

RALPH RICHTERKESSING FARM
(John Richterkessing Farm)
4600 I-70 North Service Road
St. Peters vicinity
St. Charles County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1919

HABS
MO-1919

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RALPH RICHTERKESSING FARM (JOHN RICHTERKESSING FARM)

HABS No. MO-1916⁹

Location: Township 47 North, Range 4 East, Survey 735.
4600 I-70 North Service Road, St. Peters, St.
Charles County, Missouri.

UTM: 15/709250/4297080 (residence)

Present Owner: Missouri Highway and Transportation
Commission

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: None

Statement of
Significance: The Ralph Richterkessing Farm, located in St.
Charles County, consists of seven buildings
and is historically and architecturally
significant as a farm complex representative
of agrarian German-American culture in rural
Missouri. The brick residence is a common
example of Missouri-Germanic vernacular
architecture while the various ancillary
outbuildings demonstrate the agrarian nature
of the Richterkessing property. It derives
additional importance because of its
association with the Erwin Richterkessing
farm to the east, an earlier example of
German-Missouri architecture constructed by
Richterkessing relatives. Each farm is
important in its own right, but because they
share the same architectural tradition,
ethnic culture, and German surname, they form
an impressive farm complex created and
operated by members of a tightly-knit family.

Project Statement: This Historic American Buildings Survey
(HABS) recording project is part of a long
term program to document historically
significant buildings in the United States.
The Missouri Highway and Transportation
Department (MHTD) provided funding for the
project as a requirement of MHTD's Section
106 mitigation of the impact of proposed
highway construction to the property.

The field work, measured drawings, historical
reports and photographs were prepared by MHTD
staff of District 6 Office, St. Louis and
MHTD Headquarters, Jefferson City. John

Roth, District Highway Design Engineer; Dave Henroid, Senior Highway Designer; Steve Lockett, Senior Highway Design Technician; Chris Schwandtner, Intermediate Highway Design Technician; and Bill Weiss, Intermediate Highway Design Technician, MHTD District 6 Office, recorded the field measurements. Chris Schwandtner also prepared the architectural delineations for the residence while Darrell Eilers, Intermediate Highway Design Technician, and Sue Olson, Plans Drafting Technician, created the site plan.

Design Division staff at MHTD Headquarters, Jim Corrigan, Photographer, and Steve Bushko, Photographic Lab Technician, Photo Lab, undertook the photography.

Historians: Toni Prawl and Stacy Sone, Missouri Highway and Transportation Department, May 1993.

PART I. HISTORICAL DATA

Date of Erection: ca. 1905

Architect: unknown

Historical Context

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, adventurous German families, uncertain of life in their homeland, immigrated to the United States seeking opportunity in America's growing towns and cities. Most were quickly assimilated into Anglo-American towns or rural areas and they soon lost their cultural identity. Other groups of German immigrants, however, congregated together in sparsely settled regions and established their own closely knit communities that attracted more German new-arrivals to the surrounding unoccupied farmland. Pennsylvania and Missouri were two of the most popular German settlement areas and, in time, the immigrants became the dominant cultural group in regions of these states.¹

The first Germans to immigrate in large numbers to the United States settled far from the Missouri wilderness. They arrived around the turn of the nineteenth century and were

1. Charles van Ravenswaay, *The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 4.

generally affluent merchants who stayed in the larger cities along the east coast and in the booming industrial centers near the Ohio River and the Great Lakes.²

From about 1830 to the mid-1840s, the number of families emigrating from Germany grew and this time, the majority came from the working class. Artisans and farmers were generally more prosperous and arrived in the United States seeking greater economic opportunity. Craftsmen, such as carpenters, saddlers, masons, and blacksmiths, found little work in their homeland but proved to be in great demand in the United States. Likewise, farmers had become desperate as prices for their produce plummeted and land prices rose. Enticing descriptions of abundant land and an ever-increasing demand for their products led them to settle in the vast new country.³

Emigrants from southwestern Germany in places called Hesse-Darmstadt and Hesse-Cassel arrived around 1830 in the United States and generally congregated in larger eastern and midwestern cities, including St. Louis. Others from Franconia, Westphalia, Hanover, and Oldenburg followed. Although many of these Germans also remained in the east, many others ventured boldly into the sparsely-inhabited rural areas in Pennsylvania and as far west as Texas, Wisconsin, and Missouri.⁴

