

The Henry Steinkamp Story

By Cheryl Herrmann

July 2026

As a day laborer and shepherd, Johann Bernard Heinrich Steinkamp (Henry Steinkamp) shared the same dream as many other German immigrants of his generation—the hope of leaving his homeland and seeking greater opportunity in America.

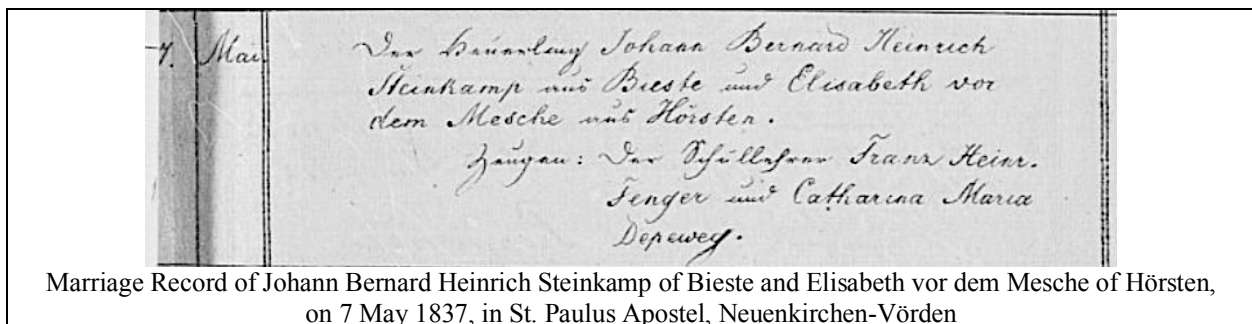
The reasons for German emigration were clearly described by H. Nieberding of Lohne, who published an article titled “On the Emigration to America and the United States of America” in No. 20 of the weekly *Sonntags-Blatt, Wochenschrift für alle Stände*. At the beginning, he wrote of mankind’s natural desire to improve one’s condition, then continued:

“The actual migration, the mass migration, began after the general opening of the American continent in the first quarter of the nineteenth century... This effort of the people to improve their situation and circumstances is then also the cause of the emigration to North America so frequent a few years ago.

From southern Germany, where the population is stronger and the pressure and the lack of food are even stronger than with us, emigration to North America had begun, and favorable news came back from there. These spread, and several years ago from our neighborhood, the Hanoverian, some who had sent favorable news from thence to their relatives, which also spread the joy of emigration.” (*Sonntagsblatt*, Vechta, No. 20 of 1834)

This “joy of emigration” definitely guided Johann Bernard Heinrich Steinkamp (Henry Steinkamp) and his wife, Elisabeth vor dem Mesche (Elizabeth Mesker), who were the aunt and uncle of George Luke Mesker, the well-known Evansville philanthropist.

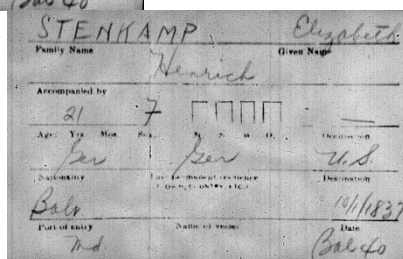
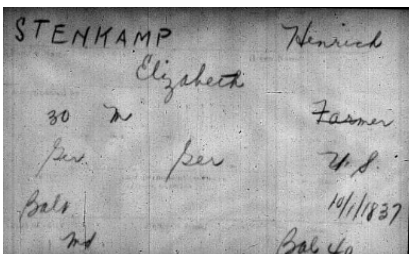
Church records show that Henry and Elizabeth were married on 7 May 1837, at St. Paulus Apostel Catholic Church in Neuunkirchen. Shortly afterward, they began their journey to America, the start of a new chapter in their lives.



They were not alone in this venture. Accompanying them was Henry’s sister, Elisabeth (Steinkamp) Nurrenbern, with her husband Bernhard Nurrenbern and their two sons, Joseph Leo and Heinrich. Together, the two families left Germany in search of opportunity and a better future.

Henry's departure is recorded in *Emigrants from the Former Amt Damme, Oldenburg (now Niedersachsen), Germany, Mainly to the United States, 1830–1849* by Clifford Neal Smith, which notes: "The emigrating hired hands are doing so to avoid military service. The emigrating maids are seeking marriage partners."

