

## Why did John Adam Heydinger Emigrate?

What prompted the John Adam Heydinger family to emigrate from Merlebach in Alsace-Lorraine to America? Several different theories will be investigated: agricultural reasons; the political climate; religious problems; economic reasons; military reasons. Many of these reasons do not exist alone but are inextricably intertwined with one another. So sort through them all and then you decide.

### THE AGRICULTURAL SCENE in the 1840's in Alsace-Lorraine

When examining the last several years of the decade of the 1840's in Europe, one sees a rather ugly picture. The idea that in rural areas of Europe people were free to live a pastoral, idyllic lifestyle is not completely correct. True, there were great European artists of the period who tended to depict life romantically – a simple folk, living close to nature and their God, toiling arduously on the land, free from the pressures of growing urban centers in Europe, unspoiled by the corrupting advances of civilization, dedicated to their families, their God, the land. It's what today we would call “the good old days.”



*The Angelus*, painted by Jean-Francois Millet. A typical French peasant couple, toiling together, is caught in the field harvesting potatoes while work is halted to pray the noon Angelus. A deeply religious people, the French peasants all realized their dependence upon the Divine for their sustenance, material and spiritual. This could very well have depicted John Adam and Catherine Heydinger in the earliest years of their marriage.

Except that they weren't so good, even if they were “olden.” A more honest picture of their lives at that time would include these grim factors: farm families were always one good rainfall away from losing their crop – either too little for the growing grain or too much for drying hay. They were subject to

diseases that could wipe out a family or a village in a season. They lived at a time when every married woman bore on average nine to twelve children, only half of whom reached adulthood. Their farms were mercilessly assaulted from many sides: wild animals, wolves especially, could decimate a flock or herd ; the tax collectors were always inspecting barns, larders, pens, and stacks – even measuring the height of manure piles - to gauge the true extent of a family’s prosperity for purposes of extracting more taxes. And worst of all, an armed cavalry at any time could drive their horses, wagons, and following cannons through their crops, destroying their season’s work in an afternoon or single bivouac – all without compensation. In fact, ancient Salic law forced peasants to support marauding armies.



A peasant village scene, early nineteenth century France, a small collection of thatched hovels, clustered together for protection, with fields set apart outside the village.

Furthermore, for all the advances in agriculture, Europe had really made little headway against famine and away from mere subsistence farming. Records show that the yield per acre of wheat, for example, averaged only thirty bushels from 1800 – 1840, but after 1840 actually dropped several bushels per acre. Indeed, most farmers were forced, during the winter months, to adopt a second trade or craft in order to earn a little more wherewithal to support all the mouths around the table.

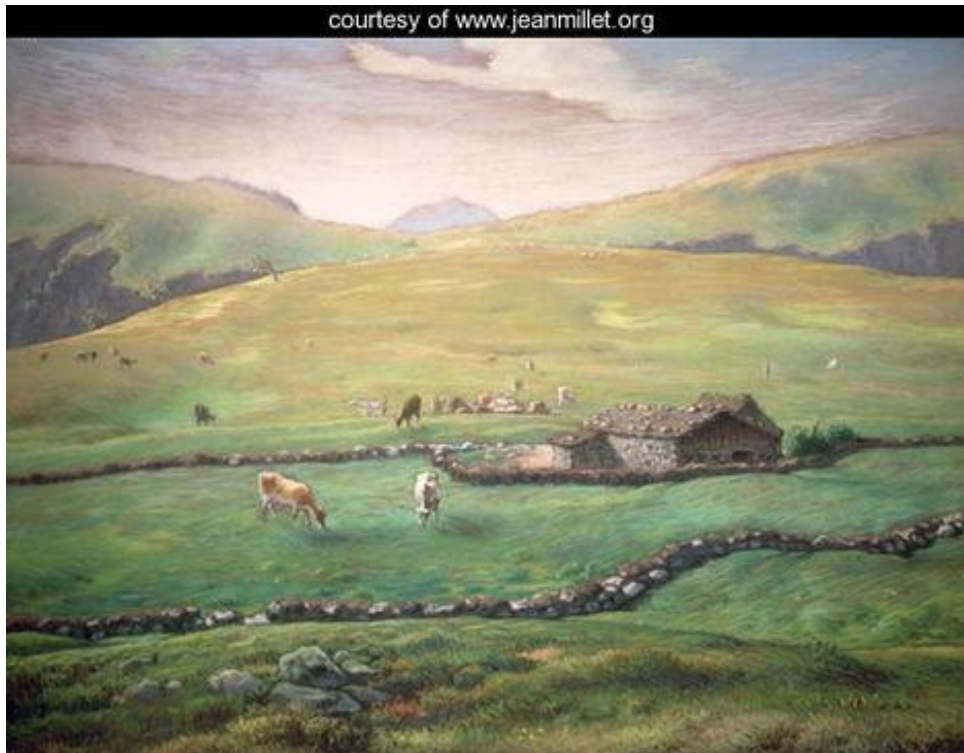
So when we today say “olden” days, keep in mind that the term then meant living a way of life that had persisted much the same way as it had for centuries, from deep in the Medieval era, not because people wanted to but because they HAD to. The rule of life was that there was to be no change, no movement –



