

The DeWolf Family of Hamburg Township, Michigan

As told by Vicky DeWolf Terry on August 17, 2022

Hamburg Township Museum, Hamburg, Michigan

The interesting thing about the DeWolf family name is that we are seemingly all related. If you run into someone named DeWolf, chances are very good that they can trace their lineage back to our first ancestor to live in America, Balthasar DeWolf.

Balthasar was born around 1621, but it's not certain where in Europe his family lived. Some say he was German, or French, or from the Netherlands or the Baltics; lots of theories abound. My guess at this point in time is that he was from England. I say this because he seemed to socialize with other English families in Connecticut. His children all had English names, and all married into rather prominent families, something that would have been difficult if he was not English himself. Of course, as more information comes to light, my opinion on this may change. He must have come from a well-to-do family, as traveling to the New World took some means; one had to have certain resources to sail here.

We do know that he was in Connecticut in the mid-1640s, as he married Alice Peck in 1645. We also find him mentioned in two different court records. The first mention comes from Hartford in the year 1656. Balthasar was charged with "smoking in the streets" which was against the law. He appeared in court, and as the story goes, he paid his fine, lit his pipe, and strolled out onto the street to smoke again! This should give you an idea of his temperament.

The second court document is dated 1661, in Wethersfield, Connecticut. A man named Nicholas Jennings and his wife Margaret were charged with witchcraft; they allegedly caused the death of the wife of R. Marvin and a child of Balthasar DeWolf by "bewitching them to death."

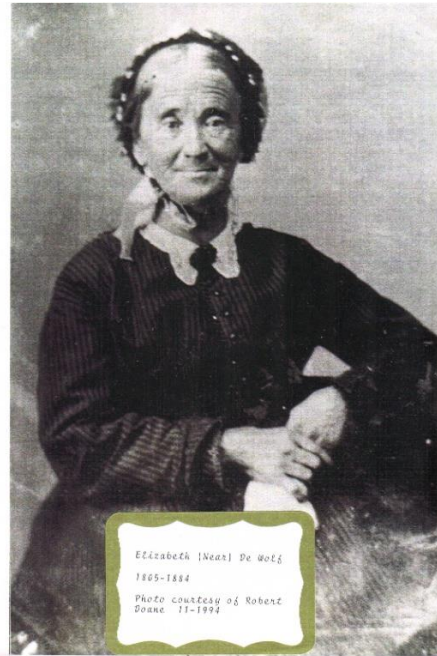
Balthasar remained in Connecticut until his death in Lyme in 1695.

If we fast-forward a few generations, we come to Balthasar's great-great grandson, Daniel DeWolf. Daniel was born in Lyme, Connecticut in 1763. (So as you can see, the family remained in Lyme for years). As a young man, he fought in the Revolutionary War, and then after the war, married Polly Fowler in Hartland, Connecticut in 1785. Daniel and Polly had nine children, but sadly, most of their children died in infancy, or before reaching the age of 20. One son, Daniel Jr. lived to be 39. The two sons who lived into their 40's and beyond were Chauncey and Jason. The family had moved around a bit, leaving Connecticut and finally settling in Lenox, New York, where all the children were born, according to the family Bible.

By the year 1830, Daniel has lost all of his children (except Chauncey and Jason) and his wife Polly. We find in the census of that year, Daniel listed as the head of household. I believe Jason and his wife Elizabeth "Betsy" were living with him and caring for him, as he was by this time blinded in several blacksmithing accidents. Census records in 1830 only listed the head of the household by name; other members of the household were listed simply by gender, and within an age range. However, Jason and Betsy fit the ages and genders listed under Daniel.

Jason was interested in the opportunities to own land in the "west", or Michigan Territory. He traveled to Michigan in October 1833 and purchased 80 of land in Hamburg Township. He then went back to New York. His father, Daniel, died in February 1834, and we see that by October of 1834, he has

purchased two plots in Green Oak Township; one was 40 acres and one was 67 acres. I have copies of the original land patents issued to Jason by the Federal Government.