The index cards and quarterly lists of passengers arriving in the District of Baltimore confirm the family's arrival. Bernhard Nurrenbern and Elisabeth (Steinkamp) Nurrenbern are listed with their two sons, Joseph and Heinrich, along with Johann Heinrich Steinkamp and his wife, Elizabeth (Mesker).



Steinkamp Index cards for the Passenger Lists arriving at Baltimore in 1837

Source: Supplemental Index to Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Atlantic and Gulf Coast Ports (Excluding New York), 1820-1874; United States Index to Passenger Arrivals, Atlantic and Gulf Ports, 1820-1874," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KDRQ-F34 : 4 December 2014>),

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Neuenkirchen Community [Gemeinde]

Bieste Farming Community

STEINKAMP, Johann Heinrich, hired hand

1/1832

Entry in the book;
Emigrants from the Former Amt Damme, Oldenburg (now Niedersachsen), Germany, Mainly to the United States, 1830–1849

LIST OF PASSENGERS entered in the DISTRICT of Baltimore from the 1st of July to the 30th of Sept 1837

NAME	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION
B. Nordenbernd	40	Male	Farmer
Joseph	8	Male	
Heinrich	4	Male	
Elizabeth	37	Female	
Joh. Steinkamp	21	Male	
Heinrich	30	Male	

Quarterly List of passengers arriving in the District of Baltimore from the 1st of July to the 30th of Sept 1837.

Bernhard Nurrenbern and Elizabeth (Steinkamp) Nurrenbern are listed with their two sons Joseph and Heinrich. Johann Heinrich Steinkamp and his wife Elizabeth (Mesker) are also listed.

The National Archives at Washington, D.C.; Washington, D.C.; Records of the US Customs Service, RG36; NAI Number: 2655153; Record Group Title: Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787-2004; Record Group Number: 85

Bernard Nurrenbern, grandson of Bernhard Nurrenbern, later shared more of the family story for *The Evansville Press*, 29 September 1987:

“Arriving in America, they encountered all of the difficulties and hardships of the earlier days. They came across the Alleghenies behind a team of oxen and when they arrived at Cincinnati, they were offered land at Evansville, then a small settlement of log houses... [Henry purchased 80 acres of land, sight unseen.]. The log cabin in which they lived was on Main Street between First Street and Riverside.”

Initially, Henry worked for the state of Indiana, helping dig the Erie Canal.
A simple log cabin was soon built for the growing family.

Henry and Elizabeth had eight children:

Heinrich Steinkamp. (1838 - 1876)
Bernard Steinkamp (1842-1878)
Mary Steinkamp (1844-1917)
Catherine Steinkamp (1846-1932)
Johann Steinkamp. (1850 – 1865)
Elizabeth Margaret Steinkamp (1850-1883)
Joseph Bernard Steinkamp (1852-1894)
Louisa Steinkamp (1854-1936)



Old Steinkamp Homestead –
originally a log cabin

Soon after arriving in Evansville, Johann Heinrich Steinkamp completed the process of naturalization and became a citizen of the United States.

Johann Heinrich Steinkamp - Naturalization Second papers,
Recorded in Indiana, Vanderburgh County Probate Book A-B-C, Page 458, Years 1821-47

And now have Henry Steinkamp makes application to become a citizen of the United States of America and the Court being satisfied that he has fully complied with the acts of Congress in such case made and provided: the said Henry Steinkamp now here takes the final oath to support the constitution of the United States of America and otherwise to support demean himself as a good and peaceable citizen thereof and that he now renounces and abjures all allegiance to every foreign Prince Potentate State or Sovereignty whatever and more particularly to the King of Hanover of whom he was heretofore a subject

Transcription:

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Newspaper accounts and census records provide a glimpse into Henry's life and steady success.

In 1850, Henry is listed as a farmer with a real estate value of \$800.

By 1860 the census shows his real estate value at \$4,000 and personal estate value of \$100.

In 1863, Henry paid the IRS \$0.72 for 12 hogs, whereas in 1864, he was taxed \$0.78 for 13 hogs.

By 1870, the value of his real estate was now at \$6,000, with a personal estate valued at \$1,000.

