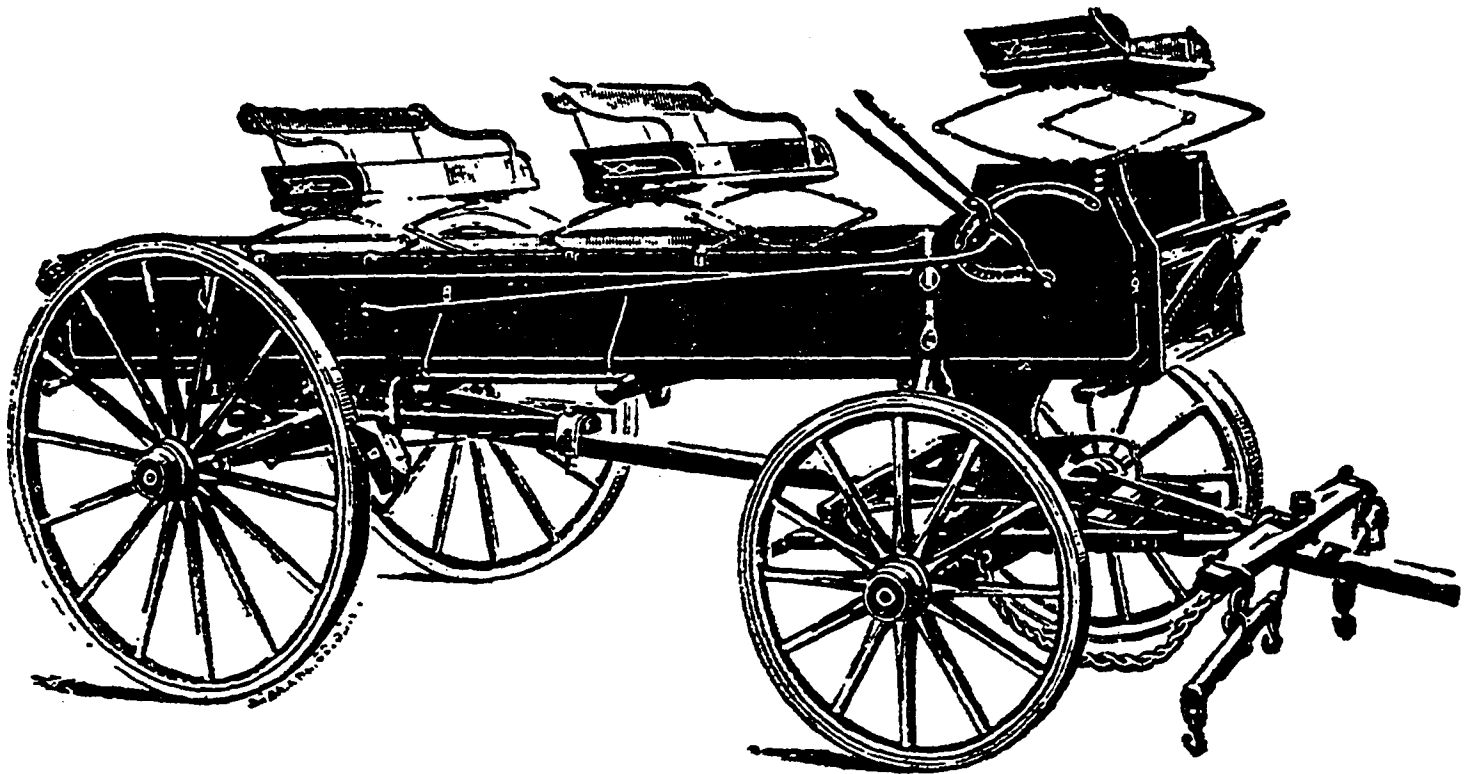


LOUIS ESPENSCHIED AND HIS FAMILY

By Lloyd Espenschied



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BY LLOYD ESPENSCHIED

*Grandson of the early wagon builder
who is the subject of this article.*

Louis Espenschied and His Family

BORNE ON THE FLOOD TIDE OF MIGRATION into St. Louis in 1840 was a young German wheelwright. Events proved him to have come to the right place and at the right time, for St. Louis was experiencing a phenomenal growth with a rapidly rising demand for wagons and their animal motive-power. The opportunity for the newcomer proved to be an extraordinary one, and he himself uncommonly capable of embracing it, thereby contributing to the winning of the West and to the Northern cause in the Civil War. Through it all, Louis Espenschied¹ stuck to his work at hand, avoiding publicity, and hence is generally unknown today; but "By their fruits ye shall know them"!

The success that was to be his mitigated against the business being carried down in the family as was done in the slightly subsequent family of Studebaker of Indiana. Louis Espenschied's children were educated and brought up amid the *nouveau riche* of St. Louis, whereby they eschewed the lowly making of wagons! Upon Louis's death in 1887, the Espenschied wagon business went to a younger contemporary, Henry Luedinghaus, who merged it with his own to form the Luedinghaus-Espenschied Wagon Company. Older St. Louisans may still recall the large red-brick buildings and piles of lumber of that plant, located on the west side of North Broadway, No. 1721, corner of Mound Street, running through to Eighth Street. The earlier establishment of Espenschied had been a few blocks north, at No. 1815 North Broadway, southwest corner of Hempstead Street.

OUR SUBJECT WAS BORN JANUARY 25, 1821, in one of those picturesque villages that dot the Rhineland, namely Oberhausen on the Applebach, in the Rhine Palatinate, some twenty miles south of Bingen-on-

1. The singular family name Espenschied comes from a hamlet of that name in the middle Rhine Valley located on the border between the Rheingau and Nassau. The Espen part means aspen, the aspen tree; the schied or scheid part denotes a water-shed boundary, generally forested, whereby it came to mean also a woods. Hence the name means simply an Aspen-woods.

