

**Midwestern Stories: How Our Ancestors Came from the Eastern Seaboard,
Switzerland, Germany, and England to Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and
Minnesota**

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Including the surnames:

**Abegglen, Allen, Backhus (Backhouse), Dawson, Duerrwechter, Egger, Freihofer,
Gebendinger, Hewitt, Koons, Imm, Niedermaier, Nias, Siegrist, Smith, and Thiel**



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SYNOPSIS

If we go back through generations of my ancestors, many surnames appear. Good points of reference, however, are my sixteen second-great grandparents. Those sixteen surnames are **Abegglen, Allen, Backhus, Dawson, Duerrwaechter, Egger, Freihofer, Hewitt, Imm, Koons, Lockwood, Nias, Niedermaier, Siegrist, Smith,** and **Thiel**. Although this book is organized around my own ancestors, going back, in some cases, many generations, I hope that others will find points of connectivity, will be able to trace their ancestry, and will enjoy the stories. That was my aim: to tell some stories, even when presenting page after page of “who begat whom who begat whom.”

My ancestor who came from the Philadelphia area on the Eastern Seaboard was Henry David Jones **Koons** (Chapter 1). Ancestors of his wife Henrietta **Allen** originated in Maryland and Virginia on the Eastern Seaboard, with stops in Kentucky and Indiana before reaching Minnesota (Chapter 2). Henry and Henrietta married in 1854 in Shakopee, Minnesota.

John Lever **Smith** and his wife Mary Ann **Dawson** were from Kent in southeastern England, emigrating to Racine County, Wisconsin, in 1857. John **Backhus** and his wife Olivia Harriet **Lockwood** were from Yorkshire in central England, also emigrating to Racine County (all discussed in Chapter 3). John **Hewitt** and his wife Elizabeth Bond **Nias** were from Somerset and neighboring Dorset in southwestern England, near the English Channel; they emigrated to Indiana in 1848 and then to southern Minnesota (Chapter 4). My grandfather Howard Allison **Smith**, son of John Dawson Smith and Lucy Backhus, would marry Florence Lenore **Hewitt**, the daughter of George Hewitt and Martha Mae Koons.

Melchior **Egger** and his wife Elisabeth **Abegglen** were from Brienz, Switzerland, in the foothills of the Alps. Melchior, with two children, emigrated to an area just south of La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1856 (Chapter 5). Also from Switzerland, from Veltheim, near Zurich, were Katharine **Siegrist** and her husband Johannes Jacob **Freihofer** (Chapter 6). After Jacob died, Katharine emigrated to America in 1855, but she died on the Mississippi River on the way to the La Crosse area. Her daughter Anna Barbara married the son of Melchior Egger, also named Melchior. The grandson of Anna Barbara and Melchior, my father Willis **Egger**, would marry Dorothy Maybelle **Smith**.

Ancestors with the remaining four surnames were from what is now Germany. John **Thiel** was born in Ittersdorf in Saarland, an area in northwestern Germany near the border with France. In 1840 he emigrated to an area south of Buffalo, New York, and then on to Cincinnati, Ohio (Chapter 7). He married Theresia **Imm**, who came from Hartheim in far southeastern Germany, on the Rhine River, and who emigrated to Cincinnati with her parents in 1847 (Chapter 8). Jonathan **Duerrwaechter** and his wife Katharina Barbara **Niedermeier**, with children, emigrated from Knittlingen, Wuerttemberg, Germany, in 1854. By 1857 they were living in the La Crosse area (Chapter 9). (The Duerrwaechter surname actually originated in Switzerland). Their son Alexander Ludwig Duerrwaechter would marry Catherine Thiel, daughter of John Thiel and Theresia Imm. Amelia, the daughter of Catherine and Alexander Ludwig, would become the mother of my father Willis Egger.

Chapters 1-4 cover my mother's side of the family. Chapters 5-9 cover my father's side of the family.

PREFACE

In 2017 I wrote Chapter 1 of this book for inclusion on the website of the Scott County (Minnesota) Historical Society. There is a lot of history in Chapter 1, including an ancestor who fought in the Revolutionary War, the early histories of Minnesota and Shakopee and settlements that included our ancestors, and a now-forgotten commercial empire on the Schuylkill River north of Philadelphia.

In the period from 2017-2020 I wrote the remaining chapters of this book, revising them into 2022. Each chapter was originally meant to stand on its own. As a result, there is overlap between the chapters in terms of descendants living in the present or recent past. I debated whether or not to eliminate that overlap and decided not to. Thus people with both Hewitt and Smith roots, for example, will appear in both those chapters.

The material for all chapters came from my genealogical research that I began in 1999 and recorded in my Family Tree Maker software. I would periodically download gedcoms from Family Tree Maker into a tree in Worldconnect on rootsweb.com and a similar tree on ancestry.com. Eventually it became impossible to download a gedcom onto ancestry.com without destroying everything previously posted, so I began to record everything twice, once into Family Tree Maker and once into ancestry.com. The ancestry.com tree is called Nearly All Our Ancestors 2. The trees on rootsweb.com and ancestry.com show the sources for all the facts in this book; it would have taken hundreds of footnotes to show all those sources in the book.

Readers may note a relative lack of detail on living persons or omission altogether. That style is deliberate, to avoid identity theft and other mischief.

There are undoubtedly mistakes and important omissions in the book. That is the nature of genealogy. Today there are myriad ways of acquiring knowledge. Databases on ancestry.com expand weekly, along with the ability to search databases. When I started, searches online were limited. Google was launched in 1998. I read most records on microfilms, either in that genealogical mecca, the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, in the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, or on films I rented and viewed at my local State College Family History Center. Today the LDS Church does not even mail films to local Centers. Everything is online, as long as one visits the local Center.

In 2021 I published a book similar to this one on ancestors of my wife Betsey Abbey Egger. It is called *Genealogical Stories About a Family from McKean County, Pennsylvania*.

I thank Aimee Egger for editing and for formatting and combining the chapters for publishing with Lulu.