THE NEARNESS OF YOU

THE STORY OF LOUIS AND MARGARET (MUELLER) JAEB

Together for 63 Years
This book is dedicated to my parents, Louis Jaeb and Margaret Mueller. It is a brief glimpse of the life they shared for 63 years, of their youth before they met, as well as the establishment of their roots in North America. It goes together with the footage of interviews with them that were captured in 2003 at their cabin at Kipabiska Lake and at their farm in the St. Gertrude district in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Margaret died on February 10, 2007, and I, her seventh born child, promised her that I would complete this project.

I have chosen to write this in the first person as it allows more creative freedom to share my own love and thoughts about Mom and Dad. This is my gift to you, my siblings, and to your children and grandchildren.

Wherever possible, the facts of Margaret and Louis’ individual histories are presented. Their memories are also shared, in many cases, in their own words.

Mom.... Dad...

“If I know what love is, it is because of you.”

Herman Hesse
A Note From the Author...

This is a bit of a story about Louis Jaeb and Margaret Mueller, my parents. It is not the complete story. But, rather it is a glimpse at their roots... where they come from and how they came together... a gathering of small mementoes, photos and remembrances... and their memories as shared so often with us children.

Louis and Margaret were brought up by families where few stories were shared about their past circumstances, beliefs, or family history, especially when it came to details about their financial situation or relationships. These omissions became more obvious during the research and preparation of the Jaeb family history by Daniel Jaeb in the 1990s, and during my interviews with Louis and Margaret in 2003. As it stands, most things remain unknown when it comes to the reasons Louis and Margaret’s ancestors left the ‘old country’, and many things remain unknown about their voyages and new beginnings in North America.

In respect to these past enigmas, Louis and Margaret talked about how their own generation didn’t want to assume things about their history as perhaps this would cause some family members embarrassment. Even so, some of the facts indicate their ancestors struggled upon arrival in the new country. The specific reasons why the Duerrs, Michael Jaeb, the Franks, the Langkammers and the Muellers left the ‘old country’ for the United States in the mid 1800s and early 1900s have gone to the grave with all of them. But we can only assume they emigrated to make better lives for themselves. Times were difficult in the Kingdom of Prussia and France during the mid-1800s so it could have been poverty, or persecution because of religious or political beliefs, or dreams of starting anew that drove them abroad. In Michael Jaeb’s case, it was because he didn’t get along with his step father. Or at least that prompted him to want to move on. Nonetheless, whatever the reasons for making such gargantuan changes to their lives, there are gaps that cause a lot of curiosity. I have chosen here to fill in some of these gaps by assuming that the family silence meant our ancestors were escaping untenable or challenging circumstances like all the other Europeans who chose to emigrate to North America during that time. And since I’ve always loved to try to solve mysteries, I have also chosen to make some assumptions when a few facts point me in a certain direction. Of course I’ll let you know when I am speculating.

It is to this end that I surmise that our ancestors were living in similar circumstances as hundreds of thousands of others in Europe during the mid 1800s and early 1900s and that just like all of these people, our ancestors chose to try making new lives in North America. I am assuming the Duerrs, Michael Jaeb, the Langkammers and the Muellers were searching for a better life and greater opportunities in a land which offered hope and freedom. And they were definitely not alone. According to a report by the United Nations, more than 52 million Europeans migrated to North America between 1820 and 1932, of which 32 million were admitted to the United States alone. And if we look at the time frame between 1844 to 1854, when the Duerrs and Michael Jaeb emigrated to the United States, they were among the 1.2 million other Germans who left to escape the depression in their homeland during that time.

The following accounts are facts about the Duerrs, Michael Jaeb, the Langkammers and the Muellers as recorded in The Ancestors and Descendants of Michael Jaeb and Louisa Josephine Dueer, in Susie’s Story as transcribed by Jane Schaefer (Mueller), and as accounted for in online databases. These facts are interwoven with the historical situation in the world at the time they came to North America. At the end of this book I cite my sources. However, since this is not an academic paper but a story, I feel at liberty to have some fun with it. I hope no one in our family is insulted or upset by the creative license I take.

The rest of the stories and family history are put forward as remembered by Louis and Margaret. It was very important to both of them that their children know about their roots and the hardships and triumphs they experienced. These experiences are a testament to the legacy of values and beliefs that they hoped to instill in us.

Sincerely,

Danette

October, 2008
Chapter II
Louis’ Beginning...

Emigrating to North America

Louis’ family roots can be traced back to the 1700’s to the German and French areas of Europe. But, the details of that time really only include a family tree with the names and dates of descendants. The first threads of Louis’ story begin to take hold when Louisa Duerr and Michael Jaeb, who were strangers to each other at the time, first arrive on the North American continent in the mid-1800s. As fate would have it, they ended up in the same small village in Minnesota where they finally met many years later and started the legacy that would spawn thirteen children and hundreds of descendants.

Louisa Duerr - Louis’ Paternal Grandmother

Louisa Duerr first touched down on American soil in 1847 while in the arms of her mother. She was only one year old at the time and must have been quite ill after the long voyage from La Havre, France, which would have taken anywhere from ten to twenty four weeks. While there is no record as to the month of the Duerrs’ arrival, conditions on the ships were known to be frightful at the best of times so it can be assumed that the family of eight (her parents Anton and Odile and her five older siblings) would have struggled considerably. In fact, it is a miracle that they all lived.

