

# *SISTERS*

*JOSIE AND MINNIE*



*BY*  
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*2005*

From Irving Berlin's  
"White Christmas"

## SISTERS

SISTERS, SISTERS  
THERE NEVER WERE SUCH DEVOTED SISTERS  
NEVER HAD TO HAVE A CHAPERONE, "NO SIR,"  
I'M THERE TO KEEP MY EYE ON HER,  
CARING, SHARING  
EVERY LITTLE THING WE ARE WEARING...  
ALL KINDS OF WEATHER,  
WE STICK TOGETHER,  
THE SAME IN THE RAIN AND SUN.  
TWO DIFF'RENT FACES,  
BUT IN TIGHT PLACES  
WE THINK AND WE ACT AS ONE.

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# FOR MY SISTERS

Jane  
Mitzi  
Joan

# INTRODUCTION

## THE PARENTS OF THE SISTERS

For the history of the sisters to begin, some background of their parents would be helpful in order to understand them. For that reason I begin with Carl Friedrich Kuhnert and Wilhelma Wiggenhorn, the sisters' parents.

Carl was born in Northern Germany, 10 August 1822, the exact place is unknown. However, when he received his citizenship in McHenry County in 1854 he renounced and abjured all allegiance and fidelity to the German Duke of Brunswick. You might think with that information it would be easy to trace his parents. Not so.

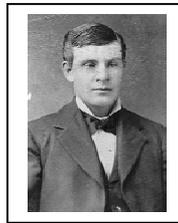
All efforts to find them have been unsuccessful. And so the story about him either deserting the German Army or the fact that he didn't register for conscription still stands as the only explanation for his cutting all ties with his native country.

In checking the Kuhnert name, however, wild

stories abound about why he arrived with money. He did not come without funds.

1854 was not the earliest written mention of Charles. He is on record of being an early settler of McHenry County in 1848.

The picture below of Charles is probably the earliest one I have. The writing on its back is in old German Script.



As you can see, he was a very good-looking young man. From a passport application in 1866, we have this physical description:  
Stature 5 feet 9 inches  
Hair light brown  
Eyes blue  
Forehead high  
Nose and mouth ordinary  
Chin round  
Complexion light

On June 10, 1850 there is a record of an Irish priest, John Healy, marrying Charles Coonheart and Wilhelma Wiggernhorn in Watertown, Wisconsin. Coonheart would be the phonetic spelling of Kuhnert.

Subsequent records indicate this marriage took place at the Buena Vista House where a German church was set up temporarily before the German church, St. Henry's, was built and before a German priest arrived in Watertown. This is the first mention of the Wiggernhorn family. How and where Charles met Wilhelma has not been established. But we know much about the Wiggernhorn family.

Wilhelm Wiggernhorn and his wife Josephine Brockhaus arrived in Watertown in 1848 from Schoeppingen, Germany where he had been a postmaster. He came with his family of 8 children in the wake of a revolution in Germany.

After landing in New York, they traveled by land and rail to Watertown where he bought the Buena Vista House in 1849. Wilhelm and

Josephine with their family ran the hotel for many years and it became the meeting place for the illustrious German Speaking 48ers of Watertown.

His eldest daughter was Wilhelma, no doubt named after her father. Remember in 1848 Charles Kuhnert was already in McHenry County as an early settler.

The earliest picture I have of Wilhelma is a daguerreotype. These early photos were in use until 1851.



Notice in this picture, which has been retouched, that she is not wearing a wedding ring. Therefore I think it is safe to assume this was taken just before she was married or directly after.

After the wedding, Charles took his bride first to Belvedere and then in 1857 to McHenry County and the Village of Woodstock.

## MORE ON THE WIGGENHORNS

As mentioned before, Wilhelm Wiggernhorn who later became William settled in Watertown, WI in 1848. He was fifty-one years old when he arrived with his wife Josephine and eight children.

Previously he had been a merchant and a postmaster in Schoeppingen, Germany.

What man had such a strong belief in himself and his convictions that there would be a better life in this strange country that he would transport his whole family to a wilderness?

What wife had so much faith in her husband that she would agree to all the hardships of a long sea voyage that would certainly confront them?

