

*Transatlantic
Ticket* 1852

Passage to the New World

BY JAN FRAZIER

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Transatlantic Ticket 1852
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This book is dedicated to the many German emigrants that braved the Atlantic Ocean in pursuit of freedom and a new life in America. Especially, it is dedicated to my great-grandparents, Christian and Elizabeth Haas Pollmann and their families, who came to Illinois in search of religious freedom, employment opportunities, and a new beginning of life.

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Introduction

The book is a compilation of fact and fiction. Elizabeth and Christian Pollmann were actual people — my great-grandparents. Christian was born in 1826 in the tiny village of Hummersen, Germany. My great-grandmother, Elizabeth Haas, was born in 1837 in Hergershausen, Germany. In reality, they were married in Pekin, Illinois, but to create a more realistic, intriguing story, the reading audience sees Christian and Elizabeth as being wed in Hummersen and already having two children when they sailed on the *Don Quixote* to New York City.

Christian arrived on May 6, 1852. He had a brother, Fredrich Pollmann already in America, making the transition in America far more viable for Chris. In actuality, Elizabeth arrived *alone* in America on the *Saxonia* on October 8, 1862. Elizabeth's mother was Anna Margaretha Weber and her father was Johann Adam Haas. Her maternal grandmother was Elizabeth Reuling, and with the many Reulings living in the Pekin area, I have to believe that she had some relatives in the city to help her adjust to the New World.

Having first visited Hummersen during the summer of 2006, I had the privilege of meeting Pollmanns still living in that incredibly beautiful community called Lipperland. It was amazing to see the Falkenhagen Church where my great-grandfather, Christian, was baptized and confirmed. I walked

the small well-worn path, leading around the church, that people in the 1800s as well as today tread to get to the large, wooden doors that open to the remarkably splendid yet simple sanctuary. With tear-filled eyes, I stood in the tiny room used by the confirmands. There, my great-grandfather had sat learning the word of God as dictated in the mid-nineteenth century. In Schwalenburg, I saw the magnificently gilded Town Hall where Christian Pollmann walked in order to get his papers to come to the New World. And last of all, I visited the Pollmann homestead — still inhabited by Pollmanns — where he was born and lived until he left for Illinois.

The visit to Hummersen was an amazing experience that I'll never forget. I've visited many times since that first incredible visit, and my thanks to my cousins, Edith, Peter, Ruben, and Felix Eichleiter for an awesome trip “back in time” into the village and life-style of Hummersen, Germany.

In addition, I found the other side of my German family in Wilgartswiesen some years later, and if you enjoy this book, you might like *Prairie Points - A Civil War Sanctuary*, which is about the Dully family as they arrive in the New World. Also, *European Roots and Beyond* tells of the funny experiences I had with both sides of my family as I tried to discover who they were and where they lived. Since first going to meet the Eichleiters in Hummersen and then the Dullys in Wilgartswiesen, we have had countless reunions both in Germany and in America. It has been an incredible experience for everyone.

I want to add that this was one of the easiest books for me to write. I felt as if my great-grandfather were sitting on my shoulder guiding my mind and hand. I did a great deal of research for this book; however, much of it seemed to be “spoken” to me in my mind by an all-knowing voice, which I believe was my great-grandfather, Christian Pollmann. It was actually eerie. Also, this is the second publication of this book as I wanted to add pictures to enhance the story.

Here's hoping that you enjoy *Transatlantic Ticket 1852*.

One

LIFE IN GERMANY - 1852

A slice of golden moon showed in the midnight sky, which was filled with dusky starlight. It was Germany, 1852, and Christian Pollmann — still fully clothed — sat on his front porch in the village of Hummersen. The February air was brisk as a chill made him pull his worn jacket closer around his body. Chris focused on the splendor of the North Star and wondered how an awesome sky so full of beauty could shine brilliance on a world filled with chaos and uncertainty.

With an unstable political situation in 1848, revolutionary acts broke out in opposition to authoritarian governments. However, as the Revolution failed, the existing monarch placed even stricter regulations upon the common Germany people, causing many families to focus their hopes and dreams on the New World, America. Such were Christian's thoughts as he sat alone, engulfed by the black night; a feeling of hopelessness surrounded him which was lessened only by letters from his brother in Illinois who gave him hope for a new life abroad.

"Chris?" The voice came from the inside of the house where Christian saw a candle burning at the door.

"Chris, what's wrong? What are you doing out there?" Even though the voice was quiet, there was strength and endurance in its tone.

“Thinking, Elizabeth. Just thinking.”

“It’s cold and late. Come inside to think,” his young wife begged.

Slowly, Chris got up from the old wooden chair. He was a tall, lanky man, mid-twenties. His blonde hair and blue eyes were indicative of the “master race” that in less than a hundred years would become a symbol for Hitler’s regime.

