had the distinction of being a member of Napoleon's body guard, and was further distinguished by saving the life of Napoleon one day when in a barber's chair. This great-Uncle was familiarly called "Jerry Fritz," and when guarding Napoleon, it was his business to scrutinize very carefully the looks and movements of anyone who came near the body of his Emperor. He noticed that the barber who was to shave Napoleon had a very vicious look on his face and so "Jerry Fritz" was on his guard and as the barber raised his razor to shave, he suddenly changed the course of the instrument and was about to cut the throat instead of the whiskers. Needless to say he did neither, "Jerry Fritz" saw to that. Later Napoleon rewarded "Jerry Fritz" by giving him a pocket knife which I am told is in the possession of a great-nephew of his who lives in Indiana but from whom I have not been able to get any response. This great-Uncle used to say that if he heard today that Napoleon was back on the throne tomorrow he would start back to France.

These chronicles I have written have been taken mostly from memory. My hunger for stories of the olden days drove me to my Father with questions about the pioneer days and he never failed to respond. With great gusto he would tell and tell until I was satisfied. In later years he lived in our home and the stories of "ye olden time" were told again and again to my children and so the experiences of these ancestors of ours became a very part of my life.

(Mrs. S. J.) Emma D. Gamertsfelder