either upward or laterally in society – because God’s will was for all to accept their lot, live out their lives in simple holiness, and earn an eternal reward. It’s easy to see how ANY external change forced upon a community could affect a man’s thinking about staying in a locale or leaving a situation in order to save his family.



Jean-Francois Millet's *The Gleaners*. In times of famine, such as France experienced in the early 1830's and again in the late 1840's, it would not have been at all unusual to see simple folk gleaning for every last head of spilled grain or wisps of straw and grain.



Jean-Francois Millet's *Grazing in the Vosges*. In the Alsace, the Vosges Mountains were similar to the foothills in Appalachia, but much less populated and forested. Centuries of clearing had denuded the hills so that cattle raising and milk products were a primary means of support. Can anyone say Holmes County, Ohio?



*Harvesters Resting (Ruth and Boaz)* Break time at the stacks, as reapers and wagoners rest from the afternoon heat. Small bundles of grain were hand-sickled, bound and stacked, then gathered by wagons to larger stacks awaiting final threshing of grain.

The idyllic scenes depicted here by mid-nineteenth century artists serve as our photographic link to the era. They captured rural French life only partially realistically, from the sense of sight, depicting for the bourgeois urban folks a romantic idea of how beautiful, simple, and easy life in the country was. What they missed was the ability to record the temperature, the aching backs, the sense of desperation as every

days toil determined that evening's bread or lack thereof. Whole generations of city folks were thus convinced that rural folks actually enjoyed and delighted in their life style. Too bad they never ventured out to ask them first hand!

## THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Religiously, the area of Alsace Lorraine had been embattled for generations. Even before the Reformation, the period of the 1520's onward, there had been threats against the Catholic religious establishment in the area. Witchcraft had always been rampant, more or less in cycles, in rural areas of Europe. Any deviation from religious orthodoxy was usually met with accusations of witchcraft, and folks would start hauling the firewood to a stake set up in the village square. Then, too, the mostly illiterate folk had to be wary of problems from WITHIN the religious establishment. Wandering, itinerant preachers, like Chaucer's Pardoner, Monk, and Friar of earlier centuries, could lead many a person astray, especially the women, by merely preaching a gospel that was not as strict as that imposed by their local parish priests. That's how these religious charlatans raised their money, after all! This is not to say that the people's pastors led blameless lives either, for a famous play of the era talks about how "some priest's children sit by other men's fires." But comparatively speaking, the itinerants were more apt to intrigue the masses because they could regale the folk with tales and stories of testimonies never seen within the villages. They were the equivalent of religious info-mecials. Remember that most people, even in mid-nineteenth century Europe, had never traveled in their entire lives more than ten miles from their birthplace, and fully 80% married a mate who lived within five miles of their own home. This latter figure would hold true even later in America until well into the twentieth century.

So villages were insular in nature, presided over by a parish priest to guarantee strict adherence to a common faith, and with neighbors policing neighbors on matters spiritual and theological. The Church ministered to these simple folks, shepherding them to salvation, praising their compliance and humility, damning any pride, sloth or envy of other classes. Deviations in faith matters were frowned upon and indelibly stamped upon people's psyches with threats of eternal damnation in flames, if not sooner in the village square.



St. Maurice Catholic Church in Freyming-Merlebach. In this church John Adam Heydinger was baptized.

