

Historical Society learns about the early years of Clinton County and the emigration of the Emslanders

By Vicky Albers

Breese Journal Editor

The Albers and the Athmers, the Haars and the Hilmeses, the Meyers and the Midendorffs, the Schomakers and the Schroeders — just a random sampling of the surnames found on Barb Salibi's Web site, www.emslanders.com, which is devoted to the identification of 19th century German emigrants who came to America's Midwest from the part of Hanover known today as Emsland, Niedersachsen.

Salibi, a researcher and genealogist from St. Louis, was the featured speaker at the Oct. 1, 2012 meeting of the Clinton County Historical Society, held at the county museum in Carlyle.

Salibi told the group how the western half of Clinton County during the 19th century was predominantly German and predominantly Catholic. Many Emslanders settled in this area, especially in the townships of Breese, Germantown, Looking Glass and Sugar Creek.

In fact, she said, Clinton County holds one of the largest rural concentrations of Emslanders in the United States and also holds the distinction of being the destination of some of the earliest Emslanders who came to this country.

Salibi's interest stems from her own family.

"I have two great-great-grandfathers who came to America from Emsland, one from my mother's side and one from my father's side," she said. "As I began researching my own family history, I learned that these were not isolated incidents of emigration, it was a movement of people."

Located on the west side of Germany, along the Dutch border, Emsland is an area about twice the size of Clinton County with about 10 times the population, Salibi said.

The first wave of Emslanders came to Clinton County in the late 1830s. Documentation shows that many other Emslanders — including familiar names like the Heimanns, the Kalmers, the Santels and the Rensings, among others — moved together to a territory of Holland and many of them later settled near Damiansville.

Today, Salibi's Web site contains the names and necessary documentation of over 3,500 people who settled in the Midwest from the area known as Emsland. Of those 3,500 people, more than 500 settled in Clinton County.

Salibi stressed the importance of having documentation to back up her research,



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including parish records from Germany with birth dates, immigration papers and more.

"If I find reliable documentation as to an immigrant's identity, I'll add it to my Web site, but I also have to show proof that they were a resident of the U.S. at some point," she said.

Salibi's research has taken her on more than a dozen trips to Germany where she will spend countless hours researching parish records in Meppen along with archives in the regional capital of Osnabruck, located southeast of the Emsland district.

She stressed that there are far more Emslanders who have emigrated to America's Midwest than the 3,500-plus listed on her Web site; however, documentation is not as thorough for everyone.

"When I speak of the numbers and percentages of the Emslanders who have emigrated here, I am only speaking of those who have been identified," she said. "I am certain there are many more who have not been identified and probably never will be."

She also noted that the emigrants listed on her Web site are those who settled anywhere in the American Midwest states of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Kansas. The Web site includes indexes to search names by state as well as by county.

Salibi said southern Illinois and eastern Missouri are somewhat over-represented in her research due to easy access to records for those areas. She also noted that no real effort has been made to include the Emslanders who settled in the general vicinity of Chicago. Reasons for this regrettable omission, she said, include both the size of the task and the difficulties involved in doing research from a distance on inhabitants of a major city.

Salibi said that our ancestors' reasons for coming to America were more economic than religious. The level of welfare in a region depended on the sources of revenue, the number of inhabitants and the distribution of income. Emsland was not blessed with rich sources of income and the farmland was poor. Also, it was forbidden to divide a farm to more than one heir.

She commented, "Since the oldest son inherited the property, other sons in the family often became hired farmers. This group of hired farmers became much larger than the economy could handle. We have very good farmland in the Midwest, so the reason they emigrated was not as much about religion as it was the economy."

And, as documentation shows, brothers followed brothers, sisters traveled with sisters and so on.

While Salibi's Web site is the byproduct of a personal research project which is focused on the understanding of settlement

patterns among Emslanders who came to Missouri and Illinois, much valuable information has been contributed by others.

"The goal is to determine what sort of relationship existed among the persons or families who settled near each other when they first arrived here and also among those who subsequently moved on together to some new location," she said.

She provided a graph showing the breakdown of the 523 Emslanders who settled in Clinton County and the German parishes from which they came. It is interesting to note that 44 percent of the 523 people came from just two parishes. The two parishes and the surnames of the individuals who came from those parishes follows (notice the many familiar names):

The parish of Lengerich

Ahe van der, Albers, Athmer, Brauer, Buetmann, Burke, Burrichter, Buss, Deiters, Eilers, Fangmeyer, Fischer, Foppe, Goers, Haar, Hilmes, Holtman, Hulsman, Jansen, Kock, Koebbe, Kollman, Kruip, Kuetter, Kuhl, Lager, Markus, Maue(n), Memann, Merscher, Meyer, Middendorf, Niebur, Overburg, Rakel, Ripperda, Roebke, Rolfes, Saller, Scheer, Schlangen, Schoo, Spihlman, Storm, Stroot, Teisman, Theisling, Thorbeck, Thuenemann, Voe-

skers, Waller, Weh, Wehlage, Wellen, Wempe and Wienhoff.

The parish of Herzlake

Albers, Apke, Boergman, Book, Brinker, Bruemmer, Diestel, Dirksen, Dueing, Fischer, Hegger, Hempen, Hermeling, Hilling, Hoemmeke, Hues, Kohrman, Korerger, Kunneke, Lehrter, Lengers, Loddeke, Rawe, Risau, Rolves, Schaper, Schomaker, Schroeder, Thien, Vehing, Wesselman, Wiegman and Wilken.

For anyone interested in doing their own genealogical research about Emslanders or emigrants from other nearby areas of Germany where so many of this county's founders have come from, Salibi offers the following advice: "It's slow work, but it can be done."

She said to be lenient with spellings, because quite often the handwritten documents are misspelled.

She also said that when looking for records, it's important to know the history of the area you're searching in. For instance, she said, Emsland remained property of the bishops of Münster until 1803. It came under rule of Prussia and Arenberg, but after the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna decided to hand the territory over to the Kingdom of Hanover. When Hanover

was annexed by Prussia in 1866, changes were again made, and the boundaries often changed depending on who was in power.

Why is this important?

"If people came over prior to 1866, they were considered part of the Kingdom of Hanover, and if it was after 1866, they came from Prussia. It's important to know this if you're looking for records," Salibi said. "When doing research, different materials were available depending on what part of Emsland the individual had resided in."

Under one ruler, for example, it was ordered that a census be done with the names and ages of all people living in every household.

While Salibi has assisted many people with genealogy work over the years, she also has links on her Web site for professionals who will provide assistance at a reasonable price. The site also includes a variety of links for learning more about emigration and genealogy.

To learn more about the Emslanders, visit Salibi's Web site at www.emslanders.com. To learn more about the Clinton County Historical Society or to become a member, call president Joe Pariseau at (618)526-4876.



The Clinton County Historical Society welcomed Barb Salibi (center), a researcher and genealogist from St. Louis, as its featured speaker Monday night. Pictured with Salibi is Clinton County Historical Society president Joe Pariseau and treasurer Judy Pariseau.