

## Emigration from the Forest Colonies Herrenwies to North America in the 19th century



Herrenwies 1847, burned down houses marked in red



Family names of immigrants from Herrenwies and Hundsbach

It was the year 1849. Long gone were the times when substantial income from wood and glass could be earned in the forest colonies of Herrenwies and Hundsbach. The colonies specifically established for forest exploitation in the first half of the 18th century were most prosperous between 1750 and 1800. After that, the best woods were cut. With the continued population growth from around 200 people to up to 780 people (1830), the per capita income fell rapidly. In addition, due to the heavy deforestation and the previously common forest pasture, hardly any sustainable regrowth of the forest occurred. The Baden government was finally forced in the 1830s to enact forest laws to restrict forest use. An increasing impoverishment of the population was the result. From 1846 on, there were several crop failures. The voices grew louder asking for urgent support and some colonists even demanded the possibility of emigration, but emigration was always rejected.

However, when four neighboring houses burned down in Herrenwies in 1849 and four families lost their homes, the tide turned and the Baden government decided to act.

The affected families were those of Leopold Meier, Dionys Bäuerle, and brothers Lukas and Michael Herrmann, a total of 26 people. Grand Duke Leopold personally released the costs of their emigration. On the 15th of May the departure to Bremen started from Mannheim harbour via Cologne to Bremerhaven. Unfortunately, the name of the ship on which they traveled to New York remains in the dark. The Herrmann brothers arrived at their destination, the small town of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, in July 1850. According to the August 1850 census, the Bäuerle and Meier families settled in Lewis and Oneida Counties in New York.

In a letter from December 1850 to their relatives, the brothers wrote that they were well, that they worked as day laborers in the woods and also as shingle makers. They earned at least half a dollar a day with good food. They had already bought land, a cow, a calf and eight chickens and they could plant anything: wheat, grain, barley, corn, oats, and other vegetables.

Many colonists from Hundsbach and Herrenwies followed the example of the brothers. From 1851 to 1853 another 270 residents emigrated at state expense. Priority was given to women with illegitimate children, young unmarried people, impoverished families and recipients of benefits. Compared to the status of 1849, the number of residents had been reduced to about 50% within four years, i.e. from approx. 600 to approx. 300 people.

About 60% of the colonists settled in Wisconsin, while others moved to New York State (Oneida, Lewis, Erie County) or Ohio (Toledo, Cleveland, Cincinnati).

With the fire of 1849, the dismissive attitude of the authorities, who denied the residents of Herrenwies and Hundsbach the option of emigration, had an end. The Baden government acknowledged that in the long term there was no other alternative than reducing the number of colonists through emigration. The debt and misery was such that there was no chance of recovery, and it was expected that the social costs would strongly increase. Since hardly any of the colonists were able to finance the travel costs themselves, the state had to pay for it. In addition, the state ensured safe transport to the overseas destination port by commissioning reputable and solid trading houses. At the port of destination, each of the emigrants received additional funds from the responsible consul of Baden, which enabled them to continue their journey.

As far as we know today, most of the emigrants from the forest colonies were able to establish themselves in North America. In the course of chain emigration, the families concentrated in a few places, where they supported each other and married among themselves.

Thus, the state-supported emigration had finally fulfilled its purpose and enabled both parts of the population to survive: both the emigrants and those left at home.