Their children ranged in ages from 26 to 9. The eldest three were girls; the oldest son was 20. Our ancestor Wilhelma, named after her father, was the eldest girl.

Josephine came from a family of seven sons and five daughters. Five of them died before age 10, one was illegitimate, and two,

including Josephine, immigrated to America.

Her father was 52 when the last child was born, and her mother was 41. Neither of her parents lived to be very old.

She was born in Stadtlon, a town close by Schoeppingen. Her father Engelbert Bechhaus was a well-educated man and served as mayor of Stadtlon.

The Watertown family of William Wiggernhorn prospered. In 1861 a son August became an apprentice watchmaker and had his own jewelry business at age 21.

Two brothers, Eugene and Constanz, encouraged by their father to begin making cigars, became prominent tobacco merchants referred to as tobacconists. This was a very lucrative business at that time. It only required a modest investment and when these sons were not helping their father in the hotel, they made and sold these cigars. The company was first located in the Buena Vista House and was called the Wiggernhorn Brothers.

They prospered to such an extent that soon they had a beautiful three-story building employing 50 people and became the second largest manufacturer of cigars in Wisconsin and expanded to Montana.



This was the age of the fabulous cigar store Indian which was prominently displayed outside. The Wiggernhorn Brothers had an outstanding example of a majestic warrior that was six feet tall, stood on a pedestal, and was appropriately feathered and beaded as well as being completely gilded. In the picture below is the cigar store Indian in all its glory.



On September 6, 1871 William and Josephine celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary with their seven surviving children and thirty-nine grandchildren. The eldest daughter Wilhelma Kuhnert had died a short time before on 14 July of that year.

William died at age 80 in 1876 but Josephine lived to be age 96. She was one of Watertown's celebrated residents and perhaps the oldest inhabitant of this area at that time.

Her obituary was glowing about how she possessed all her faculties up to the time of her death. The following is a quote from her death notice.

“The deceased was a genuine ideal of the respected German woman and to write about her rich heritage in both worlds would fill entire volumes.”

At one time it was written that the Wiggernhorns “comprise a goodly portion of the best families in the town... Not one of them scores a bad record. They were highly valued for their integrity.”

## THE BUENA VISTA HOUSE A FAMILY SURVIVOR

Wilhelm and Josephine arrived in Watertown, WI in the month of October 1848. He spent several weeks with his family of 8 children on a farm before he bought the Buena Vista House from Henry Boegel. He paid \$1650 for the hotel and the lot. A deed dated October 18, 1848 records the lot cost as \$650.00.

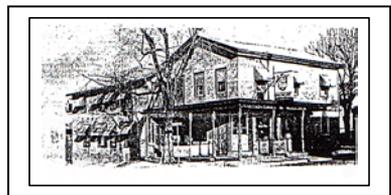


The Buena Vista House was not complete at the time the Wiggenhorn family arrived. Mr. Boegel began to build it in 1847 and named it from the time he served under Zachary Taylor in the two-day battle of Buena Vista against Santa Ana in the Mexican War. When Wilhelm Wiggenhorn bought it in 1848 it soon became a mecca for German immigrants known in Watertown as the German Speaking 48ers.

Probably the hotel first became famous when arrivals from Germany gathered together to celebrate the Revolution in Germany.

There was a parade with the procession culminating at the Buena Vista House.

The hotel itself was decorated in black, red, and gold in keeping with the German colors. A sumptuous meal was served by the Wiggenhorn family and later there was dancing in the ballroom. This glorious activity cemented the reputation that was to become in the future one of the finest German restaurants almost without equal. The only other that had such a reputation was one in Milwaukee. Now William was the entrepreneur to lead the hotel on a long history.



The completed Buena Vista House at the time William Wiggenhorn bought it.

Its sixteen rooms were carefully tended to by Josephine and the girls. It is said that the Buena Vista House quickly acquired an

outstanding reputation not only for its good food and lodging but also for the graciousness of its owner.

It became the popular gathering place for German intellectuals “and young men about town.” It was the meeting place of the “first men’s club for the nobility from Europe.”

