

The book "A History of the Weidenhofer Family in Australia 1846 - 2004" was written by Wyn Allen (née Wynifred Hope Weidenhöfer).

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The following is taken from that book, with permission of Stewart Allen, Barry Malcolm and Carlien Melrose:

Johann Weidenhöfer 1815 - 1891

Born 20 Jan 1815 Baden, Hanover, Germany

Died 4 Sep 1891 Woodside, South Australia

Buried Lobethal, South Australia

Married 22 Sep 1839 Vegesack, Bremen, Lower Saxony, Germany

Wilhelmine Zuhlke

Born 4 Jul 1812 Vegesack, Bremen, Lower Saxony, Germany

Died 20 Jul 1883 Woodside, South Australia

Buried 21 Jul 1883 Lobethal, South Australia

Johann and Wilhelmine arrived in South Australia 1846.

Children of Johann Weidenhöfer and Wilhelmine Zuhlke

1. Anna Margarethe Weidenhöfer 1839 - 1912
2. Johann Wilhelm Weidenhöfer 1841 - 1916
3. Georg Weidenhöfer 1844 - 1915
4. Adelheid Weidenhöfer 1845 - 1919
5. John Weidenhofer 1848 - 1923
6. Wilhelmine Weidenhofer 1850 - 1923
7. Frederick Weidenhofer 1852 - 1852
8. August Weidenhofer 1853 - 1945
9. Diedrich Heinrich Weidenhofer 1854 - 1925

Johann Weidenhöfer, born on 20 January 1815 in Baden, Germany, was the fifth of eleven children born to Johann Hinrich Weidenhöfer and his wife, Anna Margareta (née Wichmann).

Of these eleven children, only seven survived beyond infancy. Nothing is known of the family life except that Johann Hinrich owned a small farm near Baden. Johann and his younger brother, Diedrich Heinrich both entered the building trade, Johann being registered as “a master builder of mills”.

Sometime before 1839, Johann ventured to a small village, Vegesack, which was near the large town of Bremen. Here, on 22 September 1839, he married Wilhelmine Zuhlke, born 4 July 1812 in Vegesack, the daughter of Wilhelm Zuhlke and Anneliese Caroline (née Schmeckenberg).

Translation of the marriage document of Johann and Wilhelmine

“At the Town Hall office of suburban Vegesack in the free harbour city of Bremen, local citizen Johann Weidenhöfer, flour miller and master mason, today appeared in person , born 20 January 1815, legitimate son of the late Johann Hinrich Weidenhöfer, master builder, of Achim (suburb) and his widow, Anna Margarethe (née Wichmann) whose original documentation was handed over in writing.”

Also Wilhelmine Zuhlke born 4 July 1812, daughter of the deceased Johann Wilhelm Zuhlke and his widow, Anneliese Caroline (née Schmeckenberg), who was present with her daughter and future son-in-law, whose betrothal took place at the local church, through the proper proclamation without any objection and they announced their intention to be wedded. Dated Vegesack, 20 September 1839 in the presence of local citizens, Johann Heinrich Otto Ludwig Rohling, aged 34 years and Andreas Jacob Gagens, aged 42 years, both shoemakers. Signed with xxxx by Johann Weidenhöfer, Wilhelmine Zuhlke, Otto Rohling and A.J.Gagens. Documented by Pastor Iken. 22 September 1839”

❖ This document was translated by Mr Harry Huebler of Adelaide.

From this marriage document we can deduce that neither Johann nor Wilhelmine were able to write their names, so this explains why we have been unable to unearth any personal information written about the family. The marriage document however, gives Johann’s occupation as “flour miller and master builder”.

At this time, there was much hardship endured by the German people due to religious persecution and economic instability. News began to spread among villagers of the possibilities of a freer and more prosperous life in a far off country called Australia.

By 1845, Johann and Wilhelmine had four children - Anna Margarethe, Johann Wilhelm, Georg and Adelheid. By this time the family was making plans to emigrate to South Australia.

It is well documented that hundreds of German people with various skills and trades, eagerly sought passages to Australia. By far the largest number of these migrants settled in South Australia. The hardships of establishing a new life did not deter these determined and industrious people.

An article from a publication called "The History of South Australia - From Colonial Days to the Present" - written by R. M.Gibbs, published by The Southern Heritage, 1969, states;-

"Frederick Dutton's brother, Francis, writing in 1846, reported "they (the German settlers) to be of better and more sober habits than other labourers. Now see how differently the German labourer in the Colony acts, the necessity of every farthing spent is seriously weighed before he parts with it. You never see a German in a public house drinking spirits. He will come into town many miles a foot, carrying, perhaps a heavy load of vegetables or what not, for the market. After he has sold his goods he will take a lump of bread out of his pocket, brought with him from home, of his housewife's own baking, and his day's profit must have been good to induce him to buy even a glass of ale to wash down his frugal dinner. More frequently it is a draught of spring water."

This report is but one of many, which were sent to England in the very early days of the Colony of South Australia, indicating the high regard with which the German settlers were held. At this time, in England, George Fife Angas, who was Chairman of the South Australia Company, became aware of the unrest in Germany, so he organised ships to take many hundreds of German migrants to South Australia.

So it was that in 1846, on 17 June Johann and his family sailed from Bremen on the 500 ton three masted barque the “Pauline”, built in Vegesack in 1838. Accompanying Johann, his wife and four children, was Johann’s younger sister, Margrete Alheit, aged twenty four. Undoubtedly, Anna, as she became known, would have been of great assistance to Wilhelmine in caring for the small children during the three-month voyage. The voyage to South Australia involved crossing the Indian Ocean in the middle of winter, in a small ship with very few comforts, or facilities for young children.

