

HEINLEIN GENEALOGY

JOHN SCHERZER AND HEINLEIN FARMS

Excerpts from his book “A Mission to Serve, the Life of John Scherzer”

The early Years: From Germany to America

John A. Scherzer was born July 30, 1901 in the village of Gleissenberg, 16 miles east of Nuremberg in north-central Bavaria. Gleissenberg’s origin dates back to the middle of the 15th century, when the village began as a cluster of simple peasant homes huddled together for protection. It remained a modest peasant village through the centuries and was still little more than a few farm houses gathered together when John was growing up in the early years of the 20th century.

Scherzer’s parents were peasant farmers who raised their children in a devoutly Christian setting. John was the fifth of seven children and the youngest son. His older brothers were Leonard, Andrew, and Phillip; his three sisters were Kuni, Lena, and Margaret. All the Scherzer children attended school in the one-room village school. (His brothers fought in World War One.)

Life in Germany early in the 20th century was primitive and hard for the peasantry. The social order of Germany under the Kaiser was conservative and rigid, with privileges going to the wealthy and politically powerful. Education was strictly for the well-to-do: the landed gentry, wealthy business people, bankers, lawyers, and doctors. For the lower social classes and peasantry, there was little chance for an education above the seventh grade or any way to improve their peasant station in life.

Scherzer’s decision to emigrate to America was made without any financial support from, or approval of, his family. “I had no resources, except for a few marks saved from my meager wages. But I was young, full of dreams, happy, and ambitious, and I counted heavily on God’s leading. The world situation following World War One was frightening. The political situation was revolutionary, and one could foresee the beginning of the rise of National Socialism. All indicators pointed toward trouble.”

To America

Scherzer took the train to Hamburg at the end of September 1921 and bought a ticket to New York on a steamer, the “Amsterdam.” He was required to purchase a ticket out of New York before leaving Germany, because of the concentration of immigrants and the high unemployment rate in New York City.

Pittsburgh was the ultimate destination that Scherzer chose because he had heard his father talk about his school friend, Konrad Heinlein, who had immigrated there before the war. From conversations with his father, John knew a few facts: the Heinlein family had settled in the vicinity of Pittsburgh, they were farmers, and they had a gardening business. With his education and work in agriculture, Scherzer felt that the Heinleins could help him get a start in his new homeland---if he could find them.