Through hard work, he acquired additional land in Perry Township and Union Township, eventually owning more than 750 acres. His farm prospered, and he employed hired help.

Case 2,428: Henry Steinkamp vs. Ben. Neurrenburn; appeal; dismissed at plaintiff's cost. Evansville Courier, 9 Dec 1875, Page 4	From Henry Steinkamp, asking to be refunded \$1.55 he had erroneously paid on a poll tax. He was not a resident of the city and the Treasurer vouched for the correctness of the statement. The amount was ordered refunded. The Evansville Daily Courier, 17 April 1877, Page 4
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SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in Perry Township in the County of Vanderburgh State of Indiana enumerated by me, on the 24th day of Oct 1850. Merian Sprung Ass't Marshal

Henry Steinkamp	48 M				
Elizabeth	37 F				
Henry	12 M				
Barnes	7 M				
Mary	6 F				
Catherine	5 F				
John	3 M				
Elizabeth	2 F				

1850 US Census – Indiana – Vanderburgh County – Perry Township

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SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in Perry Township in the County of Vanderburgh State of Indiana enumerated by me, on the 11th day of Aug 1860. Merian D. Newman Ass't Marshal

Post Office Evansville

Henry Steinkamp	48 M				
Elizabeth	45 F				
Henry	18 M				
Barnes	15 M				
Mary	13 F				
Catherine	12 F				
John	11 M				
Elizabeth	9 F				
Joseph	6 M				
Sarah	4 F				

1860 US Census – Indiana – Vanderburgh County – Perry township

Page No. 6 } Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

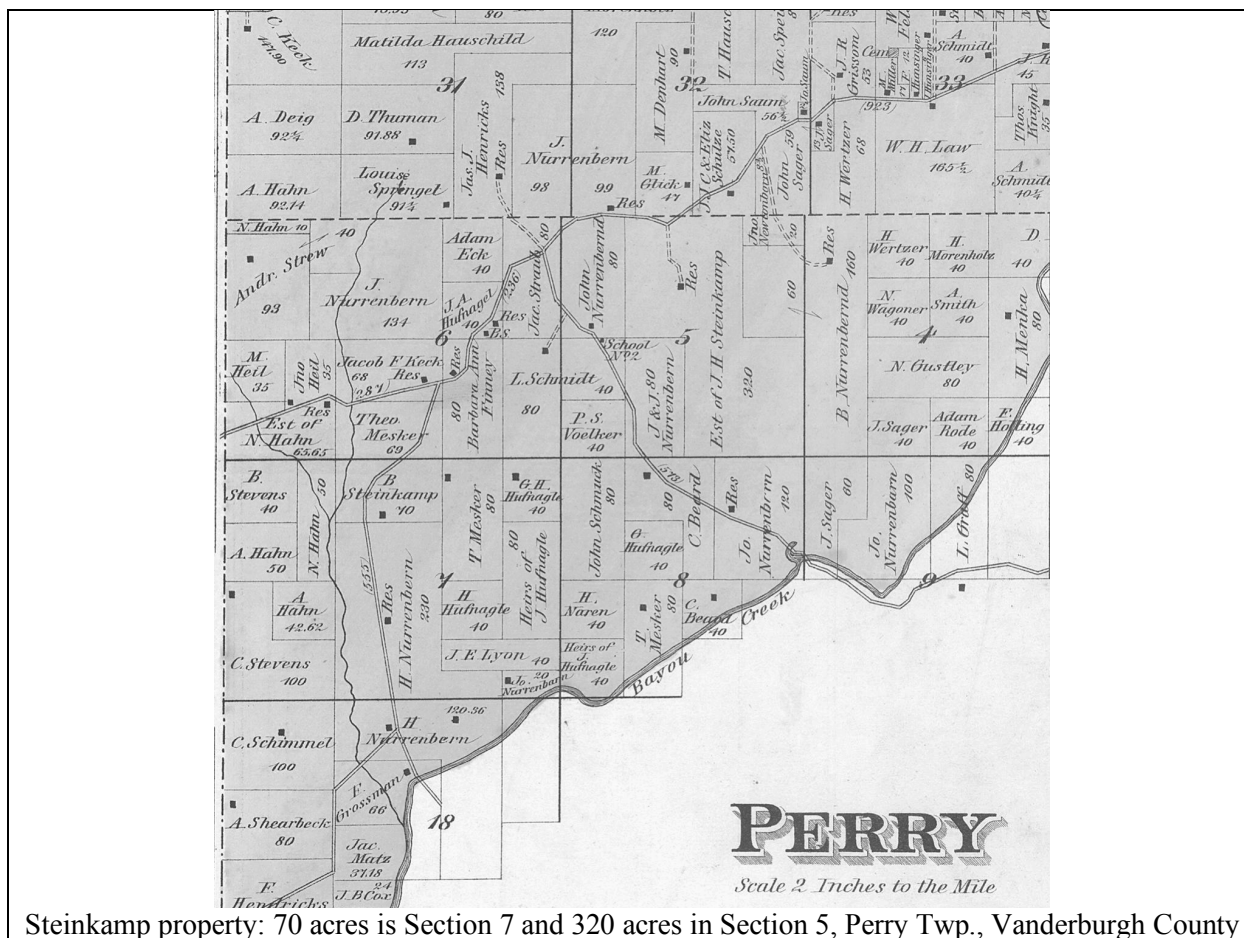
SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in Perry Township, in the County of Vanderburgh, State of Indiana, enumerated by me on the August day of 1870.