In Missouri, this concentrated German settlement occurred largely as a result of one German citizen's published account in 1829 called *Report of a Journey to the Western States of North America*. The far-sighted author, Gottfried Duden, was a respected lawyer and civil servant from the Ruhr Valley who was convinced that the problems he had encountered in his homeland were triggered by overpopulation, oppression, and poverty. He traveled with an open mind to Missouri on a self-appointed mission. His goal was to find a suitable settlement location for a massive emigration that he believed was the only solution to Germany's problems. Duden spent two years living in eastern Missouri and in his report, outlined the advantages of settlement there. This widely read book convinced many Germans to seek fresh opportunities and promoted their emigration to Missouri. Major German immigration began about 1830 and was centered in St. Charles, Marthasville, Washington, and Hermann, Missouri, locations that Duden had eloquently described in his report. St. Louis became another center for German settlement and provided a point from which many traveled to other sections of the state, mainly along the Missouri River valley.⁵

2. Ibid., 6.

3 Ibid., 5.

4. Ibid., 5.

St. Charles County, which eventually became a German hub, already had a long history well before the first Germans arrived. Strategically located at the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois rivers, the region became an early center of a river transportation network across the country. In 1764, Creole voyageurs and fur trappers from the St. Louis settlement established an outpost in what later became St. Charles. A few years later, Louis Blanchette, a Frenchman, established the first European settlement in the county at St. Charles after the governor of the Upper Louisiana territory commissioned him to establish a post there under Spanish rule.⁶

The Boone family from Kentucky was likely to have been the first of the American settlers in St. Charles County. In 1795 Colonel Daniel Boone located at Darst's Bottom in the Femme Osage district of St. Charles County. His settlement there proved to be a milestone in the county's development. The Spanish Government, still anxious to be established in eastern Missouri, offered land to Boone if he agreed to persuade one-hundred families from Virginia and Kentucky to settle in Upper Louisiana. He succeeded in his mission and witnessed ambitious new residents working diligently to establish their farms.⁷ When the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory, westward movement increased dramatically. By the 1830s, American and French settlers had claimed most of the land in the fertile upland prairies and in the Missouri River bottom but bypassed the surrounding area's more rugged terrain. During the nineteenth-century's early years, the St. Charles County settlement grew steadily but a majority of the county remained a wilderness.⁸

The German immigrants were the next to arrive in St. Charles County and they eagerly claimed the wilderness areas that previous settlers had bypassed. Although many stayed in the town of St. Charles, the large wave of German immigration that began in the 1830s had the greatest influence in the rural part of the county. Kentucky and Virginia settlers had already established

5. Ibid., 6,8; Walter A. Schroeder, "Rural Settlement Patterns of the German-Missourian Cultural Landscape," in *The German American Experience in Missouri. Essays in Commemoration of the Tricentennial of German Immigration to America, 1683-1983*. Howard Wight Marshall and James W. Goodrich, eds. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1986), 1, 27.

6. Malcom C. Drummond. *Historic Sites in St. Charles County* N.P.: Harland Bartholomew and Associates, 1976), 5; *History of St. Charles, Montgomery, and Warren Counties, Missouri* (St. Louis: Paul V. Cochrane, 1969), 94.

7. Drummond, 6; *History of St. Charles, Montgomery, and Warren Counties, Missouri*, 95.

8. van Ravenswaay, 8, 73; Drummond, 6.

plantations on the fertile bottom lands along the Missouri River. The Germans willingly settled around them and eventually tamed the rugged land away from the river into prosperous farmland.⁹ They learned to apply familiar old-world farming practices to the diverse and demanding conditions encountered in Missouri. German farmers were industrious individuals and, although they were willing to accept the region's demands, it still required a number of years to clear and develop their land.

