

# "Nach Amerika!"

## Summary of Volume II

Volume II presents a collection of 15 biographical essays of individual emigrants and families in the New World as well as 17 emigrants' personal accounts of their experiences in the place they chose to make their new home. Most emigrants from the Principality of Liechtenstein favored the U.S., substantially fewer settled in Canada and a small number of Liechtensteiners migrated to South American countries.

Migration is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Many publications have dealt with economic or political causes for migration. Historians commonly shy away from migrants' personal motivations because they are difficult to grasp in strictly scholarly terms. Yet particularly readers back in the Old Country want to know more about motivations beyond, say, economic statistics. For people who "stayed home" it is often difficult to comprehend how others could pack up their belongings and leave their native country for good. After all, the fact that relatives or neighbors choose to turn their backs on their home country can be and often is understood as a negative comment about home. Migration can be offensive to those who stay behind.

People need to make sense of the migration experience. It's part of national as well as personal histories. However, in the Old Country as well as in the New World, people tend to resort to mythmaking about migration. While migrants and their descendants often prefer exaggerated rags-to-riches stories about immigrants, folklore in German-speaking countries has coined quite different words with which to describe the desire to pull up one's stakes: Terms such as "Wanderlust" (literally the "desire to roam") and "Amerika-Fieber" (America-Fever) try to express the migrants' inner motivation as some sort of affliction or unsteadiness. Be it a story of success or an invocation of "Wanderlust", both explanations serve to make acceptable the choice to leave home.

The essays in this book concentrate on migration as a personal, inner experience. The migrants' stories can hardly explain migration as a historical phenomenon. Likewise the historical account of migration from Liechtenstein to the Americas cannot bring readers close to the migrants' experience. Thus the two volumes complement each other, one providing verifiable historical data and documents, the other supplementing the facts with the incalculable feelings migration evokes in both migrants and those who stayed behind.

### First Part: Biographical Essays

#### Rupert Tiefenthaler:

#### **"Aline Alber - Oh, if only I was a man!" - Family and the role of women among migrants"**

For his 47-page essay, Tiefenthaler draws on numerous letters and the diaries of Aline Alber, a citizen of Liechtenstein born in France who lived in the U.S. from 1884 until her death in 1927. While concentrating on Aline Alber, the essay tells the story of the extended Alber family in Liechtenstein, Austria, France and the United States.

Franz Josef Alber (1816-1877) lived as a seasonal worker in eastern France until his marriage in 1858 when he settled in Chifosse in the Vosges mountains. He traded in lumber and hired his workers - as was customary among migrants in those days - back in the Old Country. Alber's business deteriorated because of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Aline, the oldest of five children, eventually emigrated to the United States while her siblings continued to live in France.

Aline emigrated to Wabash, Indiana, where she was welcomed by a well-established family

clan. Several uncles, aunts and their children already lived in the U.S. Aline married a Liechtenstein cousin, Martin Alber, whom she had first met while visiting his sister's (Maria-Anna Salzmänn-Albers') family in Feldkirch, Austria. Aline was educated to be a teacher in France, but because Martin and she had five children she could not pursue her career in the United States until later in her life. Unlike their well-to-do relatives, Aline and Martin experienced economic hardship. Martin grew increasingly bitter; even his obituary alludes to professional frustration as one possible cause for his nervous breakdown, heart troubles and eventual death in 1918. In her diaries, Aline more than once reflected on the possibility of suicide. Her interest in education in general and the progress of her children sustained her in later life.

Tiefenthaler quotes lengthy passages from Aline's diaries and letters which makes the essay a valuable source for a first hand account of an immigrant family's life around the turn of the century.

#### **Kathryn Ingmire Buechel:**

##### **"Anton Buechel and his descendants"**

Anton Buechel (1840-1914) was the youngest of several children of Anton and Agathe (Oehri) Buechel in Ruggell, Liechtenstein. At age 27 he asked for his inheritance and left for the United States. He settled in Littleport, Iowa, where he became the town's first wagon and cabinet maker. In 1872 he married Regina Pfrommer. They had six children. The essay briefly tells about the children's lives, concentrating on the career of Frederick Anthony, the author's father-in-law. Frederick Anthony Buechel was a much-respected statistician at the University of Texas and the Chamber of Commerce in Houston. The essay is a fine example of the family histories that the descendants of immigrants reconstruct.