But these minor religious distractions paled beside those that arose as a result of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation began with Luther's posting of his 95 Theses at Wittenburg University, north and east of Merlebach. O what an awakening that section of Germany had thereafter! As popes fulminated and "reformers" preached return of the Church to purer Christian times, as papal bulls against the reform movements stacked up higher than the "Haufenmist," (manure pile) in the paddocks, as local princes chose up sides and waged wars in defense of either the Faith or the reformers, Europe gradually became a blood bath – literally. From about 1540 until after 1640, through the entire Protestant Reformation and then the Catholic Counter-Reformation, many areas of central Europe saw their populations decimated. Thunderous armies rolled across ranges and plains, slaughtering any who would not swear allegiance to their particular reformed creed. Some areas lost upwards of 90% of their population during these wars, the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) being especially ravenous on the population of Alsace Lorraine. It was very similar to what Sherman visited upon Georgia during the American Civil War, that War of Yankee Aggression, but only France could turn it into a *religious* civil conflict.

Throughout the intervening years, the Alsace was totally depopulated as the inhabitants either fled or were massacred. When peace was restored, many refugees returned, but because of the huge number of

inhabitants killed, Swiss farmers and some Germans were invited to enter, take over whatever abandoned habitations they could find, and restore the lands and prosperity of the area. These folk were of differing religions, but when common tasks such as threshing and haying demanded cooperation among families, no one questioned a man's faith. Work was work, and religion was what one did on Sunday. To think otherwise was to invite a replay of the devastating 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. No one wanted to return to that, so tolerance became the mainstay of different areas, at least during the week. On the Lord's Day, though, the pastors labored to keep alive distinctions among denominations and remind folks of the eleventh commandment – never to enter another religion's church precincts upon penalty of eternal damnation. Surely this was a breeding ground for future emigrations not too many generations hence.

As an aside here, we cannot rule out the fact that our family may have had some Amish roots, or at least Amish-influenced roots. The Heydinger lineage in the Alsace has been traced back now to 1669 on the German side of the Rhine, to Ehring, to an Andre Heydinger the First (1669-1739). Ehring, Germany, lies over two hundred miles straight east of Merlebach, just outside of Regensburg, the birthplace of the present Pope Benedict XVI. This Andre's son, also Andre, was married at Rohrbach, France, much closer to our ancestors, only about twenty-five miles to the east of Behren. Then this second Andre eventually died at Behren, meaning that in one generation the family had migrated over two hundred and fifty miles from southeast Germany to the Alsace area. All those areas were still then tiny farming communities, so the entire Heydinger rootstock as far back as we know it was agriculturally based. Unfortunately, this was exactly one generation after the end of the Thirty Years War that had destroyed most of the Churches and their records. We thus don't have absolutely accurate information of their migration patterns, but preliminary indications are that they moved in from a general east and southern direction.

Had these earlier generation of Heydingers been among those families coaxed back into the Alsace region after that war? If so, were they Heydingers who had previously lived in Alsace, escaped, and then worked their way back. (Two hundred miles seems a long way to have to flee temporarily.) Or had they been part of those German families invited down from Switzerland and southern Germany to fill the land vacuum? This seems a more reasonable conjecture. Perhaps we have been too long searching in the records of the wrong countries for our ancestors. On this point, Earl Heydinger, Charles's only son and an historian of some note, wrote to the Swiss consulate back in 1980 to try to initiate a search along these lines, but he received no affirmative answers and stopped looking. Perhaps others in the family will want to pick up on those lines for future study. (An email to us would get anyone interested a list of societies in Switzerland that assist in this type of research, though the list dates to 1981!)

Back to the Merlebah area itself now where there had been a kind of uneasy religious truce prior to the nineteenth century. The predominant city in the area was Strasbourg, just across the Rhine on the German side of the border. In the mid fifteenth century the city had gained its independence from both political and ecclesiastical powers, a rarity for the times. This attracted free thinkers and reformers which ensured that religious security and tradition were always being challenged and roiling in turmoil. Today it would be as if your local pastor simply watched TV every week to determine what homily to preach based on the ratings of the various religious channels. Sometimes the far right of both Protestant and Catholic teaching would prevail, at other times a more socially conscious gospel might emerge. The people grew accustomed to this seesawing in the faith and at least in that area practiced more toleration. They had to – life at the time in practical matters demanded cooperation among families. Activities such



as thrashing, plowing, communal herding, and even the infant trade industries springing up did not demand political or religious correctness. Today, for example, no one cares about the religious and political affiliations of a Sam Walton or a Peter Coors, as long as the one's prices are right and the other's beer tastes good.

