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Digel became Tickle

An American in the homeland of his ancestors from Immenhausen

In the 18th hundred century a Johannes Digel emigrated from Immenhausen to America. One of his descendants, Joey Tickle, visited the Haerten yesterday.

From Ulrike Pfeil

Kusterdingen. For the 54 year old from Arizona a heart's desire become true when he left the car in Immenhausen yesterday. "Already his father had dreamed to visit the home of his ancestors in Europe, but unfortunately didn't make it during his life", said Joey Tickle. With great enthusiasm he took pictures from all entry plates of the cities with the names of the cities on it, which he has learned during his genealogy research, Immenhausen, Gomaringen, Stockach. He nearly couldn't believe that he was in the city, which he had visited from the air via Google Earth. "It isn't the same", said Tickle.

It took a quite a while of intensive search until he had discovered Immenhausen as the hometown of his ancestors. The internet and especially the huge pedigree archive of the Mormon Church did help where the father didn't know any details any more. So he found out that he had to search for Digel. Some day he came across Ruediger Kemmler's website by accident, who works on the history of the emigration of the Haerten. A friend from Hungary did encourage him for a first visit in Europe and offered himself also as driver.

In the meantime Joe Tickle can explain himself how Digel changed in his American name today. The Johann or Johannes emigrated in 1754 to Pennsylvania where two of his brother's Peter and Werner had already settled. He ended up finally in North Carolina, where his tombstone with the German inscription is still available on a Lutheran cemetery. Only Tickle's parents moved from North Carolina to Arizona.

In America the G in the family name became CK and then the D became T and Tickel finally became the American spelling "Tickle" which means "tickle". Before Joey all his ancestors had German first names as for example his father was named Hermann. "Mason, carpenter, or workers in the coal or copper mines have been his ancestors" said Joey. He himself works a hospital nurse.

From Manfred Wandel from the Historical Society and Mayor, Juergen Soltau the visitors where told that there still live a lot of Digel especially in Mähringen and Gomaringen as the phone directory proofs, during a reception in the City Hall.

The first Digel in Immenhausen, Marx with his first name could be shown in a family book from 1548. Where he lived is not known, but at least the Ticksles and their friends could visit the "almshouse" in Immenhausen built in 1657 which today is private property, the "monastery court" in Kusterdingen and the old City Hall, which give an impression how the emigrants lived during their time.

Joe Tickle was deeply impressed by the encounter with his family history on the second day of his stay in Europe. He likes everything he saw so far. From Frankfurt the travel group drove in a rental car via Straßburg to Gengenbach in the Black Forest. Today they will continue the trip via Munich, Salzburg to Austria and subsequently to the home county of his friend to Hungary and finally to Poland.

Five countries in 11 days – but before the flight back on Oct 24 there is a meeting planned with Ruediger Kemmler, whom he owes so much.



Fear to be put in the "blame violin" wasn't very likely the reason, rather the bitter hardships what his ancestors let emigrate. In the former bullpen of the old City Hall of Kusterdingen Manfred Wandel (left) from the Historical Society introduced the visitors from Arizona to a punishment method of the former centuries. Tickle's wife, Sheila (right) is administrator of a youth court and therefore nearly in the same business.

From the Haerten in the New World

A wave of emigration since the 18th century but especially in the 19th century did result in a reduction of the inhabitants in the Haerten cities. Due to crop failures and dearth several hundreds people of the cities forming Kusterdingen today have searched a new living in foreign countries, most of them in North America but also in the settlement areas along the Danube river or in Russia. Ruediger Kemmler born in Wankheim and living in Munich as an insurance manager has traced down more than thousands of emigrants from the Haerten. His web site is an important source for a lot of the descendants, mainly in the USA, who are researching the roots of their Swabian ancestors.