It even became a makeshift church that had a direct influence on our personal history. I believe Wilhelma Wiggenhorn was married to Charles Kuhnert there by the Irish priest Fr. Healy whose spelling of Kuhnert ended up phonetically Coonheart in 1850. Surprisingly, Charles Kuhnert was a Lutheran and Wilhelma was a devout Catholic. Charles must have been very persuasive for, at that time, mixed marriages were possibly forbidden.

I also believe that Wilhelma’s sister Rosalia was married at the same time, setting a precedent for a future wedding of another pair of sisters.

Rosalia married Rudolph Diesel also in 1850. Rudolph and Rosalia stayed in Woodstock after Charles and Wilhelma left for

Waukegan. Rudolph became quite famous as a Trustee of Woodstock for sixteen years and a member of the School Board for ten years.

The Buena Vista House has gone through many transformations throughout the years. William continued with the proprietorship until his health prevented his continuing. He then sold it to one of his sons for a short time.

Although there are no Wiggenhorns left in Watertown, our Wiggenhorn family left its mark on the town’s history and is commemorated not only for the prestige that the Buena Vista House brought to Watertown but also for the family who began its illustrious history. The photo directly below is from 2005, 157 years from the time William Wiggenhorn bought it. It still stands as a monument to the Wiggenhorn legacy in Watertown, WI.



# CHAPTER I

## THE FAMILY

This is a story about two sisters and their devotion to each other, but first to begin it is necessary to place them in the family of Charles and Wilhelma, now Mena, in order to fully understand how this bond began and grew stronger and stronger as these sisters matured and became adults with their own families. The story unfolds with the first child of Charles and Mena.

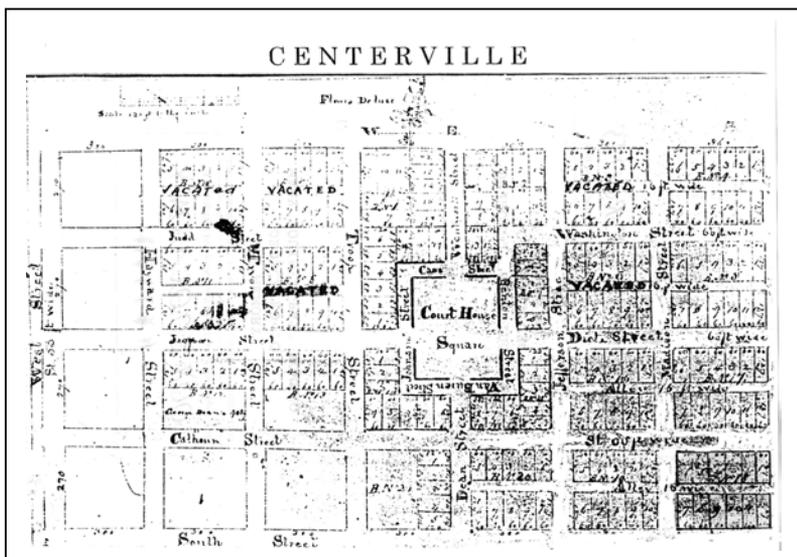
When Charles with his new bride left Watertown and her family after the wedding in 1850, it seems he undoubtedly had an agenda. The list of Old Settlers of McHenry County had already recorded his arrival date in the county as August 10, 1848.

He must have taken a small detour before returning to McHenry County because the birthplace of the first child born to Charles and Mena, Carl Jr. in 1851, was in Belvidere, IL which is not in McHenry County but in nearby Boone County. Carl

Jr. never became very successful without his father. He stayed with his father until Charles bought the store and land in Johnsburg. Although his death certificate listed his profession as grocer, I have no record of what he did or where he went until the years when he lived with Josie at the Town House in McHenry. This will be picked up in that chapter.

However, to return to Charles, it was not long before Charles purchased land in Woodstock. I include the map of Centerville even though it had been changed to Woodstock by 1845 when Charles bought his land in 1855 so that you can see exactly the blocks of land he eventually sold.

There are numerous deeds about his purchases. Some mention that he lived in Greenwood, which is an area very close to Woodstock. Several deeds mention the Village of Woodstock that had originally been plotted as



Centerville. Others give Johnsburg as his address and one specifies that the railroad ran through his property.