During this adjustment process, German farmers learned that many of the skills and tools designed to meet gentler European conditions were inadequate for their newly established farms. For example, an essential chore such as plowing, which was easy in a field that had been groomed for a century in Germany, proved to be a tremendous challenge in a recently cleared upland Missouri field.¹⁰ With the help of their experienced American neighbors, German farmers learned how to cultivate corn and other field and garden crops that were best suited to the soil and to Missouri's climate. German farmers, in turn, introduced old-world ingenuity to the Americans. With this cooperative exchange of techniques and ideas, both cultural groups found they could farm more efficiently.¹¹

German farmers gradually made their poor acres more productive and many steadily expanded their holdings by purchasing the more fertile bottom land from Americans. In the process of acquiring larger tracts of land, Germans became the dominant cultural group, and eventually displaced the southern-plantation character that the earlier owners had established. By 1860, those of foreign birth represented about one-quarter of the total population. The majority came from many different German states with Hanover being the best represented.¹²

German immigrants chose overwhelmingly to establish isolated farms with their houses located approximately a quarter mile from their nearest neighbor. Because many of the Germans who settled in Missouri arrived from regions where this kind of scattered farm placement was the rule, they found the arrangement to be suitable. The rural Missouri-Germans generally established well-rounded farms that included animals and crops. An economy based even partly on livestock needed more land than one based upon crops only. German farmers operated larger-sized tracts of land than they had in a more crowded and intensively farmed Germany.

9. Drummond, 6; van Ravenswaay, 8.

10. van Ravenswaay, 13, 11.

11. *History of St. Charles, Montgomery, & Warren Counties, Missouri*, 104; van Ravenswaay, 72.

12. van Ravenswaay, 72.

Their larger farms in Missouri promoted a more dispersed settlement pattern than they had experienced in Germany.¹³

Richterkessing Family

Erwin and Ralph Richterkessing were first cousins, each being the grandson of Henry Richterkessing, Sr. Erwin and Ralph's fathers were brothers and second generation Missouri-Germans on their fathers' side. Erwin was the son of George Richterkessing; Ralph was the son of John Richterkessing. While Ralph inherited his family farm from his father John Richterkessing, Erwin inherited the adjoining land through his maternal grandfather, Henry Meyer. The histories, names, and dwellings of both Richterkessing families are closely connected. Refer to HABS No. MO-1920 (Erwin Richterkessing Farm) for a discussion of the Erwin Richterkessing family.

Henry Meyer was born in Hanover in 1846 and immigrated to the United States at age 20 in 1866. According to the 1870 census records for St. Charles, he was living with Henry and Anna Richterkessing, Sr., possibly at the residence on the 70 acre parcel identified by the 1875 plat map as Richterkessing's property. Richterkessing's 1875 holdings consisted of two disjoined tracts east of the property Erwin and Ralph Richterkessing inherited. Although Richterkessing was listed as head of household in the census, he was two years younger than Henry Meyer. Perhaps the native-born Richterkessing had perfected his English and farming skills better than immigrant Meyer thus enabling him to offer a temporary home to his older friend, however their relationship has not been determined. Henry Richterkessing listed his occupation as farmer while Henry Meyer was classified as a farm laborer, owning no land. Anna Sanford Richterkessing was born the same year as her husband, and like Meyer, she had emigrated from Hanover. The newlyweds had no children in 1870, yet a fourth resident, 20-year-old Louise Richterkessing, lived with them. Each member of the household had parents of foreign birth.

By the 1880 census, relatives living with Anna and Henry Richterkessing included four children--even the future heir of the Meyer residence, infant George Richterkessing. Agriculture census records for 1880 provide insight to Richterkessing's holdings and operations at their farm located east of the present Ralph and Erwin Richterkessing farms. They owned over 130 acres of land, all worth an estimated \$6,000, including fences and buildings. Richterkessing listed \$350 worth of farm implements or machinery and \$500 worth of livestock. A successful agrarian endeavor, annual production at the Henry Richterkessing farm valued \$2,000 and included crops, stock, and dairy products.

13. Schroeder, 35.

Census records for 1890 are unavailable and the Henry Richterkessing family can not be located among those records for 1900. Yet John Richterkessing, the eldest son of Henry, appears in census records for 1910. Born in 1874 and just 6-years-old at the time of the 1880 census, John was the head of household thirty years later with four children of his own. Married in 1900, John and Lena Richterkessing were both Missouri-born, German descendants living in the midst of a Missouri-German community.

