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J F. Swartzendruber

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An Amish Migration

My mother was born and raised in Stonycreek Township, then Bedford County, now Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Both of her parents died when she was in her teens. When she married in 1848 she went with her husband across the State line into Alleghany County, now Garrett County, Maryland, into the pineries on the southeast slope of the Meadow Mountains, some eight miles southeast of Grantsville, Maryland, known as New Germany. Her husband, Frederic Swartzendruber, was engaged with his father, Jacob Swartzendruber, in the milling business. They had both a sawmill and grist mill.

When she came there she found that the neighbors had already contracted the "western fever", for the reason that my father had a half-brother living in the wilds of Iowa, and they were keeping up a correspondence with him. He had moved there with his family in the spring of 1846, and was one of the first two Amish families locating in Johnson County, Iowa. This man's name was Daniel P. Guengerich. He was one of the two sons which my Grandmother Swartzendruber had by her first marriage. Joseph Swartzendruber, my father's

oldest full-brother accompanied this family to their new location in Johnson County, Iowa, where he spent the summer. The season being sickly that year, mostly chill-fever and ague, Joseph contracted this epidemic, and in the fall started to return to Maryland. He stopped in the southeast corner of Iowa, Lee County, where he succeeded in getting work for a while, but was unable to do much on account of the ague. After shaking several weeks, he returned home much discouraged, expecting never to try it again.

Later Grandfather Swartzendruber was induced to take a trip to that far-off country to visit his step-son, Daniel P. Guengerich. He returned very favorably impressed with the country, and from this time thought strongly of locating there with the rest of the family. "If I mistake not that country has a great future in store", he wrote in his notebook. "The soil is very rich black loam, and has no stones or gravel on the fields. The land is timbered and prairie land mixed. The timber and brush lands seem to be the richest. It is cleared off and plowed with a very sharp steel plow, which cuts the roots as it strikes them. The land raises enormous crops of wheat and corn the first year, without any fertilizers. The wild Grasses on the Prairies and the sloughs make good hay for the stock, but cattle feed on the prairies all

winter unless there is too much snow on the ground."

Grandfather was considered a very truthful and conservative man; yet these reports were too good to be fully believed. People in western Maryland could not comprehend that there could be a country so fertile and fields so entirely free of stones as to be plowed with a sharp steel plow.

Grandfather also spoke of the disadvantages of that far-off country. Some of these were: "There are bands of roving Indians strolling over the country. Yet friendly as they are, they might most any time take on a hostile attitude and become perilous to the Whites. But the main drawback is that the people are all newcomers and all are poor. There is no Money, no wages, and no income. They simply *have hard times* in the fullest sense of the word. The climate is very healthy, with the exception that at certain times of the year there is much malaria caused by stagnant water in the Sloughs and pools, causing chills or 'Fever and Ague'. However annoying the maladies are, they hardly ever prove fatal."

Within the following two years another brother of my father, a young single man, ventured out west. His reports were very favorable, with the single exception of hard times. The desire grew in the minds of my father and his parents to go

west and grow up with the country. In the summer and the fall of 1850, several other families of their acquaintance ventured to settle in the new location, which raised their own fever to the climax. The decision to emigrate was announced and the preparation made. However much mother was opposed to the project, she finally yielded. During the winter of 1850-1851 their few belongings were reduced to money, excepting what they decided to take along. These were packed in good strong boxes the size of large trunks.

Mother had an inheritance due from her father's estate of some six or eight hundred dollars, which she received in twenty dollar gold pieces in time to take along. It was sewed into pasteboard eight inches square, packed among the bedding in one of the boxes, and arrived safely. No doubt these twenty dollar gold pieces helped to relieve the hard times in Iowa for the Swartzen-drubers. This was not as reckless a way of transporting money as it might seem. Banks were then very few and were not considered safe at all. Post-office arrangements were then not developed as now, and sending money by mail and other means was then unknown. People carrying money hid it in their clothing or in their grips, and were usually armed with a pistol. Robbers and pickpockets were numerous and dangerous.

The company consisted of six persons: my grandfather and grandmother Swartzendruber and their youngest son George, who was then twenty years old; my father and mother and their only child, fifteen months old.