These deeds are from 1855 to 1866. Today that land makes up a portion of the square and the railroad eventually did run through it.

This land of Charles is located in the bottom two rectangles on the right. I couldn't find any land deed indicating that he owned property in Greenwood.

In those ten years many events occurred. Four more children were born in this family, two more boys and our two sisters. They all listed their birthplaces as Woodstock.

Louis was born in 1854 and August in 1856. Louis eventually became very successful as one of the owners of a prestigious wallpaper company, Remien and Kuhnert in Chicago. He even appeared in the Chicago's Blue Book of successful men of Chicago.

August must have stayed in Chicago for most of his business life but left the area and went to San Diego where he lived out his life as a retired capitalist.

Josephine, the first girl, was born in April 1858 and was undoubtedly named after her grandmother Josephine Wiggenhorn.

Wilhelmina, our

direct ancestor and the younger sister was born in August 1859 and was named after either her mother or her grandfather Wiggenhorn.

I could find no records of any of the children being baptized in the faith of their mother or father.

At one time, I tried to find a baptismal certificate for Wilhelmina but there was none registered in any of the churches. When I asked her about it she told me that she was a convert to Catholicism. She never did explain to me how that happened.

Within this time frame, many other important events took place for Charles. He became a naturalized citizen in McHenry County in 1854. In view of not knowing exactly why he immigrated to this country, I am very suspicious about his motives. Was it because he still had a mother in Germany and if he had left Germany mysteriously, would he not be able to return to see her unless he was a citizen of this country?

Of course we will never know but he did apply for a passport in 1866 in another county.

Also in the town of Woodstock within this time frame was a sister of Mena, Rosalia, who married Rudolph Diesel. He and Rosalia were married in 1850 too.

These two sisters had each other for companionship in this strange region.

Rudolph, the husband of Rosalia, became quite prominent in the town and was as a Trustee of Woodstock for sixteen years and a member of the School Board for ten years. There is no such record that Charles Kuhnert participated in any community endeavor during the time that he owned the aforementioned property.

Rudolph and Rosalia had two children who eventually settled in Chicago.

There is not much to write of the Kuhnert sojourn in the Woodstock area. Obviously Charles wanted to expand his horizons, for he eventually sold his land in Woodstock and moved his family to the town of Waukegan in Lake County.

By now I'm sure you can understand why the SISTERS became so devoted to each other. They were not

only close in age but also they were the only girls in the family with three older brothers.

Little by little, as their stories unfold, keep in mind that Charles was a man with a mission. He bought and sold real estate. He obviously had wanderlust because he didn't stay long in one place, at least not long enough to reap a big profit. Was he just incompetent or was he just unlucky in his choices?

As the story of the SISTERS is told, you can decide for yourself the influence the father in their lives had, and how their commitment to each other became stronger with every family incident and every move.

## CHAPTER II MENA AND BERTHA



### **THE KUHNERT FAMILY BEFORE 1871**

*Back row: the three Kuhnert Brothers Carl Jr., Louis, August  
Front row: Wilhelmina, Mena, Charles, Josephine*

This is the only picture of the Kuhnert family with the mother Mena. It is not dated so one has to decide more or less the ages of the children by studying the deeds of Charles' acquisition of the land and the year he

bought the vinegar factory in Waukegan.

As far as I can ascertain, Charles sold the land in McHenry County in 1863. Josie (Josephine) and Minnie (Wilhelmina) were ages 5 and 4 at the time.

Charles took his whole family to Waukegan from McHenry County when Josie and Minnie were only toddlers. This was the first change in the lives of the girls but, it is safe to say, they were unaware of any big changes in their lives because the family unit was intact. Neither had started school so they were not leaving friends behind.

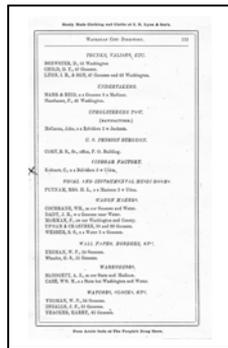
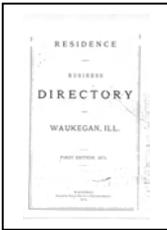
According to the deeds on record, Charles bought a vinegar factory in Waukegan in 1865 that included the machinery for making vinegar. The family address in the Waukegan City Directory in 1874 means that from 1865 to 1874 at least, Charles was a tradesman in the business of making vinegar.

