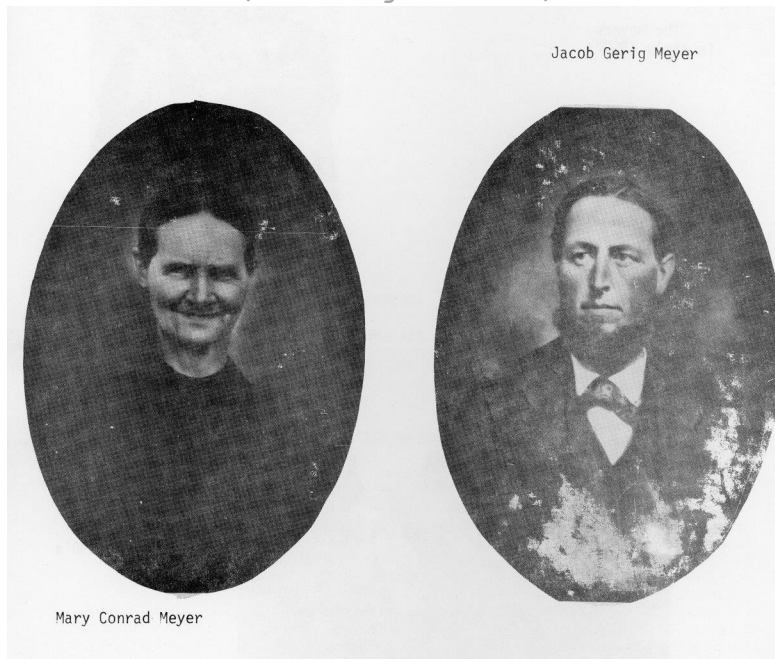


Jacob G. Meyer

(C R Gerig's cousin)



Born in Mulhouse, Alsace, the 16th of October 1846 as a French citizen, during the time Louis Phillip was King of France. In 1848 a revolution occurred and France was declared a Republic until Napoleon III, a nephew of Napoleon I came back from exile and was made President in 1850 and later in 1852 proclaimed himself emperor of France. Then I started to school at the age of 4 1/2 years in what they called (Salle daile) or (Kinder Garden). At the age of six I was promoted to the Primary school where I went through the eight grades at the age of 14 years. I quit school to learn a profession I chose the trade of mechanic at which trade I worked until 1872 when I immigrated to this country. I remember several wars, the first was in 1854 to 1855 with Russia, when France, England and Turkey fought for free passage of the Black Sea. The next war was with Italy in 1859 to 1860 when France got two provinces called Savoi and Piedmont, where Riviera and Nes are located.

Then came the time, 1867, when I was drafted. I was about 21 years old then and had just planned to go to work on the Suez Canal. The military laws of that period were rather severe. France had a standing army of 700,000 men, all those drafted, had to serve seven years in regular service, and then they were free. In the time of conscription each canton had to furnish a certain quota annually, for example the Dp2 du Hart Rhine to which we belonged had to furnish from 5,000 to 6,000 men, so each arrondissiment had to find so many recruits. Mulhouse and suburbs had an average of 500 to furnish so they put about 1,500 numbers in a bag and each man was called to draw his number, then three weeks after that came examination day when the men were examined according to the number each drew, starting at number one and examined them up to the number of men required for service, then the balance had what they called won themselves free as they had higher numbers.

I drew a low number, 31; I was examined and found O.K. for service, .marked to join in the fall of 1867, then there was a chance to get a substitute for 2,500 francs, but as there was peace by that time, I did not like to go in debt and as I was not a Mennonite at that time and knew nothing to be won, resistant or defenseless, I said, "I will go and serve my country" so I tried to get into a workman Co. I got some references of the machine shop company to send to Paris before the time came to go and was called to Brest (Dpt. Finistere) in first company artillery de Marine et des colonies, as workman in the seaport. We worked with the civilians in the machine shops First we had to make an essay which when accepted you would be