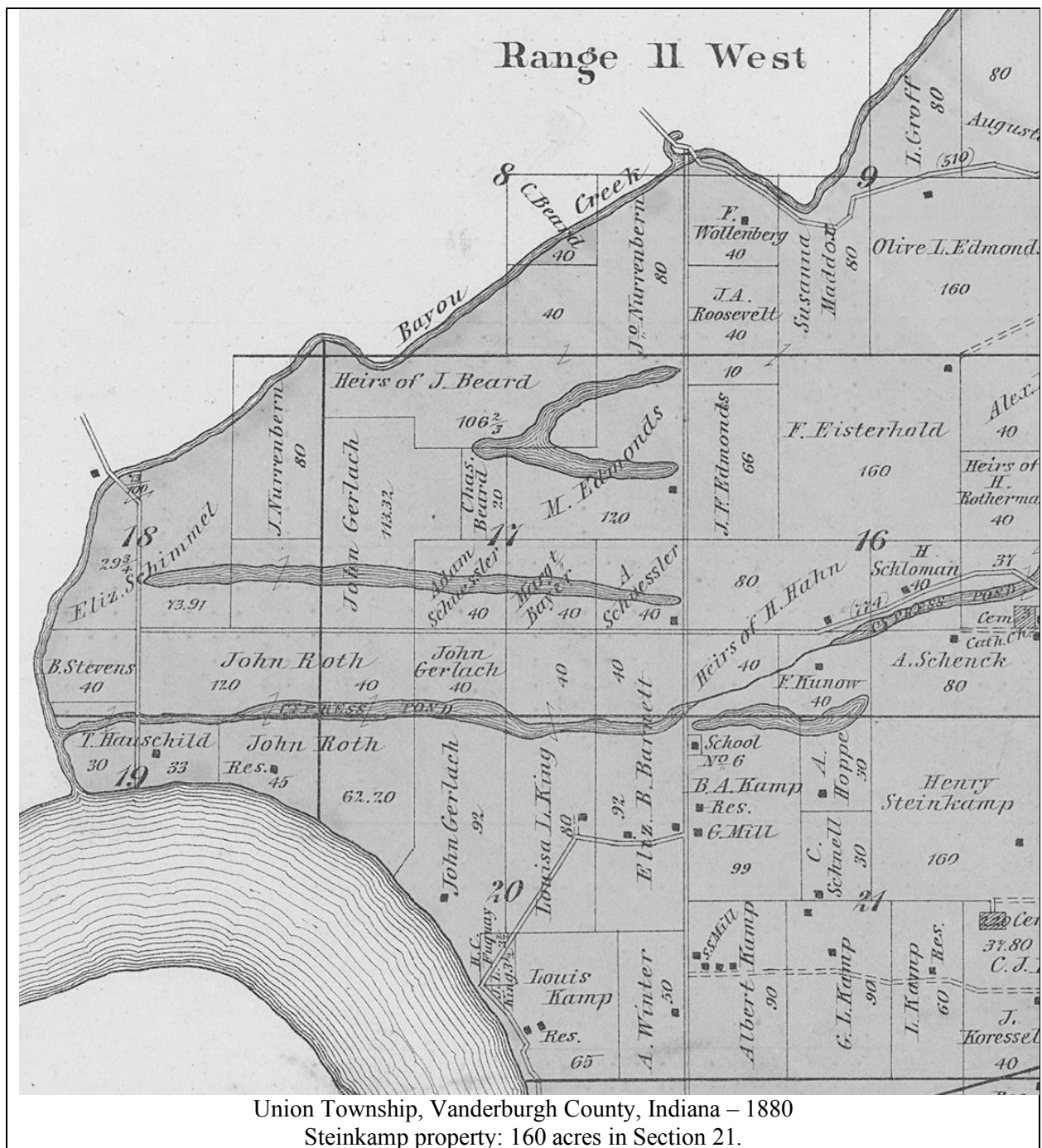
Post Office: Franklin, Ass't Marshal.

