

News from Nan

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE, GENEALOGY, FAMILY HISTORY

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE: "ADOLPH" RIEDEL (ANNA'S GREAT-GRANDFATHER, JULY 13) (AI-ENHANCED)

JULY 12, 2025 | ANNA

This post merges text published in this space in 2018 with historical context provided in 2025 by AI Assistant Perplexity.



Heinrich Adolph ("Adolph") Riedel

July 13 is the 183rd birth anniversary of my great-grandfather, Heinrich Adolph ("Adolph") Riedel.

Birth through early adulthood

Born in the German state of Saxony in 1842, Adolph was the descendant of innkeepers, but he became a weaver at an early age. As a young married man he migrated at least once within the region looking for

better occupational opportunities.

Migration to the United States

In the Saxon town of Meerane, Adolph heard of a group known as "Colonia Saxonica" (Saxon Colony) that was planning to migrate to the United States. Adolph and his wife, Marie Augusta ("Augusta"), née Joram, decided to join the group.

Most of the migrants were relatively young parents of multiple children. The Riedels' oldest child, Anna, had died as an infant in Germany, but the next four, two girls and two boys, migrated with them. Their older son was Louis Hermann, my grandfather, who was about four years old when they left Germany in 1873.

Background: Economic boom and bust after German unification in 1871

This is part of the summary provided to me by AI Assistant Perplexity as I was preparing the post. I found it to be interesting and enlightening in explaining some of the "macro" reasons that Adolph and his family migrated to the United States.

"After the unification of Germany in 1871 (a period known as the "Gründerzeit, or "founders' time or epoch"), the country experienced a period of rapid industrial growth and speculative investment. This boom, fueled by the influx of French reparations after the Franco-Prussian War, led to the founding of many new companies and a surge in stock and real estate prices.

"In May 1873, the Vienna Stock Exchange collapsed, triggering a chain reaction across Europe. By September, the Berlin Stock Exchange also crashed, marking the start of the economic crisis known as the *Gründerkrise* ("founders' crisis").

"As an industrial town in Saxony, Meerane was heavily involved in textile manufacturing. The *Gründerkrise* hit such towns hard, leading to factory closings, layoffs, and a sharp drop in wages.

"Working-class families in Meerane and similar towns faced unemployment, poverty, and uncertainty. The crisis undermined the optimism of the earlier boom years and created severe hardship for many.

"The economic crisis coincided with a wave of mass emigration from Germany. Between 1871 and 1885, millions left for the United States, with the highest numbers during and after the *Gründerkrise*."

Adolph and his family left Meerane for Hamburg in August 1873.

Riedel family migration route

The Colonia Saxonica group traveled by what was called the "indirect route": by ship from Hamburg to Hull, by train from Hull to Liverpool, and by steamship from Liverpool to New York.

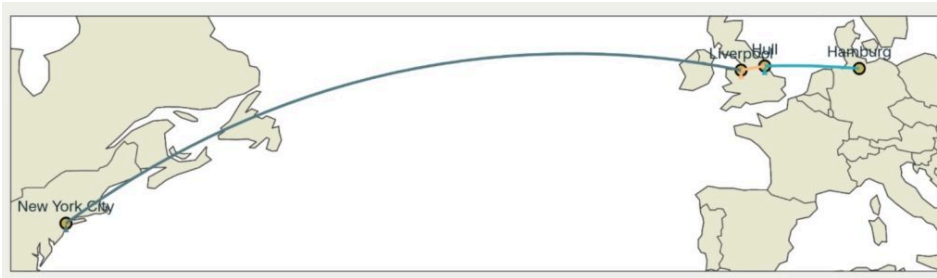
Steamship travel was still relatively new in 1873; that innovation had cut the crossing to 10-14 days, rather than the four weeks the trip had taken by sailing ship on the "direct route" from Bremen.

(As an aside, my maternal grandmother's family, the Schreiters, were on the same migration ship as the Riedels.)

More background information and a map from Perplexity

Perplexity also created for me the following information and map of the 1873 Hamburg to NYC emigration route.

"This route was widely used due to the frequency and affordability of British transatlantic shipping lines, as well as the established infrastructure for handling emigrants at each stage of the journey."