The bottom line: at the time of which we speak, the mid-nineteenth century in central Europe, it was not easy to be a Christian of any sect or denomination. An uneasy truce existed among the denominations. Except for isolated pockets, there was a general spirit of religious toleration, but above all there was no space into which to move if one's religious beliefs clashed with those of his neighbors. America afforded this space, this refuge from intolerance, from persecution based upon ideology. At least on paper it did. If one looks at the patterns of settlement in America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, look at the spacing of villages on a map and the dates of the main religious edifice within the towns. Most villages were a day's ride away from neighbors, and most were settled by religious minded folks who didn't want others questioning their biblical interpretations and religious practices. Whole groups of dissenters simply were invited to leave and could. Head the wagons down the road, over the hills and into the next empty valley and resettle to live out one's beliefs. That was the American way. Europe, by the middle of the nineteenth century, however, had no such luxury, the good spots having already been claimed. Every valley had already been settled for centuries. So it was stay and fight or leave for a new land, way across the pond!

The pressure to emigrate around 1850 for religious purposes was not as high in Alsace Lorraine as it was in some other areas of Europe. Nevertheless, among the deeply devout, this factor cannot be ruled out as political and economic pressures also built. Which of the three predominated within any family is always hard to say unless there is explicit written documentation or a strong family oral tradition. In the case of the Heydingers, we lack both.

## ECONOMIC CRISES

Economics also played a part in many émigrés' decision to leave. How hungry would you have to be to move to another place that promised not only the milk and honey but the opportunity to do more than merely survive as your parents had? Several times folks had been induced to leave their homeland for economic improvement. For example, in the late 1760's, Catherine the Great of Russia invited from other parts of Europe any farmers - Jews specifically excepted - to immigrate into her motherland, retain their language and culture, and in exchange be given fertile lands and a chance for a better life than the crowded, starving areas of Europe. Upwards of 25,000 German speakers accepted Catherine's invitation and moved. We know that some Heydingers accepted her offer because after 1770 their names begin to appear on Ukranian church rolls. None of our direct ancestors, however, trace to these early émigrés.

Another such movement took place twice in the first half of the nineteenth century in Europe. Except that this time it was America that was beckoning - not just North America but South America as well. Advertisements circulated in Europe filled with promises of instant affluence based upon virgin lands with fertile soils, teeming rivers and lakes, and boundless forests for game and hardwoods. And all for free practically. Any European farmer of even modest means, therefore, could cash out in Europe and relocate to Eden. Thus a wave of German immigrants entered the United States with the crest hitting around 1832-33. South America was the beneficiary of this emigration from Europe also, Brazil



especially. Some charlatans and entrepreneurs even wrote pamphlets for circulation among and the enticement of the Alsatians. They were filled with all sorts of information useful to preparing for the journey, surviving the trip and then finding lands in the New World. For a particularly interesting example of this, [click here](#) for a shortened version of *VERE-FOSTER's Penny Emigrant Guide, "Emigration to North America"*

## LAND PROBLEMS

How bad was population pressure in the Alsace during the period of which we speak, around 1850? Let's just say that Thomas Malthus, the noted English philosopher who dabbled in population theory, was correct when he predicted that population could outstrip available food supplies. After all the religious wars, in 1697 the population of the Alsace was a mere 267,000. By 1784 it had better than doubled to 674,000, and by 1841 it topped out at 1,025,000! Something in the water there? Maybe. Perhaps it was their good Catholic upbringing – “the use of sex for purposes other than procreation is a sin!” You remember that line, don't you? From Sr. Mary Kasildas who taught you in junior high way back then.

The bulk of the growth occurred in the most rural areas, with humans breeding as rapidly as their herd animals.

