

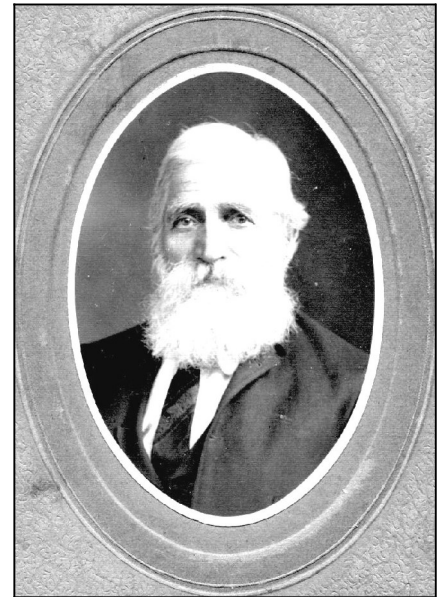
Your First Martin Ancestor in America: Soldier, Farmer, and Father

by Larry Martin © 2003, 2005

If you are reading this article, you or someone in your family, are likely a descendant of Herman and Mary Martin. This article is about Herman Martin's parents: John and Julia Martin, our first Martin ancestors in America. NOTE: The accounts of John's adventures and experiences are told in his own words in a newspaper article entitled "Soldier Boys of '61 Story No. VII," which appeared in the Galesville Republican, a newspaper in Galesville, Wisconsin, date unknown, but likely from the late 1880s. John was living in Bancroft, Nebraska at the time the article was published. The text of the original article is at the Appendix of this booklet.

John Martin was a German immigrant who lived a colorful, exciting and long life. Born and raised in Germany, he left home as a young man for a new life in America. He lived in Canada, the United States, invaded Mexico, fought the Indians in Arizona, California and Oregon, traveled to Panama, and returned to the United States to settle first in Wisconsin and later Nebraska. He enlisted in the army three times, was a shoemaker who became a farmer, married twice and fathered eight children before he died on February 27, 1914 at the age of 87.

John Martin was born in Prussia (Germany) on April 4, 1827. His father was Conrad Martin and his mother's name was Hilda. We don't know if there were other children in the family, or anything about Conrad's occupation or what interests or skills he might have passed on to his son John. But by age twenty, John had learned the shoemaker trade.



John Martin

Apr 4, 1827 - Feb 14, 1914

It was at age twenty, in 1847, that John decided to leave Prussia for North America. John claimed he did not leave Prussia to escape military service. That's probably true, although as it turned out, he saw plenty of military service with the United States army over the next several years. Prussia had a strong tradition of military service for its young men, and at the time there was considerable warring among various factions within the country. The 1840s was a period of considerable migration from Europe to North America, and John might have been caught up with dreams of adventure, opportunity, and a better life. The ship on which he immigrated landed in Quebec, Canada. This was a brief stop as he then went on to Chicago where he worked a

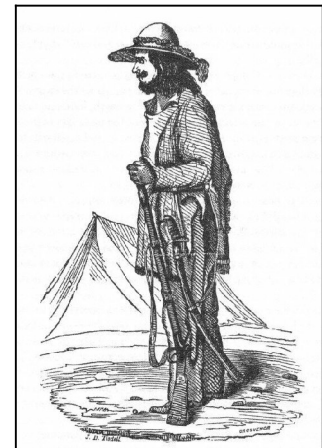


St. Louis, Missouri (with the Mississippi River in the background) as it looked about 1847, when John Martin lived and worked there.

month at his trade of shoemaker before moving on to St. Louis, where he continued to work for the next six months as a shoemaker. St. Louis was an attractive destination at the time because there were a number of small factories in St. Louis which employed German-speaking immigrants.

