

The Nucks: A Pioneer Family

Joseph and Margaret Kiser Nuck emigrated to America from Elmstein, Bavaria, Germany, in 1841. They came for economic opportunity and because they did not want their sons forced into the German army. They joined Margaret's brothers, Sebastian and John, who had come to Huntington earlier.

Joseph was 41, Margaret 38, Mary 16, Matthias 11 and Catherine 6 when they left for America in early May 1841. The trip took over two months, and the entire trip was made by water, the last part on the new Wabash and Erie Canal. One child died and was buried along the canal route in Ohio. Matilda Nuck was born in Huntington December 15, 1841.

They landed in downtown Huntington and spent their first nights in a log house on the site of the present City Building. They moved to a cabin across from the present Mt. Hope Cemetery and then further west, between the Quaker settlement and Silverton. They also lived near Clear Creek on a farm where Madame LaFolier, niece of Chief Lafontaine, lived. Much of the time they were renting from Chief Lafontaine.

Joseph and Matthias cleared land for Chief Lafontaine, crossing the river to their work site in a log canoe daily for three years. Later Matthias told his granddaughter they worked for a year before they saw "hard money." Until then, they received payment in other ways.

In 1846, the family bought an 80 acre tract from the Miami. It was north on Rangeline Road and just west of Clear Creek. Joseph and Matthias first built a rough log house there and then, in 1848, the hewed log building which is now at Forks.

Matt's son, Jacob, described his father as "the champion log chopper of the whole region roundabout. He was also an expert at notching and laying up the corners of a log house. At that work he did as much as two men, for he would notch and lay up two corners as fast as two men could put up the other two corners. He cleared five acres of land for John Hauenstein for five dollars an acre. One winter he chopped 80 cords of wood. He was hired to cut down three monster oak trees that no one else would attack. He had to use an extra long handle in the axe and cut both right and left handed. For the job he received twenty-five cents a tree. Seventy-five cents looked big right then, for money was dreadful scarce and didn't begin to circulate freely until the canal began operating from Lafayette." The marks of Matt's axe may still be seen on the logs of the Nuck House.

Game was so plentiful that Matt could stand in the doorway of the log house and shoot squirrels for breakfast. According to Jacob, "One time he saw 14 on one tree, and he simply stood and shot until he killed 12." Matt "could plug a nailhead with his rifle at twenty paces." The local gunsmith, W. Sees, made Matt's gun in 1846 at his gunshop on Franklin Street. The gun, with the gunsmith's name engraved on the barrel, plus a leather pouch for the bullets, patching and caps, a powder horn, and a little, hollow deer spike used to measure a charge of powder are on display at the Forks Visitors' Center.

Mary Nuck, the oldest child, worked as a housekeeper in the Chiefs' house at the Forks. She helped "birth" children of travelers coming through Huntington on the Canal. Mary married Jacob Zahn, one of four men who moved from Fort Wayne with Chief Lafontaine in 1842. Mary's recollection of the buildings on the Chiefs' property were preserved as drawings in the Bippus collection, prepared in 1928 for the county's centennial.

At 12, Matilda took to the fields. She said, "When my brother Matt married, I was the only stand-by at home, and I had to work in the fields. I did

lots of plowing but preferred using the horses, while father drove the oxen. He seemed to like them best."

Joseph Nuck and his family became US citizens. Margaret died in 1872, at age 68. Joseph died in Matt's home in 1887, at age 86. They and their offspring took great interest in their community and church, Sts. Peter and Paul. Descendants of Joseph and Margaret still reside in Huntington, and their legacy of honesty, hard work and solid faith continues to enrich the community.

In 1994, a Nuck Reunion was held at the Forks. Well over 300 Nuck relatives attended, coming from all over the United States.

The house underwent many changes through the years. Clapboard siding was added as soon as the Nucks could afford it, to make their log house look like a "real" house. Rooms were added and the house enlarged to the point where the original log house was no longer visible. By 1979, the house had stood empty for many years, and its owners, Jim and Carol Shuttleworth, decided to tear it down. As the additions to the house came off, the Shuttleworths realized there was a log house at its center. Understanding its value, they decided it should be preserved. It was moved to the Forks and placed near the Chiefs' House, located on the north side of US 24 at that time. The reconstruction of US 24 forced the moving of both houses, and in 1994 they were moved to their present locations south of US 24.