The presence of neighboring property owners like those named Bruns, Ehlmann, Schulte, Schwendemann, and Soenker, undoubtedly reinforced a common cultural heritage. Families enumerated immediately before and after the John Richterkessing household for the 1910 census schedule correspond with those surnames identified as Richterkessing's neighbors on the 1905 plat. Thus, when combined, these primary records indicate that the couple lived at their farm (a 200 acre parcel inherited by Ralph Richterkessing) before 1910 and possibly by 1905. Engaged in farming wheat and corn, the couple was assisted by their hired hand, Louis Schroeder, a first generation Missouri-German.

Real estate deeds record that John purchased land the same year he and Lena were married. Whether the young couple acquired and occupied an existing residence at their farm immediately after they bought the property is questionable. Plat maps of 1875 and 1905 show a building in the same vicinity on this parcel, but they may represent different buildings. Although the newlywed's residence in 1900 is unknown, the stylistic features inherit in the current Ralph Richterkessing house convey an affiliation with this period rather than the preceding century (refer to HABS No. MO-1919A, Ralph Rickterkessing Farm, Residence).

John and Lena probably built their residence during the first decade of the twentieth century following the couple's lawsuit in 1905. The legal action ensured the Richterkessings clear title to the land and may signal their intent to pursue property improvements. The couple owned their house in 1910, but not without the assistance of a mortgage.

In 1920, John and Lena Richterkessing were in their mid-forties with five children at home: Ralph, Clara, Leona, Hildegarde, and Gladys, ranging from 19 years to 4 months in age. Their third child, Elmer, died at age 14 in 1919. They owned their home until their sixties when they sold the farm to Ralph and his wife, Ella, in 1947.

The Ralph Richterkessing farm was established by John Richterkessing during the first decade of the twentieth century. Both the Ralph Richterkessing farm and the neighboring Erwin Richterkessing farm remain closely linked to their families' history and German-Missouri traditions. The following chart

diagrams the genealogy of the Richterkessing families and how generations inherited the farms:

Ralph Richterkessing Family

1. Henry Richterkessing, Sr. (born 1848; father of John Richterkessing)
2. John Richterkessing (born 1874; father of Ralph Richterkessing)
3. Ralph Richterkessing (born 1901; son of John Richterkessing)
4. Frederick J. Richterkessing, Carol Richterkessing Goodall, Pearl Richterkessing Plamann, and David Richterkessing (children of Ralph and Ella Richterkessing)

Erwin Richterkessing Family

1. Henry Meyer (born 1846; father-in-law to George Richterkessing)
2. George Richterkessing (born 1881; father of Erwin Richterkessing)
3. Erwin Richterkessing (born 1907 or 1908, son of George Richterkessing)

Chain of Title

Ralph Richterkessing acquired the farmstead from his parents, John D. and Lena Richterkessing in 1946, at age forty-five and just four years before his father's death on September 17, 1950. Based on information available at the Recorder of Deeds Office and Emmons Title Co. (Abstract file no. 4475), St. Charles, Missouri, the chain of title to the Ralph Richterkessing farm complex is outlined below:

1900

Deed May 29, 1900, recorded in Volume 75, page 527.
Luerding Heirs (Estate of Johann Bernard Luerding)
To
John D. Richterkessing

1905

Suit to Quiet Title or action to perfect title by limitation,
Circuit Court, May 30, 1905, recorded in Volume 90, page 435.
John D. Richterkessing, Plaintiff
Versus
Unknown Heirs of Levi Smith, Isaac Smith, W.M. Smith, Mary Lee
Beaver; unknown heirs of Daniel Smith, Jeff Spencer, Stowan

Spencer, Mary Rogers, Jennie Spencer, Eliza Spencer; unknown heirs of Mahala Spencer, Mary E. Smith, Sarah E. Burkles, George E.W. Smith, Edna F. Smith; and unknown heirs of Isaac Smith, Defendants.

Decree rendered in favor of Richterkessing.

1946

Deed (General Warranty) August 23, 1946, recorded in Volume 220, page 15.

John D. Richterkessing and wife, Lena Richterkessing.

To

H.H. Ralph Richterkessing and wife, Ella W. Richterkessing.

1987

Deed (General Warranty) for an undivided two-thirds interest in and to the home farm comprising 123 acres, more or less in Survey 735, T47N, R4E, June 1, 1987, recorded in Volume 1167, page 1220.