By now, the United States had become involved in a war with Mexico. The United States and Mexico disagreed over the border between the countries, and Mexico never recognized Texas as a separate territory. There were many in the United States who felt that it was our destiny to expand our western borders all the way to the Pacific Ocean. In doing so, the U.S. could acquire the land which is now Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and California which, at the time, was part of Mexico. In May, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico. Congress approved a call for volunteers to serve for a year in units to be formed by the southern and western states, which included Missouri. The governor of Missouri called for Missourians to support the war against Mexico and encouraged young men to enlist in the volunteer military units being formed. The appeal to patriotism and military service caught the attention of many German immigrant young men. In addition to the motivation of patriotism and a meaningful way in which to serve their newly adopted country, many saw enlisting as a volunteer as an opportunity to better integrate into the American way of life, and finally, while not specifically promised, there was the presumption that a government bounty in the form of a land grant might be a reward for the year of military service.

Motivated by these factors, and just a few months before he turned 21, John Martin enlisted in Lieutenant A. Allen's Detachment of Recruits of the Missouri volunteers at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis on December 22, 1847. He and other enlistees from the area were later sent to Fort Leavenworth just to the west of the Missouri border in Kansas where their units would be further organized and trained. The volunteers were not part of the Regular U.S. army. Individual volunteers were expected to bring what they could in the way of suitable clothing and other gear. The army would provide weapons, ammunition and canteens. There are reports that some German-American volunteers arrived decked out in their own uniforms of grey coats and matching pants with a yellow stripe down the seam, and displayed their patriotic enthusiasm by singing rowdy German songs. The training provided to the volunteers by the Regular army personnel consisted of only the most basic of discipline, drill, and tactics.



A representation of a non-regular army Missouri volunteer. (From Museum of New Mexico)

Based on his military service records, Private John Martin was assigned to Lieutenant Abram Allen's Detachment of the Infantry Battalion of Missouri Volunteers. This infantry battalion was also known as Easton's Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Alton R. Easton. This unit along with other Missouri volunteer units and those from other states, were combined with a core of Regular army units to form the Army of the West commanded by Colonel (later Brigadier General) Stephen Kearny. Forces of the Army of the West had departed Fort Leavenworth nearly a year earlier and captured the Mexican city of Santa Fe in New Mexico without a battle or

opposition. U.S. army forces in the Santa Fe area required periodic re-supply and new personnel to relieve those whose enlistments had expired. According to John Martin's military records, the date of his "mustering into service" began on April 22, 1848. That coincides with the departure of his unit from Fort Leavenworth. Just shortly after his 21st birthday in April 1848, Private John Martin and approximately 500 other soldiers in his unit, began the long (approximately 800 mile) overland march through Kansas and along the Santa Fe Trail destined for Santa Fe, New Mexico. Their unit was accompanied by 500 army-contracted civilian wagons loaded with provisions and ammunition. Each wagon was pulled by five oxen driven by two civilian teamsters.

While the Santa Fe trail was well known, it was not always easy to navigate or negotiate. There were vast stretches devoid of trees where nothing but tall prairie grasses or dry, bushy sage could be seen. Rarely was there a settlement or farm. The heavily loaded wagons encountered difficulties in sinking nearly to their axles in the soft earth, and crossing streams presented other problems. Often the soldiers were required to "act as horses" to assist in pulling the heavily loaded wagons. The infantrymen had particularly difficult times with sore feet. The heat and dust over the prairie and the gnats and mosquitos near the river crossings as well as the periodic thunderstorms added to their marching and camping discomfort.

Water was not always plentiful and wood for cooking meals was difficult to find most of the time. Buffalo chips were used as a substitute for firewood, but its smoke tended to impart an unpleasant odor and taste to the cooked food. Government rations and the meals prepared along the march did not always satisfy the volunteers. Some would supplement their meals with whatever was available: buffalo, rabbits and turkeys, and perhaps wild berries and fish when they were near a stream. After weeks of hot weather, thunderstorms, lack of water, inadequate rations, broken wagons, and other discomforts, many of the volunteers wondered if they would ever encounter the Mexican soldiers they had come to fight. They would not. By the time John's unit arrived in Santa Fe, in mid-August, after nearly a four month march, it was clear that the war (now being fought deep into Mexican territory) was essentially over.