#### **Robert Behnen and Pio Schurti:**

##### **"The Gassner, Seger and Walch families in St. Louis"**

The essay illustrates how one emigrant often encouraged others, be it relatives or friends, to follow him to the United States where they frequently formed small "colonies". In 1883, Johann Gassner (1836-1906) and his family moved to St. Louis where Johann worked as a stone cutter. Ten years later, the family was joined by Franz Josef Gassner, a son of Johann's cousin. He eventually became a jeweller. In 1904, Rudolf Seger came to St. Louis to work at the World Fair. Rudolf was related to Franz Josef's mother. Because work and life turned out to be so good in St. Louis, Rudolf Seger returned to Liechtenstein to bring his wife Bertha and their children to the U.S. Their youngest son Raymond eventually sponsored ten more Liechtensteiners who chose to migrate to the U.S. Indeed, Raymond and his wife Bernadine visited Liechtenstein several times where they always met with curious youths. One of them was Emil Walch, nephew of Rudolf Seger's wife Bertha. He settled in St. Louis in 1948 and worked in construction. The Gassner, Seger and Walch families continue to live in St. Louis and environs.

#### **Hans Gruber:**

##### **A "Ruggeller colony" in Nebraska and Saskatchewan**

In 1860, 30-year-old Johann Heeb of Ruggell, Liechtenstein, and his bride Elisabeth Kuehne migrated to the United States. Upon their arrival in New York, they were married in St. Patrick's Catholic Church. After living in Allentown, PA, for 17 years, Johann and his family decided to start over in the West. They homesteaded near O'Neill, Nebraska. Until 1894 at least 11 more immigrants from Ruggell joined the Heeb's in the area. One of them was Ludwig Heeb (not related to Johann). He also lived in Allentown, PA, and O'Neill, NE, before buying land in Canada. He and his wife Adelina, Wilhelm Heeb and Jakob Meier moved to Saskatchewan in 1911.

**Loretta Federspiel-Kieber:**

**"Elwina Kindle, Triesen/Liechtenstein: Emigrant and Remigrant"**

Elwina Kindle (b. 1912) lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1930 until 1967. Although she was married and has three children, eight grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren in Ohio and Kentucky, she preferred to return to Liechtenstein. She had often been homesick. Most of all she missed the Liechtenstein mountains. At age 87, she continues to spend much time in the mountains.

**Loretta Federspiel-Kieber:**

**"Everybody creates his or her own home, for one's true home is inside" An interview with Hermine Kindle de Contreras Torres**

Hermine Kindle (b. 1905), like her younger sister Elwina (above), had to leave Liechtenstein, they said, because their hometown Triesen did not offer them many opportunities. They came from a large families, several members of which ended up leaving Liechtenstein. After a brief stay in Cincinnati in 1925, Hermine moved on to Hollywood, CA, where she soon met Miguel de Contreras Torres. The couple moved to Mexico City where both of them pursued successful careers in cinema. The late actor/director Contreras Torres played a central role in the development of Mexican film. Hermine was one of his favorite actresses. With their work, they achieved recognition and fame beyond Mexico's borders. Between 1951 and 1979 they owned Gutenberg Castle in Liechtenstein as a summer residence. Hermine continues to live in Mexico City with her second husband. The author of the essay had extensive conversations with her about the movies and her work. As the title of the essay suggests, Hermine Kindle was not inclined to talk much about her experience as an emigrant. That part of her life does not seem so important to her.