43	Steinkamp	15	Mr	Horner	1000	100	Prussia
	Elizabeth	26	f	Lupinghaus			"
	"	18	f				"
	Louisa	16	f				"
	Joseph	18	m				"
	Buschdorf	18	m				"
	Hupnagel	9	f				"

1870 US Census – Indiana – Vanderburgh County – Perry township

The Vanderburgh County atlas of 1880 shows the locations of Steinkamp properties in Perry Township and Union Township. In his last will and testament, Henry bequeathed this land to his children.





Source: Griffing's Atlas, Vanderburgh County Indiana 1880,
 From actual surveys under the direction of B. N. Griffing.
 Published by D.J. Lake & Company, Philadelphia.

Last Will and Testament of Johann Heinrich Steinkamp

In the Name of the Benevolent Father of all, I Henry Steinkamp of the County of Vanderburgh and State of Indiana being of sound and deposing mind and memory do make publish and declare this to be my last will and testament .

Item First I give and devise unto my beloved wife Elizabeth Steinkamp my entire Estate consisting of Real Estate and personal property to be held and enjoyed by her during the term of their natural life.

Item Second At the death of my wife I give and devise unto my son Joseph Steinkamp the following described tracts of land situated in the County of Vanderburgh and State of Indiana to wit: The West Half of the North East quarter, the East half of the South East quarter the East half of the North West quarter and the West half of the South East quarter all of section no. five (5) in Township No. seven (7) south of Range No. Eleven (11) West containing three hundred and twenty acres more or less, subject however to the payment of my just debts which shall be alien upon said Real Estate and shall be paid by my said son Joseph Steinkamp out of his own funds.

Item Third. At the death of my said wife I also give and bequeath unto my said son Joseph Steinkamp all the personal property which may be on my farm on which I now reside. I also give and devise unto my said son Joseph Steinkamp twenty-six (26) feet by one hundred and twenty nine (129) fee corner part of Lot Number Eight (8) in Block Number three (3) in Archers Enlargement of the City of Evansville Vanderburgh County Indiana.

Item Fourth I give and devise unto my daughters Mary Lichtenberg wife of George Lichtenberg, Elizabeth Lindenschmidt, wife of Gosvin Lindenschmidt and Louisa Lindenschmidt, wife of Joseph Lindenschmidt, the following described Real Estate situated in Vanderburgh County and state of Indiana to wit: The North East quarter of Section No Twenty-one (21) in township No. seven (7) south of Range Eleven (11) West containing One hundred and sixty acres: which tract of land shall be held and enjoyed by any said three daughters in the following proportion to wit: said Louie Lindenschmidt shall have and hold fifty-two (52) acres of said tract and shall be that part thereof which will include the clearing and improvements thereon , said Mary Lichtenberg shall have and hold fifty-two (52) acres of the residue of said tract of land and the said Elizabeth Lindenschmidt shall have and hold fifty-six (56) acres of the residue of said tract of land.

I hereby appoint my son Joseph Steinkamp Executor of this my last will and testament, In witness hereof I Henry Steinkamp hereto sign my name this 3rd day of March A.D. 1879.

Heinrich Steinkamp

The foregoing was signed and declared by said Henry Steinkamp to be his last will and testament in our presence and signed by us as witnesses thereto in his presence and signed by us as witnesses thereto in his presence and in the presence and in the presence of each other.