With the end of the war imminent, many of the volunteers were released from their enlistment. After eight days of rest in Santa Fe, John Martin was discharged on August 20, 1848. He saw opportunity in enlisting in the Regular army. He applied and was accepted as a Private in the Regular army with the U.S. Cavalry for a five year enlistment. During this term of service, from 1847 until 1854, he saw duty in New Mexico, Arizona and the California territory - mostly patrolling. This, for him, was a period of adventure and rich in experience. He was initially assigned to Company C of the First Cavalry Regiment, and was stationed at Albuquerque, New Mexico for a year. From there the unit's primary mission was to control the Indians by ensuring that they remained on lands to which they had been assigned. His unit scouted for Indians who might be causing problems and to "protect" citizens from them.

John relates one of his early patrols: "At one time a detachment of 15 men were sent out to the Sacramento mountains. It took us from noon to the next morning to climb the mountains. At the top the view was fine and there was timber, water and grass in abundance. We scouted around

until late in the afternoon. We saw but two Indians. They were fired upon, but whether or not the shots took effect we never learned. The reds fled into the timber and there we found a trail. Going down the mountains we got a good view of the Indians hid in the rocks. There were many savages and they got pretty busy with their rifles. Finally we charged them and two of our men received slight wounds. Farther down we came to a place where there was a straight cliff 300 feet high. A narrow trail led down and as we descended, the Indians appeared above and commenced to roll rocks down on us. These we managed to dodge. As we were nearly out of provisions, we returned to the fort.”



A unit of U.S. cavalry soldiers such as the one to which John Martin was assigned as a Private in the Regular army (Cavalry soldiers were also known as dragoons, soldiers trained to fight on horseback.)

In July 1849, John was one of 39 men from his company which were sent to California to escort some government officials. The unit had about 150 mules and each mule packed about 350 pounds. As they were passing through central Arizona they came upon a peaceable Indian village where the Indians were threshing wheat by tramping it out by foot. But a little farther along their route, other Indians were encountered: “Our next experience was an eight-day-and-night fight with Indians. We captured the chief, but he escaped. So long as we had the chief the Indians did not fire on us.”



Representation of a cavalry soldiers' camp which they would set up each night as the unit traveled to locate Indians.

John's unit had to cross the Colorado river between Arizona and California, so the men improvised a ferry by placing boards across two canoes and lashing them together, but a tragedy occurred and "in the crossing we lost our captain and four men by drowning." About this time, they ran short of provisions and were facing a march across the Mojave desert. It was about 90 miles to the nearest water point. They loaded the pack mules with water and the men were placed on half rations. "We got through after considerable hardship" and they reached the outpost of Santiago, California where they remained for the winter.



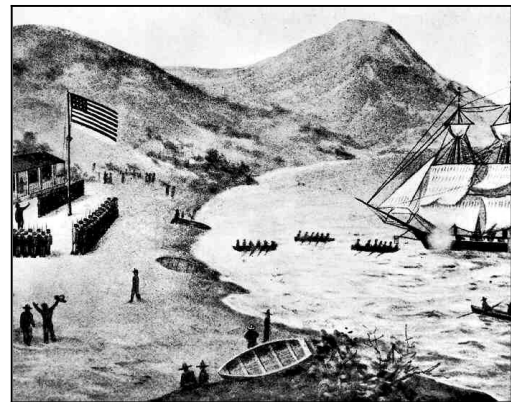
Barracks at a duty station representative of the 1850s period where enlisted men like John Martin had their bed and kept their gear.



A dining hall at a duty station such as one John Martin might have eaten his meals, circa 1850s.

With the arrival of spring, John was transferred to Company E which, along with two other companies marched back over the same road across the desert. At some point, John was one of 30 soldiers ordered to go to Yuma for provisions. They had gone about half the distance when they were attacked by 300 Indians. "We had but 20 rounds of ammunition [each], so we could fire only when it would be the most effective. We lost seven men and we estimated that we killed 50 of the redskins, including their chief."

