



# A Day in the Life

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*Life Experiences from Those Who Came Before Us* January 2005

“December 25, 1860, Christmas morning in Greensburg Township, Putnam County, Ohio,” Maria Anne Ricker thought as she sat on the edge of the bed staring at the floor, “The celebration of our Lord’s birth.” She didn’t feel much like celebrating. She felt old and tired. She didn’t feel like doing much of anything. There was an emptiness in her heart caused by the passing of her beloved husband, George Ricker, only three days earlier.

She hadn’t slept much even though it had been a quiet winter morning. A noise outside the house broke the silence. She looked out the window. All she saw were snowflakes falling in a light breeze. “Snow’s falling again. Just like the morning that George and I planned to move some of our household goods to the new homestead just west of the village known as Sixteen, in Monterey Township.” Maria thought. “Sixteen. What a strange name for a town. But it’s better than Dog Creek.” Some in the area had wanted to name it after the post office. George and she had hoped that they would name it after Father John Otto Bredeick, the priest who had done so much for the development of the village now being established in western Putnam County on the Miami and Erie Canal. But Bredeickville didn’t sound

right. Ottoville sounded much better. Maria’s attention focused on the falling snow and to that dreadful, snowy morning three days earlier.



**Remains of Ottoville’s first church used until 1862. Mass was held on the top floor and the bottom floor served as shelter for newly arrived immigrants and travelers.**

“Happy birthday and good morning, Frances,” Maria greeted her second oldest child in German as she walked into the kitchen. “Five years old today! Just old enough to help us prepare breakfast. And look outside; the Lord has given you a fresh snow fall for your birthday.” The oldest, Wilhelmina, who was seven, was already in the kitchen attending to the youngest, Herman Joseph who was ten months old. Henry, who was three years old on October the first, was outside helping his father and their neighbor, Bernard Herman Ricker,

change the wagon into a mud-sled by placing wood planks under the wheels.

Bernard had arrived in Putnam County in 1840; seven years after Rev. Johann Wilhelm Horstmann and his party had left Onsabruck, Germany to found Glandorf, Ohio. Bernard had bought land across the road from George and Maria in Union Township three years before they purchased the land that they were now getting ready to leave. George had made arrangements on December eighth for Bernard to purchase twenty acres and another neighbor, Herman Barlage, to purchase the other twenty acres. Outside, Maria could hear George explain his reasons for moving to Bernard for the umpteenth time.

“Bernard, you have been the best neighbor and friend a man could have. However, I believe that living next to the canal is the best for my family. Sure it’s not as settled as this area. You remember how wet and densely wooded this area of the Black Swamp was only a few years ago. But with hard work from you, your sons, and myself this land is giving us crops we could only dream of in Hanover. With the same hard work, I can change that part of the Black Swamp into just as productive land as this. And it will be closer to the



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canal, making it easier to get the harvest to market.”

“You’re correct, of course, George. But I will certainly miss you and your family.” Bernard started to walk away as the sun pecked out from behind the clouds. Then he stopped and turned around to remind George, “Don’t forget that Catherine and the girls are planning a big Christmas dinner. You better come back in good time or it will all be gone.”

“We wouldn’t miss your wife’s good cooking for anything Herman,” George replied as the sunlight flashed as it moved in and out of the moving clouds.

Bernard looked up, “Looks like you might not need those rails. If the sun keeps popping out it will certainly melt this fresh snowfall.”

Little Herman began crying and snapped Maria out of her back to the present. She got up from the bed and walked over to his crib. She picked him up and sat down in a chair to give him his early morning breakfast. As she looked upon the child in her arms, her thoughts again returned to December twenty-second.

“I’m glad that it’s warming up, George,” Maria said as she looked down upon her baby as he slept in his arms. “I don’t want Little Herman to catch a cold.” They were on the mud-sled traveling through Kalida on their way to the new homestead. Someone making a

commotion by the courthouse caught their attention. It seemed his wagon was stuck in



**Bernard and Catherine Ricker  
circa 1889**

melting snow and mud.

“The streets in this town are terrible! And look at that courthouse! Why it’s old and outdated. What this county needs is a new court house, like a modern and forward looking county should have! And just why is the courthouse all the way over here on this side of the county anyway? Why do we people in Leipsic and Gilboa have to travel all the way over here to do our legal work anyway? A county’s seat should be in the middle of the county, closer to the center of where most of the people live. The county seat should be moved to Ottawa! It is after all the fastest growin’ city in the county!”

The man helping him stopped pushing, “Listen here! If you don’t stop all this nonsense talk, I’m going to leave you stuck in the mud.

