

Jacob Orth and his Siblings

Introduction

It was more than 40 years ago that I became captivated by Alsace, and by tracing the path of my great grandfather, Jacob Orth, to America. All I had to go on was a name, birthdate, and the misspelled name of his natal village from the Orth Family bible. Now I know a lot more.

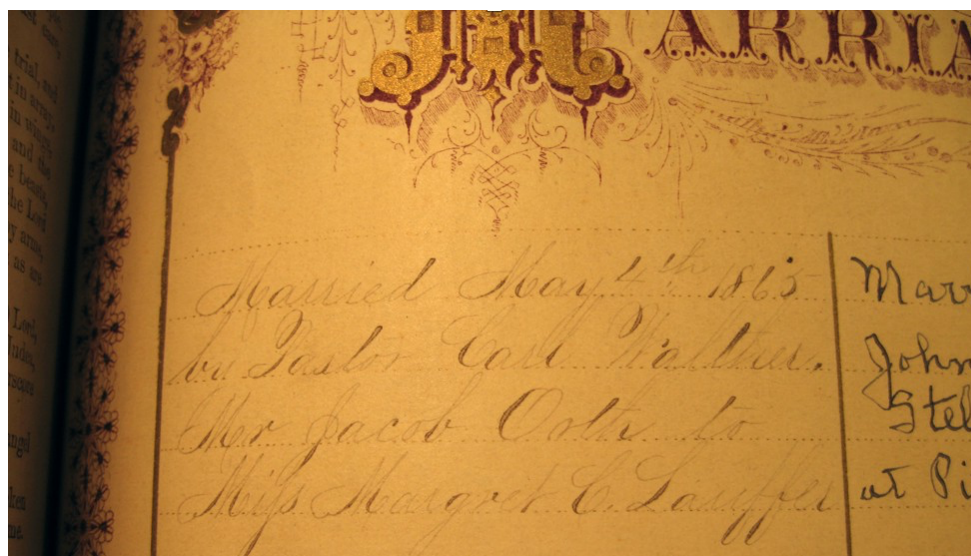
The first evidence I found the hard way, in the late 1970s, by spending dozens and dozens of hours in the departmental archives in Strasbourg, France, poring over the fragile, aging paper documents bearing original signatures—some confident, some wobbly, and others merely marked with an “X.” I was 22 years old. I proceeded to knock on doors in villages in the vicinity where Jacob was born, albeit nearly 150 years after his birth.

In some ways not much had changed. Beautiful timbered houses from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries lined the two intersecting streets that made up the village, surrounded by picturesque fields and a luscious, rolling landscape. It didn't take much to imagine when the streets were unpaved or to



visually filter out the utility poles and rooftop antennae as I envisioned my ancestors—a long line of blacksmiths—going about their lives with their families. As I walked through my great grandfather's village of several hundred people, the barking dogs alerted all that there was a stranger in town.

After returning home from a year of living in Alsace, having just completed a stage in a science lab at the University of Strasbourg, my passion was thoroughly ignited, and I set out to find out what happened in the time between Jacob's birth on the 4th of July in 1836 in the little village of Retschwiller, Alsace, France and the next entry in the Orth Family bible recorded across the ocean in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on the 4th of May 1865—his marriage to Margaret Catherine Lauffer.



Did Jacob come alone to America? When? Why? And why did he end up in Pittsburgh? I had next to no information.

Over the years that have passed since my first visit to the Alsatian village of Retschwiller, it has become easier and easier to find evidence about my great grandfather, his family, and both their ascendants and descendants, counterintuitive as that may be. Those very same birth, marriage, and death records that I had needed to stand in line to get 40 years ago—parsed out to me one-by-one by a stern, impatient woman at the Archives Departementales du Bas-Rhin in Strasbourg, France—are now available online with just a series of clicks. In addition to vital records, one can find ship manifests, census reports, newspaper articles, and even the lucky biographical sketch, all on the internet. My system of handwritten index cards gave way to a massive digital genealogy program, with the added advantage of being able to access others like me, who post records, questions, hypothesized relationships, DNA evidence, and even photos.

As factual information became more available, my curiosity expanded beyond the what-happened-when, to coming to understand the context for my great

grandfather Jacob Orth's life, in Alsace and in America, as well as the family system in which he grew up, and the family he created.

Part One—The context of 18th and 19th century rural Alsace

Understanding the historical context of Alsace, and getting a glimpse of village life, particularly the role of the blacksmith, provides a vivid backdrop enabling one to begin to construct a picture of Jacob Orth's family and their situation in Alsace.

The homeland: Alsace



Alsace is a region currently located in the very northeast of France. Given its strategic importance over time, it is surprising to me that Alsace is less than half the size of the state of New Jersey. Imagine bisecting the state vertically and you have an area whose size and shape roughly approximates Alsace. But instead of the Atlantic Ocean bordering its eastern edge (as it does for New Jersey), the Rhine River marks the eastern edge of Alsace—the current border between Germany and France. The Vosges mountains run parallel to the Rhine, on the French side of the border.

Oddly, I feel a deep contentment being in the Alsatian countryside that goes beyond enjoying its pastoral beauty. I have wondered whether this feeling is rooted in genetic memory—a sense of belonging imprinted in my cells from generations of

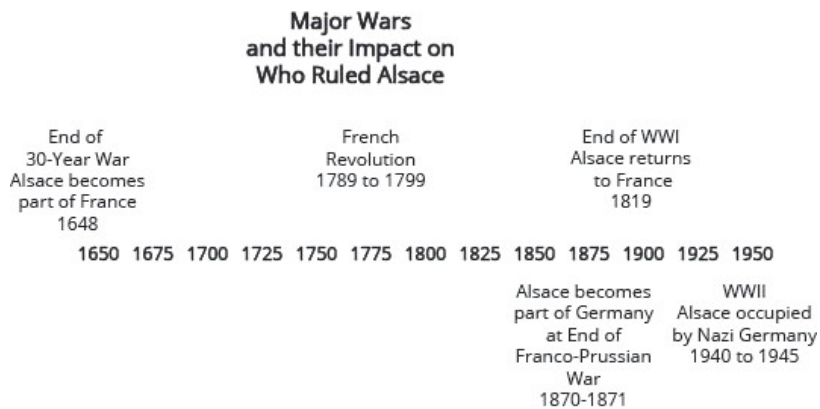


ancestors. When I first wondered this, somewhat romantically, many years ago, genetic memory was only the stuff of science fiction. Since then, the burgeoning field of epigenetics is looking at whether environment and even experience can affect how our genes express themselves, and whether these changes can be passed on to subsequent generations. While still controversial, there are growing bits of evidence from studies in animals that are leading the field to understand more. While it's a lovely thought that my feelings of belonging somehow came through my genes, I suspect that the more likely candidates for imprinting on genetic memory are negative experiences, like famine and fear, rather than feelings of well-being or love of cabbage! Whatever the reasons, I love Alsace.

Even Julius Caesar is said to have fallen in love with Alsace. He is reputed to have commented on the unusual bounty of its land—it was the Romans who first introduced viticulture to Alsace at Caesar's behest. Louis XIV is quoted as saying, "What a beautiful garden," as he viewed Alsace from atop the Vosges mountains. Indeed, for centuries, the Alsatian countryside has been valued for its relatively high levels of productivity, diversity of crops, and peasant ownership, in contrast with other regions in France and neighboring Germany. Historically, the highly fertile areas of the central Alsatian plain produced a variety of grains; the rocky slopes that abutted the Vosges mountains were, and still are, covered with vineyards; while other areas produced a variety of crops including potatoes, turnips, cabbages, and hops. Fruit trees thrived and were a standard feature of nearly every Alsatian home. At its best, Alsace was a land of plenty, particularly given its relatively small land area.

Alsace was not always the idyllic setting, though. In part because of its coveted resources, in part because it exists along the Rhine, a key transportation route, situated at a strategic crossroads between France, Germany, and Switzerland, Alsace seemed to have been eternally trampled by soldiers. To say "trampled" might sound too flippant, as the resultant damage, disruption, and death was no joke. Alsace became part of France in 1648, at the conclusion of the devastating Thirty Years War, during which Alsace and much of the region is estimated to have lost 40% of its population. The Thirty Years War began largely as a war over religion, fought in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, a transformation which had disrupted the European balance between Catholics and Protestants. In the early 1700s, wars continued; villages in the vicinity of where my ancestors lived were abandoned for some years because troops passing through had stripped their fields and trees of all produce. The French Revolution enveloped Alsace as well (1789-1799). A century later, at the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871,

Alsace and nearby Lorraine were ceded by France to Germany, only to be returned to France in 1918, at the end of World War I. For a brief period, during World War II, from 1940-1945, Nazi Germany occupied Alsace. The events during this period are terror-filled, with the Nazi's building a death camp in the Vosges mountains and conducting medical experimentation on Jews at the University of Strasbourg, the same place where I worked for a year in 1979-80.



All but 52 of the past 370+ years, Alsace has been part of France. And yet, many consider it to be German. To this day, and with few exceptions, Alsatians will proudly tell you they are French. And yet an unmistakable, germanic culture permeates the people, the language (Alsatian is a dialect of German), the cuisine, and the architecture. It's clearly a case where even centuries of belonging to France didn't erase more than a millennium of being part of the Holy Roman Empire, with its germanic roots, that preceded the formation of the German Empire. That said, Alsatian culture is its own distinct brand. Many have said that having been passed back and forth between two countries only strengthened the resolve of Alsatians to maintain their own strong cultural identity.

It is in this tiny corner of the world, ravaged over the centuries, and occupied by people with indelible pride, that my great grandfather Jacob Orth and his family lived.

Life as a village blacksmith

My great grandfather, Jacob's father, was a blacksmith in the little village of Retschwiller, just as Jacob's grandfather had been, and his father before him. In those times, in Alsace, birth order played a significant role in one's options in life. Depending on its size, a village might be able to support a handful of blacksmiths, but that did not guarantee that there would be opportunities for all of a blacksmith's sons to continue on with the family work. The oldest sons were given priority.

Jacob
Orth
~1730-1820
(blacksmith in Rott)

Johann
Orth
1763-1840
(blacksmith in Retschwiller)

Jacob
Orth
1803-1849
(blacksmith in Retschwiller then Oberseebach)

Jacob
Orth
1836-1906
(my great grandfather)

As the third son of a blacksmith in the nearby village of Rott, Jacob's grandfather moved to Retschwiller in order to be able to continue his familial occupation of blacksmith. In order to work as a blacksmith, Jacob's grandfather needed to find a different village in which to live, and his two older brothers became the blacksmiths in Rott. His younger brother, on the other hand, chose to stay in the village of Rott, but pursued a different occupation—that of stone mason. Perhaps he couldn't find a place to be a blacksmith or perhaps he chose the familiarity of staying in his birth village over occupation. The more likely fate for younger brothers was to become laborers, working for others, or even day laborers, hiring out to work day-by-day, providing help for whomever needed it, not unlike the immigrant workers who line the curb nearby where I live. Jacob's younger brother was lucky to become a stone mason.

Sometimes it took years before offspring could step into the role of blacksmith. Jacob Orth's grandfather's father (and brothers) were also blacksmiths as were many of their sons. Jacob Orth's uncle (Philipp Martin Orth) worked as a laborer until his father's cousin, a blacksmith in nearby Kutzenhausen, died, at which point Philipp took over for his father's cousin as blacksmith at age 40. One can trace the movement of younger siblings as Orth blacksmiths spread out to other villages in order to pursue the family livelihood of blacksmithing. Clearly, the shared profession tied families together.

Below is a photo of where the Orth family lived in Retschwiller. It is where Jacob was born, and where he lived with his parents, siblings, and grandparents. Jacob's grandfather's and father's blacksmithy is the lower building to the right.



Orth family property in Retschwiller. The timbered building is where animals and hay were kept. The building to the right is the blacksmith workshop. The house is out of sight to the left (and significantly remodeled).

Embedded in the wall of the blacksmith workshop is an anvil that must have been in use when the blacksmithy was operational. In 1990, accompanied by my (distant) cousins (more later about this wonderful development), I was able to speak to some current residents of Retschwiller and to poke around the old abandoned space. I even picked up a few nails and an old horseshoe. Apparently the original forge had been sold and moved to another village more than a decade earlier.



Anvil embedded in the wall of the blacksmithy

Blacksmiths of old fabricated a diverse array of metal objects, and provided many services, including: forging plough shares (the metal part of a plough that creates the furrows in the soil) and agricultural hand tools such as hoes and scythes; crafting and fitting metal treads onto the wooden wheels of a wagon; making the metal brackets used to support beams in a house and the metal bands on barrels; creating nails; and of course making horseshoes and shoeing the horses. In their spare time, blacksmiths would also make decorative items such as the beautiful wrought iron gravemarker in the Retschwiller cemetery pictured below. It dates to the era where it could have been made by either Jacob's father or his grandfather.

