

Through the Gateway:

John F. Dieterle

(1862-1930)

By: Chelsea Miles

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Picture provided by Eastern Idaho Death Records.

John Dieterle had been born a German, but he was hoping to die an American. He and his wife Anna had been sailing on *The Wisconsin* for about two weeks and were ready to reach New York City.¹ John was especially anxious to get Anna to shore soon; she was pregnant with their first child, the start of their family.² Once ashore, they could make their way towards Utah.

John and Anna had started the year 1892 in Israel where they were married.³ By September, they were making their journey to America, right in the midst of the second wave of immigration.⁴

For most of the immigrants, the American economy was enticing and opportunities were plentiful. But John and Anna immigrated for another reason. In 1887, John was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Anna was baptized in 1888.⁵ Coming to America meant that they would be able to join the Saints in Utah. Coming meant they could be sealed in the Salt Lake City temple, and they would be able to have an eternal family.

John knew that just landing in New York would not mean the end of their first journey. They would have to go through the long, immigration process on Ellis Island, a process that many had already had to face in order to gain access to America. But he would worry about that when the time came. For now, he wanted to take care of his wife and his child.

Johann Friedrich Dieterle was born May 10, 1862 in Germany to Jacob Fredrich Dieterle and Magedelena Frey. He was their second child, and only one of three to live past age 8. John knew now the importance of eternal families.⁶ Only he, his brother Georg and his sister Magdalene were still alive. His father had died in 1873, shortly after moving to Israel; his mother died in 1888. John wanted to be

¹ Marriage to Susanna Gloor documented by Eastern Idaho Death Records. Name "Anna" confirmed by United States 1900 Census.

² Birth month and year of Clara Dieterle taken from United States 1900 Census.

³ Marriage information provided by ancestry.com. Marriage year confirmed by United States 1900 Census.

⁴ Information provided by *Ellis Island* by Wilton S. Tifft.

⁵ Baptism information confirmed from Church Membership Records.

⁶ Information taken from familysearch.org and ancestry.com. Confirmed by Eastern Idaho Death Records.

sealed to Anna in the temple, but he also wanted to do his parents' temple work. Magdalena had been baptized a year before John, but Jacob died before receiving the gospel.⁷ John knew that more than one eternal family would be sealed once he and Anna got to Utah.

"Anna, look! There it is."

John shook his wife from a light sleep to show her what had glimpsed into his eye line. From a distance, the statue did not seem as big as he thought it would be.⁸ By the time they were passing beneath Liberty's upward stretch, John felt intimidated by the massive statue, but he also felt pride. She was beckoning them closer, inviting them to join her. John felt Anna grab his hand. He looked down to see her smiling. He knew that she was thinking the same thought that was racing through his mind.

We've made it.

Once the couple was allowed to leave the ship, John tried to help Anna off the gangplank, but his own legs wobbled as his feet touched the ground of Ellis Island. They made their way towards the Great Hall, where the medical examinations and registration process would begin.

In 1890, the United States government took control of immigration. The influx of immigrants had caused uneasiness, mostly for health problems, and the U.S. government set up new procedures for passenger examination. Ellis Island, an immigration port-of-entry, was built and opened January 1, 1892, just nine months before John and Anna would arrive at its doorway, waiting to enter the country.⁹

After making the two-week long journey across the Atlantic, passengers would enter the Great Hall and would file into lines in the Registry Room. The lines were partitioned by metal pipes, but years

⁷ Parents' information taken from new.familysearch.org.

⁸ The Statue of Liberty was dedicated in 1886 and is 305 feet, 6 inches. Information provided by www.statueofliberty.org.

⁹ *Ellis Island* by Wilton S. Tifft.

later the pipes were removed and benches took their place. This was because the metal pipes made the room resemble animal pens.¹⁰

The Great Hall was sometimes referred to as “The Hall of Tears.” The fate of the passengers was held in the hands of legal administrators and medical examiners. The slightest cough or indiscretion could deport a passenger or a loved-one. The first experiences of American life were stressful and, in the case of those deported, traumatic. But for these people, the registration was just a small sacrifice to make in order to receive entry.

The prodding and probing of the medical examination was conducted in two rounds. The first examination weeded out those who may have any potential diseases. They were marked with chalk on their right shoulder and were held for more examinations. Those who did not receive the chalk mark were free to move to questioning. The second round of examinations helped inspectors weed out the unhealthy, but most immigrants did move on towards the registration clerks.¹¹

The registration clerks’ questioning gave some passengers the opportunity of a clean slate. By changing their foreign name to a more American-sounding name, passengers believed they would have better opportunities in America. But not all changed names on the records were done by choice. Sometimes the clerk had a difficult time understanding the passenger and would just write down what was heard, not necessarily what was correct. Following the initial name question, passengers were asked questions such as their nationality to how much money they had to any previous criminal history.¹²

Once the questioning was finished, the passengers went to retrieve their baggage and left Ellis Island as new Americans.

¹⁰ Information provided by *Ellis Island: Your Family History Through America’s Gateway* by Loretto Dennis Szucs.

¹¹ *Ellis Island*, Szucs.

¹² *Ellis Island*, Szucs.

John and Anna searched for their luggage among the thousands of carpet bags, satchels and trunks. John thought about his experience with the registration clerk. His accent combined with the excited noise in the registration room had made it difficult to communicate with the hurried clerk. This had previously been a problem when John and Anna were added to *The Wisconsin's* passenger list.¹³

Despite the mistakes in record keeping, John and Anna had made it through registration. They were free to travel towards Utah.

Mid-October of 1893 was a busy time for John and Anna Dieterle. They celebrated their one-year anniversary of coming to America. They celebrated their daughter Clara's first birthday.¹⁴ They were sealed in the Salt Lake City temple; the day before, Jacob Dieterle's baptism and confirmation were completed and a week later, Jacob and Magdalena's sealing was completed.¹⁵ John's American dream, an eternal family, was just beginning.

After the birth of their second child, John and Anna moved to Rexburg, Idaho, where they had another six children.¹⁶ John worked as a blacksmith in Rexburg. He and Anna were members of the Rexburg 2nd ward for the rest of their lives.

The death of their son Alma George in 1914 was hard¹⁷, but their temple sealing years previous, just one year after reaching America, had ensured that John and Anna would see Alma again.

¹³ According to the Ellis Island Passenger List, John Dieterle is referred to as J.F. He and Anna are also identified as being Swedish. However, the years and the ages match and the fact that John and Anna are listed as husband and wife make it possible for this record to be used as a source.

¹⁴ Confirmed through United States Census of 1900.

¹⁵ Temple ordinance information gathered from new.familysearch.org.

¹⁶ Information gathered from United States Census' of 1910 and 1920.

¹⁷ Information gathered from new.familysearch.org and ancestry.com. Confirmed through 1910 and 1920 census.

John died December 18, 1930 from acute nephritis, kidney disease. He was buried in the Rexburg Cemetery, where his gravestone still displays his personal American dream. Above his name is one word: Father.¹⁸

John Dieterle was born a German, but he died an American.

¹⁸ Information gathered from Eastern Idaho Death Records.

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