The ships that transported the immigrants to the United States were always overcrowded. They were often carrying anywhere from 120 to 500 passengers. But 1847 was a particularly bad year. Why the Duerrs left the Alsace to move to the United States is not known. However, they chose the year in which there was a sweeping tide of immigration to North America as a result of potato famines in Ireland and Germany, as well as failed revolutions and political upheaval in Germany and central Europe. In 1847, the year they arrived in New York, 243,000 new comers reached U.S. ports of entry, of which 53,000 were of German decent. It could not have been easy for the Duerr family.

The trip over must have been hell. The overwhelming majority of passengers traveled in steerage where there was no lighting; their berths were 18 inches long by 6 feet wide and were often in tiers of up to four rows; water seeped into the steerage through ventilation holes; most passengers were sea sick with no place to vomit except in their berths; there was an average of one toilet for every hundred passengers and passengers weren’t allowed on deck; food often consisted of potatoes, herring and dirty water; and passengers often suffered from trench mouth, body ulcers, lice and worse still, were subjected to possible endemic outbreaks such as cholera. While conditions did vary among vessels, nearly all immigrants on sailing ships, regardless of class, had to suffer overcrowding and disorder, seasickness, and poor food. It was said that you could ‘recognize an emigrants’ ship by the stench.’ These ships were also often called “coffin ships” because of the number of people who died during crossings. In 1847, the year the Duerrs sailed, over 17,000 immigrants to North America died of typhus either during the passage or upon reaching North America. For those traveling specifically to New York, 1,879 immigrants died on a voyage, there were 600 cases of small pox, 3,000 of typhus, and sixty cases of cholera. While it is not known how many people died on the ship that brought the Duerrs over to New York, it is surprising that the one-year old Louisa survived such horrid conditions on the voyage or that she didn’t contract something while onboard. Perhaps if they had known they were sailing in one of the worst years in history for immigrants coming to North America, the Duerrs would have postponed leaving France. Or maybe they had no choice as they, too, were starving in Europe. As it is, they were fortunate no one in their family died during the voyage.

When Louisa’s family arrived at the harbour in New York, they would have been allowed to disembark directly from the ship onto the wharfs of Manhattan. There were still no immigrant processing centers so the shipping company pre-
sent a passenger list to the Collector of Customs, and the immigrants made whatever Customs declaration was necessary and then went on their way. Who knows what Anton Duerr declared. Who knows how long the family had to wait before they could be on their way. But hopefully the custom collectors who worked the docks were able to protect them from the swindlers who preyed on new arrivals. Who knows where they went immediately after that or where they stayed in New York prior to leaving for Ohio. It is possible they made their way to the large German community in New York called Kleindentshlanden, where approximately two thirds of the hundred thousand Germans in New York lived. Maybe they knew someone there. Or maybe they felt more comfortable staying where they could understand the language. Or maybe they were swindled into staying at an overpriced slum near the port where they were overcharged for all the essentials.

It is not known how long the Duerrs spent in New York before they proceeded that same year to Stark County, Ohio, very close to where the city of Canton is today. Three more children were born in Canton. And then in 1861 they moved to Frankfort, Township in Wright County, Minnesota, where Michael Jaeb was already farming. Louisa was 14.

Michael Jaeb - Louis’ Paternal Grandfather

Michael Jaeb was an only child born on August 19, 1833, in the town of Koenigsfeld, Province of Rheinland, in the Kingdom of Prussia. It is believed his father was a doctor by the name of Anton Jaep (later changed to Jaeb) who died when Michael was a young boy. His mother, Anna Maria Bauer, who was already a widow when she married Anton Jaep, found herself yet again widowed. But she remarried for the third time a few years later to a man named Schnieder and had two daughters with her new husband thus giving Michael two step-sisters. It is quite likely that Anna Maria Bauer came from money or inherited money from her first marriage since she was already 39 years old in 1830 when she married the 33-year-old Anton Jaep. And she was in her mid-40s, with a young son, when she married Schnieder. While in today’s world it would appear callous to make such speculations about a woman, back in 1830 a woman in her late 30s and early 40s would have been considered quite old. The average life span at the time was only 40 years.

It is believed that Michael did not get along with his step father, Schnieder, and so in 1854, at the age of 21, he emigrated to the United States with three other men from Koenigsfeld. They left the Kingdom of Prussia, (now part of Germany) on August 28, 1854, on a steam ship bound for New York. They arrived 26 days later in New York harbour, on September 22. All four men listed themselves on the ship’s manifest as farmers.

It is likely the four men’s experiences on board their ship were not quite as bad as the Duerrs as they sailed on the Germania, a German steamer. By this time the US Passenger Act was passed so conditions were more manageable for the passengers. Michael also arrived in New York one year prior to the new Immigration Offices being established at Castle Garden, so he, too, was most likely allowed to disembark directly from the ship onto the docks of Manhattan, as long as there was no disease aboard the ship that compelled the state to place the ship under quarantine for weeks on end in the harbour. Once Michael disembarked, he had to declare to the Customs Collector what worldly possessions he was carrying before he was on his way. Did he come with very much money? Most likely not as it would be another six years, working in the United States, before Michael could afford his first 160 acres of land.

While most single male immigrants tended to settle down in New York according to statistics, Michael had true aspirations to farm and so his goal was to move to Minnesota. Who knows how long the four men spent in New York or how long they stayed together. Maybe they ventured to the Kleindentshlanden to enjoy some good German beer in one of the many German-owned saloons. Maybe they went to a church in this New York German village that offered sermons in German if they were so inclined. Even within this German community, Germans tended to mingle primarily only with those from their regions of Europe. Maybe Michael and his friends knew others from Koenigsfeld now living in New York and found out as much as they could from these people about opportunities in this new country. Whatever they did, that same year Michael moved to St. Paul.