*Iron grave marker in
Retschwiller, Alsace*



The need to regularly replace metal treads on wooden wheels and to shoe horses meant that people had regular transactions with the village blacksmith, at least as often as every couple of months. In the 19th century, people paid a blacksmith in kind (a bag of wheat, a ham, or a couple of chickens). And they didn't pay each time they came. I guess it was a bit like today's subscription arrangements—you pay periodically for ongoing access to services.

One historical account describes a system of accounting that involved two matching sticks. A blacksmith had a stick for each customer; each customer had a matching stick. When a customer came to shoe their horse, or get some nails, they would bring their stick. The blacksmith would hold the two sticks together and notch them both. At the end of the season, or sometimes even just once a year (frequently between Christmas and New Year's Day), the blacksmith would visit each customer

to collect payment, counting the number of notches on the stick to figure out what a person owed. This was an ingenious system when you consider that this was a time when not everyone was literate or perhaps even numerate. Further, even for the literate, this system dealt with the fact that paper and writing utensils were not necessarily available or a convenient way of record keeping for a blacksmith in their dark workshop.



A blacksmith's workshop was kept dark so one could detect the color of the fire in the forge, The color of the flames indicated the temperature — different operations required different temperatures.

Not all villages were alike

Just as now and elsewhere, different villages in Alsace were different sizes, had differing levels of wealth, and their own character. For example, in 1836 (the first year census data is available), the village of Rott, where Jacob's grandfather was born, had a population of 718, whereas the village of Retschwiller where he moved as a young man, was half that size, with a population of 440. The majority of households in both villages were engaged with farming, though Rott had significantly more farmers working their own land while most of those involved in farming in Retschwiller did so as laborers—working for others. This reflects a

difference in wealth between the two villages, as does the fact that Retschwiller had a significantly higher percentage of women working as domestics and young men serving as soldiers.

It followed that different-sized villages could support different levels of infrastructure and services. Both Rott and Retschwiller had a mayor, a teacher, shoemakers, a wagon maker or two, barrel makers, carpenters, and a mill with a miller. The basics. Retschwiller had several shepherds and a higher percentage of weavers than Rott; Rott had stonemasons and other higher-status skilled artisans. While Rott had a church, a pastor, a butcher, a barber, and a woodcutter, Retschwiller had none of that. Soultz-sous-Forêts, a village adjacent to Retschwiller, had both a Catholic and Protestant church where those from Retschwiller would likely have gone to worship. I did the 25-minute walk down the hill to the church myself.

In addition to size and wealth, another key difference between the two villages was the religious make-up of its inhabitants. While Rott and Retschwiller were each comprised of about 80-85% Protestants and 15-20% Catholics, the Protestants in Rott were mostly Calvinists (also referred to as Reformed Protestants), while the Protestants in Retschwiller were almost entirely Lutherans. In fact, in 1809, only 2% of Retschwiller's inhabitants were Calvinists—these most likely were Jacob Orth and his family. It appears that in moving out of Rott to become the blacksmith in Retschwiller, Jacob Orth's grandfather chose occupation over living in a community with others of the same faith as he was.

Though France was considered to be a Catholic country, once Alsace joined France, Louis XIV agreed to recognize the right for Alsations to identify and worship as Protestants—either Lutherans, Calvinists, or Anabaptists. Further, the French Revolution brought official recognition for Judaism as well, with it becoming one of several religions to receive state support beginning in 1831. From the French Revolution until World War II, the majority of Jews in France lived in Alsace. Consequently, across Alsace, there were cities and villages comprised entirely of Catholics, located right next door to villages comprised entirely of Protestants, and more cities and villages that were a mixture of both. While there were many fewer Jews and Anabaptists than other religious groups, they too resided with others in cities and villages across Alsace. It was uncommon across France for there to be the kind of diversity of religious beliefs that coexisted in villages in Alsace.

This is not to say that there were not tensions between the followers of different religions, which shouldn't be surprising, given that religious differences fueled wars. Perhaps given the increased proximity, tensions may have been felt more directly. Marked divisions occurred, ranging from where in a village a family lived, to the allowable professions, to the clothing each group wore every day. As one example, the color, size, and/or style of the head wear girls and women wore identified a person's affiliation as Protestant or Catholic, as did the style of clothing and head wear worn by Jews. Without even talking to a person you could tell what their religious identity was. Another tension related to the need for different religious groups to share places of worship. While officially tolerant of religions besides Catholicism, France clearly favored and incited the practice of Catholicism, something that was evident in many state policies. For example, if a village had at least seven Catholic families, then it was required that the Protestant church be shared, alternating Sundays. The reverse was not true.

Intermarriage did occur between different types of Protestants. A prime example were Jacob's parents—his mother was raised Lutheran while his father, Calvinist. However, intermarriage was rare between Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, given strong discouragement by religious leaders and community reactions. In fact, not unlike today, the religious organizations of the time seemed to work hard at proclaiming and reinforcing the differences between their followers and others.

The economics of rural Alsace in the first half of the 19th century

Wars and religion aside, 19th century rural France was full of other challenges as well, any of which could have made a family decide to pick up and move to another continent. First, roughly every ten years there was a climatic disaster—too cold, too hot, too much rain, not enough rain—and these disasters produced subsistence crises. While certainly these conditions were not unique to France (or to those times), the dependence in Alsace on locally-grown food, and the relatively high population density was such that the ratio of food-producing land to people was low. During these periods there was often not enough food produced to meet the nutritional needs of the people who lived there.

There is no doubt that Jacob Orth and his family experienced extended periods when food was scarce. Heavy rainfall in the year 1827 led to decimation of the grain crop in Alsace. That year, the death rate in the village of Retschwiller was almost

three times higher than in typical years. This resulted in an economic crisis, beginning in 1827, that was deepened by the harsh winter of 1829-30, when the crisis was considered to have achieved depression status. Even the potatoes froze in the ground! To put these events in the context of the Orth family, my great grandfather Jacob Orth's parents (Jacob Orth the elder and Magdalena Schneider) were married in Retschwiller in 1828, a year into the crisis; their first two daughters were born in 1829 (Magdalena Orth aka Lena) and 1831 (Elisabethe Orth).

Second, the first half of the 19th century also marked the early industrialization of France, which had a wide range of impacts. Industries that had formerly been cottage industries, such as weaving, were transitioning to mechanized, regional industries. The pace of these changes in France was relatively drawn out, and different for different industries, but the trend line was evident. Like in other parts of the world, increasing industrialism was accompanied by many growing pains, some associated with challenges faced across the emerging industry, e.g. the need to create reliable supply chains and distribute product, not to mention in this case, coping with increasingly high taxation placed on the export of products by the central government of France. At one point during this period, the wine-makers of Alsace claimed that the tax owed on export of their wine to neighboring Germany cost more than the purchase price of the wine itself. This resulted in periodic economic instability.

More significantly, now faced with competition from factories, artisans' livelihoods were dramatically impacted. Depending on a person's situation, they either: sought out 'comparable' work at factories, for less pay as well as loss of control of their work; modified the scope of their work, focusing on things that could not yet be mechanized; or lost that line of livelihood altogether. In particular, this latter circumstance often catalyzed the decision to emigrate.

The occupational inheritance one can see playing out in the Orth family was more than a transaction between father and son. Typically all members of the family participated in supporting the family's line of work, including women and children. In blacksmith families, younger children may have been sent out to gather kindling to use to start fires in the forge or they might have sorted newly-forged nails by size. Older children may have operated the bellows to increase the temperature of the flame at key moments of the crafting of a metal object or have taken a wagon to pick up wood from the woodcutter. Wives might have helped determine what people owed. The sons who were designated to take over the occupation became involved more and more, learning by their fathers' sides as apprentices. One's

inheritance literally came from learning the skills of the occupation, some of which took many years to learn, and using that experience to engage and support the economic unit which would become their family. Thus, with the disruption of the location of and control over work, industrial capitalism actually disrupted how families operated in Alsace, how they accomplished work, and how they set up the next generation for success.

A third hardship for those living in rural France was imposed in 1827, when the French government further restricted access to forests for gathering wood for fuel and pasturing animals. This act disproportionately affected peasants living in rural areas, and surely would have had an impact on blacksmiths who relied on wood to run their forges. It perhaps accelerated their transition to the use of coal instead of wood.

Taken together, these hardships created conditions that led to grain riots, not just in Alsace but across provincial France. Local peasants, often women and children, protested high grain prices and literally stood in the road to block the export of the scarce grain crop to other parts of France. The poor grain and potato harvests extended for five years, through 1832—a long time to be hungry. I wonder whether Jacob's family participated in the protests.

The social and political events during this period are known as the Bourgeois Revolution of 1830 and drove a wave of emigration. This in turn foreshadowed a broader series of revolutions across Europe in 1846-1848. As with the Revolution of 1830, the Revolutions of 1846-1848 were preceded by economic and subsistence crises, extending from 1845-1850, which would again impact Jacob's family. While Ireland's Potato Famine is common knowledge, a parallel crisis that was taking place on the European continent is rarely discussed.

"The Continental Famine was caused by poor harvests of potatoes, due to the same late blight [as the outbreak in Ireland], but also of grain, due to frost, drought, rust, voles, inopportune rains, floods, and hailstorms. The Continental Famine was enhanced by hoarding, speculation, and poor governance. Hunger was followed by infectious diseases. The demographic effects of hunger and diseases are difficult to disentangle. The number of excess deaths due to the Continental Famine cannot yet be determined with any precision, but clearly it approaches that of the Irish Famine."
(Zadoks, 2008)

Perhaps it is not a surprise, then, that one of the largest waves of emigration out of Alsace began in the late 1820s and peaked in the 1850s—the period bracketing the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848. But I’m getting a little ahead of myself.

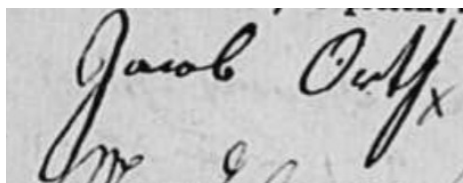
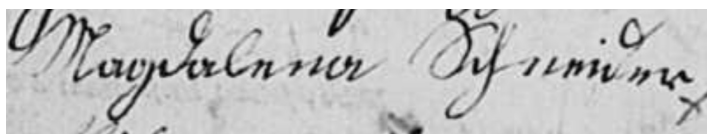
Part Two—Jacob’s Family in Alsace

Coming to understand more specifically what was happening in Jacob’s family during this time can help to reveal additional factors that may have figured into the Orth family’s decision to emigrate to America. Discovering information about Jacob’s parents and grandparents has been a matter of poring over census documents and birth, marriage, and death registers. These often include signatures and identification of witnesses, revealing a web of connections, with information about peoples’ birthplaces, relationships, and professions. Seeking out descriptions of what was happening in the specific places they lived helped to further color a picture of them and their lives.

However, there are no letters, no living relatives who knew Jacob or Jacob’s parents—very little first hand information to go on. The most valuable source of information was a 2-page biographical account of my grandfather, Frank Jacob Orth, published in the book, *Pittsburgh and Her People* that I found online. This account, based on an interview with my grandfather, includes some bits about his father (Jacob Orth) and in turn about Jacob Orth’s parents. Together, all of the small bits of evidence that exist can help tell the story of these people who died so long ago.

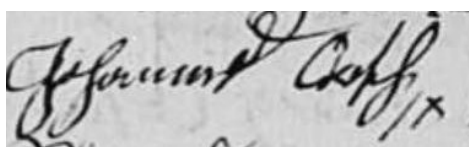
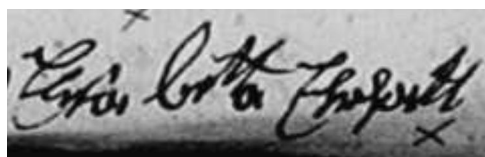
Jacob Orth’s parents

First, we know that Jacob’s father and mother were both born in the village of Retschwiller, just after the French Revolution drew to a close (in 1803 and 1801, respectively). They were later married in Retschwiller in 1828 on September 30th. Jacob the elder was 25 years old, working with his father, Johann, as a blacksmith. Jacob’s mother, Magdalena Schneider, was 27. These are their signatures on their wedding day, which happened to be on a Tuesday, a common day for weddings.

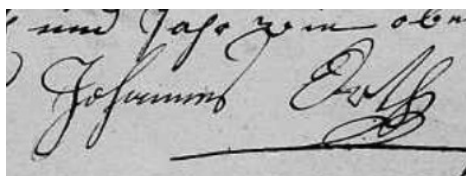
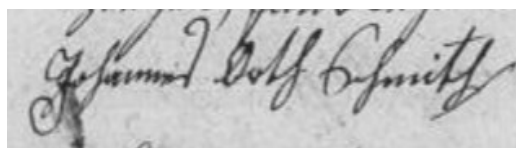
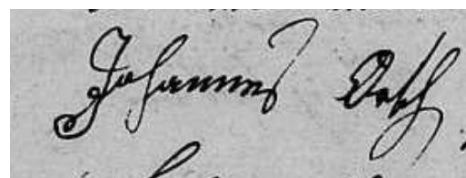
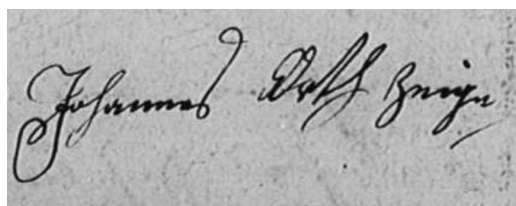
A close-up of a handwritten signature in black ink on aged paper. The signature reads "Jacob Oelf" in a cursive script.A close-up of a handwritten signature in black ink on aged paper. The signature reads "Magdalena Oelf" in a cursive script.

