

The German Society of New York on German farmer emigrants (1867)

A circular of the German Society of New York (which kept a bureau for the advice and assistance of German immigrants) describes the “points which relate peculiarly to (the) welfare” of the German immigrant farmers. The text can be found in an article by Jno A. Wagner, “European Immigration”, Debow’s Review, 1867. It was published at exactly the same time most of the following immigrant letters were written and gives us a better understanding of how the German farmers may have felt in the new country.

“On his arrival at his adopted home, he finds himself in the midst of scenes and customs entirely new and strange to him. He does not understand the language he hears spoken; he misses his acquaintance and all familiar objects, and more important to his comfort than all, he finds himself deprived of the food which life-long habit has made a necessity to him. Perhaps it will not be out of place here, briefly to describe the situation of ordinary farm laborers in the German States.

They always receive lodgings and board from their employers. As regards the first, they are supplied with warm, comfortable beds, generally placed in the vicinity of the stables, or in the upper portions of the dwelling house. Their principle diet consists of leavened bread made of bolted rye flour, and of Irish potatoes, peas, beans, turnips, cabbage, etc.

They rise early in the morning, and before commencing any out-door work receive a bowl of soup or coffee, made of roasted chickory, peas, wheat, rye, or all mixed together, and milk. At 8 o’clock they have breakfast, consisting of bread and generally cheese, lard, smoked bacon or sausage, and a ration of whiskey. Half an hour is allowed for this meal. Dinner is taken at noon, and consists of a thick soup, made in summer of potatoes and green vegetables; in winter, of turnips, beets, peas, beans, shelled barley or oats, boiled with potatoes and seasoned with onions, fried in lard or bacon. Once or twice a week they have a plainer soup, and in addition a piece of corned beef, or pork, or sausage. On Sundays, fresh meat, such as boiled beef or mutton.. An hour is allowed for dinner. At 4 o’clock, p.m., they have a meal similar in all respects to the breakfast, and half an hour’s time. The day’s work closes at 6 o’clock, though, during the planting and harvest time, it is often extended. Then the cattle are to be cared for, after which supper is furnished, consisting of boiled potatoes, sour milk, etc., and then they retire.

(.....)

The small German farmers that employ but a few hands, consider them as a part of the family, and allow them to eat at the same table with themselves, and the German families in America generally observe the same practice.”

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