

Joseph Schwegler (Sr.)

Though I've never seen the family do so, in these records I will refer to our ancestor as "Senior". The name Joseph is a favorite among our branch of the Schwegler descendants and resides in virtually every generation. We indeed have father, son and grandson in this branch named Joseph and all three lived in the same area of Gasconade County, Missouri.

The origin of the surname Schwegler is found in the farm valleys of Canton Lucerne, Switzerland. Though its ethnic origin is definitely Germanic, related to the same Germanic tribes that settled Germany, Austria, Hungary and several other Eastern European regions, we must remember that Switzerland is a confederation of peoples. Much of its northern half is ethnic German, western sections French, some southern sections are Italian and at least one and perhaps two of its cantons in the southeast are Romansh. Several cantons, similar to our states, have German, French and Italian, all three, as their official languages. The origins of our surname have been traced by Judy Lutt, a Schwegler descendant, back into the 14th century. Judy and I have met only once, many years ago when we were both teens but she has been a tremendous help and encouragement and I have complete faith in her work.

Our Joseph Schwegler, immigrated to the United States in 1863, arriving in New York City, New York on July 20th as a steerage passenger on board the S.S. Hansa of Bremen, via Liverpool, England. The point of origin for his journey is listed as Wohlhausen. Modern day Wolhusen is a small farming community located about 22 km west of Lucerne, the capital of Canton, Lucerne, Switzerland. There has been much speculation among family members and family "researchers" as to his occupation but in this country he was a farmer.

Mr. Schwegler was accompanied by his wife Anna, age 24, son, Julius, age 4, son, Franz Anton, age 1, a Peter Schwegler, age 45 and a Catherine Graninger, age 24. They went immediately from New York to the Centralia, Illinois area and attempted to settle there. There is little, if any doubt, that they had connections in that area, probably other Schweglars of their same ancestral line. However, little, if any, trace of others with our surname has been found in local records there. A family using the surname Swagler, a common misspelling of Schwegler, did live in that area and a picture that I have in my possession shows a striking resemblance between Henry Swagler, Joseph Schwegler and Rainey Schwegler, Grandfather's youngest brother. Joseph only stayed in that area for about two years. There were probably two reasons for his leaving; one being that shortly after the birth of a third son they named Joseph, Anna passed away. A second was related to my mother while she cared for Julius during his last months on earth as Joseph being too poor to buy the oxen needed to plow the prairie sod found in that area. Julius said that horses were not strong enough to last for a full day of plowing virgin prairie. So Joseph and family moved to Gasconade County, Missouri about 1865. Meanwhile Peter Schwegler had been hired by a prominent citizen of the Centralia area to serve as a "substitute" when he was drafted into an Illinois unit to fight in the Civil War. The relationship between Peter and Joseph has not been established, they could have been brothers, we just don't know.

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In Gasconade County, Joseph worked as a farm hand for a wealthy widow, named Anna Fehner Kallewyne as found on their marriage record or Kalteweihr as found in a Gasconade County history. Joseph Sr., Julius, Franz (later changed to Frank) and Joseph Jr. apparently lived with Mrs. Kallewyne and as is common to man it was not long until Mr. Schwegler and Mrs. Kallewyne were married. Two children were the product of that union. Hann is buried at the Salem Presbyterian Church in Gasconade County having been either stillborn or who passed away shortly after being born. A second son named Benjamin in 1868, lived to maturity and is named as executor of his mother's will in Lafayette County, Missouri at her passing in 1902.

The records of Peter, Joseph, Julius and Frank Schwegler renouncing their Switzerland citizenship and pledging their allegiance to the United States are found in the Circuit Court files of Gasconade County, Missouri. Mr. Schwegler passed away in 1870 and is buried in a little cemetery in Osage County, right on the Osage-Gasconade County line. The only engraved stones there are those of Joseph Sr. and members of a Myer's family. More detailed narratives of the lives of his sons will be given in conjunction with their family group sheets.