

Notes on DeBoom History

(DeBoom, Marsily, Gerhardi families)



Caroline Regine Christine Marsily
DeBoom with Baby Emma 1885

It was the custom of the successful merchant class European family, beginning in the 1700s and up to W.W. II, to ship out to foreign shores their younger sons in order to set up prosperous branches of the home operation that would contribute to the family financial strength. They would be a part of the tremendous expansion of overseas mercantile trade that resulted from the Industrial Revolution. In addition, those families that had the courage and optimism, as well as the economic wherewithal, emigrated within Europe as opportunities arose. Many examples of these moves are well known. Perhaps the most famous are the Rothschilds that branched out from Frankfurt to Paris, London and Vienna and, in the process, elevated themselves out of the bankers and merchants level to the aristocracy of these four countries. A merchant banking family with which I had some tenuous connection, in that I consulted in some half dozen of the more than 100 companies in their fold, was the Wallenbergs in Sweden. They came from Hamburg in the very early 1800s along with the large migration of journeymen artisan, technically competent, Poles, Germans, Dutch, French, English and Scots that filled the vacuum in Sweden following the enormous deaths of the last of the Black Plagues.

The De Booms and Marsilys, in a much simpler and bourgeois way, were part of both these migrations. A branch of the Marsilys moved to Northern Italy and took the name of Gerhardi (by marriage, I assume). Some of these moved in the early 1800s to the East Coast of the USA where one, an engineer, has been credited with supervising the first successful laying of the North American cable to London in the 1870s. A younger member of the American branch - ____ Gerhardi, was appointed to the Naval Academy in 189_ and retired as a Rear Admiral/Captain in _____. A second offshoot emigrated from Italy to Russia, probably in the 18__ and set up a successful brick making factory in Minsk. Remnants of this branch fled to Britain in the Revolution in 1917. One member, Walter Gerhardi, became a popular radio commentator in political news in the 1920's. In 1952 and 1953 his cousin....¹

¹ Comment by Chris: Emma documented her relationship with the Gerhardis in her "History of the Witzel Brothers." The English Gerhardis continued to correspond with her until she died in 1965. She saved some of their letters and, including her cousin's vivid description of sleeping in a bomb shelter in October 1940, shortly before the London Blitz. When we lived in London in 1954-1955, we met some of them and today I am in contact via e-mail with Dave Gerhardi whose grandmother, Alice, corresponded with my grandmother, Emma.