The legislators in Columbus made Kalida the county seat in 1834 after Putnam County had enough residents and their wisdom should not be doubted.”

“You don’t say. Well, those same legislative geniuses took away a large part of this fine county thirteen years ago. We lost over thirty thousand acres of good taxable land because it wasn’t a part of the swamp. The land that was lost included Delphos with all those good tax paying people. And what did they give us in return? More swamp land from Van Wert County. Monterey Township they called it. Well, what I call it is a sign for change in this here Putnam County.”

“Delphos? What of Delphos? The cholera epidemic of ’54 and ’55 left it a ghost town. You wait and see. Sixteen has better soil around it than Delphos...”

Their voice trailed off as George spoke up, “That county seat argument is going to only be trouble Mary; just wait and see. Why if calmer heads don’t prevail, I hear talk that some are so sore over the issue that they may burn down the court house here in Kalida. Twice the court house of Henry County in Napoleon burnt down under mysterious circumstances; once in ’44 and then again in ’47. I hear there was some who wanted that county seat to move up the Maumee River to Texas, Ohio. I hope we Putnam County residents act more civilized



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than the Henry County residents did.”

The plight of the county seat did not matter to Maria then, and it certainly did not matter to her now, after the accident. With George now with the Lord, she needed to think about her family’s future. But all she could think about is t h e p a s t .

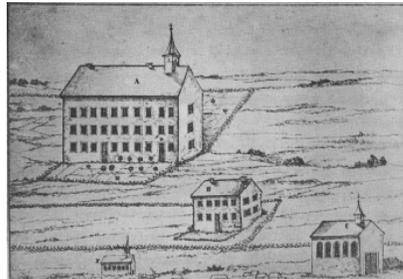
As they left Kalida, they crossed the bridge over the Ottawa River which was named after the Ottawa Indian tribe who first hunted and then later lived in this area no less than thirty years prior. The horses had trouble pulling the mud-sled over the bridge because the sun had melted the snow to a point where the wood on the bridge was showing. That was a sign of the terrible events that would soon follow. Three miles down the road lay the bridge that crossed the Auglaize R i v e r .

“Mama, I’m hungry,” Henry said returning his mother to the present. She looked down at him and realized that not only did she need to concentrate on the present, but she needed to think about the future. Herman had finished his breakfast and normally she would have already started the other children’s breakfast. Why, it was already daylight.

Maria smiled at Henry and said, “Wake your sisters. I’ll make breakfast and we’ll get going to Glandorf for Christmas day mass. After

mass you’ll hear about baby Jesus from the sisters of the Society of the Precious Blood while I talk to Father Wittmer.” Father Wittmer had followed in leadership at Glandorf, after Father Brunner and Father Boehne, Father Horstmann’s successors. Father Brunner had past away a year ago while in Schellenberg, Lichtenstein.

Henry raced off to wake his sisters. He loved going to mass in Glandorf. St. John the Baptist had a new stone and brick church. None was like it in all of northwest Ohio. It was so beautiful and shiny. The thought of going there filed Henry’s heart with joy and anticipation. Henry was too young to understand and know the pain of his father’s death.



Convent at Glandorf circa 1860

“Mrs. Ricker, Maria Anne, I am so sorry for you loss. I understand your situation. However, this plan of yours to live on the new farm must be seriously considered and prayed about,” Father Wittmer continued in German. “It is true that you are a strong woman, only thirty-five years old. But you should consider your children. Section Sixteen is nothing like Glandorf. It is a wilderness in the middle of a swamp. There are wild animals

in the forest. Some say that Indians still live there, some of which are Catholic, but others are not and therefore, can not be trusted. How will you be able to take care of farmland and the children, protecting them against such things?”

“I do not know Father. But I am sure that the Lord will find a way. George and I prayed so long and devoutly about our move. We were so sure that His will for our family was to move out there. Surely, the Lord’s will has not changed. Somehow, I believe the Lord will take care of us. The Lord will provide a way.”

“What do Bernard and Catherine think about your desire to move out there? Have you discussed this with them?”

“No Father. I will talk to them about my prayers after Christmas dinner tonight. I do not know what they will say. But they have always been such a help to our family. These last few days, Catherine and the girls have been such a great help with the children.”

“Well, we will certainly pray for you to find the Lord’s will. Like the virgin birth, often the Lord’s ways are not w h a t w e e x p e c t .”

“Excuse me madam? Would you care to buy the December 29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Kalida Sentinel? It was printed on Saturday, but it is the latest edition. It’s the county’s leading newspaper!”