"On the 14, of April 1851," wrote grandfather in his German notebook, "we bade adieu to our many friends at Grantsville, Maryland, and were taken by teams following the National Turnpike to Brownsville, Pennsylvania, where we boarded a steamboat to Pittsburgh. Here we took another Boat to Wheeling, Virginia, on the Ohio river, then another to St. Louis, Mo. where we boarded another one and went up the Mississippi river to Muscatine Iowa. Here we hired two teamsters with team and wagon each to take us out, by the way of Iowa City," to Daniel P. Guengerich's place.

This departure from friends and relatives was appalling to mother, and things looked dark to her. She felt as if she were going away from home and relatives to a dreary and dismal country, a country of want and poverty, where they were likely to be massacred by the Indians.

One morning on the Ohio River, between Wheeling and Saint Louis, she ventured a glimpse out on the water and noticed the box in which her money was packed, with other boxes, loaded on a

flatboat and fastened on behind the steamboat with a rope. Her box was piled on in a slanting way, apparently ready to slide off into the river. This frightened her so that she screamed out loudly, and fell down and fainted.

The reason they went by steamboat was because there were no railroads west of Chicago. Iowa City was then the capital of Iowa, about forty miles northwest of Muscatine. There was considerable transit by team between these two towns, and in dry weather the roads were fairly good, but when the Swartzendrubers arrived it had rained nearly every day for two weeks or more and the mud was deep. As the Pennsylvanians put it, "The Iowa mud was as sticky as shoemakers wax."

The scenery along the road was entirely different from that back in Pennsylvania. The farm houses were very few and far between, and built away from the road. No orchards were to be seen anywhere. The landscape was prairie, interwoven with strips of timber, groves, and patches of hazelbrush. This being early in May, 1851, all the livestock was roaming at will out on the green pastures of the prairies. Every cow and every horse seemed to be carrying a bell. The groves were putting on their new coat of green; every shrub was putting on its holiday dress of various colors.

Song birds were warbling their sweet melodies. All nature seemed to be endeavoring to greet the emigrants and cheering a welcome, excepting the roads. These seemed to delight in throwing mud all over them, and in stopping the wheels in their progress.

Among the blooming shrubs and trees of that day were the wild blackberry, the wild plum, and the crab-apple. With all that the skill of man has done to improve the varieties of fruit by selection and propagation, the horticulturists have not, in my opinion, succeeded in bringing out a better all-purpose variety of blackberries and plums than those natives which then grew wild, and still grow in isolated places and along the fences. And sure croppers they are, as is also the wild crab-apple. The latter was much used for apple butter.

On Saturday, May 3rd, on the second day of their drive, they had only one more big slough to cross. They were within a half mile of the first Amish home, but did not know it. This was the home of Uncle Peter Miller, who had located on the prairie about three years before, beside the trail to Iowa City. After planning a while, they decided to double hitch to the wagon upon which the ladies were seated and take it over first. Though spring seats were then unknown, a special comfortable seat had been prepared for the

ladies. There was not much need for springs, as the wheels rolled on soft ground. In they went, the men folks trying to push a little, boot-top deep and in some places deeper. They got into the mud better than out. Two of the horses got down and would not get up till they were unhitched. Then they double hitched to the other wagon and took it through on a roundabout way, for all the landscape was theirs. While the teamsters did this, the other men managed to carry mother and the babe and the boxes of household goods across to dry land. The empty wagon was finally pulled out too. All the men and horses were about as wet and muddy as they could be. By this time the sun had set and it was getting dusk.

Everybody was out of humor. They decided to stop for the night at the first farm house they could find, regardless of whose it was, and would not leave unless driven away by dogs and shotguns. Mother was treated very kindly by all, and now felt more like smiling than she had for a long time. In the still of the evening they heard the noise of dogs and swine ahead of them. This brought cheer to the company. In a few moments more they heard the voices of men singing songs. So on they hastened, and soon came to a lowly farm house, or hut.