House numbers have changed in Waukegan since that time but the existing house included with the Directory information is the only one that looks like it was built at that time.

During that time frame of 1865 to 1874, almost ten years, many things changed for Josie and Minnie. First of all, as the Directory has noted, the eldest son, Charles Jr., was working with his father in the vinegar business. He would have been 23 in 1874 and his brothers 20 and 18.

There is nothing on record about these other sons Louis and August, where they went to school, or how much education they had. Eventually these two would go to Chicago but there is nothing to indicate when they left home.

However, for the girls Josie and Minnie, these nine years, while they seemed to be idyllic, would prove to be a traumatic time in their lives. The events that ensued during this sojourn in Waukegan would bring them even closer together.



## NINE CRUCIAL YEARS 1865 TO 1874

At the time of the move in 1865 the family of Charles Kuhnert seemed to be a perfect unit. Charles had sold his land in McHenry County and moved his family of five children and Mena to Waukegan and began a business after buying equipment to make vinegar. There is nothing to suggest that he didn't prosper in this new endeavor.

However, for Mena, perhaps the change was not a happy one. Originally she had left a loving family in Watertown, WI to marry a man not of the same religion who took her first to one place where she had the company of her sister Rosalia, but then uprooted the entire family to a new area with no family and no friends.

The young sons could adjust because they had a male role model in their father, but Mena on the other hand had only two daughters who were too young to be of much female companionship. This undoubtedly was very hard for her, especially since she had no church affiliation. In fact there is evidence to

support that not even the five children were baptized in the Lutheran faith of their father.

This must have weighed heavily on Mena at this time and could have been a factor when she became ill. Nevertheless one must be very careful when making this assumption because there is no proof.

In the 1870 census of Lake County, Charles' occupation was given as brewer. Obviously making vinegar was called brewing. His eldest son Charles was 18 and also was called a brewer so he must have been working for his father.

The ages of the other children were Louis, 16, August, 14, Josephine, 12, and Minnie, 10.

It was just a year later that the first tragedy struck the Kuhnert family. Mena, mother of the family, died in July 1871. The newspaper said she died of a long illness. This is the reason the year of the family photo at the head of this chapter was labeled before 1871. This was a big blow for these girls. Somewhere within this time frame their father went back to Germany because his

mother was dying. The date is not definite but Charles put Josie and Minnie in a convent boarding school at the time. It could have been when Mena was ill or it could have been right after she died.

These two crises happening so close to one another brought the two sisters to be even more dependent on each other. The actual duration of their stay in the convent has never been established because the convent is no longer in existence.

It is unfortunate that Minnie's account of this interval in the life of the sisters can never be authenticated. All that is known is that the sisters finished their education at this convent. These girls, just entering puberty, were dealt two major blows.

But it was not over yet for these sisters. Obviously Charles, the widower, felt he could not maintain his family without someone to care for them. There is no indication that he hired a housekeeper to help him.

Instead, the next climactic episode in these sisters' lives happened less

than a year after their mother died. Charles married Bertha Zeese in May of 1872.

This makes the third major upheaval for these girls before they even had time to adjust to the death of their mother.

Charles and Bertha were married in Waukegan by a Roman Catholic priest. How ironic that Charles, a Lutheran, would marry two Catholic women.

This marriage produced many changes for this family. Bertha was a young woman of 26 who had been born in Germany and from all indications was fluent in English. There were no changes with the sons who were teenagers at the time, but there were changes with the girls. She proved to be very strong in her religious beliefs.

It is known that Minnie was a convert to the Catholic faith. Whether this happened during the time the girls were in boarding school or whether it happened when Charles married Bertha was never verified. Bertha symbolizes a nemesis in the life of Minnie, one that she often talked about.

## CHAPTER III

# THE WEDDINGS



Josie as a teenager



Minnie as a teenager

Even though the Waukegan City Directory chronicled the Kuhnert family in 1874 many changes were about to take place very quickly after the wedding of Charles and Bertha.

