

ELSOFF, GERMANY

On October 4 – 5, 1975 I visited the village of Elsoff, Germany from which place my forefathers migrated in 1738. I was taken there by a German family, Ilse (Lange) Witte and her husband, Dr. Helmut Witte and their two children. Arriving during the afternoon, we were in time to see the natives driving then- cows in from the various pastures. All stables were located in the village as part of the owners' dwelling. Most paving was of cobblestone. There are approximately 80 homes, none of which lined up with a neighbor. Thus the main street as well as several spurs wound around each dwelling.

We had a bed and breakfast in one of the two guest houses (public house) and a Sunday noon meal in the other. All children ran free in the village with but an occasional auto passing. Women, over 30, dressed in black and wore black hats to church. Men wore hats, white shirts, and some wore boots. Antiquity prevailed with nothing changed from that of several centuries ago except for electric lights and a few television aerials. One home was pointed out to me where an Althaus is currently living. War Memorial Honor Rolls included a number of Althaus names.

In the evening we visited the Lutheran minister, pastor of the only church, a 900 year old building. He became very interested as our host and allowed us to page through leather bound records dating back to 1618. For me the language barrier was a hindrance, however I was fortunate with the great interest Ilse and Helmut took in perusing the records and in talking!¹ to many local people.

The old records were handwritten in German. In 1870 a minister compiled all names with a reference number in the original recording which was usually a full paragraph. This abbreviated 1680 to 1720 record gave only individual names, year of birth, and sometimes the parent's name. Ilse read to me the following, all with the last name of Althaus.

Year of Birth	Name	Mother	Father
1687	George Althaus	Clara	
1703	George		Jacob
1706	George	Elizabeth	Johan
1708	George	Elizabeth	Casper
1711	Johannes	Agnes	Johanes Heinrich
1711	George	Elizabeth	Mar
1715	Johannes	Agnes	Mar
1715	George	Mar	Eberhart
1716	Johannes	A.K.	Mar
1718	Johannes	A.K.	Johannes Christian
1718	George	A. Mar	Heinrich

The above names offered no lead as to our immigrant. With sufficient time to study the handwriting and the ability to read German, one could possibly find clues in the paragraph References relative to the migrants to America.

We attended the church service. There was a long ringing of what seemed to be about five bells and all ringing at *the* same time. Very small hymnals were carried by those attending. The church was completely filled with only a few coming in cars. The young folks all sat in the first five rows and they rose when the pastor entered. There was little formality or ritual. We were quite conspicuous in the group but did not feel at all uncomfortable.

We visited for an hour with George Grouel a native. His brother will soon retire and seems to make a hobby perusing family records. Through a possible correspondence in English with a Mr. Kleinkert we could encourage George Grouel's brother to pursue our heritage. We visited Mr. Kleinkert. I had written him stating my intention to be in Elsoff. Mr. Kleinkert had worked in Rochester, New York, now having retired in his native village. These names had been given to me by George "Bud" Althouse who had been in Elsoff in 1974 while on his way home from India. Mr. Kleinkert could of course, speak English quite well. He was unable to give us much information, having been in America some forty years. He related some local history of the past two wars plus local habits still practiced.

The wars or fighting never entered this totally rural and secluded village, however he found where a bomb had been dropped (probably unloaded) in a woodland of his.

Our visit to Elsoff revealed the quaint habits passed on for many generations in what we refer to as the "old Country". Ilse said, "Well pop, just think here walked your ancestors one time". She made this comment while we were walking through the village after dark. A stream flows through the center of the village. Flowers appeared in every spot not used for vegetables; they were planted in containers in the small bridge railings. The lawn around the church was mowed with a scythe. The church was located high and apart from the village center. These two days in Elsoff was the highlight of my twenty-four days in Europe. This having been my fifth time to visit in or pass through Europe and Germany. Ilse was an exchange student who had lived with us on our farm for a year during 1952 -1953.

[Althouse, Harry N.; Althaus – Althouse; A genealogical booklet; 1977]