Jason was a blacksmith by trade and operated one of the first smithies in Hamburg. His wife Betsy was from the Near family. Betsy's parents also came to Hamburg, and Jason deeded his 40 acres in Green Oak Township to them. Betsy's sister Siba married Ferdinand Grisson; her sister Sarah married George Grisson; and her sister Irene married John Pickard who ran the tavern in the Hamburg Hotel (which was owned by the Grissons). So there were quite a few family ties in early Hamburg, thanks to the Near sisters. Anna Nancy Near, another sister, came to Michigan with her parents; she never married, but did inherit the 40 acres of land in Green Oak after her parents died.

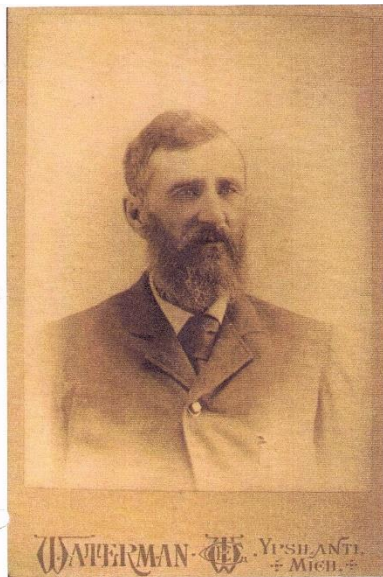
Jason built a log cabin on his 80 acres in Hamburg Township and farmed the land. During this time, he learned that he could apply for his father's pension, which was never granted to Daniel for serving in the Revolution. So Jason took up the battle, enlisting the help of Kingsley Bingham, a U.S. Congressman from Green Oak Township. Eventually Jason was awarded the pension; \$76 per year, retroactive. I believe coming into these monies led to the building of a larger farmhouse; moving out of the log cabin after 20 years and five children must have been wonderful. The house still stands on M-36 and has been in the family since Jason built it in 1856/1857.



De Wolf Residence in
Hamburg, Michigan
Photo taken before 1880

Elizabeth (Neat) De Wolf &
Jason Gillespie De Wolf on
porch

It has also been said that Jason and Betsy's first child, a daughter named Ann, was the first white child born in Hamburg Township, but we don't believe that to be true. Heman Lake had a daughter named Elizabeth that was born before Ann. They had five children in all: Ann, Hiram, Sarah, Mary and Wesley.



Hiram DeWolf



DeWolf home ca.1905; Hiram DeWolf and his family

Hiram DeWolf, the eldest son, served in the Civil War as a member of Michigan's 26th Infantry, Company E. He enlisted on August 11, 1862 and mustered out on June 4, 1865. He was at Appomattox when General Lee surrendered to General Grant. Although Jason didn't serve in the military, family stories say that he traveled back to New York and did some of the ironwork on the Union's ship, the Monitor. This would have been in 1861, and may explain why Hiram didn't enlist in the army until 1862. He was probably needed on the farm while Jason was away.

Hiram returned home from the war, and married Mary Elizabeth (Libbie) Tanner in 1866. They moved into Hiram's home with Jason and Betsy. The new farmhouse was designed to hold two families; the eldest son, who would inherit the property and run the farm, and his bride would move into the small 'apartment' at the back of the house on the main floor. As time went on and children began coming into the picture, the young family would move into the main part of the house while the grandparents would move into the smaller apartment.

Hiram and Libbie had eight children. Two of their sons died young; little Charles, their first child, died at the age of 3 in a tragic accident, while Murray died at 18 months of influenza. The other six children all married and had children of their own, but it was James, their youngest son, who would take over the farm and live in the house with his bride, Minnie. James and Minnie were my great-grandparents, and I remember them very fondly. James also farmed the land for as long as he was able. Eventually the 80 acres were broken up; some went to James and Minnie's children so they could build their own homes. In the late 1920's, James was the Road Commissioner for Hamburg Township, and personally worked on the building and improving of M-36. In fact, it was originally called DeWolf Road.



James DeWolf and his bride Minnie Janke DeWolf



James DeWolf with his dog Shep

The DeWolf home is now occupied by Joyce DeWolf Terry, the granddaughter of James and Minnie DeWolf. She has many pieces of furniture, photographs, letters, and other memorabilia of the DeWolf family and is a wonderful source of information on the history of the DeWolf family and Hamburg itself. Joyce is also the author of the book "Be Ye Steadfast" about the history of St. Stephens Episcopal church in Hamburg, Michigan.