Village weddings in Alsace were joyful, festive, inclusive celebrations and typically featured a procession through the village, of wagons and people carrying objects for the married couple's new life: the wedding bed covered with garlands of flowers, an armoire, tables and chairs, a tub, kitchen utensils, a cradle, etc. Given the financial hardships of the year—1828, Jacob's parents might have had a more modest procession than some. Further, reflective of these slim times, they lived with Jacob the elder's parents, thus were not setting up a new household.

Jacob the elder's parents were also present on the wedding day. Johann Orth and Elisabeth Ehrhardt were 63 years old and 60 years old, respectively, on Jacob and Magdalena's wedding day. Having recently attended my son's wedding, I can imagine that Johann and Elisabeth must have experienced deep satisfaction and overflowing happiness. Here are their signatures on that day.

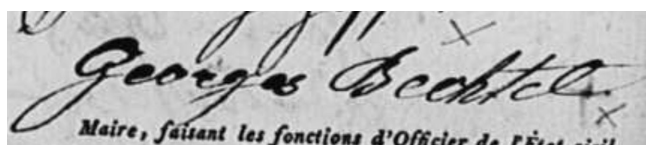
A close-up of a handwritten signature in black ink on aged paper. The signature reads "Johann Orth" in a cursive script.A close-up of a handwritten signature in black ink on aged paper. The signature reads "Elisabeth Ehrhardt" in a cursive script.

Incidentally, one can find Johann Orth's signature, as a witness, on many different documents in Retschwiller. Perhaps the frequency with which his signature appears signifies that he was a highly respected person in the little village of Retschwiller (we know that he served as mayor for some number of years), that he was a friend to many, or maybe just that he lived nearby to the place where people came to sign so was a convenient witness. There were only about 400 people who lived in Retschwiller at the time. Here are some of my favorite signatures of his:

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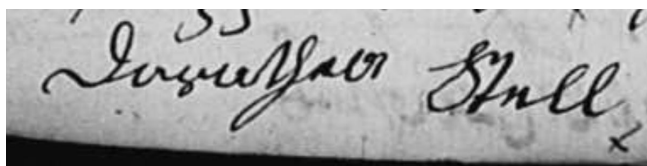
Looking across multiple documents at his signature, you can see that he sometimes signed Johannes Orth Schmidt (schmidt is Alsatian for blacksmith), indicating the pride and identity tied up with his profession. Comparing his signatures to the signatures of others, Johann appears to be both confident, perhaps more accustomed to writing, and to even have a bit of flourish to his style. I love the little embellishments he adds.

We know that Jacob the elder's sister Eva Orth was also present at the wedding, likely carrying her 9 month old baby, Karl (whose name would change to Charles after emigration to America). Eva herself had been married the year before, in 1827, to Georges Bechtel, a teacher from the nearby village of Leiterswiller, where they now lived, in the school house. Georges was one of the witnesses to Jacob and Magdalena's marriage.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Georges Bechtel". Below the signature, there is a line of printed text in French: "Maire, faisant les fonctions d'Officier de l'État civil".

Georges' father, also a teacher, and Georges' older brother would leave for Philadelphia in just a few years time—sometime after 1830. Georges and Eva would follow in 1838. These are likely some of the influences that led Jacob Orth's family to emigrate to America.

Jacob's mother, Magdalena, was a Schneider—a prominent family in Retschwiller, with many households bearing the name, most of them related. In the records, Magdalena's father, Philipp Schneider, is listed as a plowman and then a farmer (perhaps he initially hired out as a day laborer able to serve as a plowman, and then was able to purchase and farm his own land). Like Johann Orth, Magdalena's father, Philipp Schneider, had served as mayor of Retschwiller, a socially important role. He was deceased at the time of Jacob and Magdalena's wedding—he died when Magdalena was 13 years old—but the signature of her 68 year old mother, Dorothea Stell, showed that she was present at the wedding. From her rusty signature, it seems as if she did not often have the occasion to write.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dorothea Stell". The script is somewhat stylized and appears to be from an older document.

After the death of Magdalena's father, Magdalena and her mother Dorothea lived with Magdalena's older sibling, Philipp Schneider, and his family. Philipp was eleven years older than Magdalena and worked as a laborer. Magdalena would have needed to bring a dowry to her marriage. Typically this might have included: a spinning wheel; a trunk containing her daily clothing, and outfits for Sundays, holidays and celebrations; as well as household linens such as tablecloths and bed linens. Magdalena's older brother Philipp would likely have helped to provide this. During the years between when Magdalena's father died and when Magdalena married and moved out, brother Philipp and his wife had 7 children—doubtless Magdalena would have been needed to help care for them. One of these children, Magdalena's nephew, would emigrate to America in 1846—another likely influence as Jacob's parents considered whether or not to emigrate.

Enter Jacob

Over the next decade or so, Jacob the elder and Magdalena would have six children, three of whom lived to adulthood. The first five were born in Retschwiller. One of those was Jacob, my great grandfather.

Jacob Orth 1803-1849		& Magdalena Schneider 1801-1849			
Magdalena Katharine Orth 1829-1881	Elisabeth Orth 1831-bef.1849	Salomea 1834-1835	Jacob Orth 1836-1906	Georg Philippe Orth 1838-1880	Salomea 1841-1842

The local economy and the weather, for that matter, had improved some by the time little Jacob was born, on 4 July 1836. His birth must have brought the family great joy, as the year before, in August 1835, they had lost baby Salomea (on the tail of a year when Retschwiller showed double the number of deaths typically recorded—all children). Who knows what the cause might have been—perhaps scarlet fever or another disease that disproportionately felled children. All the Protestant and Catholic babies were baptised, an important moment in a family's life. Baptisms brought with them their own traditions, including a procession of the celebrants in the village. Below is a photo of one such baptismal procession.



Baptismal procession in Oberseebach

Yet the joy of Jacob's birth would not spare the family from a subsequent series of sad events, each of which brought about more personal loss. In the Fall of 1837, Jacob the elder's younger sister, Elisabeth Orth (married to Jacob Hirlemann) died at age 33, leaving six little children, one of whom was a baby. She had lived in the nearby village of Kutzenhausen. In the Spring of 1838, Jacob the elder's older sister, Eva Orth (married to Georges Bechtel), set sail with her husband and four young children to America. Then, Magdalena's mother Dorothea Stell died in November 1838 at age 78—just a month after Magdalena gave birth to her fifth child, Georg Philippe Orth. And Jacob the elder's mother Elisabeth Ehrhardt died two months later in January 1839 at age 70. In just over a year's time, Jacob's father had lost his only two sisters (one to death; the other to America), and he and wife Magdalena had both lost their mothers.

In the Fall of 1839, Jacob and Magdalena, their four surviving children, and Jacob's grandfather, Johann, picked up and moved from Retschwiller to the village of Oberseebach, where Jacob the elder and his father set up to continue their work as blacksmiths. Just a few months later, in January of 1840, Jacob the elder's father Johann died at the age of 76. Jacob and Magdalena had lost the last of their living parents and now lived in a new village, where their support network was thinner. Jacob the elder would likely have needed to write a letter to his sister Eva Orth, now

in Philadelphia, letting her know that their parents had both died, and that he had moved out of Retschwiller, their natal village, to pursue his livelihood in Oberseebach.

Little Jacob and his siblings would have been young when the family moved to Oberseebach; Lena age 10; Elisabethe age 8; Jacob age 4; Georg age 2. Oberseebach was about a two hour walk from Retschwiller—likely longer if you were walking with children. The family would have had to make multiple trips in a wagon to bring all of their household belongings and any livestock they may have owned, not to mention the contents of their blacksmith's workshop. They moved in October 1839, so would have also had a full larder to transport, with all of the food they had saved up for the winter. Making this move would have involved no small effort and cost. While having lost most of their familial connections in Retschwiller speaks to the timing of such a move, I have wondered what actually motivated the Orth family's move from Retschwiller to Oberseebach itself.

The first thing that comes to mind is that Jacob the elder may have wanted to grow his blacksmith business in a place with more opportunities. In 1836, Retschwiller had five blacksmiths (for a population of about 400) whereas Oberseebach had seven blacksmiths for a population of over 1600. Further, between 1836 and 1841, there was a steady stream of people leaving Retschwiller—this was not the case in Oberseebach. Sixty-six people left Retschwiller during that period, either for another village (as Jacob and Magdalena did), to emigrate to America, or to emigrate elsewhere. Not only would this have led to a diminishing need for blacksmith work in Retschwiller, but there was definitely a trend unfolding—more than just the Orth family felt some urgency to leave.



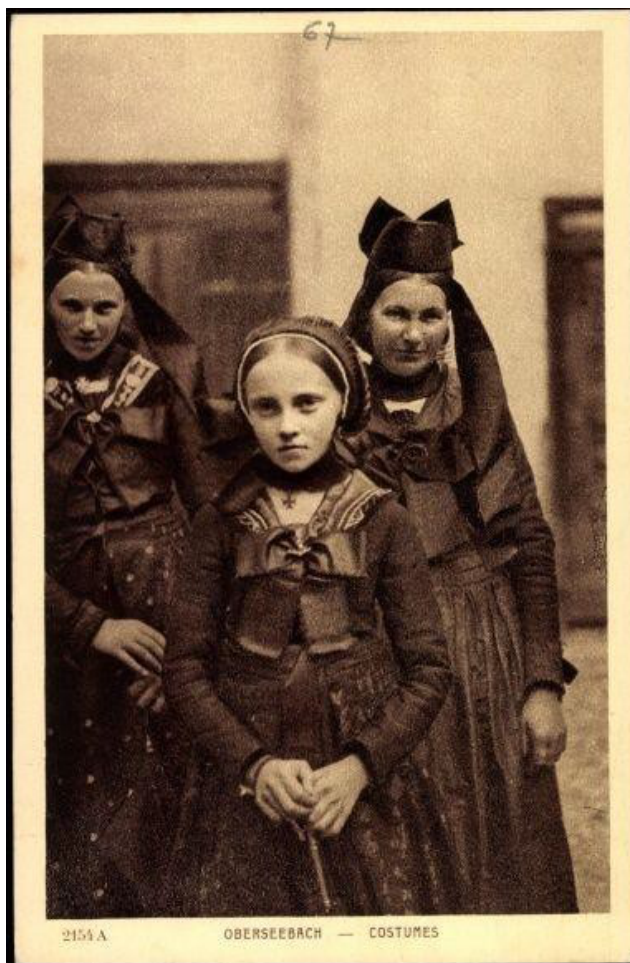
*Oberseebach: The village
Jacob Orth and Magdalena
Schneider moved to in 1839*

Especially given that they were just coming out of an economic depression several years earlier, one could imagine that Jacob and Magdalena craved a setting with more opportunity and prosperity. With its relatively small population, Retschwiller's services included just the bare necessities. Aside from one cabaret (place that serves food and drink), there were no food vendors or other food establishments in Retschwiller. In contrast, Oberseebach had a couple of boulangeries, several butchers, two milkmen, four merchants, a grain seller, an inn, and 4 cabarets. It had a swine herder, a goose farmer, a down-maker, two barbers, a wood cutter, and two midwives. Imagine how different it would have seemed, coming from Retschwiller, where a much greater degree of self-sufficiency was required. Anything needed that was not provided in the village, people had to do themselves, travel to another village to get, or do without.

It's worth noting that the housing stock in Oberseebach was more grand than in Retschwiller, reflected in the fact that Oberseebach had 8 carpenters, a surveyor, 3 window makers, a shutter maker, 13 stone masons, 2 turners (who operated lathes), someone specializing in house embellishments, and two locksmiths. This compared to Retschwiller's single carpenter. Construction brought with it more need for objects forged by blacksmiths as well.

Some of the 'plenty' that was in Oberseebach came from having a population that was more than four times the size of Retschwiller. But that didn't explain everything. There was also greater general wealth in Oberseebach, where in 1836, over 50% of those engaged in agriculture, owned their property, unlike in Retschwiller where only 10% of the households identify themselves as cultivators (as opposed to laborers).

Another indicator of the relative prosperity of Oberseebach, was the number of people focused on making



clothing, particularly nonessential items. While in Retschwiller, there were nine weavers who made cloth and one seamstress, Oberseebach had 29 weavers as well as 6 spinners, 1 seamstress, 7 tailors, and 9 dressmakers (couturières).

Couturières were specialized tailors— typically the ones who made the local traditional costumes that Alsatians wore to church, weddings, and holidays. Unlike tailors, couturières tended to be women. Almost every village had its own traditional costume with slight differences that identified a person’s religion, as well as their stage of life and social status. Apparently there were sometimes even winter and summer variations of the costume.