So what was the effect of this rabbit-like explosion of humans on a landscape already pushed to the limits of production? Absolutely devastating. Over time, the soils became poorer as more production was squeezed out of them. Horses and cattle could produce only a certain amount of fertilizer. Then the size of holdings had to decrease, too. The custom was that each succeeding generation of married sons received a portion of the original family property on which to live, farm, and support a family. When the older generations died, their land was then absorbed back into the “family land bank” for still later generations. Thus the increase of population and the outdated inheritance laws had reduced the average size of an Alsatian family's holding in 1850 to about 3 hectares, a little over 7 acres. Try to raise a family on that! These reductions forced sons who had no land to become day laborers, some in agriculture but most in non-farming activities. However, by then too many landless and unmarried sons had produced too large a labor supply, and thus a corresponding diminishing of wages for all ensued. Some countries just couldn't win for losing! What do they say: Buy land because they ain't making any more of it. This certainly applied to central Europe in 1850.

Another related “agricultural revolution” also took place at the same time. When land holdings diminished to a certain point, as outlined above, the farming actually became more intensive but in a very narrow range of crops. Cereal crops such as wheat and oats were abandoned as not yielding enough income per acre. In their place a whole new type of crop was raised: tobacco, hops, vines and madderwort, a source of red hued dyes for the clothing industry. While all of these types of crops were highly labor intensive, nevertheless, they yielded about three times the income to a family as did cereal crops. So, as more people depended upon less land, more arable land was taken out of stock production for vegetables, with the diet of the entire country starting to shift to vegetarian. Then, as wages fell and diets changed, poverty and malnourishment grew proportionately. Along with that poverty came increased susceptibility to disease so that mortality rates actually fell after rising steadily for generations. Bottom line: the countryside was hurting and more people began moving into urban areas. That move may have benefitted certain individuals and freed up land from farming, but it didn't solve the problem, just created new ones in towns instead.

Further complicating the mid-nineteenth century picture was the expanding exploitation of the vast coal and iron ore reserves in the Saar area on the border between Germany and France. Lorraine especially had vast deposit of both. The area gradually used these resources to become a newly formed industrial hub, providing jobs for many of those displaced from farming. That sounds good – good for the hungry, good for the capitalists, good for land owners in the city areas. But was it necessarily good for the spirit of those moving?

What could possibly attract starving former farm kids to the cities? After all, in towns there was even less vacant land upon which to grow the necessary vegetables and a few fruits and berries. The answer – jobs, jobs, and jobs were the magnet for the excess rural population. The surge in population and two timely inventions began to create industrial jobs. The harnessing of steam power and perfection of mechanized looms created a burgeoning weaving industry in the Alsace. Capitalism was being born and Heydingers seem to have attended its birth. So the long and short of it is that John Adam seems to have been one of the displaced agricultural workers who moved his family into town to provide bread, not by dint of plowing, thrashing, and milling but by working as a weaver. What circumstances conspired to finally force this move? Force a man whose entire family was rooted in land for generations past and who himself was raised as a farmer to become a city slicker?

We need to look backwards at least one generation.