A few grown boys were outside, and their

mother soon appeared on the scene too. After the barking of the dogs was stilled, one of the teamsters ventured to ask to be taken in for the night. But the woman declared this to be impossible, as it was Saturday evening, and the boys had all come home for Sunday, so they were full. After a little while the man too came out, but bareheaded. He had only one hat for Sunday and for other days and could not find it in the dark. The teamsters then explained that they were bringing immigrants from Pennsylvania, that they were all strangers though they themselves lived in Muscatine. They said they had had hard luck and it was impossible for them to go farther.

These people were then anxious to know who the newcomers were, half suspecting they were Amish. The name of Swartzendruber opened wide the doors of hospitality in the humble home of Uncle Peter Miller. Only they were sorry that they could not entertain better. And in fact, the accommodation, as well as it was meant, was very limited.

The Millers had already had supper and had been about ready to retire. At that time of the year a light was seldom used after dark. But the hostess managed to find half of a candle, and proceeded to set the supper table for the guests. Their fare was mostly corn bread and corn cake,

sauerkraut and "speck" with potatoes for a change. But on this special occasion this family chanced to have wheat bread to last them over Sunday provided the boys would not eat too much. This bread, with salted lard or salted tallow instead of butter, answered for supper.

While the immigrants were seated at the table enjoying their supper as best they could, the hostess noticed that the candle would soon burn out, so she managed to fix up an old-fashioned lard lamp to illuminate the room after the candle light gave out. Those of our young readers, who do not know what candle lights, candlesticks, or lard lamps are, will please ask some old grandma who is seventy or more years old, and let her explain it to you. Coal oil and oil lamps were then unknown, and gas and electric lights unthought of.

This family consisted of father and mother, two girls in their teens, and seven boys. Several of the older children were of age, yet they were contented in the paternal home. The youngest was five years old. They were a jolly set of boys, always in good humor. There was apparently no end of vocal music and whistling. Their needs were but few and easily supplied, and I dare say, as I have known them since, they lived more contented than the ordinary person does to-day with all the improvements and modern conveniences.

After supper was over the tired guests were ready to retire, and probably the generous family was just as ready to show them to bed on account of the scarcity of lamp power. The boys usually slept "upstairs" when they were at home, but the men guests were given these beds — all except one which the host and his two youngest sons wanted to occupy. There was only one bedstead in the house, and this was for the parents, but it was given to grandmother and the young mother with the babe in her arms. The larger boys slept somewhere out of doors.

Before the larger boys were allowed to retire for the night they were required to bring in some fence rails to the wood place and reduce them to firewood for preparing the Sunday morning breakfast. This they did singing and whistling merrily while they worked. The strangers were requested to sleep as long as they wished on Sunday morning, which they gladly did.

The next morning when the host heard some noise among the strangers, he rose as quietly as possible, went down the ladder, and kindled a fire in the cookstove. The hostess also appeared at the same time preparing to bake biscuit for breakfast as their store of wheat bread had been nearly exhausted for supper. But lo! when the smoke ascended the stovepipe, the strangers raised a

scream and came down the ladder very sparingly clad. The pipe by some mishap had become disconnected and they were smoked out of their beds like squirrels out of a hollow tree. After this was corrected preparations for breakfast continued.

If they had been alone, corn cake would have been good enough, but these very welcome strangers had to have the best that could be provided. Very sorry were the hosts that they had no genuine coffee, but had to make rye coffee instead. When the hostess went to get flour, she found the host's lost hat in her wheat flour barrel. The barrel stood in the corner of the room, covered with a cloth tied over the top. Some wooden pins were driven into the logs of the house on which to hang hats and coats right above the barrel. The hat was removed rather on the sly and taken out and given a hasty dusting.

The flour sieve was considered as necessary in the household as the coffee mill. Corn meal and wheat flour were supposed to raise more lightly if sifted; and so this flour received a thorough sifting, and the table was set. One of the boys was sent to bring in the cows, two in number, while two other boys were awaiting them with milk pails to furnish milk for breakfast. When all was ready, the newcomers were invited to help themselves to their hearts' content of what was set before them.