Having the necessary outfits for Sundays and special occasions was an expected part of every woman’s dowry, but considering the different resources in each family, and in each village, I expect there must have been a significant range of what each person was able to acquire, and who made it. As one example focused on the “big bow” style of headaddress that was characteristic for women living in Strasbourg—though many different factors influenced the style of headaddresses worn by girls and women, wealthier women typically had head-dresses that were more generously big, made with more fabric. Also, wealthier families could have afforded to have someone else make their costume, others would have to make their own.

Variations of the style of headaddress worn in Strasbourg

While there were undoubtedly financial motivations to moving the family, a second reason that could explain the move from Retschwiller to Oberseebach could have had to do with the religious composition of the two villages. Oberseebach was one of just a dozen villages in the north of Alsace with an enclave of Calvinists—the chosen religion of the Orth’s. In 1841, 53% of Oberseebach residents identified

themselves as Catholics, 45% identified as Calvinists; there were only 1% each of Lutherans (16 people) and Jews (20 people). That same year, Retschwiller reported 82% Lutherans and 18% Catholics.

My grandfather, Frank Jacob Orth, recounted that his father had told him that Jacob the elder served as a minister in Alsace. This could explain motivation for the move, especially given that presumably he was a Calvinist minister. As a minister, Jacob the elder would have been more devout than others, and driven to lead others in their faith. For many years, I thought he must have done his ministering in Soultz-sous-Forêts, nearby to Retschwiller—the nearest Protestant church. The fact of the family's move to Oberseebach and that the Protestant church in Soultz-sous-Forêts was Lutheran has made me wonder whether he did his ministering in Oberseebach, and that the family moved to make this easier to do.

I like to think that those early years in Oberseebach, from 1840 to 1845, were happy ones for the Orth family. They may well have been. They were settled in a new village with more opportunity, and the economic context was relatively favorable, given that one had a means for earning a living, which as a blacksmith, Jacob's father did. No longer were they part of a small religious minority, as their community now included many others who were practicing Calvinists. Little Jacob would have been aged 4 to 9 during these first years in Oberseebach, entering the golden years of childhood, with two big sisters and one little brother. And in 1841, the Orth family welcomed another baby—like the first baby they lost, they named her Salomea.

Then again, it might have been a difficult time. The family had recently lost all of its senior members, as well as having lost contact with Jacob's aunts (who died or emigrated) and their families. Jacob's family was no longer were an active part of the community in Retschwiller, though I found some evidence that Jacob the elder returned for a celebration or two, as his signature appears as a witness on a couple of documents. The distance from Retschwiller to Oberseebach likely meant losing all those clients who ordinarily came to get their blacksmithing done by Jacob the elder—business contacts he would no longer have. Becoming part of the community in Oberseebach, building up new business contacts, making friends—all of that would take some time. And then, in 1842, baby Salomea died at the age of seven months.

Whether, in general, these were happy times or not, we are unlikely to know. What we do know is that these five years were an interlude before another difficult period.

Part Three—Emigrating to America

The push and pull that led to emigration

The Orth family's move to Oberseebach in late 1839 preceded, by several years, the impending economic and subsistence crises that extended from 1845-1850. As in the earlier crisis, from 1827-1832, climatic conditions worsened, crops failed (this time due to the potato famine), prices shot up, ushering in hunger and social unrest. Another round of peasant revolutions tore across Europe—the Revolutions of 1846-1848. Emigration numbers peaked as people sought better situations.

In 1846, after enduring a year of this new period of challenges, Jacob's family might have received a letter from Eva Orth in Philadelphia, saying that her husband, Georges Bechtel had died at age 42, leaving Eva with an infant and several other young children. Would Jacob the elder have felt some pull to join her? That same year, Magdalena's nephew, Michael Schneider, the third son of Magdalena's only brother, Philipp Schneider—the boy who Magdalena had helped raise—decided to emigrate to America, to Iowa. The Orth family likely knew many others who were leaving Alsace, heading to America or to Russia, another popular destination for emigrants seeking better lives. In some villages, groups of families chose to emigrate together, and settle as a group.

It also turns out that there were emigration agents who traveled door to door in France encouraging emigration. Some were employed by shipping companies—the shipping companies reserved space for passengers on their ships that agents were required to fill. Some agents represented a country, seeking to populate a region that needed settlement. Still others were religious proselytizers, looking to recruit members to their faith to populate a new location. These agents traveled from region to region, mostly in Alsace and Lorraine where both the population and the impact of industrialization was greater than in other areas of France. Agents marketed emigration as a pathway to prosperity. They connected immigrants with carriage services that could transport them overland to the coast (usually to Le

Havre, France for those headed to North America) and facilitated purchase of cross-Atlantic passenger fare.

Imagine being Jacob's parents. The conditions surrounding their life had gotten more difficult, seemingly with no bottom in sight. They were likely in the position, regularly, of worrying whether they would have enough food and money to survive. The bourgeois revolutions of 1846-1848 were underway but had yet to succeed, and would not. The family had picked up and moved from Retschwiller to Oberseebach. Could they pick up and move again?

And yet, the decision to emigrate was enormous. There was so much that could and did go wrong in what can be characterized as the three segment journey of emigration—overland to port of departure; crossing the Atlantic; and then getting to one's final destination in a new country. The emigration agents helped only with the front end of the journey. One can imagine, despite uncertainty and looming dangers involved with such a major journey, how the opportunity to escape the economic instability of Europe, and the resultant fear of not being able to care for one's family during this period of time, would have appealed to many.

Leaving for America

And so Jacob's parents finally decided. In the Spring of 1849, they chose to trade the promise of America for their situation in Alsace. Perhaps the deterioration of their circumstances was so profound that the additional risk of emigration did not deter them. Possibly the move to Oberseebach had effectively served as a rehearsal, a confidence-building event, showing them they could successfully relocate their family. Maybe, with their parents and most of their siblings gone, they no longer felt the pull of their family holding them in Alsace. Whatever the calculus was, we can say for sure, that it was not a rash decision. Even so, what lay in store for them was not what anyone had hoped.

The first tragedy to befall their little family was the death of second oldest daughter, 17 year old, Elisabethe Orth. We don't know exactly how or where she died. I know that she appears alive and well in the 1846 census, at age 15, living with her family in Oberseebach. I have scoured the remarkably complete vital records in the entire region between then and when the family leaves for America, and have found no mention of Elisabethe's death or marriage. And, according to their ship's manifest, Elisabethe did not board the ship with the rest of her family.

Nor is there any evidence that she ended up in America. Considering the facts, it seems as if Elisabethe likely died on the overland journey to Le Havre after they left Alsace and before the family boarded the ship. This makes further sense when you take into account that 1848-1849 was the timing of a serious cholera epidemic in Europe—traveling across France would have provided plenty of opportunity to become infected. Imagine the heartbreak.

I have not yet discussed in any detail Jacob the elder's religion, nor of the important differences between Calvinist (Reformed Protestants) and other Christian beliefs. I'm sure there is much to say, but the point that has stuck with me in learning about Calvinist beliefs in the 19th century is that the church promoted the view that Christians do not earn salvation, but that it is a "*wholly unmerited gift from God—that good works are the Christian response to that gift.*" In short, Calvinist churches believe that *fate is predestined*. Given this view, Elisabethe's death, or anyone's death, really, was considered to be God's will.

When the Orth family finally arrived in Le Havre, the French port of departure to North America, they might have had to wait days or even weeks to board a ship, spending their limited funds for lodging and food. The name of the ship the family boarded was, *The Virginia*. It had originated in Liverpool, England, where it was loaded with its cargo of salt. *The Virginia* then sailed to Le Havre where it picked up 273 passengers, including the Orth family.

While we do not know what *The Virginia* looked like, this is a picture of the ship that brought Eva Orth, Georges Bechtel and their family across the Atlantic ten years earlier. Depending on the wind and weather conditions, the voyage could have taken anywhere between four to six weeks—occasionally longer, never faster.



The Charlemagne — the ship that Eva Orth, Georges Bechtel and family traveled on from Le Havre, France to New York City in 1838

There has been much written about the harrowing trans-Atlantic experiences of emigrants during these times, crowded with hundreds of other passengers in dark, damp, rat-infested, insect-ridden, unventilated spaces. Poor sanitation, limited access to water, and rough seas compounded the misery. Suffice it to say that it was an ordeal at best.

But for the Orth family it was even more terrible. The second tragedy occurred on this second phase of their journey. Jacob Orth, the elder, died enroute from Le Havre, France to New York City. We of course don't know for sure the cause of his death, but the context is telling. First, mortality on immigrant voyages from Europe to New York during the period spanning 1836 to 1853 has been estimated to have been about 3 deaths per 200 passengers. This same study found that there was one year in particular during this period in which the average number of deaths was more than double—1849. The average number of deaths in 1849 would have been more like 6 deaths per 200 passengers. As mentioned previously, the timing of the Orth family's journey corresponds to the cholera epidemic, which, traveled from Europe in 1848 to North America in 1849. Thus 1849, the year that Jacob Orth's family immigrated to America, was a particularly treacherous time to cross the Atlantic, and cholera was a likely cause of death of Jacob Orth, the elder, preceded by what may have been the cholera-caused death of daughter Elisabeth.

After he died mid-Atlantic, Jacob the elder would have been buried at sea. Following is a firsthand account of a burial at sea told by Reuben Smith, in October 1854. (*The Diaries of Reuben Smith*, edited by Lana Wirt Myers, 2018.)

At nine o'clock this morning, she was buried.

I cannot imagine a more oppressively solemn ceremony than a burial at sea. It surpasses the ceremony on land in point of solemnity as much as the awful grandeur of mid-ocean surpasses the mild, soft, beauty of a tranquil lake. The great desolate stretch of water, with its billows and its howling gales, seems to invest the presence of death with a more realizing terror than is felt on land. A general feeling of oppression was felt all over the ship. Seamen and passengers, alike, had a solemn look upon their faces...

Here in mid-ocean, everything is still as death. The corpse is brought from the 2nd cabin sewed up in a piece of sailcloth and strapped to a bare board. The face is up. At its feet is attached a heavy weight, and four seamen lift the board upon the

bulwarks of the ship and move or shove it out seaward until it balances. Then the first mate tips the board and the corpse goes into the sea feet first and is lost to sight in a moment, to become feed for and to be gnawed at by the greedy monsters of the sea. This burial at sea will never be effaced from my memory.

Imagine Jacob's wife, Magdalena, watching as her husband's body slid into the ocean. And his three children. What were they thinking and feeling? Doubtless their own father's words were echoing in their heads, as he would have so recently spoken to them of sister Elisabeth's recent death as predestined fate. Deep grief was perhaps overshadowed by heightened anxiety about what lay ahead.

Arrival in New York City

Landing in New York City would not provide the Orth family with escape from cholera. As luck would have it, their ship landed at the docks in New York City on July 14, 1849—right in the midst of the raging epidemic that had largely shut down the city.

In July, the case rate began steadily abruptly to rise. A week after the Fourth, eight-five new cases and thirty deaths were reported. The weather too had grown steadily warmer and business declined as New Yorkers left [for the countryside] and provincial merchants feared to enter the plague-ridden city. By the fourteenth of July, only one theater remained open. At least two dozen churches had, before the month ended, closed their doors as well.... (Rosenberg, 1987, p. 110).

This account paints a picture that is sadly, not unfamiliar to those of us living through the COVID-19 pandemic. Things would get worse in 1849 before they got better.

According to the account told to my grandfather by his father Jacob, Magdalena Schneider (Jacob's mother) died soon after landing in New York City, presumably also felled by cholera. Did she become infected on board the ship while nursing her dying husband, or perhaps even before boarding the ship while nursing dying daughter Elisabeth.

This famous image, painted in 1861, shows a family of tired Alsatians arriving in New York City after their exhausting trans-Atlantic voyage. It brings to mind the scene of the Orth family's arrival. A difference is that the Orth family, who started out their journey as a family of six, would have been reduced to four people upon landing; soon to be reduced to three, when mother, Magdalena, died.



Neither Ellis Island, nor Castle Garden, the immigration processing site for New York City that preceded Ellis Island, existed in 1849. Ships landed on the main wharf, and spilled their passengers out directly on the docks. There the passengers were beset by unscrupulous individuals offering to change currency, sell counterfeit railroad and boat tickets, peddle non-existent lodging options, or make fraudulent offers of employment. It was not uncommon for newly-arrived immigrants to be bilked out of much of their precious funds and/or lured into unfavorable situations.

In 1845, appalled by what was routinely happening to their countrymen, the German Society of the City of New York set up a system whereby society officials met German-speaking immigrants at the ships, and offered assistance and protections. Perhaps Magdalena and her children were met by these officials, and were directed to a place to stay and importantly, to a place where ailing Magdalena could get care.