Rhine.² (Ironically enough, this beautiful countryside today is the West's great Rhineland defense bastion.) Louis (Ludwig) was the fourth of ten children of Johann Peter Espenschied and wife Maria Philippina Spies. The parents had been born, grown up, and married all while their countryside was occupied by the troops of the French Revolution and Napoleon. Remembrance of this, along with continued population pressure and renewed political unrest in the tightly-bound Rhineland, must have supplied the "push," and the attraction of great new lands in the Mississippi Valley the "pull," that sent young Espenschied westward. A cousin of Louis's mother, Jacob Spies (1817-1908), of the same countryside, following the deaths of his parents set out to try the New World, whereupon he was joined by Louis.

The two travelers arrived in the Port of New York on April 20, 1840, on the U. S. Packet Ship *Charles Carroll* out of Le Havre, northern France.³ Our two young immigrants appear to have gone inland by the Erie Canal and Great Lakes. Louis tarried in Chicago, while Jacob went on to the St. Louis area, where a brother had already gone, as well as other landsmen—followers of Duden⁴. Hearing from Jacob of the favorable outlook there, Louis followed him, settling in St. Louis proper to ply his trade, while Jacob went over to the Illinois side to join the German community at Belleville,⁵ later settling at Marine, Madison County, Illinois. Our two young citizens-to-be appear to have been the kind of newcomers observed

2. The birthplace of Louis and his siblings, a large stone house with mansard roof, said to have been built by the Rheingrafen, is pictured in the writer's booklet, "The German Background of the Espenschied-Esbenshade Families," 1938, 53.

3. The date and place of landing is given in a short biography of Jacob Spies in *The History of Madison County, Illinois*, published by W. R. Brink & Co., 1882, Edwardsville, Illinois, 498. Knowing this, identification of the ship was possible through the National Archives, Washington, D. C., by means of their extensive collection of passenger lists of ships arriving at New York in the mid-1800's. The passenger manifest of the U. S. Ship *Charles Carroll* reveals the two names: Ludwig Hespenshit age 19, and Jacob Speiss age 22, among those from Rheinbeyer or Rhine-Bavaria. The ship *Charles Carroll*, as she stood up New York Bay in a stiff breeze in 1835, is the subject of a painting by J. G. Chapman and of an aquatint by W. J. Bennett, an original print of which is in the Print Room of the New York Public Library, Stokes Collection, E. 39.

4. Reference is made to the famous *Bericht* or Report by Gottfried Duden, published in Elberfeld in 1829, which so glorified the lower Missouri Valley as to bring many Germans to the St. Louis area, starting in the 1830's.

5. Jacob Spies (1817-1908) stayed in Belleville only until the following year, 1841, when he returned to his native land relative to an inheritance. In 1843 he came back, married, bought a tract of land in Madison County, Marine Settlement, where he settled. Later he was a partner in the Valier-Spies Flour Mill of Marine. A brother had come to America in 1838 and settled in Marine, Louis Spies (1819-1880). Another brother, Friedrich (1822-1911), also migrated and became a lawyer in St. Louis. Of Jacob Spies's nine children, the eighth, Jacob Alfred Spies, spent some time in Germany, came back, and married in Marine a German-born cousin, Anna Spies (1861-1960). They removed to Iowa and helped establish the hamlet of Graettinger.

in St. Louis in 1840 by the British author-traveler J. S. Buckingham when he wrote that: "... the most valuable description of emigrants are found here, especially Germans who bring with them from 100 to 500 dollars in gold for each family, with sober and industrious habits and great economy."⁶

In those days almost every hamlet across the land to the receding frontier had its blacksmith and wheelwright, much as today about every cross-roads has its automobile service station. "The smith, a mighty man is he," sang Longfellow, and he was mighty economically as well as physically, for the smith not only shod horses but did all kinds of iron work, and many, skilled in the wheelwright craft, built wagons.

In getting started in his adopted land Louis naturally worked for others. While so engaged, we find him listed in the 1842 St. Louis City Directory as a "journeyman blacksmith" at 152 North Second Street. The following year, he mustered the courage to start out for himself, we learn from his later bill-heads. Evidently he began as a blacksmith and undertook wagon making as the opportunity afforded. It was not long before Louis Espenschied was hitching his wagons to the star of the western horizon, as it were! From the cart for river-front haulage, to the ordinary farm wagon, to the heavy Conestoga-type wagon for overland freighting; from wagons made on order to wagons stocked for immediate sale—that was the way the business developed. His advertisement in the 1859 St. Louis Directory, featured by a cut of a Conestoga wagon, carried the notice: "Keeps constantly on hand a variety of LARGE FREIGHT AND FARM WAGONS." The ordinary farm wagon, which could be a covered wagon as well, probably was his "bread and butter," and the large freighter the cream of his enterprise.

Having managed to establish his own business in 1843, Louis took unto himself a life partner. On January 26, 1844, "Loudwig Espenschied and Catharina Weber" were married, according to the record of the Reverend Frederick Picker of the Evangelical Protestant Church, on file at the St. Louis Marriage Bureau. She was the daughter of Conrad Weber and wife Maria Katharina nee Paul of Carondelet, who, with their children, had come over in the 1830's from the Palatinate of the Rhine, Village of Zeiskam. The father, Conrad, had undertaken the development of a fourteen-acre tract on the Mississippi River in lower Carondelet, including the building of a home and construction of docks, when he died in 1849, probably in the cholera epidemic of that year. Son-in-law Louis guided

6. Buckingham, J. S., *The Eastern and Western States of America*, London, 1842, Vol. III, 127-28.

the widow in the settlement of the estate, which included a sub-division of the tract in 1853. This was the time of the boom in the railroad as well as that of the steamship along the riverfront, whereby the widow and her children were rewarded from Conrad Weber's enterprise. A further sub-division gave rise to a new street from which present Espenschied Street takes its name in southern Carondelet, running westward from the riverfront.⁷ Louis had been in his adopted land not much longer than the required time when he applied for citizenship, his naturalization record being dated March 30, 1847.