The door was opened by a slight figure of a woman, beautiful nonetheless as the candlelight played upon her long brown hair, brown eyes, and olive complexion. With Italian ancestors on her mother’s side of the family, she didn’t meet the qualifications of a pure German woman — not in physical features, anyway — but she had the mental strength of the German Frau and the fortitude needed to work long, hard hours in the house as well as in the field if necessary.

“Chris,” Elizabeth commented as she stoked the fire, whose embers were still red, “What’s wrong? You’ve not been yourself in days. When I talk to you, you’re only listening with one ear.”

Chris had hung his jacket on a hook near the door and now stood looking out the curtained window. Even though there wasn’t extra money, Elizabeth insisted on nice curtains on the windows and a rug before the fireplace.

“Chris?”

“Yeah, what is it, Elizabeth?”

“You haven’t heard a word I’ve said, have you?”

“You asked me what I was doing outside.”

“No, I asked you what was wrong. You’re not yourself. I share everything with you — every personal problem that I have. What are you keeping from me, dear husband?”

Christian moved slowly towards the fire, accepting the cup of coffee she offered him. Elizabeth always kept soup and coffee warm at the fireplace — one more thing she felt important in her household. Even though Elizabeth had a second-hand iron cook stove in the kitchen, she still preferred the fireplace. She had learned to cook and bake on the fire, and it brought back precious memories of her earlier years.

“Okay, Elizabeth. Sit down, please.”

Elizabeth got a cup of coffee for herself and took a seat on the bench across from her husband. He looked tired, she thought — not just exhausted from a

long physical day but also from mental anguish. She waited.

Christian took a sip of the warm brew, looking into the cup as if it offered answers. “I’m worried about our future here,” he finally commented.

“Here, in this house?” she questioned quietly.

“No, in this country, Elizabeth — in Germany.”

Her heart sank at her husband’s words. “It’s Georg, isn’t it? He’s talking nonsense to you again. Why do you let him upset you?”

Christian’s brother, Georg, three years his senior, often coerced Chris into doing things to which Elizabeth objected. He meddled in their business — both personal and financial — and Elizabeth often felt that her husband was undermined. Several ventures of selling crops to Georg’s acquaintances in Hummersen had resulted in little or no profit, and Christian had learned that Georg had not always had his brother’s best interest in mind.

“No, it’s not Georg, Well, at least it’s not him entirely,” he added. “With the failed Revolution, Germany has changed for the worse. Taxes have increased drastically; the government continues with strict, unbelievable regulations; churches are being unified according to the government’s wishes; and now the inheritance laws have changed so that only the oldest son will inherit anything.”

The thoughts literally rolled off Chris’ tongue as if he had struggled to contain them, and now they were finally being regurgitated with despondence. Sounding as if he had practiced this speech many times, Chris felt a bit embarrassed at the velocity of his words. The fact was, he had gone over everything in his mind hundreds of times, and it was truly a relief to let them out, and he breathed a long sigh of relief.

In softer tones, he concluded with downcast eyes, “We can barely clothe the children and now the potato blight has made the food supply short. You know this winter has been a nightmare.”

“We’ve made it, though, Chris.” Elizabeth tried to drive home a point, but it sounded feeble.

“Barely — we made it barely these past months. How about next winter? It’s going to get worse, Elizabeth.”

Elizabeth clung to the hope that they could raise enough crops for a profit

so that they wouldn't be forced to move — away from her parents and younger sisters. She had hoped that maybe she could take in sewing and mending for the upper class, but with two children, there had been precious little time.

"Maybe you should try to get a job again as a cabinet maker," she suggested. "You did well after your apprenticeship. We shouldn't have let Georg talk you into farming part of your father's land."

"I was glad to help my father, but under the new inheritance laws, eventually, all of this land will go to the eldest — Georg — and we'll have nothing. I think cabinet making is what I need to do again, but not here," Christian concluded.

Elizabeth's eyes met her husband's. A tightening in her stomach kept her from asking the inevitable — how far would he want to move? Bavaria? To a big city — Munich or even Berlin? Finally, Elizabeth choked the word, "Where?"

Christian didn't answer. Silently, he placed his cup on the nearby table and covered his face with hands for a moment. Eventually, he found the courage to look at Elizabeth's wide-eyed stare as he whispered, "Away from our fatherland of Germany. America, Elizabeth, America."

* * * * *

Chris watched Elizabeth's olive skin pale at the word "America." Looking down at her coffee, her hand shook slightly as she sat the cup on the bench. Not looking at her husband, she folded her hands as she felt a tear trickle down her cheek.

Finally, she found the strength to utter, "It's so far. We'd never see our families again." Her dark eyes — now wet with tears — finally rose to meet her husband's. His strong, solemn face and firm-set eyes usually gave her strength but not tonight.

"You and the children are my family. You promised to leave your mother and father and forsake all others for me. What was that, five year ago? Remember, Elizabeth?"