“What is your name?”  
M a r i a a s k e d .  
“Sorry for not introducing



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myself, madam. Lee's the name; Levi Lee. I'm one of the editors of this fine paper. Page two contains a fine article on the Cotton states desire to separate from the United States. You might find it interesting r e a d i n g . ”

Maria thought about it for a while and decided to buy one. It was better than thinking about what happened at the Christmas dinner at Bernard and Catherine's house. Bernard and Catherine did not like the idea of Maria moving to the n e w p r o p e r t y .

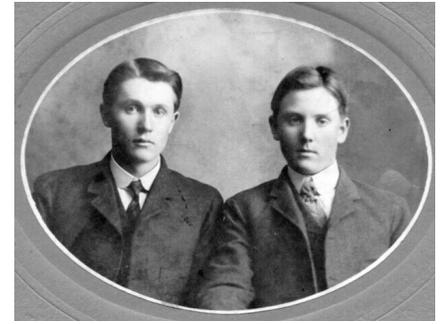
Herman Ricker, their oldest, thought that he could help Maria and her family because he lived in Delphos. In '52 he had left his father's farm and moved there. He was seventeen then; now he was twenty-five. In May, he was set to marry Katie Trentman. He was also planning to open a furniture store with Joseph Krieff with the money had saved as being a captain of a boat on the canal and now working as a carpenter. His long term goals were to also own and run a furniture manufacturing facility in Delphos. “I am after all Little Herman's godfather, am I not?” Herman had proclaimed to his p a r e n t s .

Maria was in Kalida to talk to the lawyer about the estate. She had arrived early and would have time to read the newspaper. Herman was going to meet her soon so he could accompany her to the lawyer's office. Women did not have much legal authority in those

days. Maria opened the newspaper to the second page to read the article the editor had told her about. She started to read the first column and then stopped. She noticed the line in the second column, “Life lost.” Could it be? She could not stop herself from reading t h e a r t i c l e .

“A terrible accident happened near Glandorf on Saturday night last, in which a man by the name of Recker was deprived of life. The circumstances, as related to us by a friend, were about these: Mr. Recker was passing over the bridge on the west side of Glandorff, when a part of the structure gave way, and his horses fell through. Recker at the time was on a low sled, and although the distance he fell was trifling, not more than two feet, his neck was broken. After falling, he immediately arose to his feet and then dropped dead. This is the most singular accident we had ever recorded. A person might fall off a sled a thousand times, and not hurt themselves.”

Tears ran down Maria's face. The events of the accident were relived once again. Although the newspaper was not correct on all the information it still reminded her of what happened. She wondered who the friend was. She was thankful for that friend, for she knew after reading the article her neighbors, friends, and even people she did not know would say a prayer for her and her children. She would need all



**William and Louis Ricker**

the prayer support of the county to get her through the next few w e e k s a n d m o n t h s .

“Look outside grandma Mary!” four year old Louis exclaimed. “It's snowing on Christmas Day!” At this his cousins Lewis, two years older than he, and Joseph, the same age as he, ran over to the other window to look outside.

Maria had been looking down at baby Herman in her arms, but looked outside at the snow what had generated so much excitement in Little Louis. The falling snow hid the twin Gothic towers of the new church in town to her east. Their house was almost two miles away but Maria could still watch the progress of the twin towers as they were built up over the last few years.

Maria smiled as she replied, “What a beautiful sight boys.” She was referring to the sight of her grandsons as much as the gently falling snow. Maria had remembered how thirty years earlier snow on Christmas day made her depressed. That was in the past, when all she could do was pray. Now she reflected on the fact that the Lord had indeed



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answered her prayers and provided help through Louis Landwher, her second husband. He had been a good father and husband, which was evident since her two sons had named their boys after him.

“Can we play in it grandma?” the boys asked as they jumped up and down.

“Better ask your mothers boys. They’re in the kitchen making dinner.”

Herman had married Elizabeth Lehmkuhle, whom had lived only a mile north of the home that she was now seated in, the one that George built. Henry married Elizabeth’s sister, Mary, the same year as his brother married, 1885. Maria’s daughters had married the Hoffman brothers, Matt and Dave, and moved to Arkansas to farm the new lands out there. As the boys ran to the kitchen Maria looked at the baby in her arms as she said David’s prayer, “Praise the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

*The people, places, and events in this article are of historical record while the conversations and thoughts of individuals are of folklore and legend. Thanks goes to the Putnam County*

*Library and other local libraries, BGSU, and the men and women working at the Putnam County Court House.*



**Louis Landwher and Maria Anne (Ricker) Landwher 1867**