WAGON TRAINS COULD TRAVERSE THE VAST PLAINS westward of the Missouri River before any roads were built, because the ground was relatively flat and firm and practically treeless. As early as the 1820's traders began to freight goods by wagon over the ill-defined trail that ran from the Missouri River bend southwest to Santa Fe. All manner of vehicles were used, including the large Conestoga-type wagon, with its boat-like body and sway-back canvas cover, together with smaller versions of this famous Pennsylvania overland carrier.⁸ Initially these "prairie schooners" were made mostly in the East, especially in Pittsburgh.⁹

As for the wagons used by the Army in the Mexican War, 1846-47, and

7. St. Louis Recorder of Deeds, Plat Book 5, 65, a plat of 1859 entitled "Espenschied & Weber's Dry Dock Depot Addition . . . City of Carondelet," which shows Espenschied Street for the first time.

8. The Conestoga wagon, named from an Indian tribe in what became Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, has been said to have been a "truly American product" (Bryan Hamilton, "The Conestoga Wagon," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, XIV, 405-11). The Pennsylvania Farm Museum of Landis Valley points to an English prototype wagon pictured on page 16 of the book by Sell & Weybright: *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, 1955. But English sources attribute the covered wagon to Germany (Trupp, G. A., *The History of Coaches*, London, 1877, Plate 4 entitled "The Ordinary German Farm Wagon"). Joan Parks, in *Travel in England in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1925, 7), suggests "the four-wheeled wagon was probably introduced from the Low Countries" in the sixteenth century. The Germans, in turn, credit the Romans with having originated the heavy four-wheeled wagon (von Ginzrot, John Christian, a work published in Munich, 1817, referred to by Thrupp, *op. cit.*, 17). We do find Roman covered wagons in Ucelli, Arturo, *La Rotta E La Strada*, Milano, 1946. The covered wagon thus is of ancient origin on the Continent, and the famed Conestoga wagon was a modern adaptation.

9. Gregg, Josiah, in his *Commerce of the Prairies*, 1844, says: "The wagons now most in use upon the prairies are manufactured in Pittsburgh; and are usually drawn by eight mules or the same number of oxen" (University of Oklahoma Press, 1954, Vol. I, 35, Max Moorhead, editor).

"The wagons employed in the Santa Fe trade were of the old Conestoga pattern, with sail-cloth covers stretched on bows, manufactured in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania" (Hughes, John T., *Doniphan's Expedition*, 1907, 630, Appendix G, William E. Connelley's notes).

In *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*, by James Josiah Webb, edited by Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale, California, 1931, 129-30) one reads of wagons made in Pittsburgh, the larger ones loaded with 5,500 pounds.

in the trains supplying frontier forts during the Indian troubles, we learn from the National Archives, Washington, D. C., that: "An examination of a number of wagon contracts during the period between the Mexican and Civil Wars indicates that the Army purchased most of its wagons in New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh."¹⁰ Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, however, Espenschied and associates were to bring to St. Louis a substantial Army wagon industry, as will be seen.

A second natural route across the western plains from points along the Missouri River was north-westward, generally out along the Platte River to the Rocky Mountains, and thence again northwest to Oregon, or west to Great Salt Lake and California. It was the emigrants who took wagons in numbers over this route, beginning in 1843 with those bound for Oregon. Then came the Mormons destined for Salt Lake, followed by the Gold Rush horde of 1849-50. The wagons used were both heavy freighters (which experienced difficulty in crossing the rivers and mountains), and the smaller covered wagon with its square box-like body. Both were prairie schooners, the smaller one, more easily handled, being in the majority, judging from contemporary pictures.¹¹

Strangely enough, it appears to have been a religious sect that gave Louis his first considerable business in "prairie schooners." When the Mormons sallied forth westward from Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846, bound across the vast plains toward the Great Salt Lake, they were desperately in need of wagons. They themselves built most of them, it seems, but they were obliged also to call upon others. The oldest grandchild of Louis Espenschied, old enough to have known him and to have heard family lore at first hand, has written: "Grandfather had made wagons for the Mormons when they left Illinois, and had made a special box on the back to hold fruit trees ready to plant."¹² That Louis continued to supply wagons to the Latter Day Saints is indicated by this entry in their accounts, dated May 16, 1855: "Paid \$2,000 to Louis Espenschied and Co. for Wagons,"

10. Letter to the writer from the General Service Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C., dated April 19, 1956. A further inquiry concerning such army wagons as may have been made by Joseph Murphy during the Mexican War period failed to disclose any information (letter of March 8, 1960).

11. Dunbar, Seymour, *A History of Travel in America*, 1915, note under Figure 370, Vol. IV. Covered wagons used in Montana in the 1870's and 1880's, of both the heavy freighter ox-drawn type carrying 8,000 pounds, and the lighter 2,000 pound mule-drawn wagon, are the subject of contemporary photos by L. A. Huffman in the book, *The Frontier Years*, by Mark H. Brown and W. R. Felton (Henry Holt & Co., 1955), 170-180.