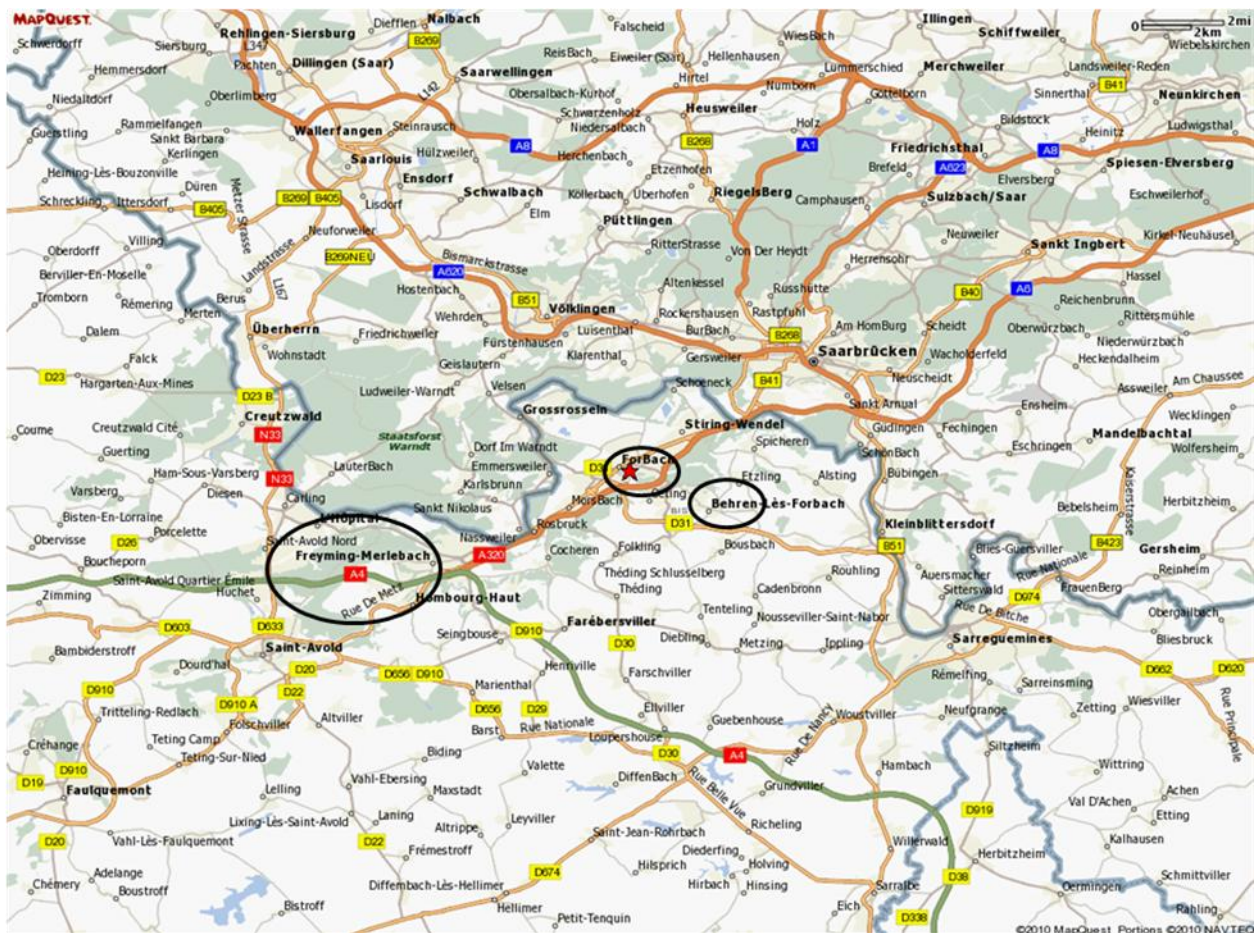
We know that John Adam's father, Pierre Heydinger, was at least a fourth-generation farmer from Behren-les-Forbach, about ten miles to the east of Merlebach. He married Barbe Delesse, also at Behren, in 1790. His death certificate indicates he passed away in 1811 at Kerbach which is situated just one hill still further east of Behren – about like living in Tiro but dying at North Auburn. Pierre's father, Christian, had also been from Behren-les-Forbach as was Pierre's grandfather, Andre - three generations of Heydingers from the same village. So John Adam was the one who actually made the move to Merlebach. So it seems as if at least up to his time there was stability on the land and enough of it to support families. But John Adam's move had already occurred by February of 1827 when he and Catherine Brun were married, according to a surviving marriage certificate, at Kerbach. By December of 1827, their first son, John Heydinger, father of the nine "American" Heydinger boys, was born at "la commune Merlebach canton de la Forbach de Moselle." Pretty obvious that the birth occurred in Merlebach, ten months after the Kerbach wedding. But the most interesting thing on the certificate is John Adam's occupation – listed as "tisserent," that is, a weaver. WHAAAT! Not a farmer? How could that be?

Time for speculation here. We know that Pierre Heydinger, John Adam's father, was actually the third son of his father Christian who was married in 1744. Christian produced a son Jean Nicolas later in 1744, then another son Apolline in 1758, both before Pierre in 1759. So given the laws at the time, Christian's farm would have been split into three parcels. We don't know the size of the original holding, but records show that most were in the 6 to 7 hectare area in size. So what was Pierre to do for his one son, John Adam? He may have been raised on the Kerbach farm, learning his farming skills there, but marriage was a whole other thing and forced other obligations upon him. Without land, he HAD to move to town.

As luck would have it, John Adam came of age and was married just at the time when the weaving industry was beginning to form in the area. The bad news is that at exactly the same time, the entire country entered an economic crisis that lasted until the spring of 1832. More fuel was thrown on the fire

when smallpox and cholera epidemics also struck in 1827. What a time to marry! Had John Adam known what the immediate future held, he surely would have ties a ribbon around it and put off siring a family, but that was not the Catholic way. Faith would get them through.

