

## • A Fine Brantwood Bohemian Family

On 22 June 1950, it was reported in THE BEE that: *“Mary and John Hoffman came to Brantwood in 1894. They were of German descent and were first located at Spencer. Mr. Hoffman, with some of his wife’s relatives, walked from Spencer to Knox Mills to work. Mr. Hoffman bought 40 acres of land for \$40.00. With true pioneer spirit he started a farm out of the wilderness. The Hoffman’s reared a large family. Mr. Hoffman was killed by a falling tree and Mrs. Hoffman, with true pioneer fortitude, reared her family alone, instilling into them habits of industry and thrift.”*

Eight of the eleven members of the Hoffman family are pictured in a photograph below taken by E.E. Whiting at his studio in Prentice. The recently rediscovered photograph probably celebrated the christening of the baby, Herman Hoffman, in the late spring or early summer of 1902.



In the photograph from left to right are:

- John Hoffman, born 17 June 1897 in Brantwood, WI
- Joseph Hoffman, born 3 August 1900 in Brantwood, WI
- Johann Hoffman, born 1 August 1864 in Krizenec, Bohemia
- Crescentia Hoffman, born 23 October 1898 in Brantwood, WI
- Mary Hoffman (the eldest child), born 10 December 1892 in Markt Eisenstein, Bohemia
- Maria Weber Hoffman, born 27 August 1870 in Mochov, Bohemia
- Herman Hoffman (the youngest), born 11 April 1902 in Brantwood
- Theresia Hoffman, born 13 September 1895 in Knox Mills, WI
- Three additional children, all born later in Brantwood, WI included : Anton born 4 March 1904, Anna born 26 March 1906, and Rose born 29 December 1907

Johann Hofmann and Maria Weber were married on 6 October 1891, in Mochau (Mochov), Bohemia. The following year, there is a baptismal certificate for Maria Hoffman showing that she was born on 10 December 1892, in Markt Eisenstein (Zelezna Ruda), judicial district of Neuern (Nyrsko) and administrative district of Klattau (Klatovy). The certificate listed her father as Johann Hoffmann and mother as Maria Weber, with religion listed as Roman Catholic.

Maria Hofman is also recorded on a residency document, dated 24 May 1893, showing that she had the right of residency in the community of Kundratitz, political district of Schutten-

hafen and province of Bohemia. The document noted that Maria was a day worker, born in 1871 and married.

The family's emigration from Bohemia was a bit convoluted, as Maria's husband, Johann, traveled after his wife and daughter because he had to serve one year in the army before he was permitted to leave the Austrian Empire. Passenger records show that Maria Weber Hofmann and her child Maria arrived at Ellis Island in New York harbor on 10 August 1893 in steerage aboard the S.S. Spree, after embarking at the port of Bremen, Germany. They travelled with Maria's parents and other siblings, including Joseph Weber, a farmer, from Bohemia, his wife, Theresia, and children, Walburga, Josef, Wenzel, Johann, Karolina, Kresencia and Hermann. According to records at Ellis Island, Johann Hoffmann, age 29, arrived at Ellis Island (which had just opened in 1892) in New York harbor a few months later on 5 October 1893 also aboard the S.S. Spree from Bremen.



Germans from Bohemia were among the seven million-plus Germans who migrated to the United States between 1850 and 1900. Those Catholic German-Bohemians were from the Bohemian Forest in the counties of Bischofsteinitz, Mies, and Tachau, an area commonly known as the Sudetanland.

The reason for their migration to the United States was economic. With the decline of serfdom, peasants acquired the right to subdivide their lands. The subdividing soon resulted in the creation of parcels too small to support a family farm. The only escape from poverty for these displaced farmers was emigration. While the right to emigrate from Bohemia was not officially conceded by the Austrian Empire until 1867, German-Bohemians began migrating to the United States during the 1850s. They first settled in Wisconsin where they found what they were seeking — land. Their letters home telling of the rich farm land available in America caused a chain migration, feeding on the hunger for land of other families back in Bohemia.

Most German-Bohemians settled in the Wisconsin counties of Calumet, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Winnebago and the Wood villages of Auburndale, Blenker, Hewitt, Marshfield and Milladore. Shortly after their arrival in America, the Weber and Hoffman families made their way to Marathon County in central Wisconsin, where the Webers purchased a 120 acre farm two miles northeast of Spencer in the town of Bright just north of Marshfield. The property was located in the southwest quarter of section 33, Township 27 North, Range 2 East.



In the following year, 1894, Johan and Maria Hoffman, and some of the Weber relatives walked almost 70 miles north from Spencer to the Brantwood area in southern Price County. Here Johan purchased 40 acres of land for \$40.00.

On 30 July 1898, John Hoffmann appeared before the Price County Clerk of the Circuit Court for the State of Wisconsin and declared his intention to become a citizen of the United States and renounced forever all allegiance and fidelity to Franz Joseph, King of Austria. He stated that he was born in Bohemia in 1864, emigrated to the United States and landed at the port of New York in October 1893. He became a naturalized citizen on 20 June 1906.

According to his death certificate, John Hoffman was killed by a tree falling on 4 September 1911, in the Town of Knox. Mary subsequently raised the children and lived on the Hoffman farm until her death on 30 October 1948, and both John and Mary Hoffman are buried in the Prentice Cemetery.