

Migration from Germany to Illinois

Name	Place of Origin	Date Immigrated/ Place Landed	Place Settled
Johann Friedrich Christian Stolt (1830- 1880)	Pomerania, Prussia, German Confederation	About 1854 (According to death certificate)	Elgin, Kane, Illinois

Johann Friedrich Christian (Fred) Stolt (1830-1880)

Fred Stolt was born in 1830 in Hohenwarth, Grimmen, Pommern, Prussia which is a very small village in Northern Germany near the Polish border. Hohenwarth currently has only 45 inhabitants and was likely quite small when Fred lived there.

Fred's father, Johann Christian Stolt, had moved to Hohenwarth from a village to the north called Karnin. The Stolt family can be traced in the records of Karnin as far back as 1685, showing that the family had deep roots in that region of Pomerania. Because John later appears in records as a tenant farmer, it is likely that he was granted or leased a small plot of land to work. All of the Stolt children, including Fred, were born in Hohenwarth.

Fred's Childhood

Fred's life, as the son of a tenant farmer, was defined by hard work, strong religious traditions, and a steady yet almost impoverished country lifestyle. His family relied heavily on the estate owner, and the village community offered support, but there was little opportunity for advancement.

Hohenwarth had no school of its own, so Fred would have walked the two miles to Stoltenhagen, where the village schoolmaster taught catechism, basic reading, Lutheran hymns, and a little arithmetic. Lessons were held only in winter, when farm work slowed. Many tenant farmers' sons learned just enough to read but not to write, and it seems that Fred remained functionally illiterate—something later reflected in his U.S. census record.

Fred Stolt was the fourth son so had virtually no possibility of inheriting the land tenancy, which would go to the oldest son. To complicate matters, Pomerania had just gone through a period of bad harvests, falling grain prices, rural debt, and growing poverty during the Agricultural Crisis of the 1840s. As Fred neared 20 years old, he was faced with no real opportunities in Pomerania. In addition, Fred was facing conscription in the Prussian military.

Military Conscription in Prussia

The Prussian military service followed a rigid timeline: registration and a medical exam at age twenty, two to three years of active duty until about twenty-two or twenty-three, reserve service through twenty-six, and then another twelve years in the Landwehr militia. In practical terms, Fred would have been called up around 1850. For young men of his background, military service was something to avoid if possible—discipline in the Prussian army was notoriously harsh, with corporal punishment, relentless drills, and severe officers. Class bias made conditions even worse for the sons

of farmers and laborers, who received the fewest privileges and the most menial assignments. And the obligation didn't end after active duty; men could still be summoned for militia training, internal security, or wartime mobilization for years afterward. The prospect of being drawn into conflicts during a period of European instability only heightened the fear and resentment many young men felt toward conscription.

At that time, many Germans had already immigrated to America, and the Midwestern cities had thriving German communities. Although no records exist of Fred's family or neighbors emigrating, he likely learned about opportunities in America despite growing up on a farm in a small town.

Migration to America

Fred Stolt immigrated to Illinois about 1854 (according to his death certificate) and arrived in Elgin about 1857 (according to his obituary). Fred had three older brothers, but there are no records of them emigrating. Since no passenger list has been located, it is not known whether Fred came to the United States alone or with someone else. It's also not known why he ended up in Elgin.

In 1854, Fred Stolt's journey from Pomerania to Illinois would have followed the typical mid-century immigrant route. He likely traveled from Bremen to Bremerhaven by road, then boarded a sailing ship bound for New York, a voyage that lasted 40–60 days. After disembarking at the New York docks and passing through the early procedures of Castle Garden, he would have continued inland by rail from New York to Albany and Buffalo, then crossed Lake Erie by steamer to Detroit. From there he would have taken the rail line to Chicago, and finally the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad to Elgin. The entire journey usually required 6–8 weeks at sea and another 7–12 days in America, for a total travel time of roughly 7–10 weeks from departure to arrival at a port.

We don't know at this point whether Fred spent some time in Chicago before traveling west to Clintonville (South Elgin). We do have records, however, that place Fred as a butcher in Clintonville in 1857 and later in Elgin.

[Fred's life is discussed more thoroughly in the Biographical Sketch.]

Augusta Weber (1846-1936)

[Augusta's migration journey and childhood are told in Chapter 10 about the Weber family.]