It wasn't long before John's unit crossed the desert for a third time. This time his unit was going all the way to San Francisco. The Indians along the southern Oregon coast and northern California were not cooperating with authorities and were resisting being sent to a reservation land farther north in Oregon. So, John's unit was placed aboard a ship which sailed northward from San Francisco to a bay on the southern coast of Oregon known as Port Orford. The army was to round up the Indians and convince or force them to go to the reservation.

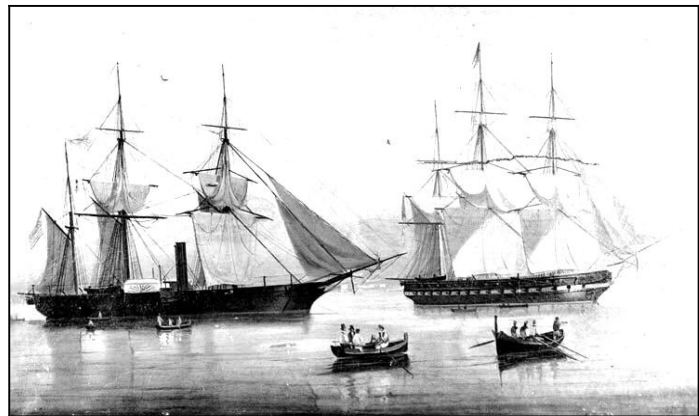


Representation of Army barracks near San Francisco, 1846 where John Martin might have been assigned.



The bay at Port Orford, Oregon where John Martin went ashore about 1852. Photo taken 2000.

The ship carrying the army troops anchored two miles off shore of Port Orford. John and his fellow soldiers from the sailing ship were transferred into “whale boats” to row themselves to shore. The local Indians were watching from the high rocks on shore and began firing at the boats. The boat John was in capsized and he and the others clung to the boat until the wind finally drifted them to land.



Representation of U.S. Navy ships off-loading soldiers into whale boats to be rowed the two miles to shore at Port Orford, Oregon, about 1852

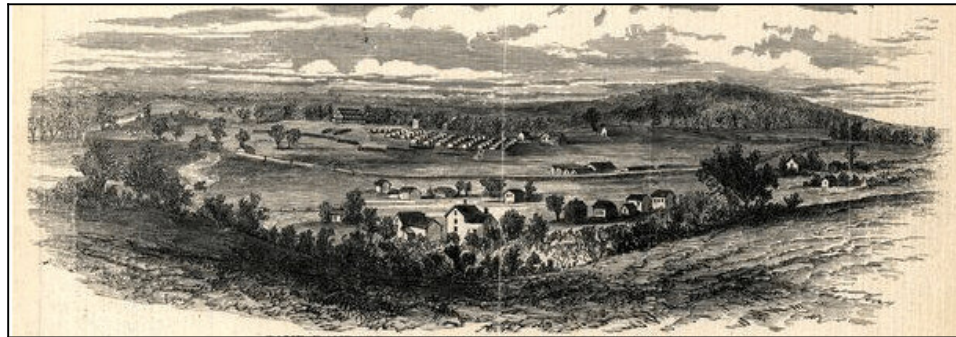
John and his unit scouted for Indians during the next two weeks and then returned to California overland. In all,

John relates that he “spent nearly two years chasing Indians in Oregon and California.”

While stationed in California, John completed his five year enlistment in the Regular army. He was discharged in San Francisco in August 1854. “I got my discharge and \$100 traveling expenses. I left San Francisco on ship on the return trip, crossed the Isthmus of Panama and then on to New Orleans.” He had to cross the width of Panama by land as the Panama Canal did not exist at that time. It would not be built until 60 years later. From New Orleans, John went up the Mississippi by boat to St. Louis, and then on to Chicago and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. “A few weeks later I started out to look for land and finally located in what is now known as Crystal Valley, near Galesville [Wisconsin].” As a veteran of two enlistments in military service, he was eligible to acquire some farmland from the government. We don’t know for sure if John ever resumed his trade of shoemaker, but at some point, he became a farmer on the land he acquired in the area. He soon met and married another German immigrant, Millie (or Mina) Gratzuioher or

Gratzuohrer). They were divorced in October 1857 and had no children, according to John's military pension records.