But what a time to get out! Tens of thousands did, leaving in a huge wave of emigration to America in the early 1830's. But John Adam chose NOT do so. Speculating, we can conceive of John Adam's having already purchased land in or near Merlebach to prepare for his impending marriage. His marriage certificate says that he was born in Kerbach but was living in Merlebach at the time of the filing of the application. It is entirely possible that he had set up as a weaver prior to his marriage, either on a small farm holding or in a town cottage, weaving in his own home, as was so common all over Europe. (It's rather ironic that at this time in history, an occupation which had always been the provenance of females since biblical times was now being taken over by males.) Anyone having traveled extensively through Holmes County, Ohio would be familiar with the practice of home industry. There, as in Europe, almost every Amish farmer has a side business – basket making, quilting, cabinetry, cradle building, baking, blacksmithing – just about every trade is represented on the numerous signs along the county and township roads. Some are run by the females, but most are male operated industries. We speculate that this is what happened to John Adam after leaving the Forbach area.



The region of Alsace Lorraine from which the Heydingers began their emigration. Circled are R. to L.: Behren, Forbach and Merlebach. Rohrbach, also mentioned in this article, lies just off the lower right lower side of the map.

Cloth making in the Alsace and Lorraine in the 1820's and 30's was concentrated mainly in the flax industry. It was a long, laborious task from seedling to skirt. Only the woolen and cotton industries were more labor intensive. If John Adam raised his own flax and processed it completely from the planting, harvesting, soaking, separating, spinning, and then through the weaving processes, it would have required fully a year per crop. We doubt that John Adam did all this. His son John surely would have remembered something of the processes and carried the memory with him to America, relating it to his sons somewhere along the line. There is nothing that has survived in the oral family traditions to attest to John Adam's full involvement in the flax processing, much less the weaving. Neither John Adam nor son John left a spoken or written record of it. This silence alone does not prove anything, but it does force us to be prudent in our conjecturing.

A more probably conjecture is that he was engaged in weaving cotton. Now cotton was not a cash crop for anyone in the Alsace-Lorraine area at that time. Rather, it was all imported from America. Most was shipped out of the port of New Orleans, Louisiana. In fact, when the first great emigration from the Alsace took place in the early 1830's, many left for Louisiana and began farming there. We have found no Heydinger names on any of the shipping lists from that time, though.

So we are left with as many questions as we began with. Did John Adam own farm land in or near Merlebach at any time between 1827 and 1850 when he emigrated? If so, how much did he own and what did he raise? If, as both his wedding certificate and immigration papers stated, he was indeed a weaver, did he mean as a full or as a part time, cottage laborer? Only further research can answer these questions, and the answers may cause us to revise some of our conjectures.

The only thing we know for sure is that John Adam did not leave then with that first wave. His oldest son was only five, and he had two other children, Joseph and Elizabeth, under the age of three. An ocean voyage would not have been good on the family. So he waited and continued to farm and work on the side. The cottage industries of weaving were flourishing in the 1840's in France and the Luxemburg areas. Cheap wool from America via England was flooding the area and found ready hands to spin, then weave material on small family owned looms. John Adam may have owned one of these had he been a flax weaver first.

Life was not particularly good for cottage weavers. Whole villages were engaged in the occupation. Merchants then bought the goods for resale in the larger tailoring cities. But despite the concept of weaving guilds with their apprentices and journeymen, weavers were basically at the mercy of the merchants. Smart merchants - the Kaufman - could not reduce the prices paid for the weavers finished goods or else a general strike would have occurred. Instead, on an individual basis they tried to enforce fines for things such as short weight, goods too coarsely woven (Imagine the difference today between 60 and 200 tpi cotton Sears sheets!), or for tardiness in delivery of goods. Haggling took place at every step of a sale. It did not help that the bulk of the merchants in the area were Jewish, so it is not improbably that certain anti-semitic expressions were probably formed on the lips of even John Adam in those days. (We have never found a written record of anything of Catherine having ever uttered anything, even here in America. Noble lady! Lucky Adam, too.) In fact, violent revolutions actually occurred in some villages, most notably in 1834 and then again in 1848. Interestingly, it was one of these weavers strikes that motivated a certain Karl Marx to begin his research and writings, and weavers' strike form a central



core in many of his chapters as examples of what he saw as wrong in the emerging capitalistic system. So the Heydingers were even present during the gestation of *Das Kapital*.