NYC had set up make-shift cholera hospitals across the city. These were late in being established because few wanted to put up infected individuals in their buildings. The first cholera hospital, set up in May 1849, was on the second floor of a building, above a tavern. Subsequently, several public schools were emptied of desks, and cots set up for those beset by the disease. In fact, despite best intentions, the cholera hospitals were effectively a place to die, away from others, rather than a place to get better. Was Magdalena directed to one of these cholera

hospitals? It is unlikely they would have let the children accompany her. Or did she die in whatever location the family found to stay after landing in New York City?

After Magdalena died, then what? Descriptions of the cholera-torn city are grim.

The city seemed unable even to bury its own dead. Bodies might lie for hours, in some cases for days, in the streets before they were started on their way to Potter's Field. After they unloaded from the scows that brought them to the city cemetery on Randall's Island, the dead were deposited in a wide trench some hundred yards in length, one body on top of another to within a foot or two of the surface. Fortunately, they were not allowed to lie thus and infect the city with the odor of their putrefaction. Thousands of rats swam each day from the city to the island, burrowed quickly into the hastily covered trenches, and disposed of the excel flesh before it could mortify. (Rosenberg, 1987, p. 112-113)

One can only hope that the three Orth siblings, now orphans in a new land, were unaware of the likely fate of their mother's remains. Traumatized and scared, Lena (now age 19), Jacob the younger (age 13) and George (age 11), presumably, now had to figure out how to get to Philadelphia, at the height of a cholera epidemic, where their widowed Aunt Eva Orth lived with her children.

Part Four—Searching for Aunt Eva

Arrival in Philadelphia

The distance from New York City to Philadelphia is about 90 miles. Options for travel in 1849 included stagecoach, steamboat through a combination of rivers and canals, and train. Or I suppose one could have walked. The three Orth offspring must have figured out how to get to Philadelphia, and just maybe they had an address for their Aunt Eva. There was no city directory in Philadelphia in 1849 and 120,000 people lived there.

Recall that the cholera epidemic was in full force in New York City—by early September 1849, there would be over 5000 deaths, and it was still late July when the three would have set out for Philadelphia. Apparently Philadelphia fared better vis à vis cholera than New York City, with fewer deaths. But a look at the headlines in Philadelphia newspapers shows the high level of peoples' fear and concern about

this epidemic that had originated in Europe, was brought to North America by immigrants, and now was traveling down the Eastern seaboard.

In 1849, Aunt Eva would have been a 49 year old widow—her husband Georges having died 3 years earlier—with six children still living. (Eva had borne ten children but had lost four as infants—three in Alsace, and one since arriving in Philadelphia). Eva had no occupation. I suspect that her first and third children supported the family—the 21 year old and the 14 year old. Twenty-one year old Charles was trained as a printer and working up the river, in Trenton, New Jersey, living in a rooming house. Fourteen year old Maggie (short for Magdalena), no longer lived at home. She likely lived with a family, working as a domestic, sending her earnings to her mother. This was not uncommon even at the young age of 14 (in Alsace or Philadelphia). The oldest daughter, Caroline, was 18. Caroline had recently married a Bavarian-born gunsmith, Jacob Rupertus, eight years her senior, moved out, and in 1849 would have already pregnant with her first child. Hers was likely viewed as a good marriage, as her husband was a craftsman with his own shop rather than working in a factory. The remaining three Bechtel children still lived at home in 1850: Frederick (13 yo), Elisabeth (6 yo) and Louisa (3 yo).

Eva and her children, all except the oldest, Charles, lived in the Kensington District of Philadelphia, northeast of the center of Philadelphia. The Kensington district was a mix of industry and working class homes, largely inhabited by Irish, English, Scots, and German immigrants. Imagine lots of two-story row houses interspersed with industrial workshops and factories. What earlier in the century had been a diverse array of relatively small-scale industries, including furniture-making, tanneries and leather working, iron works, wagon works, etc., was becoming increasingly dominated by larger textile industries, including many carpet factories and the associated dye works, yarn factories, woolen and cotton mills, and even textile machinery makers. Looking at the occupations of Eva's neighbors gives a flavor for which industries may have been located nearby in her neighborhood. There were many cabinet-makers, brick-makers, and several umbrella-makers. There were also more than a dozen butchers, tanners and a glue maker who undoubtedly used the by-products of the nearby meat-packing plants and tanneries. Having briefly lived near a working tannery, I know that the odor of processing animal parts would have been oppressive in the neighborhood. Keep in mind that this was a time before any environmental regulations.

Imagine the scene that may have played out—Lena and the two boys knock on Eva's door. Nineteen year old Lena would have been just ten years old when she

last saw her Aunt Eva in Alsace. Jacob would have been only three. Georg would have barely been born. Would Lena have had to explain who they were, that their parents had died in the course of their journey? That they had no place to go? Would Eva have been fearful of inviting them into her home, given the context of cholera? Would she have balked at taking in three more mouths to feed? Her own 14 year old, Maggie, didn't even live at home. Standing behind Eva, and peering at their cousins, might have been 13 year old Frederick who had been barely five when they left Alsace, and the two little girls, Elisabeth and Louisa. I like to imagine that Eva connected Lena, Jacob and Georg to the German Society of Philadelphia, who would in turn have helped them find a place to stay, and possibly jobs.

It's possible, too, that Lena, Jacob, and Georg never found their aunt and cousins. We have no evidence that they did, despite their living in Philadelphia for the next year. Philadelphia was big and had many different neighborhoods. Without information about where their Aunt Eva lived, what would Lena and her two brothers have done? If they had to guess where their aunt and family lived, maybe they would have gone first to the part of Philadelphia called, Germantown. But that is not where Eva and family lived.

The only thing we know for sure, is that the three Orth siblings DID get to Philadelphia, and that nineteen year old Lena Orth married twenty year old German-born Ludwig Schmidt on 30 June 1850, at the Salem Zion United Church of Christ, a reformed (Calvinist) Protestant church in Philadelphia, about a year after they arrived in America. Connecting immigrants to church communities was something that the German Society of Philadelphia would have done; connecting marriageable young people is something that church communities would have done. In case you are wondering, this is not the church where Eva's daughter married—St. Michael's and Zion (Lutheran) Church.

Part Five—Settling into their new lives

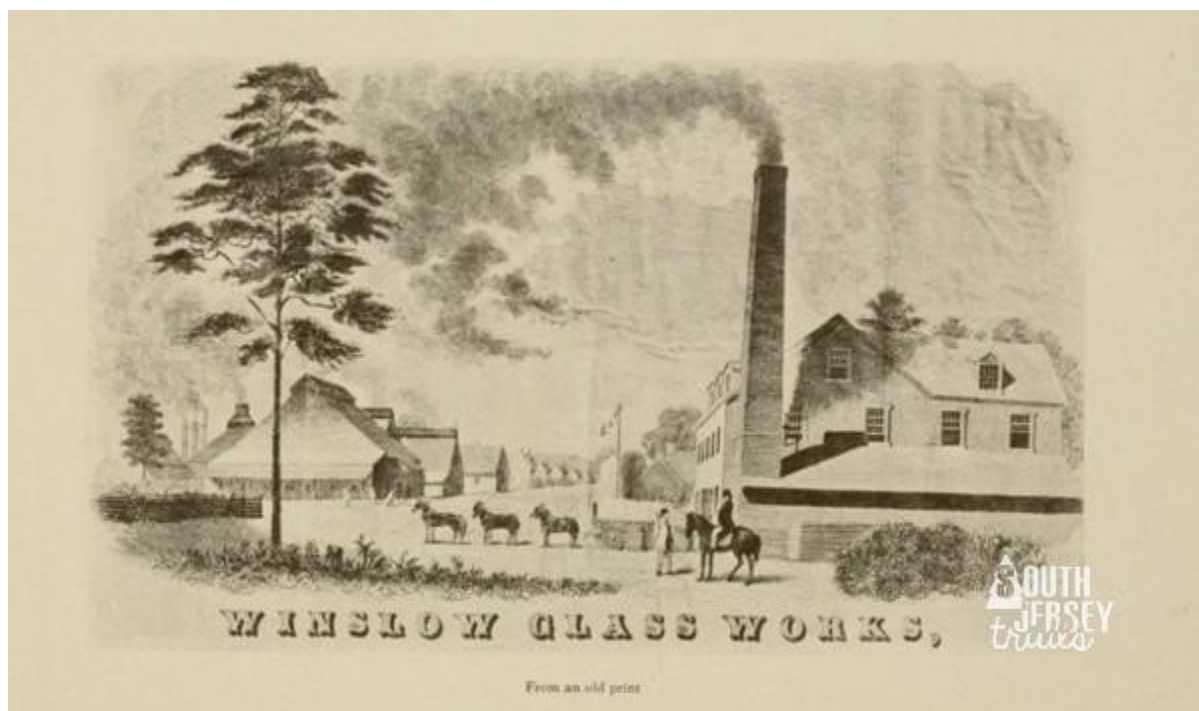
Moving to New Jersey

Another thing we know, also from the biographical account written about my grandfather, is that Jacob and Georg Orth had "*learned the glass trade in New Jersey.*" For those a little foggy on geography, Southern New Jersey is directly across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. In modern times that is a five minute drive

across a bridge. In those days it would have been a relatively brief ferry ride. And it turns out that Southern New Jersey was one of the principal glass manufacturing regions, second only to Pittsburgh. New Jersey had the natural resources needed for glass-making: sand to supply the silica; clay to make the fire pots where the molten glass is made; plenty of trees to provide wood to fuel the furnaces; salt hay to use as packing material; and navigable waterways. Fragile glass did not travel well in wagons on bumpy roads. The sand in Southern New Jersey was particularly sought after for glassmaking due to its high iron content which lent a green tint to glass. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were over 90 glass factories in New Jersey.

Glass factories in Southern Jersey were built near to where the necessary resources were, which meant outside of cities. The glass factories, called glass houses, often became the reason for towns, with names like Glassboro. Factory owners provided factory-owned housing and factory stores. Besides isolating factory workers, this situation meant that the glass factories controlled the economic lives of their glassworkers. Being part of a factory-owned setting may also explain why I can't find a record of either Jacob or Georg Orth, or for that matter Lena and new husband Ludwig, between the years 1849 to 1858—that the census-taking may have been more constrained in these company towns. I imagine that the two brothers would have lived with big sister Lena in Philadelphia, between August 1849 and June 1850 when Lena got married, and likely after she married as well. Perhaps they were all ensconced in the glass factory scene.

Perhaps relevant, is the next bit of evidence I found—the birth of Lena and husband Ludwig Schmidt's first child, Anna Maria Magdalena Schmidt, in 1851, in Winslow, New Jersey. Winslow was right next to the town of Glassboro, and was the location of a large glass factory called the Winslow Glass Works. A list of workers at the Winslow Glass Works (though from several decades later) showed that of its 200 workers, 80 were children. It's not unreasonable to think that Winslow Glass Works is where the two boys, Jacob and Georg apprenticed, likely living with Lena and Ludwig. Lena's husband, Ludwig, himself a recent immigrant from Germany, was a saddler—someone who made and repaired saddles. Wherever there were horses, he had the potential for work. One might argue that the potential for work for a saddler might be even greater in a more rural setting than Philadelphia.



Note the housing built for the workers and their families adjacent to the factory.

Winslow was located in the middle of the New Jersey Pine Barrens—an ecosystem characterized by acidic, sandy, nutrient-poor soils on which thousands and thousands of pine trees grow. One can imagine that the landscape might have felt more comforting to those coming from rural Alsace, than the big city of Philadelphia. Further, one can imagine how fortunate Lena, 13 year old Jacob, and 11 year old Georg must have felt to know that there were not only jobs available, but that they had the opportunity to apprentice at “a trade.” Could there also have been some comfort in a line of work that centered around a furnace—just as their father’s work as a blacksmith had?

Apprentice glassblowers began their experience early—often as boys of ten or twelve years—expecting to devote their entire lives to the craft. Their tasks started with keeping the work area clean. Gradually, apprentices would learn other tasks such as carrying the glass to the [furnace], gathering the [molten mixture] the master would blow, or operating a mold. (Jacobs, 1992, page 4).

As exciting as becoming an “apprentice” must have sounded, the work was physically hard, the work environment hellishly hot, and six to seven 12 hour shifts a week must have seemed endless for adults, let alone children. The glass manufacturing business became notorious for its mistreatment of children, some

of whom were said to be locked in the glass factories so they could not escape the grueling work. In fact, the example of “glasshouse boys” was used to feature the plight of child laborers. The situation was abhorrent enough that it was successfully used to pass the first child labor laws. But not until the 1890s.

The Winslow Glass Works specialized in window glass as well as some “hollow ware” glass items such as bottles, whiskey flasks and fruit jars. (The Mason Glass factory, specializing in fruit jars was also located in South Jersey.) In 1848, the Southern Jersey glass factory owners agreed to stop operating their plants seven days a week so that their workers could attend church. This was only true for their hollow ware glass operations; the window glass workers still worked seven days a week because there was a need to run the furnaces continuously.



Winslow bottle

Aunt Eva and her children

For the next 6-8 years, Lena and husband Ludwig, as well as brothers Jacob and Georg appear to have remained in New Jersey, not far from Philadelphia. Perhaps they had connected with Aunt Eva and her children, or maybe not. In March of 1857, Aunt Eva died, at age 57. After extensive searching I was able to figure out the fate of Eva’s children—I particularly wondered what became of the youngest children after Eva died.