Between his divorce from Millie Gratzuioher and his later marriage to his second wife Julia, John had the opportunity for further military service. The Civil War in the United States broke out between the South and the North in 1861. Again, the states were called upon to form military units and for their men to volunteer for service. Once again John enlisted in the army, this time to fight in the Civil War on the side of the North. He volunteered for a three year enlistment and entered the service from Gale Township, Tempealeau County, Wisconsin in September, 1861 as a Wisconsin volunteer. He was eventually assigned to Company C of the 30th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment. The 30th was organized at Camp Randall near Madison, Wisconsin and was formally mustered into service on October 21, 1862. During the time John was assigned to the 30th Regiment, its mission was primarily to provide guard and security duty at army installations in the state.



Artist representation of Camp Randall as it appeared in 1862. John Martin was assigned here during his Civil War service October 1862 - December 1863.
(Wisconsin Historical Society)

John served for 15 months, but this time his military experience was not a good one. Illness among the soldiers was very common during the Civil War, and accounted for more casualties than actual battle. John became very ill with Scarpulsus (apparently an infection of the throat and lungs), and while he was being treated in the hospital at Camp Randall, he reportedly got in some trouble. An entry in the Company Book reported that another soldier accused John of stealing money from him in the hospital. We don't know the validity of the accusation, as no formal charges were ever brought against John.

John was discharged at Camp Randall, Wisconsin on December 1, 1863. His discharge papers identified John as 35 years old, 5 feet 4 ½ inches tall, dark complexion, black eyes, brown hair, and a farmer by occupation when he had enlisted in 1861. The surgeon, in John's discharge papers, stated that John had contracted Dyptheria in June, 1863 which was followed by Thyroid fever, and "has been on the decline ever since that time." The surgeon acknowledged that, "Previous to the time he was taken sick he was considered a very healthy man." But now the surgeon wrote that, he found Private Martin incapable of performing the duties of a soldier because of "Paraplegia contracted at camp Randall, Madison, Wis while in the line of duty in the

month of June 1863. At present, he is totally disabled and in my opinion never will recover.” John himself relates that, “I was discharged from the service because of sickness.”

Following his discharge from the army, John returned to his farm home near Galesville, Wisconsin. It was there that he met and married his second wife, Julia Hirsch. John and Julia were married in Galesville by a Justice of the Peace on March 22, 1864. Their first child, Minnie, was born eleven months later. The eight children of John and Julia were:

- Minnie Elizabeth Martin (b. Feb 17, 1865; d. May 11, 1951 at age 86)
- William Frederick Martin (b. Aug 18, 1866; d. Jan 18, 1932 at age 65)
- Johnie Edmun Martin (b. Oct 22, 1868; d. 1879 at age 11)
- Herman Albert Martin** (b. Apr 28, 1870 in Council Bluffs, IA; d. Oct 31, 1934 in Dalton, NE at age 64)
- Edgar Franklin Martin (b. Apr 13, 1874; d. Sep 1934 at age 60)
- Amelia May Martin (b. Sep 16, 1878; d. Apr 21, 1976 at age 97)
- Ervin John Martin (b. Dec 22, 1880; d. Dec 19, 1967 at age 87)
- Elmer J. Martin (b. Feb 20, 1887; d. 1891 or 1892 at age 4 or 5)

At some point, John and Julia moved from Galesville, Wisconsin to Clinton County, Iowa where they lived for a year. Their son Herman was born in Council Bluffs. The family moved across the Missouri River into Nebraska and homesteaded in Boone County before moving on to nearby Washington County. The U.S. census of 1880 shows the family living at Fontanelle township, Washington County, Nebraska. The family finally settled in Bancroft, Nebraska a few miles to the northeast in Cuming County. Bancroft was on the southern edge of a large Indian reservation. Bancroft was served by the railroad and grain, cattle and hay were shipped out by the local farmers. By 1909, the town had reached its peak population of 1,000. The community had a complete array of the usual businesses as well as a planing mill, flour mill, and wagon makers.



