

Hermann, Missouri

"THE RHINE CITY ON THE MISSOURI RIVER"

Hermann, the river town of hills and valleys, wide Market Street, soft, orange-red brick buildings and tall church steeples, is reminiscent of parts of the Rhine Valley. Cupped against the background of three hundred foot hills and early houses set against the sidewalk and the neat lawns and flower gardens give the city an old world charm.

In Philadelphia, the same city that gave birth to a great nation in 1776, a dream was born in 1836 of establishing a great city somewhere in the west where German culture and German customs would be retained, "a safe asylum for us, our children and their descendants." Meeting for the first time at the Penn Hotel, Laetitia Court, Market Street, Philadelphia, May, 7, 1836, they decided to look for a new land where they could enjoy the beauty of the country and the genial companionship of fellow Germans. The Society was to be for the people and by the people.

The German Settlement Society of Philadelphia was formally organized on August 27, 1836. One immediately feels the feverish enthusiasm of the organization. At this first meeting there were two hundred twenty-five signers to the constitution. Everyone seemed to feel certain of the most glorious success. Two weeks later three hundred and fifty shares had been sold at \$50 a share. Every share carried a vote and the right to one city lot. (On demand the money could be refunded). Every member had absolute equality of rights and privileges. A poor man could pay for his share by working for the Society.

In April, 1837 three deputies were asked to visit areas in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Michigan and Wisconsin to find land of not less than 25,000 acres. By this time eight hundred and twenty-three shares had been sold. Auxiliary Societies were established in Albany, Baltimore, Montreal, Cleveland and Pittsburg.

No reports from the other places can be found in the files, but the report from Missouri was "glowing". Perhaps because of the idealized report of Gottfried Duden and Fr. Bromme's liberal praise of Missouri this place was selected by the scouts. Some of the assets they listed were plenty of limestone for building houses, hill land for fruit trees and grape vines and grazing for cattle, and valleys for grain, more cool water springs than any other area visited and adjacent to a navigable river. Missouri was yet on the very frontier.

F.G. Bayer, school master at Zions - Gemeinde of Philadelphia, was deputized as agent to lay claim to the land in Missouri. He left July 27th and purchased 11,012.5 acres for \$13,765.68. Most of this was Congress Land, but along the mouth of Frene Creek and up Frene Creek Valley he purchased eighty acres from Stephen Atkins, eighty-six acres from Willis Hensley, seventy-three acres from William Guyler and forty acres east of Frene Creek from Polly Phillips. William Jarvis refused to sell his land to the Society. He retained his claim and later became the source of much vexation and annoyance to the settlers.

On October 5th, the announcement was made in Phil-

adelphia that the land had been purchased. At once the name of the town was discussed and the name Hermann selected. There was an eagerness that almost seems unnatural, a rush almost ridiculous. Resolutions regarding the government of the town, regarding land, etc., were passed which were uncalled for and premature. Without knowing anything about the land and its topography they laid out the town on paper, planned and named public squares for recreation, laid out streets and dignified them by naming them after German and American celebrities. The public squares were to be named Schiller, Goethe, Weinland and Herder. A wide street running north and south, named Market Street, was to be ten feet wider than Market Street in Philadelphia. A Market House was to be in the middle of this. "No glue, soap, oil, turpentine, gunpowder, starch factories or any others which endanger or make disagreeable the lives of neighbors may be erected in Hermann." Two thousand two hundred building lots were laid out and assigned in feverish haste to those who bought shares. Every owner was to erect a house valued at \$300 during the first year of ownership (\$500 on Wharf Street) or forfeit the property. Some of the people, when they later arrived in Hermann, did not like the lots assigned to them.

An article in the German paper "Allgemeine Anzeigers der Deutschen in Gotha" December 19, 1837, stated, "The purchased land lies sixteen German miles above St. Louis. The building of this new land on the Missouri in the founded town of Hermann will start in the spring (1838) and there is no doubt, from the clamor which this undertaking has aroused, will go forward quickly. The building of the town assures craftsmen, artists and laborers a good job and good pay. In the surrounding area the diligence of the German farmer will produce good crops. The advantage which the early members have is the low price of the shares which will buy land from the organization. The price of a share is now \$50, but plans are to raise the price in fifteen months. The price of the land is the same for all members, \$3 per acre for first class, \$2 for second class. Building sites in town are sixty English feet by hundred and twenty feet, each \$50 but along Wharf Street \$150."

F.G. Bayer was appointed General Agent. The enormous tasks placed on his shoulders were too great for one man. He was to oversee everything that pertained to the property of the Society, to superintend the surveying, not only of the town, but also of the surrounding area, to assign property to the colonists and record their claims, to hear and adjust complaints of the settlers, to answer innumerable communications of prospective colonists and shareholders, to furnish food supplies for all, to arrange for building saw and grist mills and send detailed reports to the Society in Philadelphia.

Seventeen persons, Daniel Oelschlaeger with wife and one child, G. Henry Gentner and wife, Conrad Baer, Georg Conrad Riefenstahl with wife and five children, and John Georg Prager with wife and two children left