F. Lunkenheimer
Henry Mesker

State of Indiana Vanderburgh County as:

Be it remembered that on this 21st day of July 1879 Frederick Lunkenheimer one of the subscribing witnesses to the within and foregoing last will and Testament of Henry Steinkamp late of said County deceased, personally appeared before the clerk of the Circuit Court of Vanderburgh in the State of Indiana and being duly sworn by the Clerk of said Court upon his oath declared and Testified as follows that is to say: that on the 3rd day of March 1879 he saw the said Henry Steinkamp sign his name to said instrument in writing as and for his last will and testament and that this deponent at the same time heard the said Henry Steinkamp declared the said instrument in writing to be his last Will and Testament and that the said instrument in writing was at the same time at the request of the said Henry Steinkamp and with his consent attested and subscribed by the said F. Lunkenheimer, & Henry Mesker in the presence of said Testator and in the Presence of each other as subscribing witnesses thereto and that the said Henry Steinkamp- was at the time of the signing and subscribing of said instrument I writing as aforesaid of full age (that is, more than twenty one years of age) and of sound and disposing mind and memory and not under any coercion or restrain as the said deponent verily believe and further deponent says not.

F. Lunkenheimer

Sworn to and subscribed by the said Frederick Lunkenheimer before me the clerk of this court at Evansville the 21st day of July 1879. In attestation whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name and affixed the seal of said court. {Seal}

Jesse W. Walker Clerk

Johann Bernard Heinrich Steinkamp died on 16 July 1879 and Elizabeth died 9 December 1883, in Vanderburgh County. They are buried in St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery in Evansville.

From humble beginnings, his family flourished. More than 1,600 descendants have grown from that first immigrant generation:

8 children, 35 grandchildren, 84 great-grandchildren,
and many more beyond.

From a shepherd and day laborer in Germany to the patriarch of a large American family, Henry Steinkamp's story reflects both the hardship and the hope that defined the immigrant experience.

Death of Pioneer Henry Steinkamp died yesterday morning aged 74 years. He came to this county in 1835, and settled in Evansville. He afterward removed to the farm now known as Steinkamp homestead in Perry township. He leaves a widow and five children. Evansville Courier, 17 July 1879, Page 4	 Gravestone of Elizabeth and Heinrich Steinkamp	
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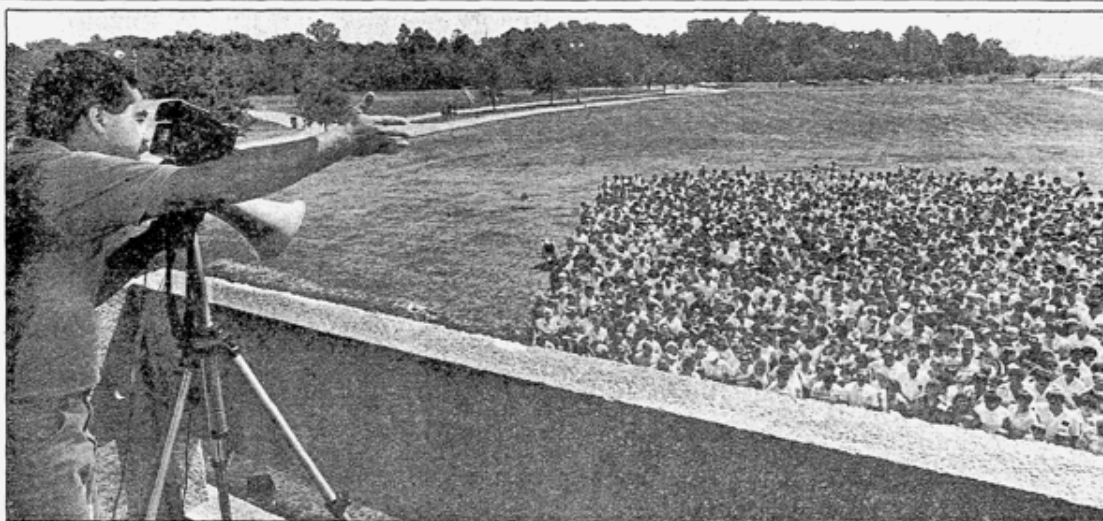
In 1937, on the 100th anniversary of the purchase of land, the descendants celebrated.