12. Mrs. Max J. Koeck, nee Lucille Overstolz (1876-1948), daughter of Philippine Espenschied and husband Henry Overstolz (Mayor of St. Louis, 1876-81), in letters to the writer in the 1940's. Pictures by Huffman, referred to in footnote 11 above, indicate that a box trough hung on the wagon back was common practice.

signed "John Wardle and Erastus Snow." These wagons would have cost about \$100 each, so there were evidently some twenty of them in this purchase. The Salt Lake City historian who kindly supplies this record has explained that "In May of 1855 there were a large number of our people crossing the plains who had come from England by way of New Orleans to St. Louis. Mr. Snow and Mr. Wardle had charge of fitting out these companies at St. Louis."¹³

The great wagon movement over the central route during the 1849 California Gold Rush must have pressed into service all manner of wagons collected from the Missouri countryside, or rushed from Eastern suppliers. Louis Espenschied's product was probably well represented. The sudden "Americanizing" of California enhanced intercourse with the Missouri frontier and was to lead to the trans-Mississippi railroad following the Civil War. In the meantime, trouble with the Mormons in 1857 brought United States troops into Utah to insure the acceptance of a United States-appointed governor, thus increasing traffic over that route and encouraging the formation of wagon express companies.

The now famous firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell is said to have started operations in 1855 with 300 wagons, and by 1859 to have increased its transportation facilities to 3,500 wagons, 40,000 oxen, and 4,000 men, in order to handle the government freight to Utah.¹⁴ Horace Greeley, the noted New York editor, on his western journey of 1859 (which led to his famous injunction "Go West, Young Man"), upon reaching Leavenworth, Kansas, exclaimed over "Such acres of wagons! such pyramids of extra axle trees! such herds of oxen! such regiments of drivers and other employees!"¹⁵ Whence came all these facilities? The wagons probably came mostly from the larger Eastern manufacturers, shipped down the Ohio and up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers; but there must also have been a goodly representation of St. Louis builders, including Espenschied.

Almost simultaneously with the Utah wagon bulge there occurred another gold rush, that to the Pike's Peak region starting in 1858. The following year Russell and Jones started operating from the Missouri River to Denver

13. A. W. Lund, then assistant church historian, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, in a letter of June 9, 1943.

J. Thomas Scharf, in his *History of St. Louis City and County*, 1883, says: "About 1850-51 St. Louis was a favorite rendezvous of the Mormons on their way to the west," and quotes from a contemporary newspaper article (587-88).

14. Majors, Alexander, *Seventy Years on the Frontier*, published 1893, reprint of 1950, 143; Billington, Ray Allen, *Westward Expansion*, Macmillan, New York, 1948, 636.

15. Greeley, Horace, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859*, New York, 1860, 47-48.

the "Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company."¹⁶ This appears to be "The Express Company" which Henry Villard of St. Louis, early in 1860, said "intends to start a fast freight in the course of a few weeks."¹⁷ It must have been that express company or some competing outfit that was reported to be using Espenschied wagons in the following news item from the *Daily Missouri Democrat*, Tuesday morning, January 31, 1860, under the section entitled "City News":

The Pike's Peak Fast Freight Line and Rocky Mountain Express, ship their pioneers and outfits on the Isabella today, on the Missouri river. Their wagons are all new, manufactured in this city by the celebrated maker, Louis Espenschied. They go out to make stations and prepare the way for the immense migration that will start this spring for the new Eldorado."¹⁸

For partisans of a given make of wagon it was a common boast in those days that the so-and-so make of wagon was the only one that could go to the Pacific Coast and back on its own wheels. The writer has heard this said of Espenschied wagons, which causes one to wonder if the prairie schooners of those days were like Oliver Wendell Holmes' "Wonderful One-Hoss Shay"—so perfectly built that it lasted a century, and then

"Went to pieces all at once—
All at once and nothing first—
Just as bubbles do when they burst."¹⁹

Not yet ready to burst were the wagons that carried the slogan "Pike's Peak or Bust," but some of their owners are reported to have returned "Busted, by God!"²⁰

Many were the wagon ventures that headed westward across the plains from various settlements along the Missouri River. One such started in 1861 from well up the river, at Nebraska City, to establish a more direct route to Fort Kearny on the Platte. One of the participants later described the "Wagons Used" in these words:

The freight wagons used were the Murphy and Espenschied, made in St. Louis, and the Studebaker, made at South Bend, Indiana. These

16. Settle and Settle, *Saddles and Spurs*, 1955, 28-29.

17. Villard, Henry, *The Past and Present of the Pike's Peak Gold Regions*, St. Louis, 1860, Princeton University Press, 1932, 154, 158.

18. The essence of this news despatch was reproduced in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* of January 31, 1960, in the Column "Through the Years," under the caption "100 Years Ago—Tuesday, January 31, 1860."

19. "The Deacon's Masterpiece; or, The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay," by Oliver Wendell Holmes, in *The Hub and New York Coachmaker*, a trade monthly, Vol. XIII, 1871, 3.

