

SEP 1960

Dear All,

Chris and I have just returned to New York after a summer's tour of Europe. We saw most of the countries of Free Europe---- from Scotland to Spain to Austria----and managed to squeeze in a short trip to East Germany and Berlin.

One of the real high spots of our tour was a two-day visit in Leimen, Germany. As all of you loyal Reams must know, Leimen is the family ancestral home. It was from this town, in 1717, that the local baker, Johann Eberhardt Riehm, set out for the New World. He went with William Penn to Philadelphia, and thence to the wilds of Lancaster County. There, he took up the difficult task of clearing the land and tilling the soil, and making friends with the Indians. His descendants have since spread all over the United States. But this has little to do with my visit to Johann Eberhardt's original home, and that is the subject of this letter.

Leimen is a community of 3,000 on the plains south of Heidelberg. Although it is only four miles from the large city, it is by no means a dependent "suburb" of Heidelberg. The town's economy is based upon wine, cigars, and cement (the largest cement factory in Germany). The surrounding fields, in addition to grapes and tobacco, are covered with wheat, corn, and dairy cows.

Many Riehms have left Leimen since Eberhardt's time, but the ones that remain include some of the most prominent families of town. The cement works were built up to its present lofty position by August Riehm, who has recently retired. Anton Riehm is a leading wholesaler of Leimen cigars. Young Anton Riehm (called Tony) owns, at 21, the town's movie theater and a radio-appliance shop. One of the most imposing buildings of Leimen is the ancient "Gasthaus Baren", a hotel-restaurant that has passed from Riehm father to Riehm son for over three hundred years.

Chris and I drove into Heimen one fine morning, and began asking people about Ream family history. After a few blank stares, we met Anton Riehm (Uncle Tony). A half-hour later, we were eating lunch in his home, and thus began two days of "red-carpet service" in the various Riehm households of Leimen. It was slightly incredible; our last name was our free ticket to some of the grandest wining and dining in Europe. We were the first American Reams to visit Leimen in eight years, so we got the full treatment.

The Riehms are quite proud of their family history, are quite familiar with it, and like to talk about it. Fortunately, young Tony could speak English very well, so we had an effective bridge over the language barrier.

According to the Leimen Riehms, our family was first noted around 1000 AD, when one of them sailed with Leif Ericson on his wild voyages, to Iceland, and probably North America (around Cape Cod). So, the next time any of you encounter a "Mayflower" descendant, you can inform him that your ancestors had his beaten by over six hundred years!

Sometime during the years between 1000 and 1600, the Riehms drifted south from Denmark into Germany, with one branch of the family settling in Leimen. Here, they discarded their barbaric Vikings ways, and became small, independent businessmen. They prospered until the end of the seventeenth century, when war spread hardship and famine throughout the Palatinate. Penn's stories of rich farm lands and complete liberty fell on friendly ears in this area of Germany, and the people left by the thousands to settle southern Pennsylvania. The area around Lancaster and Reamstown still retains its German, or "Pennsylvania Dutch" atmosphere. Our family can take pride in the fact that Eberhardt was one of the first of these settlers.

In Leimen can be found the family coat-of-arms, an impressive device in colors of gold, red, and blue. In addition to the family characteristics of strength, bravery, faithfulness, unity, etc., the coat-of-arms gives this general description: "not aristocratic, but good and honest businessmen, ready to fight in defense of God, country, and noblemen." That last bit may not seem right to our democratic-egalitarian oriented minds, but I'm sure that it was a high compliment in the seventeenth century, when the coat-of-arms was devised. I took some color photographs of the coat-of-arms, and perhaps all of you will see it, and be impressed, in the near future.

There were other bits of Ream family history discussed, and there is a large book on the subject which the Germans are going to send me sometime.

Of course, all of the talk was not in one direction, for the Riehms wanted to know all about the Reams. They thought we all wore long beards and black clothing; someone from the Amish country around Lancaster had sent them a picture some years before!

In summary, then, we spent a grand two days in the ancestral home. We learned many additional facts about our family history, many more than I can relate here. One final word: whenever someone begins to talk about Columbus' trip or the "Mayflower", you are entitled to assume a superior air, and to inform that person that Deck Hand Riehm made the same trip across the Atlantic in 1000! That should certainly silence the person!

Love,