Silently, she nodded.

“My brother Fredrich has been in America for almost two years. He has earned enough money for his wife Louisa and the three children to join him now in Illinois. We could go with them. There’s work, food, and hope, Elizabeth. It’s not a land for the weak of spirit or for men who can’t work long, hard hours. Fredrich says that he never knew real work ethics until he went to America. The pioneers there work with perseverance and efficiency unknown in Germany. But the hard work pays off. He already owns a small plot of land and raises his own food and also works as a carpenter. When his children arrive, they will be well fed and will go to school — a public school.”

Chris paused, waiting for a response. There was none.

“Elizabeth, I want Margaretha and Anna-Marie to have a better life than this. The rich are getting richer here, the poor poorer. For the children to go to school means that I need more money, and we’re not among the rich. The Revolution of 1848 failed. Heinrich von Gagern had such an ambitious plan to create a modern, liberal constitution for a unified Germany. Unfortunately, the National Assembly at St. Paul’s Church led by von Gagern failed because of the many setbacks. Now, we live in a Germany that I don’t know.

“It was bad before 1848 but impossible today. Basically, the feudal, militaristic systems are being re-established. As you know, General von Wrangel has already led troops through Frankfurt, re-capturing the city with his troops, who have earned the nickname ‘street sweepers.’ I understand that they yield only to violence. Otto von Bismarck and Fredrich Wilhelm are also gaining old power. Who knows what all of them will do to us.”

Again, Christian paused. “Our neighbors are gone, Elizabeth. The Meiers left for America last year, and the Dulleys and Zimmermans left in 1848, along with hundreds of other German families throughout the country. Actually, the Dulleys live close to Fredrich.”

Elizabeth spoke for the first time since the start of the conversation. “The Dulleys aren’t close, Chris. They’re hundreds of kilometers apart.”

“Well, they are in Indiana, and Fredrich lives in Illinois. I think that’s pretty close considering the size of America.” He shrugged and smiled as Elizabeth mustered a grin.

“Christian,” Elizabeth whispered as she, too, sensed that they belonged to a life that was gone, and she wiped a final tear from her cheek. “This conversation isn’t a total shock to me. I saw the stars in your eyes when our neighbors left us and went to the New World. I’ve watched you daydream quietly for over a year and was sure you were thinking of this. I couldn’t ask, though, for fear I was right. But I knew when I married you that you wouldn’t settle for a poor life. In fact, your drive and ambition are what attracted me to you — always striving to be better, wanting more, and expecting the best.” Elizabeth paused as she reached for Christian’s hand. “You never have to convince me of your plans. The children and I go wherever you go and whenever you are ready.”

Christian pulled his wife towards him, folding his arms around her body. “We’ll have a new life, my love. I can feel it. Wait to tell the children and our parents, though. Let’s get arrangements in place first.”

Elizabeth nodded. Chris felt his wife’s body stiffen slightly as she pulled away.

“What is it?” he asked, watching a worried look continue to darken his wife’s face. Only once before had he seen this same distressed look, and that was when he had told her that they were leaving their cozy home in the village for a small farmhouse in rural Hummersen.

“Chris, I’m frightened.” Elizabeth felt her stomach tighten again as she looked into her husband’s eyes. “I’m very frightened.”

“Me, too, but we can do this,” he answered as he placed his arms once again around her. “We’ll talk tomorrow. It’s late.” He kissed her lightly on the lips, hoping that he saw a glimmer of hope in her eyes as he got up to ready himself for bed.

As he walked past the window, Chris noticed that the brilliance of the night was now slightly hidden by clouds, which rolled in from the east. He stood looking at the changing atmosphere of the midnight sky with his eyes still focused on the unchanging North Star.

“God help us through this difficult life,” he whispered, “whether we’re in Germany or America. Life is a struggle, but it’s all for you, Lord.” Christian’s religious strength had come from his Lutheran mother — who eventually joined the Evangelical Church — and he leaned on her foundation

continually as life seemed impossible to bear at times. However, now it seemed more difficult.

The stars — including the North Star — were nearly completely hidden now as a clap of thunder was followed by the rain pelting against the window.

“Winter storm coming?” Elizabeth asked, picking up the two coffee cups now empty and carrying them to the dry sink in the kitchen.

Christian hoped that he was hearing the old lilt in his wife’s voice — that optimistic tone, which had carried them through many difficult times.

“Yeah, I think so.”

Christian’s thoughts again returned to the storm that had been brewing in Germany for years now, knowing that it was his sole wish to escape. However, what he didn’t anticipate was that the storms were fierce not only on the continent of Europe but also on the open waters of the Atlantic and on the vast prairie lands of America. What he didn’t know was that he and his family would never escape the storms wherever they went. However, Christian — optimistic as he was — would always possess faith and hope in his family’s future.