20. What purports to be the origin of the saying "Pike's Peak or Bust" is given in "The Colorado Gold Rush . . . 1858-59," in the Southwest Historical Series, edited by Leroy R. Hafen, Vol. X, 319.

wagons were constructed especially for the plains transportation business; made of the best timber, wide tracked, strong and tight, high double box, and heavy tired, and covered with heavy canvas over the bows. More of the Murphy make were used than either the Studebaker or Espenschied, although many claimed the Studebaker was the easiest running. Seven thousand pounds was the load drawn by five yoke of good cattle. . . ."²¹

AT THIS POINT in Louis Espenschied's career, just before the Civil War, we might note some St. Louis records which are revealing of his progress. His locations are recalled in the City Directories starting in 1842. By 1847 he removed from downtown to a location northward, then just outside the city, the so-called Bremen District, on Ninth Street near Webster, which is presently Tyler Street.²² The California Gold Rush of '49, with wagon trains streaming across the plains, must have given him a boost, for the listing for 1852 shows that he included a Broadway address. By 1857 his plant was at its final location, 582 Broadway, which was renumbered to 1582 Broadway about 1868. By the latter time, Louis's family was ensconced in a substantial red-brick house across from his plant at No. 813 Hempstead. His advertisement in the 1859 Directory gives his business location as "Between Brooklyn & Hempstead Sts., Opp. the Mound." This was the Great Indian Mound which stood on the riverfront at present Mound Street and extended westward to Broadway, from which St. Louis received its by-name, "Mound City." Louis must have seen the Mound give way to the advancing city, being leveled in 1870, as reported by the artist-archaeologist A. J. Conant.²³

The Directory of 1859, in its "Business Mirror," lists some 65 wagon makers, with two of them advertising, Joseph Murphy²⁴ and Louis Espenschied. The two advertisements bear what appears to be the same attractive

21. Rolf, D. P., "Overland Freighting from Nebraska City," *Nebraska State Historical Society Publications*, Vol. X, 1902, 281.

22. This district, the 10th Ward of 1860, was called "New Bremen" because of its many immigrants from North Germany, according to C. D. Kargau in his *St. Louis in früheren Jahren*, St. Louis, 1893, 46-47. Mentioned are the "plants of Louis Espenschied and of John Cook (who, despite his name, was a valiant German) that turned out thousands of wagons for the Army during the war" (page 47).

23. Conant, A. J., *Footprints of Vanished Races in the Mississippi Valley*, St. Louis, 1879. The Frontispiece pictures "The Big Mound at St. Louis, 1869."

24. Joseph Murphy started his business in 1844, according to James Malcolm Breckenridge in his book of 1932, *William Clark Breckenridge . . .*, 233, in a note on "Freighters' Wagons . . ."; but Murphy appears to have started as early as 1826, according to the article by a great-granddaughter, Emily Ann O'Neil Bott, entitled "Joseph Murphy's Contribution to the Development of the West," in the *Missouri Historical Review* for October, 1952. Strangely enough, however, Murphy is not known to have produced Army wagons during the Civil War, and is not listed in the Directory of 1864.

cut, a covered wagon of the Conestoga type, with the driver cracking his whip over four horses—probably a stock type-founders' item from Pennsylvania.

The progress of Louis, and of his cousin Jacob Spies across the river in Illinois, naturally encouraged the folks back home in Germany to try their luck in the New World. The Directory listing of 1854-55 includes three of his brothers who had arrived and were working with Louis, namely Karl (Charles), Henry, and Peter. Karl had come with the parents, landing in New York and arriving at St. Louis, appropriately enough, on the 4th of July, 1853. Louis had in view for them a farm near the Jacob Spies family at Marine, Illinois, where they bought, and found friendly German-American neighbors. Another son, Jacob, settled nearby, and has left a large progeny.

The United States Census of 1860 records Louis's family on the eve of the great upheaval that was to come, the Civil War:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Value of</i>		<i>Where Born</i>
			<i>Real Estate</i>	<i>Personal</i>	
Louis Espenschied	37	Wagon Maker	\$40,000	\$10,000	Bavaria
Catharine "	36				"
Louis "	14				Missouri
Philippine "	13				"
Charles "	11				"
Frederick "	9				"
Louisa "	2				"
Anna Safel	26				Baden
[servant]					
Mary Schoulter	14				"
[servant]					

Ward 10, Visitation No. 426/432.

[The ages are only approximate, as probably also the valuations.]

Thus one sees that at age 39 (rather than 37 as given), Louis was progressing nicely both financially, and, with his wife, in rearing a goodly family.

With the coming into office nationally of the Republican, or anti-slavery, Party in 1860, Missouri was badly divided. News of the bombardment of Fort Sumter at Charleston, South Carolina, on April 2, 1861, created intense excitement, and was to mark the beginning of the Civil War.²⁵ Before martial law was declared in St. Louis, which was on August 14, 1861, Louis Espenschied and associates went into action for the Northern cause. They proved to be representative of the German element that tipped the

25. The stirring times of the Civil War in St. Louis, during which "almost every day bristled with prominent local events," are described by Scharf, *op. cit.*, Chapter 16.

scales in St. Louis for the Union. Without waiting for the government to ask for tenders, four fellow-manufacturers, headed by Louis, made the following offer to the local Assistant Quartermaster:

St. Louis, Mo. 6 July 1861

To Major J. McKinstry
A.Q.M.U.S.A. St. Louis

The undersigned Wagon Makers of St. Louis propose to furnish any number of Wagons that may be needed by the Department—Viz 6 Mule Wagons 2½ inch Iron Axles 12 inch Box with substantial Wagon beds for the Sum of One hundred & twenty five Dollars each. These Wagons are warranted to carry 5000 to 6000 lbs each and are used by the Freighters to New Mexico & Utah and are preferred to the Army regulation Wagon.

We also propose to furnish the Army Regulation Wagon for 6 mules at the Sum of One hundred and fifty Dollars (\$150) each. All the work we may furnish to the Department will be warranted. Many years experience in making Wagons for the "Great Plains" enable us to make the very best Wagons.

Your Obt. Sts.