Finally, then, a greater revolution occurred, somewhat akin to what Henry Ford did in America with his automobile factories. He sucked farm boys from the land to the cities by the thousands, eager for higher wages at easier work, but at the expense of sometimes dehumanizing working and living conditions. The beginnings of industrialization were also stirring in the Alsace.

Primitive loom factories had begun to be developed in major urban areas that attracted French farm boy hands to operate. The standard size cottage loom could produce a six foot wide bolt of cloth and could easily fit into a cabin room and be dismantled to turn the same room into a dining room or sleeping quarters. We can picture John Adam bent over his loom in the light of the short winter days. But then large buildings were constructed, usually at the edge of a village and on the local waterway. The individual home looms were moved to the buildings and were powered by a mechanical steam powered engine. Human hands were still required, many of them, so the huddling of the masses began in these villages. Lads and even lasses who had grown up in the fresh air sacrificed their adolescence on the altar of these loom rooms, and voila! The modern factory system was born. We don't know whether John Adam entered into servitude in one of these establishments or whether he continued a little longer in his home. His patience, though, had been thoroughly tested by 1850.

But abandon a way of life for the city? Hardly. Hang on a little longer and he could eventually move and retain his agricultural lifestyle in America. It had to be a conflicting time for the growing family.

#### APPROACHING A DECISION

So then hang on they did in Merlebach as the family grew some more with John Adam and Catherine closing out the 1830's with two more girls. But then disaster struck, personally and nationally. In 1846 a third son was born to the family, Phillipe, but he died within a year, on October 3, 1847. We cannot know the sorrow the family experienced, but it must have been grave. Then came 1848 and all of Europe erupted in revolutions and warfare. A wave of individual freedom, sparked and then crushed temporarily by the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic wars, reignited again, this time accelerated by a drive for political and nationalistic motives. In short, armed revolutions occurred in almost every country in Europe, with capitals burning and the flames of revolution reaching into the countryside as well. Folks had to declare themselves. Many voted with their feet by fleeing from France to Germany, and then later from Germany back to France. Where to go to escape? By 1849 the revolutions had somewhat mitigated but their effects remained.

How did the Heydinger boys fare during this period of conflict? We don't know. We do know that they did not serve in any man's army. The family oral tradition, passed on to us from John to Peter and then eventually through Ed Heydinger here in America, says that they were declared too short to fight in any army. The French had a minimum height restriction in the 1840's of five feet five inches for enlistment. John as a young twenty something was only five feet four and Joseph a little less so. Again we cannot know the embarrassment attached to rejection for military service at the time, but one letter surviving from Ed Heydinger says that this rejection for service may have been the deal breaker – John Adam is quoted, after his sons' rejections for service, and when they had commented about leaving for America, "Then we'll all go!" So he made plans to leave.

A new wave of emigration had begun around late 1849 and throughout 1850. The Heydingers were about to join this tsunami of escape. This time companies were formed that offered package deals. Hucksters were sent all around Europe to advertise not just land in America but transportation to the New World as well, both within Europe to reach the great port cities and then booking on passenger ships to make the great crossing. A veritable fleet of sailing ships was constructed to make these crossings – a few such trips and the cost of the ship was recovered. Any more trips were pure profit for these companies, provided they did not wreck or sink. This time John Adam and Catherine seemed to have succumbed to the movement as well as many of their neighbors. Sons John and Joseph were age twenty-three and twenty respectively while the girls, Elizabeth, Margaret and Mary were now teenagers, able to withstand the rigors of a sea voyage.

So a unique combination of religious and economic factors, coupled with political stresses and land shortages, all conspired to incite John Adam, Catherine, their children, and numerous neighbors to pull up centuries of long entangled European roots and begin the arduous journey to America. The voyage across the ocean, though, was to be one short part of their trip from Merlebach to Crawford County. They still had to pick their way across France from the Alsace to Le Havre and then at the other end from their landing port to north central Ohio. Those two parts of the journey were equally as fascinating as the actual water crossing to a family whose entire lives had been spent within the view from the highest hill in their neighborhood. That they, and thousands like them, made it and we are here today is a testament to the hardiness of their genes, their faith in the Divine, and their intelligence at every turn. In the succeeding chapters we shall see how they employed all three of those to survive.