**Rupert Tiefenthaler:**

**"...that I am more enterprising than all of you together" Biography of Karolina Lampert, née Schädler, based on her letters from America**

Karolina Schädler (1843-1918) married Xaver Lampert (1839-1872) at age 22. In 1868, after the birth of their first child, Julius, the family emigrated to the United States. In earlier years, Karolina wrote frequently to her sister Juliana and other relatives in Triesenberg, Liechtenstein. Approximately 80 of Karolina's letters are preserved in Triesenberg. The correspondence spans more than forty years and impressively illustrates emigrant life. From 1868 until 1884 the Lampert family lived in Freeport, Illinois. They had two more children, Theresia and Liene. Karolina relates to her relatives back in Liechtenstein what difficulties emigrants have to cope with, and she always rejoices when she can report that other Liechtensteiners arrived in Freeport or at least stopped over on their way to a new home in the United States. For many newly arrived immigrants, Karolina's home was the first contact in the U.S. Although close ties existed among the Liechtensteiners in America, they saw themselves as part of a larger German ethnic group. In some cases, Liechtensteiners refer to their place of birth as Germany, even in letters to relatives in Liechtenstein. After her husband's death, Karolina had to take on additional responsibilities. In 1884 she decided to resettle in Portland, Oregon. She was able to sell her home in Freeport to Thomas Eberle, another immigrant from Triesenberg. In Oregon she hoped to be able to make more money with her hand-woven carpets. After six years in the city of Portland, she moved two more times within Oregon. After the death of her daughter Theresia she increasingly had to fight off homesickness. Year after year she planned to visit her sister and relatives in Triesenberg, but her plans never materialized. Her last letter dates from May 1915. Two more letters written by her son Julius arrived in Triesenberg. We do not know whether she lived to celebrate the 50th anniversary of her immigration in 1918.

**Florin Frick, Thomas Kuhlmann:**

**"Gentlemen, you don't know me and I don't know you, but with your permission I'll present my project"**

**The story of John Latenser, architect in Omaha, Nebraska**

The first part of the essay by Thomas Kuhlman recounts Latenser's education in Europe and life in the United States.

Johann Latenser (1859-1936) was born in Nendeln, Liechtenstein. Like his father, several cousins and uncles, he chose a profession in construction. After 1873 he took a job as a caretaker in his brother Heinrich's business in Strasbourg, France. In winter he attended a technical college in Stuttgart where he was trained to be an architect.

It is not known precisely when he emigrated to the United States. In the early 1880s he worked as a draftsman in different architectural firms in Chicago. After gaining much experience, he moved to Omaha in 1886. Around this time, he dropped an "r" in his last name and signed as John Latenser. He managed to win the contract to build Webster School. He held a post as federal superintendent of construction and continued to build thirty more schools. Perhaps his most important contract was the Douglas County Court House in Omaha. His sons, John jr. and Frank, joined him in his business. Their firm continued to be successful. In Omaha's old downtown, explains Latenser's grandson Frank Nestor, 89 out of 98 blocks contained at least one building by Latenser & Sons.

The second part of the essay by Florin Frick is an architectural historian's appreciation of Latenser's work from a European perspective.

**Arthur Brunhart:**

**The emigrant family "Manzele-Büchel" from Balzers, Liechtenstein**

Brunhart's essay tells the story of Buechel brothers Werner, Eugen, Josef jr., Louis and Walter, all of whom settled near Mequon north of Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. In 1949, their father Josef Buechel visited them in Wisconsin and travelled around the U.S. All his life Josef had wanted to visit the place where in 1881 his father Fidel Buechel had been found dead beside the railroad tracks near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Fidel had emigrated to Guttenberg, Iowa, with a group from Balzers when his son Josef was but three years old. Apparently he grew so homesick that he decided to walk back to New York along the railroad tracks and return to Liechtenstein.

Of Josef's sons, Werner was the first to emigrate in 1927. After working in different places for two years, he took a job as a dishwasher in the Hotel Onesto in Canton, Ohio. He stayed until 1932 and became a cook. Eventually, he moved to Mequon where he started the "Alpine Village" that he ran with his brothers who followed him to the U.S. Over the years, the "Alpine Village" became a popular country inn. Hundreds of newlywed couples from around Milwaukee had their wedding receptions here. Werner also was an accomplished musician and composer. He died in 1985.