The oldest of Eva’s children, Charles Bechtel, now 30 years old, married, and parent to three young children, clearly took on the role of head of family. Charles was the baby in Eva’s arms when she attended Lena, Jacob, and Georg’s parents’ wedding in 1828. Charles had become a well-regarded and successful printer in Trenton, New Jersey. The two youngest siblings, 14 year old Elisabethe and 12 year old Louisa, moved in with Charles and his family, in Trenton, New Jersey, after Eva died. Charles’ relative prosperity meant that the girls would have been able to attend school, rather than be farmed out as servants, as their sister Maggie had been at age 14. Sadly, Elisabethe died a year later, at age 15, but Louisa lived with Charles and his wife Clementine and their growing family until Louisa married a neighbor and moved down the street where she lived for the rest of her life.

Second oldest, Caroline, was married, and took in third youngest, 19 year old Frederick, who worked for Caroline's husband as a gunsmith. Like Elisabeth, Frederick died at a relatively young age of tuberculosis, and was buried in Caroline and her husband's family plot.

In each of these cases, the two oldest siblings reached out and folded their younger siblings into their lives.

Third oldest child Maggie, who at the time Eva died, would have been 22 years old, and would likely have been working as a domestic for the previous 10 years, was not taken in by one of her older siblings; she moved on to a different future. I have not yet been able to locate where Maggie lived and worked from age 14 on, nor have I been able to locate her in 1857, when her mother Eva died. However, in March of 1859, at age 24, Maggie married a man named John Gottlieb Hoff, a shoemaker who had grown up in Philadelphia. Within several years, in 1863, the two of them converted to Mormonism and traveled with a group of 300 other new converts along the Mormon Overland trail on their pilgrimage to Utah. They were on one of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company "church trains," meaning that their way was paid by the Mormon Church. Maggie and John's covered wagon was one of 55 in the wagon train that traveled from Florence, Nebraska (now Omaha) to Salt Lake City, a journey that took them 63 days. Here is a painting of Maggie, Eva Orth's second daughter.



Like 70-80% of Mormon men in that era, John, Maggie's husband, did not take on "plural" wives (the polite term for the practice of polygamy). However, John and Maggie were surrounded by those who did have multiple wives and in some cases, dozens of children. Of John and Maggie's seven children who lived to adulthood, two married into the Hayes family and two married into the Hess family. Both the Hayes and the Hess families were prominent "first" families in the Mormon community. John Williams Hess, an uncle of the two Hess' who married two of Maggie's children, had seven wives and 63 children. That's a lot of cousins!

In some ways, the launch of Georges Bechtel and Eva Orth's children into the world followed what might have happened if they had stayed in Alsace. Family resources were put into preparing the oldest son, Charles, for a profession. Not only did

Charles attend school through the end of high school (very unusual at the time, but perhaps predictable given that Charles' father Georges Bechtel and grandfather were both teachers), but Charles also spent two years after high school training as a printer. All of those years he was in school, Charles could have been earning wages, but the family invested instead in his forward success. Charles was able to set up his own print shop and eventually purchased and ran a newspaper. Family resources were also invested in ensuring that the oldest girl, Caroline, had a good marriage. Securing futures for the oldest son and oldest daughter was a first priority in 18th and 19th century Alsace. In Alsace, the younger siblings were often put to work, even as adults, to help support the family and take care of their aging parents. It was not uncommon for them not to marry. Thinking about the fact that Maggie was sent out to work, and that she didn't marry until ten years after her sister (who was just four years older) fits this traditional pattern. The power in the family shifted to the two oldest siblings, who stepped up once their remaining parent, Eva, died, and they were set up with the infrastructure—a profession and a marriage—to be able to handle this.

The three Orth siblings, on the other hand, who lost their parents on the journey to America, were catapulted into the world without the family having built this infrastructure. Big sister Lena, age 19, would likely have made the decisions for the three of them, initially. Had her dying parents given her advice about what to do from their death beds? I have often thought of the relationship that forged between these three siblings, and have searched for evidence of how this relationship unfolded over time. This is something that has been difficult to discern after so many years.

Moving to Pittsburgh

The glass market in New Jersey faltered in 1857, which corresponds to the timing of Aunt Eva's death and also to the general period of time when the Orth siblings moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh had captured the role of glass capitol of the United States. The year 1858 also marked the first year that a through passenger train was available to travel from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. What we know for sure, is that all three of the Orth siblings moved to Pittsburgh either together, or in succession sometime beginning around 1858 (Lena, 28 years old; Jacob, 21 years old; Georg, who now went as George, 19 years old).

The first concrete evidence of the move was finding that Jacob Orth turned in his paperwork to become a naturalized citizen in Pittsburgh, on 5 April 1858, at age 21. On 20 March 1860, Georg became a naturalized citizen, also at the age of 21, also in Pittsburgh. In 1860, Jacob was living on the Southside of Pittsburgh, on Oliver St., and working as a glassblower. In 1861, there is evidence that George also is living on the Southside of Pittsburgh, also on Oliver St. Perhaps they were living together.

Lena and husband Ludwig appear in the Pittsburgh City Directory in 1861. Ludwig's occupation is listed as "saddler and saloon keeper." I also found records showing he received a license to sell whiskey. Starting up as an artisan (saddler was Ludwig's lifelong profession) in a new city required time to build clientele and a reputation, whereas selling drinks to passersby less so and it also required little expertise. It was not uncommon for people to operate this kind of short term operation in times of need— what were called taverns in the US and cabarets in Alsace. In that same year, Lena and Ludwig welcomed the birth of their second child, J. William. Chances are that Lena had had multiple lost pregnancies or babies in the ten years since her first baby, Annie was born. Now they had a newborn and a 10-year old. It's not clear where Lena and family lived, but it seemed that brothers Jacob and George may have lived in a boarding house.

Part Six—The period from 1860 to 1865

Soon after arriving in Pittsburgh, and about when the Civil War erupted, Jacob and George chose different life paths. Jacob went in search of gold; brother George enlisted to fight in the Civil War.

In search of gold

The Pike's Peak Gold Rush began in July 1858 and lasted through early 1861. An estimated 100,000 people, known as the "Fifty-Niners," were said to have rushed to the southern Rocky Mountains to make their fortunes. The biographical account of my grandfather recounts this about his father, Jacob: "*Jacob went west during the Pike's Peak gold excitement in 1859, remained there for about four or five years and then returned to Pittsburgh.*" Jacob would have been aged 23 when he left in search of gold—about the age I was when I went in search of my family history.



A major hurdle to seeking gold was getting to where the gold fields were—in this case, what is now Colorado (At that moment, Colorado wasn't even established as a territory yet, let alone a state). By 1860, one could travel from the East via railroad to partway through Iowa, which still left nearly 1000 miles to travel to the site of the gold fields, across the Eastern Great Plains, by foot, horse, or wagon. Many people loaded their wagons and/or horses into freight cars so they would be prepared for the final, long leg of the trip.

Because this was a race to get to the gold before others did, speed was of the essence. Fifty-Niners' diaries recount the relentless push, through all kinds of weather, muddy trails, and worse. There are tales of sabotage as the Fifty-Niners competed to arrive ahead of others. And of course, access to food and water became an issue as the number of people traveling popular routes increased, many of them completely unprepared for the challenge.

Once in the area of the gold fields, it became clear that knowledge and expertise was a significant factor in people's success, much more so than in the 1849 California Gold Rush.

Early Colorado miners expected to repeat the California experience. Whereas a simple pick and pan or sluice box were all that were needed to remove gold from streambeds in California, gold in Colorado was not found as nuggets but rather as "float" gold, that is, particles too small to be recovered by conventional means. It became obvious that to make money in Colorado gold, the vein (or lode) had to be mined from solid rock. Hence, underground hard rock mining developed quickly. Stamp mills [a type of mill machine that crushes material by pounding rather than grinding] were brought to Colorado as

early as 1860 in order to crush gold from the rock after it was mined. Another technique, the arrastra, was also tried to pulverize ores. Due to the difficulties and costs, individual prospectors were replaced by capitalists and mining engineers in northeastern Colorado's mines.

The increased complexity of gold in Colorado led the Fifty-Niners to join forces with others in cooperative endeavors as they worked to make their fortunes.

Conditions in the mines were generally unsafe, wet, and cold. Life above ground was also rugged and uncomfortable, with miners living in tents, lean-tos, or shacks. When it became apparent that initial areas were likely already depleted of gold, and striking it rich was not as straightforward and easy as many hoped, the “Go-Backers” movement began, with Fifty-Niners turning around and returning to their homes.

A person who would choose to travel hundreds and hundreds of miles in pursuit of gold would likely have had personal qualities that distinguished them from others—ambition, a willingness to take risks, and perhaps a thirst for adventure. Those staying for several years, which included Jacob, had to have possessed the additional qualities of optimism, persistence, and/or the belief that their hard work would eventually pay off. Jacob entered the Gold Rush about a year from its start and returned to Pittsburgh 2-3 years after what was considered to be the end of the boom. We can speculate that he either continued to search for gold (it is only in hindsight that we know when the gold was depleted). Or perhaps he delayed his travel back to Pittsburgh given the war-torn state of the country. We have no information about Jacob's success in finding gold, but we can probably assume that he was not wildly successful, given that he returns to Pittsburgh to his vocation as glass-blower.

That said, perhaps the fortune that Jacob gained through taking part in the gold rush was not something that could be measured in wealth, but rather in the confidence and experience gained as a young man who took on a big challenge and figured out how to operate in a completely novel situation—a far cry from apprenticing for years with one's father.

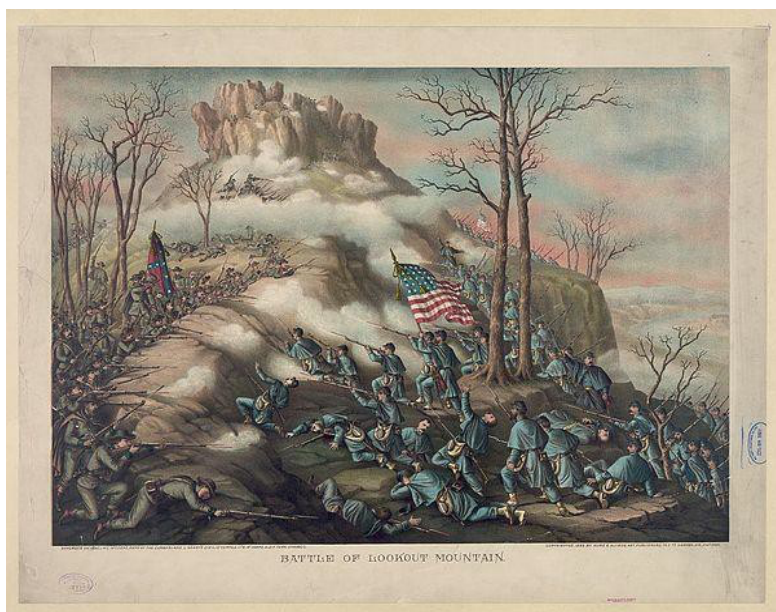
Here is a picture of Jacob Orth's pocket knife, and its chamois sack, something that may well have accompanied him on his gold mining ventures.



It is interesting to me that Jacob chose to come back to Pittsburgh, a place he had only lived in for a year or two at most before leaving for the gold fields. The Southern Rocky Mountains were beautiful, and new settlements, largely populated by those who had come to mine gold were forming there. Certainly the air quality was better than in Pittsburgh, where the particulate from coal-fired industry darkened the sky even during the day. Did Jacob want to return to a tamer life with the kinds of comforts that he had not had for several years and to resume the more predictable work of being a glass blower? Did he crave being near his siblings, the only family he had? Or did he want to settle down and start his own family, something more easily done in Pittsburgh than the frontier in Colorado

Serving his country

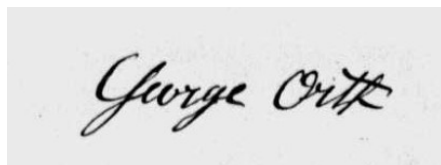
Brother George did not join Jacob in his search for gold. He instead chose to enlist in the Union Army on 5 Nov 1861 in Pittsburgh, PA at the age of 23. Imagine, a boy arriving in America at age 10. Then a little more than 12 years later, he enlists to fight in the Civil War. He must have felt a sense of allegiance and/or duty to his new country, or perhaps he believed in the cause. It is also possible that serving in the military held the allure of getting ahead.



Among other engagements, George fought at Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, under a Captain Williams, in November 1863.

Though George enlisted as a private in the Pennsylvania 13th Infantry Company B, he mustered out as a corporal in the 19th Infantry Company C. One has to infer that George's intelligence and/or leadership skills distinguished him enough to advance up the ranks, becoming a corporal—either that or a surfeit of his comrades had died.

Described as having gray eyes, brown hair, fair complexion, George stood 5'7" tall. Here is his signature:

A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The signature reads "George Critt" and is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

I'm sort of fascinated by the fact that a boy who left Alsace at age 10, and then probably received no subsequent formal education, is able to have a decent signature, in cursive no less!