Bancroft, Nebraska, circa 1909, as it probably appeared when John Martin and his family lived on a farm near the town.

John was a farmer and eventually lived out his later years in the Bancroft area. But even in later life, John wasn't finished with the U.S. Army. For almost the remainder of this life, he ran an ongoing dispute about his military pension for claimed disabilities. He was denied a pension in 1894, granted a pension in 1897, declared ineligible again in 1900, and began receiving pensions again in 1907 of \$30 per quarter. His wife Julia continued to receive military pension payments after John died in 1914. John's pension payments finally ceased when Julia remarried in 1917.



The farm home of John and Julia Martin near Bancroft, Nebraska, circa 1910.



John and Julia Martin at their farm house near Bancroft, Nebraska circa 1910.

Julia Hirsch, who became John Martin's second wife, was born Julia Sophia Hirsch on June 16, 1849 in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. Her parents were William and Katrina Hirsch. Julia came to the United States with her parents when she was eight years old. The family located near Lacrosse, Wisconsin.

Julia married John in Galesville on March 22, 1864. She gave birth to eight children, the first in 1865 and the last in 1887. Soon after John's death in 1914, Julia moved to Dalton, Nebraska to be near her sons Herman and Ervin, who had moved to Dalton a few years earlier. She subsequently remarried, as was a common practice for widows in those days to ensure some degree of security. She married Mr. A. G. Weaver October 17, 1917, probably in Dalton, and they lived on a farm eighteen miles southeast of Dalton.

Julia died in Dalton on December 24, 1924, at the home of her son Herman, following two weeks of illness. Her obituary in the *Dalton Delegate* of December 26, 1924 relates: "Mrs. A. G. Weaver passed away at the home of her son H. A. Martin, Wednesday morning at 8:15, death being caused by old age with pneumonia as a contributing factor. She became ill about two weeks ago and was brought to the Martin home, and had maintained since arriving there that this was her last illness, that her death would occur on Tuesday. Knowing the end was near she made all plans for the funeral and the burial of her body." When she died her Martin family consisted of six living children, thirty-three grandchildren, and four great grandchildren. The obituary concluded, "The death of Mrs. Weaver means the passing of another of the pioneers of Nebraska. She was of a quiet, retiring disposition, a home-lover in every sense and her passing will be mourned by a large circle of friends who join the *Delegate* in extending sympathy to the bereaved in their dark hour." According to her wishes, her funeral was held at the Trinity Lutheran church in Dalton, that six of her grandsons serve as pallbearers, and that her remains, accompanied by her son Herman and Mr. Weaver, were transported to Bancroft, Nebraska and placed beside her first husband John Martin.



Julia Sophia (Hirsch) Martin
Jun 16, 1849 - Dec 24, 1924

John Martin had died nearly ten years earlier on February 14, 1914 in Bancroft, Nebraska. The obituary in the March 6, 1914 *Bancroft Blade* newspaper included this account: "Another of the Civil war veterans passed away last Friday night, when John Martin died at an age of eighty-six years, ten months and twenty-three days. The deceased passed through many dangers during his long life and his strong constitution showed itself also in his last illness, pneumonia, against which he battled for twelve days, finally however succumbing to the bitter foe, death." The obituary concluded: "May his death remind us all that the hour of our death is appointed as was the hour of this good old man, and lead us to prepare ourselves, as that at any time, we might be ready to face the judgement of the Lord." Services were conducted at his home, the Lutheran Church, and the Bancroft cemetery.

The remains of both John and Julia rest in the Bancroft cemetery. They are the first members of our Martin family to have arrived in America and from whom our own families have derived their existence through their son Harman Martin. John Martin came to this country seeking opportunity. He was accustomed to nineteenth century Prussian/German military traditions and he stood ready and willing to serve his new country in military uniform. He acquired and farmed the land, working hard to earn a stable living and, with his wife Julia, provided a wholesome environment of old country traditional values in which to raise his family.