(Signed) Louis Espenschied

Jacob Kern

Jacob Scheer

John Cook

The original of this letter was hand-written, of course, and had been submitted in duplicate.²⁶ It was transmitted by Major McKinstry, in a letter of July 8, to Brig. Gen. M. C. Meigs, Quartermaster General, Washington, D. C. The original letter of July 6 bears an endorsement by General Meigs saying: "Order 200 wagons at \$125." There is the further notation, in another hand, "Ordered July 15/16." No time was lost; the preference of the wagon makers as to type was accepted; the transaction was made without competitive bidding, such was the emergency and such the trust.

Evidently the wagon makers worked with despatch, for before the year was out several of them were back seeking more and bigger business, representing, as they said, some twenty wagon makers needing work, for civilian business was at a stand-still:

26. These government records are from the Office of the Quartermaster General, now held by the National Archives, Washington, D. C. The General Services Administration of the Archives has kindly made a "Reference Service Report" about wagons supplied by Louis Espenschied during the Civil War. Dated January 15, 1953, written by Mark N. Schatz of the World War Section, it outlines eight items of information. A microfilm copy of the documents comprising 46 frames has been made, entitled "Records of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92." The importance of wagons to the Union Army is brought out in the recent book, *Quartermaster General of the Union Army*, a biography of M. C. Meigs by Russell F. Weigley (Columbia University Press, 1959), 268-71.

St. Louis 17 December 1861

To Major R. M. Allen, Q.M. U.S.A.

Sir:

We propose to make for the Western Dept. U.S.A. One Thousand more or less (1000) Wagons *complete* same as we now furnish at One Hundred and Twenty five Dollars (\$125) each, *payable the first of July 1862*, the whole work will be warranted.

We refer you to the report of the A. Q. M. as to the good service rendered by our Wagons made in St. Louis, used in transportation by the Army in Mo., while a large number of the Wagons made East have been a serious loss to the Govt. by breaking down on the march and the great cost of repairs.

We represent some 20 Wagon Makers who have now no employment for their hands, their contracts being filled and who are anxious to give their men employment during the Winter.

Very respt. Your Obt. Servants

(Signed) Louis Espenschied

Jacob Kern

James Archer

This letter likewise was referred to General Meigs at Washington, carrying on its back this recommendation by the addressee, Major R. M. Allen of St. Louis: "The wagons furnished hitherto by these parties have been uniformly good, and if freight be added to Eastern made wagons, they have cost less." On the back is also a lengthy endorsement by General Meigs, difficult to decipher, in which he compares prices of Philadelphia and Chicago-built wagons. What became of this offer is not shown by the record, but the St. Louis wagon makers evidently were kept busy.

Such further quartermaster records as exist are of *contracts* that run through 1866 for wagons, and especially wagon parts, reflecting the wear and tear of rough usage. Particularly were wheels in demand; a wagon was no better than its wheels and evidently the local Army people knew where to obtain well-built ones. Although the Quartermaster General's records show many contracts to supply at stipulated prices, they do not include the actual orders. These appear to have been issued locally as the demand arose.

How was it known just what was wanted in the way of detailed construction in this army wagon? Was there a specification covering it? The National Archives people found that there was, and kindly supplied a photo-copy. It takes the form of "Articles of Agreement" for the manufacture of six-mule (covered) wagons, 1864-65. The Specification may have been formulated after Louis supplied most of his wagons, but it is interesting in giving the description and size of all the parts. It even in-

cluded a requirement for interchangeability, i.e., "... the several parts of any wagon will agree and exactly fit those of any other, so as to require no numbering or arranging for putting together. . . ." ²⁷ In addition to making wagons, Espenschied seems to have specialized in making the hardest part, the wheels, producing them by the thousands over the years of the war. The National Archives found that he also "... acted as a surety on numerous contracts for wagons and wagon extras entered into by James Archer and Jacob Kern of St. Louis."

During the Civil War a local emergency arose when, in 1864, the Confederate General Sterling Price invaded Missouri and threatened St. Louis. "The militia was enrolled with the greatest rapidity," and included in the Sixteenth Regiment, Company I, we find: "Louis Espenschied, Capt., John Cook, 1st lieut. . . ." ²⁸ Here are two of the local wagon makers turned soldiers, fortunately without their having to undergo much service, for Price was soon repulsed.

READJUSTMENTS TO PEACE-TIME CONDITIONS there must have been, following the war, but there is no indication of a serious setback in Louis's business. Probably the civilian demand for wagons, suspended by the war, quickly reappeared. But Louis did lose several of his business associates and employees: his brother Herry, one Philip J. Weber, and foreman Henry Damme. These three formed their own firm of wagon makers, known as Henry Espenschied & Company, listed first in the Directory of 1866 as of 448 Broadway. The Directories indicate also that later Henry returned to Louis, while Weber and Damme formed a partnership that became quite successful. ²⁹

Of the post-war period this incident is told: Louis was well acquainted with the officers of Jefferson Barracks (Benton Barracks?), and one evening held a dinner party for them. It being cold, he invited the cab-drivers to come into the kitchen to get warm and partake of food. Among these was Joseph Pulitzer, who was later to become a reporter and famous newspaper man. Louis's son-in-law, Henry Overstolz (later Mayor of St. Louis), recognized the worthiness of the cabby and helped him.

The 1870 United States Census shows Louis Espenschied to have been

27. A cut of a "Six-Mule Team Complete, Harnessed and Hitched to U. S. Army Wagon," is given in the *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861-65*, Plate CLXXIV, Fig. 39, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1893.