George was discharged 5 Nov 1864, and like Jacob, he made his way back to Pittsburgh. The reason listed for his discharge was "expiration of service."

The different life choices of these brothers surely points to temperamental differences between the two.

Part Seven—After the Civil War

Back in Pittsburgh

By 1865, the Civil War was over, and Lena, Jacob and George were all back in Pittsburgh. Over the past 4-5 years, during the American Civil War, they had been separated. This moment marked roughly 15 years since they had arrived in New York City, from far away Alsace—three orphaned children, now adults.

I imagine that these three shared a deep bond: the memories of living as the children of the village blacksmith in rural Alsace; leaving their homeland and all they knew; losing their parents on what must have been a long and traumatic journey; and then the need to find their way and devise strategies for survival in a new world, with 19 year old Lena likely stepping up as surrogate parent for the two

boys. All three siblings would go on to raise families, eventually all living in the same neighborhood on the Southside of Pittsburgh, just blocks apart.

Telling the story first of my great grandfather, Jacob Orth:

According to the entry in the Orth family bible, Jacob Orth married Margaret Catherine Lauffer, daughter of German immigrants, on the fourth of May in 1865. The Pittsburgh newspapers from that day were filled with articles about President Abraham Lincoln's assassination (that had happened two weeks earlier), theories about the assassination plot, Lincoln's funeral, rewards offered for the capture of Confederate war leaders, and news that armies were returning home.

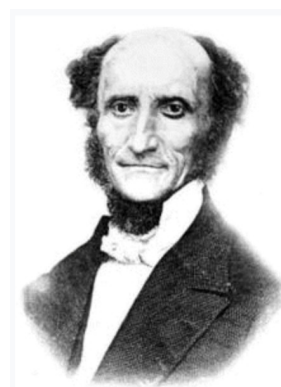


*Jacob Orth and Margaret Catherine Lauffer
These are possibly their wedding pictures.*



*Jacob Orth and Margaret Catherine Lauffer
These pictures are from later in life.*

It is noted in the family bible entry that Jacob and Margaret were married by Pastor Carl Walther. Apparently, Carl Walther (actually Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811-1887) was a major figure in the American Lutheran religious scene. Dissatisfied with the form of Lutheranism being practiced in his native Saxony (Germany), Walther led a Lutheran religious community from Germany to St. Louis, where he established a form of Lutheran practice that was truer to the original structures and strictures intended by Martin Luther. Read that as more conservative.



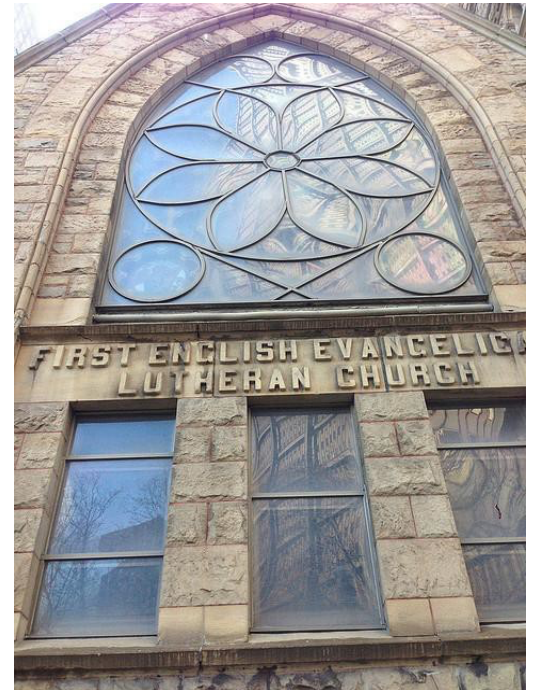
Pastor Carl Walther

Walther was the first president of the Lutheran Church's Missouri Synod (a Lutheran synod is an organization of churches with similar theological interpretations). This was the first Lutheran Synod in America founded by German immigrants to combat what they saw as the liberalization of Lutheranism in America. Pastor Carl Walther was known for his fire and his vigorous opposition to the theologies of non-Lutheran denominations in America.

Jacob and Margaret were members of the First German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Pittsburgh (whose name changed later to the First English Evangelical Lutheran Church). In 1856, the Pittsburgh Church Council voted to unite with the Missouri Synod. Perhaps Walther, who lived in St. Louis, was visiting Pittsburgh in 1865.

However it played out, Jacob and Margaret had the distinction of being married by a star pastor, known for his conservatism. Given that none of the other marriages listed in the family bible specify who the minister was, it makes me think that Jacob and Margaret were extra proud to have been married by Walther.

Recall that Jacob the elder, and the line of Orths that preceded him, were all Calvinists (Reformed Lutherans). It's interesting to note that Jacob the younger not only chose Lutheranism over Calvinism, but reverted to old Lutheranism—an even more conservative theology. This may be important in understanding how the relationships between the three siblings evolved.



Over the next 12 years, Jacob and Margaret had seven children, five of whom lived to adulthood. Their first four children were born when they lived at 505 Carson Street on the Southside of Pittsburgh. In 1871, Jacob and family moved to 2306 Carson St. where their remaining three children were born. Carson St. is the main commercial street in the Southside of Pittsburgh.

Jacob Orth & Margaret Catherine Lauffer						
1836-1906		1843-1913				
Elizabethe George-Anna Orth	John Henry Orth	Margaret Josephine Orth	Mary Emma Orth	Ida Lillian Orth	Albert George Orth	Frank Jacob Orth
1866-1897	1867-1949	1869-1873	1870-1936	1872-1889	1875-1955	1878-1952

This photo shows 2306 Carson Street—the family home and Orth family place of business. Margaret ran a millinery (hat business) on the first floor, and the family lived upstairs. This was where the family births and deaths happened, and where life celebrations as well as funerals were hosted. For nearly fifty years, Jacob Orth's family lived here—my grandfather and two of his siblings continued to live at 2306 Carson even after their parents both died.

Below are images of shops along Carson Street in the 1880s: A butcher and meat store, a shoe store, and on the next page, a millinery—likely a competitor to Margaret's shop, and a saloon, located just a block away from the Orth family home.



Family home on 2306 Carson Street





The Southside was a colorful part of the city, with Carson Street at its center.

By 1884, [Carson Street] had 11 shoemakers, 15 merchants, 4 taverns, 3 breweries, 1 chair factory, 2 cabinet makers, 1 saddler, 8 carpenters, 2 tailors, 1 plasterer, 2 doctors, 1 barber, 7 coal merchants, and 2 bakers. It was a crowded place where nearly six people lived in each house. It was a rough town with cock-fights, dog-fights, prostitution, heavy drinking, horse racing in the streets, and billiards. [Boehig, p.73]

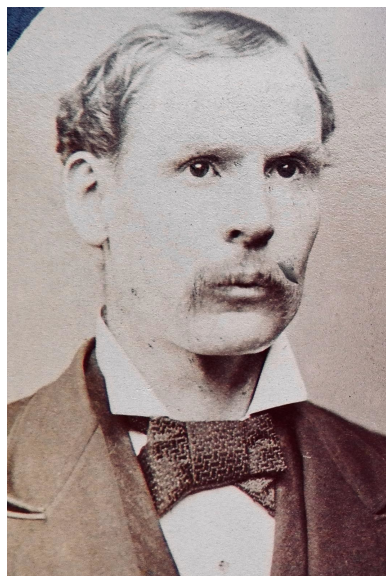
Over the years, Jacob worked mostly in the glass industry, as a foreman for Abel, Smith & Company glass manufacturers, and subsequently as the manager of the business for a number of years. Jacob was listed as a co-partner in the business, suggesting that he might have invested funds in it. Perhaps he did gain some wealth from the gold rush. When the business was sold, in 1896, Jacob then accepted a position as superintendent of the glasshouse of Phillips & Company. In 1898, he retired from glass manufacturing. Margaret kept her millinery business going past when Jacob retired, and it appears that Jacob became involved in helping Margaret with the business, as did one of their daughters, Mary Emma Orth.

There is plenty of evidence of a close relationship between Jacob and Margaret and her birth family—the Lauffers. Margaret, the oldest of seven children, was only one of two in her family to marry (along with the oldest boy). Most of the Lauffer siblings lived together, around the corner from Jacob and Margaret, when Jacob and Margaret's children were growing up. Margaret's sister, Mary Elizabeth Lauffer, worked first as a teacher and then as the assistant principal of the Humboldt school

on the Southside of Pittsburgh. In various combinations, the Lauffer brothers started entrepreneurial enterprises, including the manufacture of mince meat, jams, preserves, and fruit butters. The most successful of the Lauffer businesses was one run by the youngest Lauffer, William Albert—W.A. Lauffer & Co. This stoneworks company existed for almost 40 years, in various forms, and at one time or another employed all of the Lauffer brothers as well as Jacob Orth. Below is a photo showing several Lauffer brothers, Jacob Orth, and my grandfather Frank Jacob Orth in front of W. A. Lauffer and Co.



Lauffer & Co. in approximately 1888. W.A. is standing proudly by the wagon. Brother Harry Lauffer is holding the reins, with my grandfather, Frank Jacob Orth, sitting next to him. On the steps, Jacob Orth (top right), young Albert Orth (lower right) and others can be seen.



George Orth



Mary Wilhelm

Brother George Orth's life unfolded in some ways that were similar to Jacob's but there was one clear difference. He married a Catholic woman.

George's wife, Anna Maria Wilhelm, was known as "Mary" and immigrated to Pittsburgh with her family from Darmstadt, Germany (in Southwest Germany not far from Frankfurt) when she was about five years old. The daughter of a laborer, Mary and her family lived at 2812 Carson St., just five blocks down the street from where Jacob and his family would move in 1871. George was 30 years old when they married; Mary was 20. They married on 14 June 1868 at St. Michaels—a Catholic church on the Southside of Pittsburgh.

We know that interfaith marriages were not condoned in Alsace in the 19th century—and while not unheard of, they were also rare in the United States at that time. When they did happen, interfaith marriages were accompanied by significant social complexity and most often resulted in very displeased families. To be married by a Catholic priest, George would have had to agree to raise his children as Catholic (which he did) and likely have been required to convert to Catholicism himself. The stakes were high, because at that time, in the eyes of observant Catholics, a person outside of the church would be condemned to a state of eternal punishment after death.

For a religious conservative like Jacob Orth, the constraints around suitable marriages were even narrower:

Among the Germans in the Midwest who would form the Lutheran Church's Missouri Synod, mixed marriage was strictly forbidden. To these Lutherans, Protestant-Protestant intermarriages—including marriages with Lutherans from other synods—were just as suspect as unions with Catholics or Jews. A model constitution for American congregations by German pastor Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Loehe in 1846 forbade intermarriage and insisted that children “are reared in and for the Lutheran Church.” A half century later, an editorial in the Lutheran Witness offered a more doctrinal explanation. Intermarriage could not possibly be entertained by “the person who believes that his church has the whole truth of God’s Word,” for all other churches “are more or less entangled in the meshes of error and unbelief.” (Thuesen, 2003.)

This alone could have explained a rift between brothers Jacob and George. Big brother Jacob’s disapproval would have stung.

George and Mary had five children over a period of ten years, four of whom lived to adulthood.

George Orth & Anna Maria (Mary) Wilhelm				
1838-1880		1848-1931		
William Adam Orth	Anna Maria Orth	George John Orth	Magdalena Catherine Centennial Orth	Margaret Amalia Orth
1869-1920	1871-1900	1873-1951	1876-1964	1878-1880

George and Mary would have been bearing children around the same time as Jacob and Margaret, with two pairs of cousins being born just a few months apart. Did the cousins grow up together? The difference in the religious followings of the two families meant that they would have attended different churches, and each would have baptized their children according to different traditions, neither involving a procession through the village, I might add. The baptismal records of Jacob and Margaret’s children are in German, while the baptismal records of George and Mary’s children are in Latin. Both the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church and St. Michaels Catholic Church had associated afterschool and sabbath programs for children—to assist in raising children within the faith. You can imagine that Jacob and George’s children may have attended these church-run programs. In short, though their children were close in age, their membership in different church communities, and the expectation of raising one’s children as Lutheran or Catholic might have impacted how much time they spent together.

In the late 1860s and the 1870's, Jacob and George worked at the same glasshouse together—Knox, Kim & Co.—one that specialized in window glass blowing. Both Jacob and George were initially listed among eleven Co-Partners of the company. However, in 1877, a notice in the newspaper announced the dissolution of Knox, Kim & Co., due to the stepping down of J.W. Knox and George Orth, and the launch of a successor firm called Abel, Kim & Co. which went on to become Abel, Smith & Co. By then, Jacob served as its manager. Did this parting of ways reflect a falling out between Jacob and George? Or perhaps it just represented a difference in priorities and resources at the time.

Glasshouses often provided the opportunity for photos to be taken of the employees, typically, standing next to a chair, hat in hand, and with the background that is in this picture of George Orth. I suspect that somewhere, a similar “company” picture of Jacob Orth must exist.