Ella W. Richterkessing (widow of Ralph Richterkessing who died June 1978) and husband Arthur A. Koper

To

Frederick J. Richterkessing and Lois Richterkessing, his wife; Carol R. Goodall and Arthur Goodall, her husband; Pearl R. Plamann and Marvin Plamann, her husband; David C. Richterkessing and Suzanne Richterkessing, his wife.

1992

Condemnation of land, Circuit Court, Parcel #8, Petition number/case number: CV192-2760CC, October 29, 1992.

To

Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General Statement

Situated in the Missouri Rhineland Region, the architecture of the Ralph Richterkessing farmstead and the adjacent Erwin Richterkessing farm embodies characteristics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Missouri-German building traditions (see MO-1919-A and MO-1920-A for specific information about the Richterkessing residences). Concentrations of German immigrants founded or adopted settlements in St. Louis and surrounding areas along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers that developed a distinctive German flavor indicative of their presence. Henry Meyer and John Richterkessing established their farms near St. Peters and St. Charles, two neighboring communities in St. Charles County with high concentrations of Missouri-Germanic architecture.¹⁴

Site

Once agrarian, most of the land surrounding the Richterkessing farms has developed into a commercial area which supports numerous businesses. Even the address changes of the farms and neighboring structures reflect the dominance of Interstate 70 and its role in the suburban growth of the region. Both farms are situated off I-70 North Service Road, an east-west trending route parallel to I-70 and formerly named Old Mexico Road. This area, which is in St. Peters city limits, continues to develop at a rapid rate largely due to the growth of St. Charles County and accompanying demographic factors. Heavy traffic, increased real estate values, and new business establishments along this corridor have affected the agrarian setting of the Richterkessing farms.

The extant buildings at the Ralph and Ella Richterkessing farmstead consist of the main residence (MO-1919-A) and several agricultural outbuildings including the barn (MO-1919-B), a smokehouse (MO-1919-C), a garage/shed (MO-1919-D), a chicken coop (1919-E), a secondary barn (MO-1919-F), and a grain shed (MO-1919-G). The variety of buildings, and their construction materials and techniques suggest they were erected over many years in response to changing demands of an evolving farm in continuous operation. Some outbuildings were constructed shortly

14. Milton Rafferty, *Atlas of Missouri* (Springfield, Missouri: Aux-Arc Research Association, 1970), 9; and Erin McCawley Renn, "An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Missouri German Architecture," in *A Guide to the Tours*, Vernacular Architecture Forum, Tenth Annual Meeting, St. Louis, Missouri, comp. Osmund Overby (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1989), 63.

after the residence was built; however, the main barn directly to the east is one of the oldest outbuildings and may predate the Richterkessing house. Its mortise and tenon construction and hand-hewn beams reflect labor-intensive barn raising traditions that persisted for generations, therefore its possible the barn is associated with the previous residence at the site that appears on the 1875 plat map. The stone smokehouse with a frame lean-to addition, a relic from the days of home meat processing, is more serviceable as a shed today.

The buildings at the Ralph Richterkessing farmstead are in a fair state of preservation and minimally altered. Architectural elements like the quatrefoil windows and some interior woodwork have been removed from the residence, but the damage could be reversed. The agricultural operations at the farm have subsided and the growing urban environment surrounding the buildings continues to threaten its demise. Relocation, and perhaps adaptive use like that of the smokehouse, may enable a future for the Richterkessing residences. The landscape along with the residences have been modified somewhat, yet they provide a glimpse of Missouri-Germanic architectural heritage and link this place to another period and way of life.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Original Architectural Drawings:

No original plans or drawings are known to exist.

Early Views:

No known historical photographs are available.

Interviews:

Ehlmann, Marilyn [Great Granddaughter of Henry Richterkessing and Great Granddaughter of Henry Meyer]. St. Charles County Historical Society, St. Charles, Missouri, Interview with Stacy Sone and Toni Prawl, May 10, 1993.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Missouri Highway and Transportation Department (MHTD) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funded this study on the Richterkessing Historic Complexes in coordination with the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a requirement of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. Both the Erwin Richterkessing farm and the Ralph Richterkessing farm will be directly impacted by MHTD's construction of the Interstate 70/Route 115 (370) Extension interchange (Job No. J6I0879D) at the sites. Provisions for the resale and relocation of the Richterkessing houses also are part of the Memorandum of Agreement between the four agencies.