

## *A Veteran of War* by Lucy Lang Sekerka

**B**orn in 1823, Johann Sebastian Lang, my great-grandfather, was a stone-cutter by trade. You would think that carving stone would have been a well enough established trade in Bavaria to see him through his life of 70 plus years in the country of his birth, but it was not to be. He had been educated for the Catholic priesthood, but the Church authorities did not want or need his service. And now, after two years learning to cut marble in Italy, he was returning home through the mountains to his home town of Fussen with a certain sense of accomplishment. Finally he was coming home, with a skill respected by his friends and family to a community where carving was a valued and honorable trade. His own father had actually fallen to his death from a scaffolding while working on the stone wall at the local monastery, so it was with a sense of pride that he was coming back to honor his family's tradition and in particular, his father. Upon his return from his years of apprenticeship, I am sure that his sisters, Seraphina and Regina, would have welcomed him with open arms. What a startling disappointment it must have been for him to discover that the government of his homeland had formed a new independent Confederation, and conscription was well underway! Compulsory service for an indefinite period of time was not why he had worked so hard to learn a trade!

This was the first time war controlled an important life changing decision for Sebastian, but frustratingly, not the last. He wanted no part of this uprising and so was very quickly arrested and actually sentenced to death for refusing to serve in the army. Sebastian was lucky, as his family and friends cared about his future. They certainly must have agonized having him return from so far, only to have him be imprisoned. It was clearly understood by many that others had chosen to leave Fussen for America because of politics. After all his sister Kreszenz, had married and by 1853 was settled in a place called "Potter County, Pennsylvania" with her husband, Konrad Jaeger.

Sebastian was lucky in his friendships, especially with a man named Schwartzenbach. Herr Schwartzenbach was the local barber and was permitted to go into the prison and cut the hair of the prisoners. It is not known how long Sebastian was actually held in the prison. But it must have seemed like a miracle when his friend, the barber, whispered in his ear during his hair cut that he should escape the prison through a 30 foot long sewer pipe. At the same time this loyal friend secretly placed a small drawing of the escape route and put it in his collar and whispered "be careful." It was very clear that the few remaining members of his family expected him to try to escape, and indeed were even encouraging him to follow the others who had been disappointed in their country's efforts to continually fight their neighbors by immigrating. He was skilled in a profession he could take with him, and if he could squeeze his 5' 9 1/2" frame through that 16" sewer pipe, it was only a short distance to the Austrian border!

His sister had gone to America - if she did it, why couldn't he? Using the instructions of his friend, and at the agreed upon time he successfully wormed his way through the dark and dirty 30 feet of sewer pipe! His friends secretly provided fresh clothing and gave him a packet of money and instructions on how to obtain a boat ticket to cross the Atlantic Ocean on a ship bound for America!

Research has not verified the actual ship that he traveled on or the exact date he arrived. Under the circumstances it could be assumed that he might have used an alias. But, he landed safely in New York City with a bit of his fortune still intact. It is not known why he chose the area known as Virginia to start his new life in America, but it is where the records follow him. Perhaps, it was the mountainous topography that felt familiar to a young man from Bavaria. Research conducted thus far suggests that his mother was born in a town called Schwangau, Bavaria, a relatively short distance from Fussen and that the family names "Lang" and "Swiger" were very common in that area. The name "Swiger" is also common in Harrison County and it could be that he planned in advance of his journey to America, to travel to Harrison County because he knew someone among his family or friends who had settled earlier in that area of the old Dominion.

There is no doubt that his life and prospects had changed forever. It wasn't long before he found a real Virginia girl, Sarah Ellen Payne, and married her in 1853 in Clarksburg, Harrison County. Sarah was the daughter of Turner and Lucy Payne and she must have been swept off her feet by the good looking foreigner. His handsomeness, dark hair, fair complexion, were set off by very blue eyes. Or maybe, as we have learned from research, there was just no one else around to marry! Typical of the time and place country life was hard work every minute of every day just to maintain human existence. Sebastian had his stone cutting craft and could earn \$5 a day when he found employment, but he was not trained to farm and his first attempt to buy land was a bust. He bought 100 acres in Doddridge County, but since the seller did not have title to the property he lost his meager investment. It was time to move back to Dola, in Harrison County where Sarah's relatives were prepared to help the young family. They rented a farm and Sebastian did some tombstone cutting which provided a simple income for his family. Their first child was Lucy Catherine, born in 1856, and Charles Matthew Lang, my grandfather was born in 1858.

During the next few years, there must have been many conversations between Sarah and Sebastian and their neighbors about what Sebastian called the "Rebellion." After all, she was a southern woman with an ancestry long and true, pointing back through several generations who had depended upon the efforts of slave labor.