Just as there is evidence that Jacob and wife Margaret were strongly connected to the Lauffers, Margaret's family, there is evidence that George and Mary were connected to Mary's family—the Wilhelms. The witnesses of George and Mary's marriage and of their children's baptisms, were all on the Wilhelm side of the family.



George Orth

As for Sister Lena.

To my knowledge, Lena and husband, Ludwig, only had three children over the course of 15 years, all of whom lived to adulthood.

Ludwig Paul Hermann Schmidt & Magdalena Katherine Orth		
1828-1891 1829-1881		
Anna Maria Magdalena (Annie)	J. William	Louis G.
Schmidt	Schmidt	Schmidt
1851-1923	1861-1912	1866-1911

Their oldest child, Annie Schmidt, married an Alsatian immigrant, George Haehn.

While Jacob and family became Evangelical Lutherans, and George and family were Catholic, it appears that Lena and family attended a German Reform church (the closest to their parents' religious following as Calvinists). Three siblings, three different churches. Given that Lena was 19 years old when the family left Alsace, she might have been the only one of the three to have been cognizant of the details of her parents' beliefs. In the context of their life in America, the siblings apparently felt free to choose their own religious followings.

While upon their move to Pittsburgh, Ludwig lists himself as both a saloon keeper and a saddler, in the subsequent years, he is listed as a saddler only, and then a saddler and harness-maker. There is no mention of Ludwig being a saloon keeper for about ten years. But by 1873, the occupation he listed in the Pittsburgh City Directory is as saloon keeper and restaurateur—no longer a saddler.

It's unclear what the timing of this occupational change corresponds to. Was the increased urbanization of Pittsburgh and the beginnings of public transport, such that the demand for services associated with horse-powered transport were being lost? Or was the opportunity of running a family business more appealing and possibly a more lucrative path forward. In addition to Lena being able to play a role in their restaurant, youngest son, Louis, was a bartender and then listed as a liquor supplier. Louis married a woman, Kate Leffert, whose occupation listed on the marriage license was as a beer supplier. In some ways, this situation more resembled occupations that made room for the whole family, unlike working in a glass factory.

I have wondered whether Lena's family's relationship to alcohol caused strife with Jacob and family. Evangelical Christians were key supporters of the temperance movement that was gaining momentum in the 1870s-1880s. Members of Lena's family bought and sold alcohol, and imbibed. Lena's youngest son, Louis, died of cirrhosis of the liver. And yet I found a notice in the newspaper that at the age of 40, Louis (who had moved with his family to Beaver County, 40 miles northeast of Pittsburgh), traveled to Pittsburgh to attend his uncle, Jacob Orth's, funeral in 1906—not what you would expect if there had been estrangement.

It is worth pointing out that not only was Lena older than Jacob and George (7 and 9 years respectively), but she had her first child at age 22, whereas Jacob and George were both 30 plus years old before they started their own families. In some ways this difference in timing skewed the generations as much as Lena having played the role of surrogate parent to Jacob and George. Annie, Lena's oldest, was having children in the same era as Jacob and George.

In other evidence of connection between the families of the three siblings, I found that the executor of Lena's will was George's wife Mary's brother, Peter Wilhelm.

Lena and George died within a year of each other—George in 1880, Lena in 1881. In my grandfather's biographical account, it says that George died of a wound received while he served in the Civil War. On his death certificate, it says that George died of syphilis at age 42. I suppose that both could be true—that syphilis is a sort of wound, and could be argued that it is a wound that many soldiers acquired during a war. Lena died of uterine cancer at age 52. In both cases, their spouses outlived them significantly—by 51 and 10 years respectively. Jacob lived another 25 years, dying in 1906 at age 69 of pneumonia.

Reflections on Family and Place

My mother, Emma Lou Orth, and her siblings, never knew that their paternal grandfather, Jacob Orth, had a sister, Lena, and a brother, George—at least it was not part of their working knowledge. At first I wondered, how is that possible? What led this essential three-some, who shared so much as a unit, likely owed each other their very survival, and lived nearby to each other as adults, to grow apart? I wondered whether their different religious choices could have impacted their relationships. Maybe they didn't like each others' spouses? Or perhaps it was any

number of the standard variety of differences that emerge between siblings, or just between people, that could explain their growing apart.

Or maybe they didn't grow apart, and the fact that their children's children were unaware of the relationship between Jacob, Lena, and George is simply the result of a natural loss of connection across generations. Lena and George died 25 years sooner than Jacob. As Jacob's youngest child, my grandfather would have been just a toddler, effectively assuring little to no firsthand memory of his Aunt Lena and Uncle George. Perhaps it is not a surprise that then my grandfather's children (my mother and her siblings) would have had little knowledge of Lena and George.

This made me curious. I started asking people I know whether they knew their grandparents and if they know the names of their grandparents' siblings. To my surprise, more than 150 people responded to my survey, aged 20 to 90. Of those, nearly a quarter of people had not met one or more of their grandparents. Further, only about a third of the people I surveyed knew that their grandparents had siblings and what their names were, and an equal number (one out of three) had no idea whether their grandparents had siblings.

My mother, Emmy Orth, used to say, "Blood is thicker than saliva," a twist on the old adage, implying that blood ties endure the longest. We would always giggle. It is not, however, something that was evident in my family. My parents' sibling relationships were somewhat fraught, as are relationships between my own siblings. And I find that, in general, among the people I know, that it's not uncommon for there to be little curiosity about one's forebearers.

To me, learning about my ancestors and the details of their lives provides a certain perspective to my place in the world as well as a connection to how their lived experiences played out in the context of history. I won't lie—I find learning about most peoples' family history exciting, not just my own. So it is not simply the fact of a blood relationship that intrigues me. To me family histories are real live stories just waiting to be figured out. I find it fascinating to imagine the day-to-day lives of people in different eras and contexts, and to consider challenges they faced, decisions those in earlier generations made, and what those choices yielded. What would have happened had they made different decisions?

Take, for example, the decision Jacob Orth the elder and his wife Magdalena Schneider made to emigrate to America. This decision, likely carefully considered for years, resulted in their own immediate deaths, but brought their offspring to a

new land, presumably with more opportunity at the time. Did that decision at least yield the result that parents Jacob Orth the elder and Magdalena Schneider hoped for their children?

When I spent that year in Alsace, at age 22, my knocking on doors led me to meet Emmy Orth, a distant cousin, married to Alfred Schneider. Emmy, my cousin, has the same name as my mother—Emmy Orth. Recall that my line of the family is descendant from the third son of a blacksmith in the village of Rott (Jacob Orth's grandfather, Johann Orth). Emmy is descendant from Johann's older brother—the first son (Philipp Orth). Thus, Emmy and I are both great granddaughters of Johann and Philipp's parents—Rott blacksmith, Jacob Orth and his wife Anna Marguerithe Zimmermann. Emmy is their five-times great granddaughter; I am their four times great granddaughter. That makes us fourth cousins once removed.

As third son, Jacob Orth's grandfather, Johann, needed to leave his home village of Rott to make the living he wanted to make, in Retschwiller. His son, Jacob the elder, would leave Retschwiller to go to nearby village, Oberseebach, and then leave for America to make the life he wanted to make. While Jacob, Lena, and George all raised their families in Pittsburgh, their children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and now great great grandchildren live in over a dozen different states—spread to the winds.

In contrast, Emmy Orth, my cousin, was born in Rott, the product of at least five generations, all living in Rott. On a trip to visit Alsace in 1990, my cousin organized an Orth family reunion, including nearly 75 people, all descendants of Jacob Orth and Anna Marguerithe Zimmermann. While some knew each other, most did not. Even though these siblings and cousins lived in fairly close proximity to each other, there weren't necessarily close relationships between family members—or sometimes any active relationship at all, even though they were related by blood.

All to say, that my mother's adage, that "Blood is thicker than saliva," might be exactly wrong. The family members we choose (those saliva relationships) and those that come with them (the welcoming of inlaws into our lives) seem, in the long run, to often replace blood relationships. I know that each of my sons' partners feel like part of my family in a very real way. And I feel myself folding their families into ours—the construction of new familial relationships.

Back to the question of whether Jacob Orth the elder and Magdalena Schneider would feel content with their choice to have left Alsace. Evolutionarily, we are built

to procreate. In that sense, having delivered three healthy children to the shores of America, though precipitating their own deaths, resulted in Lena, Jacob, and George fulfilling that destiny: between them they had 15 children, 12 living to adulthood, who in turn produced 35 grandchildren—all now Americans.

Whether moving to America resulted in more opportunity and prosperity in the short run, or more importantly, in the long run, is difficult to know. Jacob took the opportunity to seek his fortune by mining gold—though did not appear to strike it rich. George voluntarily enlisted as a soldier in the Civil War, where he became infected with the disease that would result in his relatively early death. Lena also died at a relatively early age of cancer. Collectively we know that Jacob and his siblings lost at least three children to illness and disease before adulthood; they lost two daughters who both died as young mothers leaving four motherless grandchildren. All in all, the mortality rate did not seem to be different than it was in Alsace, at least in the generation immediately following Jacob and siblings.

One could argue that one of the biggest differences in the lives of Jacob and siblings, and in turn their offspring, happened because they went from living in rural Alsace to living in Pittsburgh—a large, industrial city. All that was lost in beauty may have been gained in the increased opportunities that came along with that. This included more diverse ways to make a living and greater exposure to and opportunities for education. We see evidence of Jacob and his siblings' children pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities, a few who pursued advanced education or married someone who did (for example, my grandfather was an attorney; his oldest sister Elisabeth George-Anna Orth married one), and there were several accountants. Elisabeth George-Anna attended a music academy and her sister Mary Emma Orth attended art school, all in the 19th century. As grandchildren grew, an increasing number of them also pursued advanced education, including a medical doctor (George's grandson Clarence Merkel), a woman who pursued a degree in mathematics at a time when few women did (George's granddaughter Ruth Margaret Merkel). And yet, to this argument, I might counter that the trend towards more education, as we passed from the 19th to the 20th century, was neither unique to America nor necessarily to people living in cities. Strasbourg and its many opportunities were close enough to the Alsatian countryside that it would have been in easy reach.

One of the things I found to be surprising when I arrived at the University of Strasbourg, in Alsace, in 1978, was that most of the scientists at the institute where I worked had been there for their entire careers, a stark contrast to my experience

in medical research labs in the United States. At that time in the United States, and now as well, a person's career path typically took them to different institutions in different states. Academics might go to graduate school at one institution, pursue a postdoctoral fellowship at another institution, and then work as a researcher at a third institution. The same was true in corporate America. My father, in chemical sales, had been transferred from New York City to Chicago and then Boston over the course of my childhood, requiring that we uproot the family and move, leaving behind friends and the familiar. Further, it wasn't uncommon for partners and families to need to live apart to accommodate these occupational expectations—my father left for Chicago a full year ahead of the rest of the family. The priority was on achieving success in one's chosen career, over connection to family or place. A question I asked my colleagues at the University of Strasbourg was, "Why are you all still here? It seems that you have been here, at this institute, for your entire careers." The consistent response I got, was: "Why would I leave? This is where my family is. Alsace is where I grew up."

This struck me. Coming from a family and a culture where families had been "spread to the winds," with my parents' siblings living all across the nation, and first cousins who I saw only very occasionally, the idea that one would intentionally sink roots in a place was novel to me. Having witnessed, over the course of my year in France, my colleagues' love of place—of Alsace—was different than I had experienced or even witnessed in my own life up to that point. In the case of Alsace and Alsatians, "place" represented the locus of history, culture, language, cuisine, and tradition as well as family and environment. In many ways, my observation of this deep connection to place was one of my biggest take-aways from that year in Alsace. The potential to have this centuries-long connection to my place on Earth was lost to me when Jacob the elder and wife Magdalena left Alsace for America, and when my grandparents and parents chose to follow opportunity wherever it took them. And yet, these same decisions, made by my ancestors, instilled a sense of possibility for me and those in my generation—a feeling that life could lead anywhere.

As different as the world is now in the 21st century, as compared to the 19th century, there are similarities that jump out to me. Now, just as 200 years ago, the places we live change over time, impacted by disease, weather, war, new technologies, changing economies, and are subject to the myriad ways that we humans impact our communities and environments, for better and for worse. Throughout it all, the ebb and flow of opportunities are life's backdrop. Some require short term sacrifices and/or investment of time and resources. Others

involve taking risks—sometimes big risks. We are faced with choices, to stay and adapt, to actively work to improve our situations, to seek alternatives including removing to another place. I think of how Jacob the elder and Magdalena's decision was just such a choice, with its consequences rippling across subsequent generations.

It's hard to describe the excitement I feel to have gained a little glimpse of the lives, circumstances, and choices that led my Alsatian forebearers to come to America. It doesn't take much for me to muster feelings of awe at the courage and tenacity exhibited by the Orth family. I have often wondered what these relatives would think to know that one of their offspring's, offspring's, offspring's, offspring not only knows their names, but is deeply interested in the details of the lives they led. I hope they would feel honored.