German finds niche in food business

Grocery earns reputation with butter barter system

Gerhardt Heinrich Frederich Fienning was born near Osnabruck, Germany, His father was a landless farmer who hoped to protect his sons from cons-

cription into the kaiser's army Henry Tiemann worked with the Fienning family on the same large farm until he emigrated to the

United States in 1884, Three years later, after establishing himself in Richmond, Tiemann sponsored the Fienning family to join the growing colony of Germans in Indiana.

The family crossed the stormy Atlantic in steerage class, the lowest priced fare available. They

Richmond remembers

By Mary Ellen Donat



rode in the lowest portion of the ship, an area normally reserved for cargo. The family was forbidden to go up on deck during the 13-day voyage because young Gerhardt had measles.

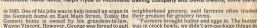
When the family arrived in Baltimore, immigration officials changed 6-year-old Gerhardt's name to George Henry Frederick Fienning. The family settled in Richmond and the father began working at Gaar-Scott, a local manufacturer. Less than two years later, he died of typhoid fever

George's widowed mother, Katherina, moved her family into three rooms in the back of a home on Liberty Avenue. In a small garden in the back yard, she grew vegetables to feed her three children.

"They ate cabbage, rice and turnip soup," said George's son, Richard, "They didn't have any meat, so to speak. That was out of the question.

Katherina became a respected midwife who assisted in the births of many area children. Her eldest son, 14-year-old Charles, worked at Gaar-Scott and 10-year-old Elizabeth quit school to look after George and help with the housework. When George

was 13, he quit attending St. John's parochial school to work at Duning's Bicycle Shop. George began working for Starr Piano Company



the job in 1905 because of health problems. George married Frances Von Pein and they had nine children. He built up an A&P route and sold groceries from a horse-drawn cart. On June 28, 1909, he

opened a grocery at 11th and South D streets with partner, Oscar Nolte. The family home was at 1011 S. Eighth St. "We all had our turn working at the grocery," said

Esther Fienning Youngflesh One of the jobs given the children was to kill and

pluck chickens, sometimes 50 at a time. Mary Ellen Donat is a Richmond native who writes a weekly column on local people, places and events of the past. Oldest son, Richard, who eventually owned the



The grocery at 330-332 S. 11th St. was owned by Oscar Nolte, far right, and George Fienning, second from right. Others in the picture are, from left, unidentified, Mr. Cox, a flour salesman for Richmond Roller Mills; Ralph Hyde of Richmond Baking Company and David Owens, store clerk.

> their produce for grocery items. "Farmers brought butter and eggs in. The butter

garine sticks. Some call it progress.

to get the butter.

was in crock bowls, we didn't pre-package things in

that time." said Richard. "We got 150 to 200 pounds

of butter in a week, and had a market for every bit of

it. We knew where it was coming from and what we

Richard Fienning operated the store until he re-

tired on April 30, 1976. Changing times forced the

store to close. By then, Richmond had moved past

times of fresh butter in crocks to pre-packaged mar-

were getting. People would come from all over town