"Indirect" migration route from Germany to the United States

New York City to Forestville, Michigan

The Saxon group entered the United States through New York's Castle Gardens (the forerunner of Ellis Island), and they eventually arrived in Forestville, Michigan, by the *E. B. Ward* from Detroit.

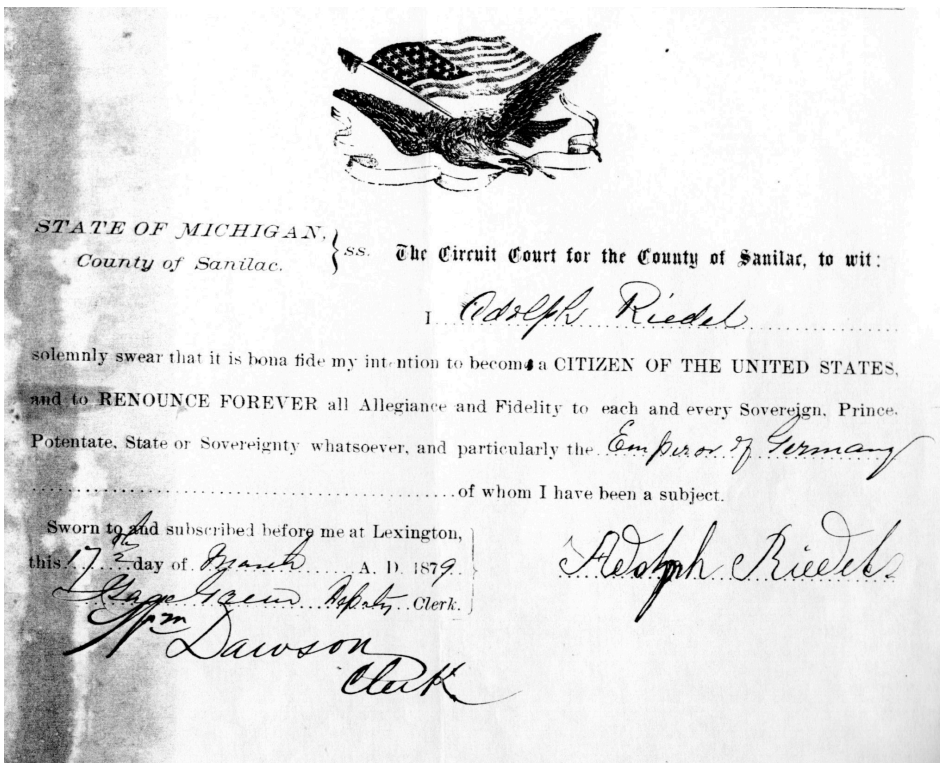
The *E. B. Ward* was named for Eber Ward, a Detroit industrialist who in 1852 had purchased a large tract of land in Forestville, Michigan (about 100 miles north of Detroit), and who was now offering 40-acre parcels to the German migrants for \$7.00 per acre. The land had been burned over in an 1871 fire, but the migrants appreciated not having to cut down so much timber before planting their farms.

Adolph Riedel purchased a parcel, built a log cabin, and established a farm and orchard. Within a few years he had purchased additional land and built a hotel and saloon.



"West End" Hotel in Forestville, Michigan

Adolph Riedel's hotel had a mixed reputation. On the one hand, it was a community center that hosted carnivals, parades, and plays. For example, the village's first Oktoberfest in 1878 celebrated the fifth anniversary of the group's arrival and the year when many members became American citizens. (Adolph declared his intention to become a citizen the following year.)



Adolph Riedel citizenship declaration, 1879

On the other hand, Adolph was fined for selling whisky on the Fourth of July, and there were constant complaints by early-rising farmers who were being kept awake most of the night by drunken drag racing on horseback.

Perhaps to somehow compensate for some of the wilder goings-on in the hotel, Adolph's wife, Augusta, donated land in Forestville for a Lutheran church.

Adolph also started other businesses in Forestville, including a blacksmith shop run by his son-in-law, Emil Zwicker, and a grain elevator, which was later taken over by my grandfather, Louis Riedel.

Here is a photograph of the Adolph Riedel family taken in about 1890.



Adolph Riedel and his family in 1890. My grandfather Louis is standing on the right. All of Adolph and Augusta's children were born in Germany except the youngest, Arthur.

◀ 1842 ◀ 2025 ◀ HEINRICH ADOLPH RIEDEL