The “Pauline” reached Port Adelaide on 27 September 1846 and, it would seem that Johann and his family were soon settled near the Sturt River, near the present day suburb of Marion, several miles south of Adelaide.

Quite soon after the colony of South Australia had been proclaimed in 1836, there was a large number of German migrants who, upon arrival in South Australia, requested that they be naturalised. At first this was refused, but by 25 March 1847, an Ordinance had been declared and, over 300 German adult males were naturalised (it seems that wives and children did not need to be naturalised). The Ordinance was a very lengthy, legal document probably quite incomprehensible to the new migrants who were required to repeat the Oath of Allegiance, thus:-

“I do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. So help me, God.”

After paying a fee (the amount was not disclosed) the migrants were recorded as British subjects and Australian citizens. Johann’s registration number was 2657. At this ceremony, Johann gave his address as Sturt Road and his occupation as “farmer”. No doubt, he would have found that his skills as a carpenter and builder would have been useful to himself and, eagerly sought after by other settlers in the area. Although Johann’s occupation in Germany had been registered as “master builder of mills”, he soon discovered that there was no call for this trade, so he applied his skills to house building and later, to farming. The next record we have of Johann is that, in 1849 he was requested to act as witness at the marriage of Wilhelmine’s sister, Amelia Caroline Zuhlke, who married Frederick Janczen. Sometime later, Amelia Janczen was fined by the local council for tethering her goat in the road!

Farming in the Southern Area of Adelaide

The Chief Surveyor of the colony referred to the Adelaide Plains, which at that time, were covered with tall, dense native timber trees as "The Great Plain". Part of this plain became known as "The Black Forest". Colonel Light recommended that the trees be chopped down and cleared so that the land could be used for crop growing and for grazing sheep and cattle. As early as 1839, wealthy citizens of Adelaide had bought much of this land. Near the Sturt River at Marion, land was divided, and small farms established.

Modest cottages were built, generally only two rooms, with mud walls and timber roofs which were covered with a double layer of wooden shingles. Timber was also used for fencing, although some farmers preferred to dig ditches around their properties. They often dug these five feet wide and three feet deep. This was to keep their animals from straying. Water was scarce, and many wells were dug - usually some metres deep - only to find that the water was unsuitable for drinking. However, farming flourished in the area, with cereal crops, vegetables, sheep, goats and cattle being the main products.

By 1851 Johann, recorded as a carpenter and builder, was listed in the Lands Memorial Documents as having bought twenty acres of land, "with all houses standing" for 250 pounds.

The birth registrations of Johann and Wilhelmine's last four children (born in Australia) were given as: - Johann 1848 at Sturt Road, Wilhelmine 1850 at Blackforest by the Sea, (probably near where Brighton is now) and, August 1853 at Adelaide, Diedrich Heinrich 1854 at Marion by the Sturt. (The latter, no doubt named after his father's brother, Diedrich Heinrich who arrived in South Australia only shortly before Diedrich was born in 1854). Pastor Kapler, an itinerant Lutheran pastor, records in his baptismal register that he had baptised Wilhelmine, August and Diedrich in the Marion district. It is possible that Pastor Kapler visited the Adelaide hills area, so it is quite likely that he influenced Johann to move to the Onkaparinga Valley where a large number of German migrants had already settled.

In 1856 whilst still living by the Sturt River at Marion and, registered as a farmer, he bought another eighty acres in this vicinity, for 375 pounds. However, in that same year, he bought thirty six acres in the Hundred of Onkaparinga. By this time, he most probably was living at Woodside. Unfortunately, there are no reports

of Johann and his family having moved from the Marion area to the hills, so we can but imagine Johann loading the family possessions and his tools of trade onto a bullock wagon. The children, aged from about four to eighteen years and, their parents would most likely have walked along the winding, sloping tracks made by other bullock wagons. We know nothing of how they settled into the new community, but there would have been plenty of work for all the family. Johann built a house on the corner of Robert and Moffat Streets at Woodside.

By 1859, Johann was known to have been one of the trustees of the German Protestant Church. The group of trustees bought land at Hahndorf, (about twelve kms from Woodside) on which a church was to be built. All fifty members of the church agreed to contribute ten shillings whilst two members donated six pounds and five pounds. Whether the church was built is unclear, but in 1865 Johann was recorded as one of the trustees of the Lutheran Church at Woodside. The trustees were instructed to build a church to be known as St Petri. It was interesting to notice that one of the other trustees was Edward Delchau, whose daughter, Anna Sophia Mathilda, married Johann's youngest son, Diedrich Heinrich, in 1887.

Wilhelmine died of a stroke in 1883, aged 71, leaving eight children and thirty three grandchildren. Records give her place of burial as Lobethal Cemetery, but for some reason, her headstone was removed from the grave and placed, with about ten other headstones, in a recess near the door of the Lobethal Lutheran Church, built in 1859 and, now used as a Parish hall. Wilhelmine's headstone is well preserved and the inscription, written in German, is clearly readable.

Johann died in 1891, aged 76, of a brain hemorrhage, parting with forty grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Records indicate that he was buried at the Lobethal Cemetery, but the site has not been located. Johann and Wilhelmine are to be admired and respected for their courage, faith and tenacity, in overcoming enormous handicaps and difficulties, setting a fine example for their hundreds of Australian descendants.

Updated by Barry Malcolm 21 March 2015