His sister Magdalena Buechel lived in the United States from 1928 to 1937 when she returned to Liechtenstein. Josef jr. emigrated in 1937 and in 1939 Eugen followed his brothers. Eugen unexpectedly passed away during a visit to Liechtenstein in 1995. Louis joined his brothers in 1947, but returned in 1968. In 1948, the year father Josef visited his sons in the United States, Walter, the youngest of the family, also emigrated.

**Rudolf Rheinberger:**

**Alois Rheinberger - wine-growing pioneer in Illinois**

Alois Rheinberger (1827-1915) emigrated to the United States in 1848. Before settling in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1850, he returned to Liechtenstein to marry his bride, Margaretha Brasser. The young couple was joined by Alois' father Josef Ferdinand and his sister Anna Maria. In Nauvoo, Alois's bought a house that had been built by the Mormons before they

moved on to found Salt Lake City. On 12 acres he began growing wine grapes, starting with seeds he had brought along from Liechtenstein. Besides a vineyard Alois started a sizeable orchard with apple, pear, cherry and plum trees. His business prospered.

Margaretha and Alois had ten children, five of whom did not survive their father. Alois continued to be a prolific letter writer. In his correspondence, he usually writes with great detail about ups and downs as a wine-growing pioneer. He was successful, although he never quite assimilated. After 67 years in the United States he still did not know much of the English language. In one letter, he confessed that he could not understand his grandchildren, and they could not understand him.

### **Jürgen Schindler:**

#### **Stephan Schaechle and his descendants - A family from Eschen in Oklahoma**

This short essay is an example of how immigrants' descendants try to reconstruct their family history - often with great difficulty.

According to records in Liechtenstein, Stephan Schaechle (1860-1927) left Eschen, Liechtenstein, in 1877. His obituary states that he arrived in the United States in 1882. Similarly, little is known about his life in the subsequent years. He lived near Cincinnati, Ohio, and Kentucky with his family before he - according to family lore - decided to move to an area with more Catholics. Thus, in 1909, the Schaechle family settled near Elk City, Oklahoma. Stephan and his wife Katherina had eight children whom they reared on their new farm.

### **Pio Schurti:**

#### **"...but I take it in stride" - Konrad Sele in Los Angeles**

Konrad Sele (1911-1998) could not find employment in Liechtenstein although through the support of his parents and siblings he had been able to get a good education. This experience of unemployment depressed him and made him feel ashamed of himself. Unemployment also alienated him somewhat from his native country. He emigrated to Los Angeles in 1929. When he returned to Liechtenstein in a soldier's uniform after the war in 1945, he no longer spoke German well. His sister remembers that they had a hard time communicating. Language reflected Konrad's development: He had left his native country behind and had become thoroughly Americanized.

Konrad held a number of jobs as dishwasher or busboy when he first arrived in America, but eventually found employment as a cook in the California Hospital in 1932. He returned to this job after military service. He became the head chef in the hospital's kitchen and stayed until retirement in 1977. Konrad and his wife Margaret (née Kaelin) had three children, Francis, Mary Anne and Anthony.

### **Beatrice Noll:**

#### **"An adventurous life in Canada - John Thoeny from Schaanwald, Liechtenstein"**

John Thoeny probably was not so sure about wanting to emigrate, for he returned to Liechtenstein twice before settling in Prince George, British Columbia, in 1937. John first left Liechtenstein in 1924, but returned in 1930. A year later he married Elisabeth Söllner. Just one month after the wedding, John again moved to Canada where he hoped to be able to make money more easily. Apparently, his hopes were frustrated, for he returned to Liechtenstein in 1933 where he first found employment in construction and later collected insurance premiums from the insured. By 1937 he again grew tired of his situation in Liechtenstein and left once more for Canada - this time with his wife and for good.

Life in Canada was adventurous. As a single man he took temporary employment here and there. To move around, he and his friends simply jumped trains. They often went bear hunting. After his return in 1937, John began to work in the mines at Stewart, British

Columbia. He was in charge of the cable railway with which both miners and ore were transported. This job was so dangerous that he gave it up when he and his wife started having children in 1939. He bought a farm near Prince George where he worked until age 85. The farm is now run by his oldest son. John died in 1996.