The breakfast table was entirely minus any dainty dishes: the hostess probably considered the hot biscuits as such but the teamsters did not. Aside from the biscuits, there was a plate of hot corn cake, an every-day dish and with some people in Iowa an every-meal affair, just as wheat bread is to-day. There was a large dish of boiled potatoes with the jackets on, another one with brown gravy, and one with salted lard instead of butter. Rye coffee served for a beverage. One of the teamsters ventured to ask for sugar for the coffee, but they had none. The hostess went around offering more coffee and biscuits, but no one wanted any more.

While they were eating they had an opportunity to notice the house and its furniture, better than they had the evening before. If I remember mother's story correctly, the house was built of logs, with a sort of "upstairs", which ordinarily consisted of about two extra rounds of logs above the lower story. This gave room for a floor bed or a low bed under the roof. In this home this part of the house was considered the boys' dormitory. Yet in it were stored away many things that were in immediate use. In one end stood a spinning wheel, a flax wheel and a reel, which was considered more necessary in the home of those days than an "ABC Book".

The main part of the house in the lower story had two apartments, of which the largest was called the "room". It had a fireplace in the gable end, a large dinner table, a chest, the only bedstead in the house, three short benches, two chairs, and a sewing chair. There was no rocker, for there was no room or time for an easy chair. The other apartment was called the kitchen, which contained the cookstove and a few other very necessary articles of furniture. Beside the kitchen door was a ladder fastened to the wall, which served as a stairway to the second floor.

The house also had an additional part, which was called a "leanto", on one of the long sides. This was the girls' dormitory. The walls of the leanto were made of prairie, or probably slough, sod turned over with a plow, and laid up somewhat like a brick wall. It may have been plastered on the inside. The floor was of "mother earth". The roof formed the ceiling.

This being Sunday morning and breakfast over, the men folks began to think of cleaning their dirty clothing. Besides, they had not shaved since they left home nearly three weeks before. They thought they had properly cleaned their cowhide boots in the dark the evening before, but it seemed to be a very imperfect job by daylight, so they went at it in good earnest trying to look well when

they arrived at Daniel's. But lo! this rich Iowa soil proved to be as adhesive when dried as it was when wet. The girls came to assist the women a little with knives, but they had kept comparatively clean and their job was soon finished. The men folks, however, finally gave it up for some future time. Mother smiled at them and proposed boiling the garments in soapsuds or lye.

By this time the boys had brought in the oxen. They had three yoke and had contracted for two more — ten oxen altogether. Each ox carried a bell, so he could be more easily found. The boys put on the yokes and then fed them some corn every morning. This was to train them to the process of being yoked. The young oxen would be broken to drive when spring plowing began in the latter half of May. A team of five yoke of oxen would be used on the heavy breaking plow.

The wheels of the immigrant wagons were set in motion, and about ten o'clock on Sunday morning, May 4, 1851, the Swartzendrubers arrived at their destination without any more mishaps. They were very kindly received, and tears of joy were shed. After the touching commotion was over, Daniel's wife asked where they had lodged for the night. When she was told, she asked: "Well, did you have breakfast?" Both of the teamsters answered at the same time: one in the affirmative

and one in the negative. Then they asked for an early dinner, as they wanted to start back so as to get home by Monday night.

This ends the story of my parents' migration to Iowa as mother told it to me. I suppose the men folks succeeded in cleaning their dirty clothing, for they were not of the dirty kind. My parents bought what was called "Elm Grove", consisting of eighty acres, for two dollars per acre. It had several small fields and a log house, fourteen by sixteen feet in size. They bought three more eighties of government land at \$1.25 per acre.

It may not be out of place to mention that Grandfather Swartzendruber was a minister. The day after these folks arrived in the new colony, another minister, John Gingerich, came. He, his wife, a single son, two older sons and a son-in-law with their families, all came at the same time, overland with teams and wagons from Lancaster, Ohio. With their coming, the Amish Church in Iowa was organized, and by the grace of God still exists.

John Gingerich was the ancestor of nearly all the Gingerichs in the vicinity of Kalona. And Grandfather Jacob Swartzendruber was the ancestor of at least half the Swartzendrubers at this place.

J. F. SWARTZENDRUBER