

Preface

The Immigrant Besemers

By
W. James Besemer
And
Richard I. Hofferbert

2009

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In 1922, twenty-five year old Wilhelm Friedrich Besemer left his Swabish hometown of Kirkheim unter Teck, in the south of Germany. A year later, twenty year-old Marta Schehrer left the small Swabish village of Faurndau am Fils. Each was bound for South Bend, Indiana. Each came to work, to marry, to raise a family, and to be an American.

We make choices that shape who we are. Wilhelm's and Marta's choices to come to America dramatically affected the course of their lives and those of their descendants. They met in "Americanism" class in the 1920s. They learned English and the ways of their adopted country and community. They were transformed as a result of their earlier decision to emigrate. Not only were they themselves transformed, but by touching the lives of others they also changed the community they chose to join.

How much Swabish culture found its way into the lives and spirits of their two children and five grandchildren? DNA tests can tell us something about the gene pool; however, there is no such test for cultural inheritance.

Questions about from where and from whom we come are interesting for anyone with a bit of curiosity about who they themselves are. Even if we did not have any more ambitious goals, that curiosity would be enough to motivate this venture into our family's past.

Over the past decade, with the help of many family members scattered from Germany across the U.S., we have put together key parts of the story that led to and resulted from the Besemer / Schehrer migration. We have been less fortunate with the Schehrer history than with that of the Besemers, and that imbalance is necessarily reflected in our writing. In particular, we have only the thinnest thread of Marta Schehrer's predecessors in America, although we do fill out much of her ancestry in Germany.

Chapter 1 presents what we know of Wilhelm Friedrich Besemer's relatives in America prior to his own immigration. There we offer a clue to the ancient origins of the Besemer family in 13th century Swabia. We then chronicle his grandfather's siblings' migration to southern Michigan in the mid-19th century, as

well as that of his grandparents, Johannes Besemer and his wife Barbara Knöll Besemer, in the 1890s.

Chapter 2 tells the special story of Carl August Besemer, Johannes and Barbara's son, who preceded them to Michigan by a year. He paved the way for his parents. He also contributed substantially to populating that part of the country, siring 17 children who were themselves generally quite prolific.

The story of Wilhelm Besemer's life in Germany, his service in the Kaiser's army, and his migration to Michigan to join the earlier migrants is told in Chapter 3. A similar story about Marta Schehrer's life in Germany is the subject of Chapter 4.

After the early 1920s, the setting for the story has shifted to South Bend, Indiana, where Wilhelm and Marta met, discovering that they had grown up just a few miles from each other in the heart of southern Germany's Schwabian country. Chapter 5 tells the story of their courtship and marriage, the friends they made in South Bend, and their honeymoon trip back to Germany in 1927.

Chapter 6 tells the story of the newlyweds and how they built a family. It relates how they moved from a comfortable home in the heart of South Bend to the rural setting that had been Bill's (by then he was called "Bill") dream since his arrival on these shores.

Chapter 7 is a memorial to my partner Richard Ira Hofferbert who passed away peacefully on July 6th of 2011 while sitting at his computer. He will be missed.

Chapter 8 covers the life of Wilton James Besemer to date with a few concluding remarks. *WJB*

Dedication

We appreciate what Bill and Martha accomplished over their full lives. And it is with appreciation for those accomplishments that we dedicate this work to our own children:

James Jonathan Besemer
David Charles Besemer
Linda Marie Besemer
Mark Richard Hofferbert
and
Samuel Carter Hofferbert