<i>Land Purchase Centennial Marked by Family Reunion</i> Nurrenbern-Steinkamp Scions Meet on Original Tract in Perry Township The 100th anniversary of the purchase of land in Perry township by Bernard Nurrenbern and John Henry Steinkamp, brothers-in-law of Cincinnati, was observed last Sunday at a reunion of descendants of the two men at the Robert Nurrenbern farm on the Mt. Vernon highway, six miles from Evansville. The site of the reunion was the original 80 acres purchased by Bernard Nurrenbern. Mr. Nurrenbern and Mr. Steinkamp came from Germany in 1834 and settled in Cincinnati. On September 18, 1837 they purchased adjoining tracts of land—each includ- ing 80 acres—in Perry township, Vanderburgh county, from a government agent at Cincinnati. They moved to their land shortly afterward and started clearing it. Mr. Steinkamp, beginning with his 80 acres, accumulated 750 acres during his lifetime and Nurrenbern accumulated 920 acres. Most of the land, which is in Perry and Union townships, is still in possession of descendants of the men. Robert Nurrenbern and George Steinkamp, grandsons of the two men, hold the original tracts purchased 100 years ago. Two hundred and fifteen persons attended the reunion last Sunday. Of these, 124 were descendants of Bernard Nurrenbern and 91 were descendants of John Henry Steinkamp. Evansville Courier, 26 Sept 1937, Page 4	
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And on the 150th anniversary, over 1500 people attended the reunion at the University of Southern Indiana.



1987 - Nurrenbern – Steinkamp 150th Anniversary Reunion at the University of Southern Indiana



Photographer Eric Hassler put his wide angle lens to good use at a reunion of the Nurrenberns and Steinkamps Sunday.

Courtesy photo by Jason Hallmark

At this reunion, it's 'howdy doody' time a thousand times over

By MARK COWLING

Courier staff writer

Don Nurrenbern of Francisco, Ind., was vacationing in Hawaii back in '74 or '75 and stumbled upon a cousin he had never met. "We were at a luau, rubbing backs. I was rubbing backs with this lady and she turned around and asked me who I was. I told her my name and she said, 'Well I'm one of your relatives.' Today was the first time I've seen her since."

Perhaps all the Nurrenberns, or even all the Steinkamps, are not so fortunate as to

meet by accident. So an estimated 1,500 of them made a point to get together Sunday on the University of Southern Indiana campus.

This reunion coincided with the 150th anniversary of the year Bernard Nurrenbern and John Henry Steinkamp bought farms on what is now USI property. The brothers-in-law came to America from Hanover, Germany.

It was the first time in 50 years the families had gathered and many of those attending saw several strangers. Name tags

frequently included the name of the wearer's father.

They came from several states, the farthest coming from California, according to Elmer Nurrenbern, organizing chairman of the reunion.

The oldest Nurrenbern present was Edward Deig, who will be 99 on Tuesday. The oldest Steinkamp was Clothilda Wanne-moeller, 86. The youngest Nurrenbern was Miss Kristen Ann Schmitt, born July 23, and the youngest Steinkamp was Miss Levi Kelly Kinsinger, born July 31.

Sunday's festivities were the result of

two years of research and planning by Elmer Nurrenbern, his cousin Leroy Kercher of Pittsburgh, and others.

On display were butter churns, a spinning wheel, sausage grinders and other family antiques. A 20-minute slide show on the family histories was shown every hour.

Late Sunday afternoon, the family members planted two oak trees near the University Center. Traditional musical groups entertained, including the Germania Maennerchor band.

Don Nurrenbern's father, Walter, 67, was present 50 years ago at the reunion

marking the 100th anniversary of the families' settling in Evansville. On Sunday he wore a hat worn by "his father, Robert, at their last reunion."

Don said, "Maybe I can wear it at the 200th anniversary."

Organizers began registering family members at 8 a.m. Sunday, and by 10 a.m. more than 1,000 were present for an outdoor Mass. After eating lunch in two shifts, the families organized into two softball games. About 300 others chose to swim.

The Nurrenberns were victorious over the Steinkamps in volleyball.

The Evansville Courier, August 17, 1987, Page 11

Who knows how many descendants will attend in 2037 for the 200th anniversary?

The End