28. Scharf, *op. cit.*, 476.

29. Philip J. Weber is listed in the 1870 Census as having been born in Oldenburg about 1828. Brief biographies of his three sons are given in *The Book of St. Louisans*, published by A. N. Marquis & Co., St. Louis, 1912.

worth \$150,000 in real estate and \$125,000 in personal estate. While these figures probably are only approximate, they do accord with the large estate left by him upon his demise in 1887. They reflect earnings on the Civil War wagon business, and increments in investments in land, which started in 1848. With no income tax in those days, with interest rates up to ten per cent, and with rapid appreciation in general, it paid to be industrious, to save, and to build up one's business!

Among his acquaintances there grew an appreciation of Louis's role in providing the vital means of road transportation for the Northern Army in the Civil War. There was drawn up a petition to him, dated February 19, 1870, reading as follows:

With a view to give assurance of the high esteem in which you are held by your personal friends, a number of them desire to perpetuate your likeness on canvass and the undersigned have been appointed a Committee to request you to sit to one of our best Artists for your Portrait. To this end we request of you to signify to us when it will suit your convenience to gratify the wish of your friends in this behalf.

We remain

Very Respectfully,

John M. Krum
Frederick Hill
Ferdinand Bischoff
J. E. Cook
J. P. Colcard
J. P. Vastine
Nathan Cole
John C. Vogel
Joseph Kilpatrick, Committee

Two ex-mayors (Krum and Cole) are to be seen here. Attached to the writer's copy is a list of thirty-six subscribers to the portrait, additional to the committee, headed by Louis's old co-worker, Jacob Kern. Louis's response, dated February 22, 1870, was simply that "... this would be too much honor for me and instead of the Portrait I will forever cherish your letter as a more than sufficient token of your esteem."³⁰ Soon thereafter, however, Louis's son-in-law, Henry Overstolz, prevailed upon him to "sit," and it was before the well-known portrait painter A. J. Conant. Presentation of the canvas to Louis was reported in the *St. Louis Times* of April 28, 1870. The likeness has come down to the present grandson-writer, in whose

30. These manuscripts and other memorabilia have come down through Louis Espenschied's daughter Philippine, Mrs. Henry Overstolz, and in turn through her daughter, Maria, Mrs. James P. Whiteside of Warrenton, Missouri.

home it hangs, a warm reminder of a grandfather whom he never saw in life, but to whom he now has the opportunity of doing honor.

About the same time, April 20, 1870, Louis was petitioned by some fifty-five fellow citizens, "irrespective of party," to "... become a candidate for the position of City Treasurer soon to be filled by special election. We believe that in you . . . are combined the qualifications . . ., namely, competency and honesty," etc. Expressing appreciation, Louis responded, "... business engagements prevent me from complying with your kind request. . . ." ³¹ Although he was well occupied with business, probably there was also his natural modesty and the realization that his lack of education mitigated against a public office. His son Frederick, college educated, did become City Treasurer after serving as Secretary to Mayor Henry Overstolz.

That Louis Espenschied sought to improve his product and in doing so exercised ingenuity is seen in a United States Patent issued to him in 1878, No. 203,821, entitled "Improvements in Vehicle-Axle Lubrication." The invention sought to banish the wagoneer's bane of dry axle by automatic self-lubrication. A grease-box is so disposed in the shoulder or collar of the axle, that the side-wise play of the wheel forces grease through a duct onto the bearing surface of the spindle. Whether the arrangement ever came into use is not known.

THE 1870 CENSUS previously mentioned reveals not only the success of Louis's business, but also something of his household. Listed are the parents, the five children still at home, the mother-in-law Catharine Weber, and three servants. Included are two young women whose names are garbled, but who are known to have been Elizabeth and Catharine Crecelius, orphan nieces of Louis's wife. A sister of these Crecelius girls, Louisa (1847-80) met in the Espenschied home the one she was to marry in 1868, Frank Frenger. Frank was a son of Louis's widowed sister Elizabeth, and caused that branch of the family to migrate into New Mexico as he pursued the Santa Fe Trail. A daughter of his has written:

As to the Espenschied wagons—My father was a post trader in Fort McCrea, N. Mex. (where I was born) and the Espenschied wagons were used in carrying freight across the country from St. Louis. Uncle Numa Raymond also sold Espenschied wagons. He had a general Merchandize business, and was passenger & mail coach manager of the old Santa Fe trail from Santa Fe to El Paso & Silver City, N. Mex. . . . ³²

31. *Idem.*

32. From Amelia Frenger, Mrs. Karl Heckrich (1869-1948).

The Espenschied home at 813 Hempstead Street lay across the street from the back of the wagon plant that faced on Broadway, southwest corner of Hempstead. The opposite corner, northwest of Broadway and Hempstead, Louis had also acquired, and it is remembered by the piles of lumber that flanked the home. The red-brick house afforded a large front living room with its Steinway piano, and a back dining room, served by dumb waiter from the kitchen below, where "... not less than twenty often sat down to table, for our grandparents raised ten children besides their own—and all were well provided for."³³ The same writer has recalled the wagon shop across the way, where "... we loved to roam around the place, no danger of cars and the steady workmen let us see them at work. I can still hear the anvil ring as the hammer came down on the hot iron and the sparks flew." The present author's brother Frederic has recollected, "Grosspapa's shop and its piles of wagon hubs, the fresh odor of oak and hickory and the anvils and forges. . . . To this day I am at home in a shop where wood and iron are fashioned, and the smell of the lumber and the fumes of the forge are sweet to me."³⁴

Indications of Louis Espenschied having been the good citizen as well as the family stalwart are found in the literature: In 1850 he was one of the founders of the "Deutschen Schulverein und die freie Gemeinde von St. Louis."³⁵ For eighteen years he was on the St. Louis School Board.³⁶ He was a founder and director of the North St. Louis Citizens Mutual Savings Fund and Loan Association.³⁷ At the time of his death he was a vice-president of the Fifth National Bank, president of the North St. Louis Mutual Fire Insurance Company, and a prominent member of the Germania Club.³⁸