kept there as workman, if rejected you were sent to the regiment in Lorient. We were paid as third class 12 cents per day and 2 cents sold or pres as it was called, and that was big pay for a French soldier at that time. We had everything furnished except working clothes. After seven months I took the examination for Brigadier and was advised on Sunday that I was to receive my promotion, as I had passed all O.K. I received a telegram that Father had died suddenly and that he had been sick only a few days. He died of pneumonia. My Captain asked me what I wished to do and he proposed to give me a furlough of 30 days and as there was a law at that time that the oldest widow's son should be freed to help sustain the family, he said that he hoped I would work it up during this period of 30 days so I could be released from active service but would be put in 3rd reserve class. I got my orders for the home route but it had to be visaed and signed by the Admiral of the Port before it was valid and as this fellow was not in his office for two days, I was delayed and was not home at the time of the funeral getting there three days after. This was in February 1868. I then tried to get my papers in shape to send to Paris to the minister of war where it had to go through some (red tape as they say here) then I expected an answer from them before my furlough was up, but none came and I had to return to Brest again. Here I will mention it that it was harder on me and mother than the first time. This was my second trip for Alsace to Brest in Britany, clear across France. I came there just in time, when my furlough was up and reported myself sick, as I did not feel like working yet. After five days I was in the shop again when the orders from Paris came to disarm. They sent me back home again on reserve of six months renewable. Then as my father was engineer of stationary steam engines in Mr. Miegs & Co. Wool Factory, they offered me his position, that was one reason I wanted to learn that trade as mechanic. I got along O.K., had a dollar a day and free lodging and wood and light, so we could get on fairly well.

In 1870 the period of the Franco-Prussian war started and I was recalled to Brest again to join my former company and had to stay for nine months. There was lots of misery, as France lost this war through jealous diplomats playing the game with Bismark the German Chancellor at that time. They took three-fourths of the army provisions in Metz and Sedan, with Napoleon included. In making peace at Versailles, they made France pay one billion dollars ransom and took the two best provinces, Alsace and Lorraine. Now while in Brest they took nearly all of our company except those from Alsace and Lorraine to the front. We were very eager to go too but not to fight, but to get over to Switzerland until it was over, but that was what they were afraid of and so kept us there until it was done before we were discharged. They gave us an opportunity to stay in the French army but we were glad to get away as quickly as possible. We were also thankful that we were not in any battle and did not have to shoot anyone and we are very thankful even yet.

Through these war times we were prevented from corresponding with home folks as the enemy lines were cutting off the chance, so I mention this to give an idea how we got in mind of America. As mentioned we could not write home so I tried to correspond with uncle Ben Gerig. We could send it over the English Channel to the U.S.A. I mentioned in a letter some of our hardships we had during the war, and I got an answer in a few weeks from him. Must tell you the story how we were surprised. I was in the shop when the quartermaster who was our mail man brought me a registered letter from America in a big yellow envelope that they used at that time and he saw that it was from the U.S.A. and while it was registered he wondered what was in it. Well I said, "We will see," and as it had a big seal to shut the envelope, I broke that seal open and under the sealing wax there were four French gold pieces, five Francs, wrapped in tissue paper and fastened to the letter, as uncle Christ Gerig just was over here for a little more than a year, he still had those French 5 Francs pieces and he gave them to uncle Ben Gerig to

send to me. We were both astonished, the Sergeant and I. Inside the letter was a ten dollar gold bill, then the fellow said surely I must treat him as he brought such a letter. In the letter uncle Ben urged me, as soon as this war was over to make arrangements to come over here. And when I came home there were not so many machines as now. They had the mowing machine and it was combined for harvesting grain, wheat and oats, but had to be tied by hand. In many places wheat and oats had to be cut with the cradle as there were too many stumps in the fields so this made more hard work. We were not so particular about how many hours we put in in a day, often in hay and harvest time we were in the fields till 9 o'clock in the evening, of course we had supper at 5 o'clock and went out again. Now in conclusion I will state how I come to locate here in Miltown township. On the original farm, there lived a Christian Sommers and wife who were from Alsace near Mulhause, and he was partly related to mother. They had no children and every two weeks they came to church at Oak Grove. We were then living at the farm where Bro. J. S. Gerig is now, in the old log house. Then these people generally stopped and fed their horses after the meetings and as he was growing old, he commenced to offer a good chance to come out in the swamps as they called it at that time. As stated there were about 78 acres in this land and of this there were only 35 acres tillable, the rest was timber and mostly pasture. So he prevailed on uncle Ben Gerig to let us come and farm his place on 3-5 or 3 bushels out of 5 for grain, use all the hay on the farm, they had 10 cows and just common implements. Then in March 1878 we moved there and worked the farm for 3 years on those conditions.

Written by Jacob G. Meyer

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