

Prussian Immigrants: A closer look at the Gentz, Maass, Knuppel, Koch and Block families in 1850 Tyler County.

In an attempt to explain the relationship of these families, Charlotte Gentz, daughter of Christian Gentz (residence 122/122), and her husband William Maass had immigrated as newlyweds from Usedom, Prussia in 1845. By the time the rest of the family made the journey in 1850, they were living in Jasper County.

Possibly with William and Charlotte was William's brother, Charles Maass (res 119/119). We know that "Father" Maass was here prior to '45 because he sent a letter back to Prussia from Orleans for William and Charlotte to be married. So, Charles Maass may have traveled with his parents pre-'45 instead of his brother and new sister-in-law.

Though records have been found stating the senior Maass names were Zimmermann Maass and Johanna Gatzen, it seems safe to assume that the senior couple in res 120/120, Chas D and Mary, must be the Maass parents using what they perceived as Americanized names. Of note, Gentz was shortened from Gentzen, so that is another avenue of research to pursue.

Fred Koch (res 121/121) sister Louisa was married to Johann (John) Knuppel; and they, too, were on this 1850 voyage along with two sons, Ferdinand and Ernest.

They had a 3rd son, Augustus, who had traveled to America ahead of them in 1846 on the Bark Constitution, making the voyage with the Block family. It is with Augustus with whom John and Louisa and Ernest are staying in this census record in res 118/118.

Now the Block family is a bit mysterious as how they connect with these families as no intermarriages have been found; but in addition to Augustus traveling with them, the Gentz and the Blocks were clearly at least good friends if not related, particularly evident after the two families moved to Port Neches from Sabine Pass sometime before 1870. The Blocks came to own a cemetery; and when Christian Gentz died, the Blocks erected a monument in his honor and dedicated the grounds to him.

The Blocks were already in Sabine Pass, Jefferson County, in 1850 when Christian Gentz had traveled to America with five children, three boys and two girls, first shown in Tyler county. The sons are with him there in Tyler, but the girls, Fredrika, 16, and Alwine 15, are found in separate households in Sabine Pass, Jefferson Co. Fredrika seems to be in a boarding house in res 259/259, and Alwine is staying with the town assessor/collector and his family. He was from NY and was actually the census taker. That household was res 251/151. The Blocks were in res 253/253, right in between the two sisters. One could speculate that he had assured Christian he would look after his girls until the family caught up with them in Sabine Pass.

The oldest Gentz daughter, Charlotte, married to William Maass, is recorded in 1850 Jasper census in December, one month after the Tyler county census was taken. By then her brothers Charles and Fred are listed separately. These two young boys (Charles is my direct ancestor) got counted in two counties.

Perhaps times were really rough is the reason the girls went ahead with the Blocks, or the girls were just anxious to begin a new life. But clearly the Blocks were trusted friends, if not relations.

Ferdinand Knupple, also on this Bark Neptune voyage, is not recorded in these households but is recorded with his parents and brother Augustus in 1860 in Hardin County.

Ernest is not there, nor has there been further record of him that I can find.

By 1880 Hardin County census, Ferdinand had been married since 1864 and had seven children. His bride was Alvena Koch, the now grown little 7 year old daughter of Fred Koch and Augusta Maass Koch of the 1850 census.

These brave immigrants, a close and wonderful family unit, helped to settle much of Southeast Texas. The Blocks and the Knupple and part of the Maass family are credited with settling what was then Cook Bluff. Gentz and Maass, at least William and Charlotte, along with the Blocks, helped to settle Sabine Pass and later Port Neches. They make me all the more proud of my heritage.

Researched and written by Sherry Sharp, 28 Jun 2011