Following an illness of cirrhosis of the liver and edema of the lungs, Louis Espenschied passed away peacefully at his home on February 3, 1887. His mate, having over-extended herself attending him, caught pneumonia and followed nine days later. In beautiful Bellefontaine Cemetery, overlooking the Father of Waters eastward, these two immigrants are gathered to the soil of their dear adopted land. The estate was largely of realty, which was not sold but divided among the four surviving children. The valuations seem to have been nominal, so that the total value can only

33. Mrs. Max J. Koeck. See footnote 12 above.

34. Frederic F. Espenschied of Washington, D. C., letter of December 21, 1941.

35. Max Hempel, *Geschichtliche Mitteilungen über den Deutschen Schulverein und die freie Gemeinde von St. Louis*, 1900, 6, 56.

36. Scharf, *op. cit.*, 842, 844.

37. *Kennedy's St. Louis City Directory*, 1859, Appendix 24.

38. St. Louis newspaper obituaries, February 3, 6, 1887.

be surmised, but it appears to have been on the order of a half million dollars. Right well did this modest immigrant do!

THE CHILDREN

TO COMPLETE THE PICTURE of the Louis Espenschied household, we take a brief account of the children:

1. Louis (1844-71), the oldest child, was sent to a German university to complete his education. He returned with his health impaired and in a few years died. His father thought it a mistake to have sent him abroad.
2. Philippine (1847-1925) showed artistic talent as a child; an imposing blonde, she became a social light of the city as the wife of Mayor Henry Overstolz in their imposing home at 3439 Washington Avenue. They had six children who also made the social welkin ring. Her husband, a widower when she married him, was the age of her father, and died in 1887. Philippine married again, Dr. Otto E. Forster, without issue.
3. Charles (1851-1926) started with Nash & Smith in the tea, coffee and spice business. Upon marrying Achsah, daughter of Stephen Gardner, he went into her father's business of flour milling, later taking over operation of a mill at Hastings, Minnesota. Upon retiring in 1926 he wrote for *The Northwestern Miller* "Some Random Recollections." Returning to his St. Louis home at 3500 Washington Avenue (diagonally cross from the Overstolz-Forster home), he became a City Councilman, and fathered a bill to take the city hospital system out of politics. Charles and his wife had two daughters, Louise and Ruth.
4. Frederick F. (1856-1908), favored and talented, graduated in 1875 from the St. Louis Law School, now part of Washington University. Fred, as he was called, started as private secretary to his brother-in-law Mayor Henry Overstolz, became City Treasurer under Mayor David R. Francis, and was State Senator 1891-93. He married a name-sake, Clara M. Espenscheid of Brooklyn, New York, and they had three children: Frederic F., Clare, and Lloyd, the present writer. Unfortunate in investments, he died prematurely.
5. Louise (1860-1940), the youngest, attended Vassar a year, and married a scion of a wealthy family, Henry V. Lucas. They had one child, "Little Henry." Louise divorced her husband; he lost his fortune; she married again, William C. Clopton, so-called "Judge," a violin collector. She, her son, and second husband, lie in the Bellefontaine plot with her father, as do her sister Philippine and brother Frederick.

EPILOGUE

THE PRESENT GRANDSON-WRITER, along in the 1930's awoke to an interest in his forebears, for one thing because of his unusual surname. He had been born in 1889 in Baden, North St. Louis, and remembered most happily a boyhood of rod and gun. When but twelve, upon the failure of his dear father, he accompanied his mother to her parents' home in Brooklyn, New York. There he became active in radio and electronics, entrancing subjects which took him abroad and enabled him to ascertain the German background of his family.³⁹ Returning to St. Louis in 1937-38 to trace the American family pattern, he found his birthplace atop the hill at 8317 Halls Ferry Road existed no more. The adjoining Catholic Church and Parish of dear neighbor Father D. S. Phelan was still there, but run down. The cemeteries alone seemed unchanged! Driving downtown along Broadway, he discovered the original Louis Espenschied wagon plant and home were gone. There did still exist the big red-brick group of buildings of the Luedinghaus-Espenschied Wagon Company at Broadway, corner of Mound; but, alas, the place was deserted. The office at 1721 North Broadway bore the tell-tale sign "For Lease!"

Reflecting upon the changes that occur within a life-time in this swiftly moving age, he entered the office, and made the acquaintance of the only person there, a watchman, who let him look around. The place was stripped of everything. Only in the cellar was there anything—a pile of rubbish ready to be thrown out. But wait—there were interesting-looking papers. Sorting the few that were not damaged, two items were rescued:

1. A wagon catalogue, entitled "Descriptive Catalogue and Price List of the Celebrated LUEDINGHAUS AND ESPENSCHIED WAGONS," which was published about 1902. Remarkably descriptive it is, with its 101 pages, half with illustrations and half with dimensions and prices.
2. A form letter under the firm's letterhead, seemingly the final one, dated July 4, 1934, reading in part: "We have discontinued the manufacture of farm wagons and have dismantled our plant, and wish to dispose of all our machinery."

From this it appears that the type of wagon last to be manufactured was the mundane *farm* wagon. Its passing meant the "end of the road" for the industry, as well as for this particular company. The animal-drawn vehicle had come a long way from its ancient appearance on the banks of the Euphrates and the Nile; and now, this letter echoed "finis" on the banks of the Mississippi.

39. See footnote 2 above.