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.....*A Veteran of War, continued*

What did she and Sebastian believe was the right thing to do, and how was this civil war going to affect their little plot of land, and the lives of their children? Sebastian had faced this problem earlier, but this time it was different, because he had established a home and hearth right in the middle of future fields of battle. A decision had to be made - north or south? I feel sure his Catholic schooling influenced his decision to join the Union Army, as slavery would have seemed unfamiliar and unacceptable to his German upbringing.

The Civil War was a pivotal event in the history of the United States, one that determined once and for all the question of slavery and strengthened the role of the federal government. For West Virginian residents, the 1861-1865 conflict was momentous for another reason - the rending of Virginia into two parts, east and west, and the formation of a new state called "West Virginia."

I have always thought that it was fortunate that Sarah was a true pioneer woman trained to manage life off the land. Whenever I read or hear about the Civil War, my heart goes out to her, my great-grandmother. She was left to fend for herself and her two young children in a backwoods area of Virginia when her man volunteered to serve with E. 1st West Virginia Light Artillery in 1862 on the side of the Union. Her mother Lucy Payne, had died, but her father, Turner was alive in 1861 and her brothers, cousins and other family connections were making the same decision - which side was right? I'm convinced with further research that some of her family chose the side of the Confederacy, thus they had become her husband's enemies. She was truly alone with the responsibility to feed and clothe the two small children and herself in a world of poverty and distrust.

Sebastian's life in the service was drastically changed when his superior officer asked for volunteers in 1864 to go to a smallpox hospital in Cumberland, Maryland and he was the only volunteer the Captain could find to send. It was only for a few months, but when he returned to his unit he complained of sore eyes.

He was even made aware of the fact that his shooting was not as accurate as before because of his increasing disability. One of the statements sworn too: "He was never sent to a hospital for his medical condition as he was ambition to perform his duties as a soldier." But at the time of his discharge, his eyes were so badly inflamed, that he asked permission of his Captain to see a doctor. In addition his body was covered with swollen red lumps. The doctor gave him some eye wash called "sugar of lead" but it was not helpful.

His troubles continued when he returned to civilian life. He was home only a short time after his discharge June 28, 1865 when Sarah died of cancer on September 20, 1866 at the age of 44 years, leaving the two little children, Lucy and Charles in the care of their worn and sick father. Sebastian managed to stumble along in life, and married as his second wife Sophronia Philoda Hall in 1868. Sophronia was a strong and positive influence and lived to be in her nineties. She and Sebastian had 5 more children and their first little girl was named Sarah

Regina - the names of his first wife and sister. Based on affidavits in the pension record, he was very well respected in his community and managed to minimally provide for his family until he was 60 years old, at which time he was no longer able to see and was suffering from scurvy.

A doctor's affidavit in his pension file made a very charming statement about his character. *"During all the time of my acquaintance with him - have treated him more or less regular for ... troubles that he has not been able to benefit to any extent on account of his inability to provide for his large family and take the proper care of himself. Besides he is one of those obstinate Germans who thinks medicine next to death..."* As his great-granddaughter, I smiled at his Germanic disregard of medicine. He died on November 27, 1893 and was laid to rest in Hall Cemetery, Dola, Harrison County, West Virginia with a very nice tombstone inscribed "Lang."

Sebastian's life could be summed up with this statement he made to pension officials: *"O could I have my eyes as I have had them I never would ask the government any aid. Before I went in the Service I made five dollars per day and now I make nothing, I do not regret my service to the U.S. if I had one half dozen such eyes as I have had I would cheerfully give for the same cause."*

*Signed, Sebastian Lang*

Yes, I believe Johann Sebastian Lang's biography would make a great movie. It would involve the historical times of two beautiful countries, the tragedy of war, poverty and disease and at the same time represent the greatness of America and its immigrant heritage. ☪

*Some of the many research sources used:*

**IGI Record** (International Genealogical Index)

**Pension Records for Civil War Service**

**Civil War Record**

**Harrison County PA Marriages**

**Harrison County PA Deaths**

**U.S. 1880 Census, W. VA**

**Photographs**

**Search for Will**

**Genealogical & Biographical History Swiger Family**

**Newspaper Article:**

**Interview with Sophronia Lang**

**Correspondence with Family**

**Interviews**

*For Lucy's entire article along with complete source citations, interviews and footnotes, see Cuyahoga West Chapter's website at:*

[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohcqogs](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohcqogs)

**or go to Google and type in  
Cuyahoga West Genealogy**

**IGI RECORD:**

Sebastian Lang was christened at St. Mang's Catholic Church on September 9, 1823 (Batch 7725005 sheet 83 source 1126109 film).