### **Mary O'Brien Migliore:**

#### **My Liechtenstein Connection**

In this essay, Mary O'Brien Migliore of Elkader, Iowa, explores her relations to immigrants from Liechtenstein to Clayton County, Iowa. Born into a typical American family with ancestors from different parts of Europe, she began to research the ancestry of her mother, about whose family she knew very little. Eventually, the author found out that her mother descended from Liechtenstein immigrants. She was fascinated to discover how many people in Clayton County were related to Liechtensteiners. Guttenberg, Iowa, attracted more immigrants from Liechtenstein than any other place in the United States. However, Liechtensteiners were mostly considered German, which is one reason for their descendants' difficulty in tracing their ancestry.

### **Joachim Batliner:**

#### **"Why me! Why did I have to leave?" - Elias Wille of Balzers, Liechtenstein in California**

Elias Wille's story stands out among emigrant tales because he never stopped regretting that he had emigrated in 1906. At least he often gave expression to his homesickness - often in flowery prose - throughout his 66 years in California. For nearly four decades he was a gardener in San Francisco's Catholic cemetery and he regularly wrote for both German- and English-language newspapers affiliated with the Catholic church. One reader of his articles and poems, Anna Elisabeth Oehri of Baltimore, eventually becomes his wife. They have four sons. Life in San Francisco is steady and secure. Elias's sons are Americans. San Francisco is more and more the center of Elias's life. And yet, he continues to write longingly about his native country. Several articles of his are published in a newspaper in Liechtenstein. Elias urges young people to think twice before deciding to emigrate. In 1938, one of Elias' adoring poems to Liechtenstein is published in a textbook used in the Liechtenstein schools. After the death of his wife, he often asks friends and relatives in Liechtenstein to pray for him in the Maria Hilf Chapel in his hometown. One last farewell to Liechtenstein is published during his last visit to his native country in 1962. Elias Wille died in 1972.

## **Second Part: Personal Essays by emigrants**

The second part of volume two comprises 17 personal essays written by emigrants themselves and some essays based on interviews. Except for Frank Beck in Los Angeles, who emigrated in 1924, all of these contributors left Liechtenstein after World War II. Herbert and Peter Brunhart made a new life for themselves in Colombia and Bolivia respectively. Emil Nipp chose Canada over the United States although he had relatives in the U.S when he emigrated. Nipp as well as Arnold Biedermann, Paula Godilo-Godlevski, Eugen Hemmerle and Lotte Rogers-Weil came to the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. To them (or in some cases to their parents), America was a conscious choice. They hoped for a better life. Starting in the 1960s, immigrants first came as visitors. They ended up staying. Thus, Rainer Nägele, who came to California as a student and then became a professor, finds his legal status quite fitting: He considers himself a permanent alien. Similarly, Peter Gilgen twenty years later. After completing his degree at Stanford University, he accepted a job offer at Cornell University.

Andrea Eberle, Anita Garcia Kaufmann, Ursula Gregg-Konzett, Rita McLean and Sonhild

Rodney-Wanger had originally planned shorter stays in the United States, but ended up marrying and staying. None of them considers herself an emigrant. Sonhild Rodney-Wanger, for instance, has been living with her family in Connecticut for more than two decades, but she does not consider herself an emigrant. Or as Anita Garcia Kaufmann puts it: She is a Liechtensteiner at home in Florida.

Gabriella Massaro contributed the story of her immigrant parents: Her father came from Italy and her mother from Liechtenstein in the early 1960s. She describes in some detail the particulars of growing up in a household with two cultures under the roof and yet another outside the house. The author and her sister grew up praying in German and talking about food in Italian.

Rita McLean lived in Montreal for eight years and is a citizen of Canada. She now lives back in Liechtenstein with her two children.

All the individual essays illustrate aspects of emigration as personal experiences. How do people feel in their new surroundings? What is their emotional response to their experience? Such questions are difficult to answer for migrants in the last century unless they left behind letters or diaries. The personal accounts of contemporary emigrants complement the reader's understanding of the migration phenomenon.

Any questions and suggestions are welcome:

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