**PENSION RECORD FOR CIVIL WAR SERVICE (No. 303752 served 3 years);**

Gives a Personal description; height 5 ft. 9 1/2 inches, fair complexion, dark hair, and blue eyes. His signature is clearly Sebastian Lang and his second wife's is Sophronia Lang on this record. It gives his death at the age of 70 years and that he was born in Germany. Many of the other statements in this story were taken directly from his pension file of more than 60 pages.

**CIVIL WAR RECORD -**

Cumberland, Md. April 1864 - Captain - I have the honor to request that Corporal Sebastian Lang, Batty E 1st W. Va. Baty Vols may be attached as a nurse for the Smallpox Camp, Cumberland, Md. ... the only person that can be found who has had the smallpox willing to perform the duty ..... and will report to the surgeon in charge of Gen. Hospital Cumberland, Md. ... Please furnish transportation for Sebastian Long (sp.) a member of Upshur Battery from Clarksburg to Wheeling

**HARRISON COUNTY MARRIAGES 1785-1894 by Cochran P. 120:**

Long, (sp.) Sebastian to Payne, Sarah E. 27 Jan. 1853

**HARRISON COUNTY DEATHS by Hickman P. 41:**

Sarah Lang 9/20/1866 44y b. in E. Va. Turner & Louisa Payne, parents signed Sebastian Lang

**U.S. 1880 CENSUS: W.Va. E003 P. 3 dwelling No. 19, family No. 19:**

Lang, Sebastian	58	farmer	BV	BV	BV
Saphrona P.	44			Va.	De
MD					
Sarah R.	11		WV		
Mary A.	9			WV	
Theresa C.	6			WV	
Charlotte R.	4			WV	
Elmira L.	1			WV	

Note: found no other Lang's from BV which is probably Bavaria (DE = Delaware and MD is Maryland). Sarah, Mary A. & Theresa A. are named as having attended school within the last year. Household number 9 is Elisha P. Hall. So they were neighbors to her father and mother.

**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

Tombstones, pictures

**SEARCH FOR WILL:**

Sebastian had next to nothing when he died. Therefore, there was no need of a will.

**GENEALOGICAL & BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF THE SWIGER FAMILY P. 220:**

Note: includes photograph of Sebastian Lang

**NEWSPAPER ARTICLE - INTERVIEW WITH SOPHRONIA LANG:**

....."Mr. Lang was mustered into the service of the U.S. in the Civil War September 17, 1862, the records show, and became a corporal in Battery E. of the First W. Va. Light Artillery, which the late Major Alexander C. Moore, of this city, organized in Buchannon in August and September 1862. The Battery consisted of young men from Upshur, Harrison and Randolph counties. The Battery first defended the town of Buchannon against Gen. B. F. Jenkins of the confederate forces. Soon there after the troop went to Wheeling where it was fully equipped and then sent back to Clarksburg, and in turn to New Creek and Romney, Moorefield and its vicinity, as well as with General B. F. Kelly in his campaign in the summer of that year, to Cherry Run, Williamport, and Hedgesville in Lee's retreat from Gettysburg, returning with the brigade to the South Branch Valley, where it served until the summer 1864. Upon Gen. Hunter's return from Lynchburg, the battery was ordered to join the Army of W. Va., and accompanied it to the Shenandoah Valley where it took part in the engagements with the enemy at Snicher's Ferry. Cedar Creek, Kernstown, Bunker Hill, and Berryville. The battery was then attached to Artillery brigade and in the fall of 1864 was ordered to the artillery camp at Camp Barry near Washington, D. C. and remained there until the close of the war. The battery was mustered out of the service June 28, 1865."

Note: I was fortunate to have found the yellowed clipping of this interview which described his life in Germany and his method of escape.

**CORRESPONDENCE WITH FAMILY:**

I was told that Sebastian and his family lived next to the bicycle shop on one of the main streets of Fussen, Bavaria, Germany.

**INTERVIEW:**

The city engineer of Fussen met with my husband and me when we visited, and assured us that the existence of the sewer was just as described, and if we had time we could go and see it. The distance to the Austrian border was about 6 miles.

P.S. Because of writing this article, I thought I would look for Schwartzbach, the "barber". I checked Footnote and found Schwartzbach, Michael in the 1860 Census of Potter County, Pennsylvania which was the very same county that Sebastian's sister and her husband had immigrated to a few years earlier. Michael's birth year was the same as Sebastian's and he names Bavaria as his birth country. I can't say that he was the "barber" friend, as he gives his profession as brewer, but he could have been among the Schwartzbach family that helped him to escape. It certainly is a consequence. The research goes on.

Yes, I believe Johann Sebastian Lang's biography would make a great movie. It would involve the historical times of two beautiful countries, the tragedy of war, poverty and disease and at the same time represent the greatness of America and its immigrant heritage.

Respectfully submitted by Lucy Lang Sekerka