Charles evidently decided to move back to McHenry County. Those who know the history of Johnsburg say he bought the land and the general store in 1873. This seems to be a more reasonable account than

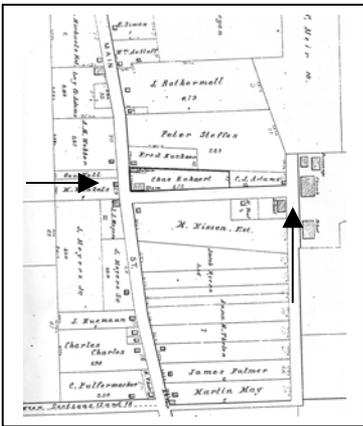
the Waukegan City Directory of 1874.

At any rate, Charles and Bertha are now in Johnsburg. After his marriage to Bertha in 1872, Charles must have sold his property and vinegar factory in Waukegan within this time period and bought the general store in Johnsburg.

In the history of McHenry County, Johnsburg was classified as a small hamlet situated three miles southeast of Ringwood and

about two miles northeast of the McHenry village. It has always been known almost exclusively as a German settlement and when Charles Kuhnert bought his land and general store John the Baptist Catholic Church was the largest of any denomination within the county.

St. John's Roman Catholic Church was established in 1845 with three families but in 1880 Charles Kuhnert was registered as one of its 275 families. The land and general store of Charles was on the corner before turning into the area where the church was situated.



The land of Charles is outlined in black. Follow it to the church and school, which were very close.

The very next notice of his being in the area was

the birth of Otilia in 1875. Although her birth is chronicled in the records of St. John the Baptist in Johnsbury, she was not baptized until 1880. This account makes me believe that Bertha was insistent that Minnie be baptized also in the Catholic Church. This could have been the time that Minnie said she converted to Catholicism.

However, there is an anomaly in the family. I found that Josie, who was born 15 April 1858 in Woodstock, was baptized 5 May 1858, also in the records of St. John the Baptist in Johnsbury. The Kuhnert family lived in Woodstock at that time, but why was Josie baptized and not any of the other children of Mena? Could she have been a sickly baby? That is the only logical explanation.

At any rate, Charles and Bertha are now in Johnsbury. After his marriage to Bertha, there is nothing in the family records as to why Charles decided to sell his property and vinegar factory in Waukegan and buy the general store in Johnsbury.

At the time of Otilia's birth, the sons no longer lived with the family. Charles Jr. had married in 1877. His residence at that time on his marriage license was given as Chicago so obviously he did not move with the family to Johnsborg.

Louis was 23 and August was 19. I presume they had left home also at the time of the move and were already working in Chicago. The girls, Josie and Minnie, were 17 and 15 respectively depending on the time of year.

Josie began to teach in the Catholic school of St. John's before the nuns came.



Josie as a young adult

Remember that both she and Minnie had been educated at a convent in Waukegan.

At that time, teaching laws were more relaxed than they are today. It was probably a one-room school because there were only these 275 families.

Bertha had several other children but the only other one beside Otilia that survived was a son, Rudolph, born in 1881. He was a toddler when the girls got married in 1882.

It is easy to see why Minnie, who was the only one at home, resented being the helper to Bertha. She could have rebelled and this could be the reason she said Bertha was mean to her.



Minnie as a young adult

## OTILIA

Josie and Minnie always talked about their half-sister Otilia. They spoke of her with much affection.



This tintype is a particular favorite of mine. It is easy to see why Otilia's sisters would want to watch over her.

After the birth of Otilia, Bertha had two other girls who didn't survive, Helena and Adelia. This must have been hard on Minnie, who was the only one at home because Josie was teaching. I don't know why these babies didn't survive or if there was even a doctor in this small village of Johnsbury, but the experience of their deaths must have had an impact on both Josie and Minnie.

Otilia became very proficient on the organ and

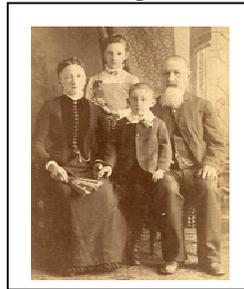
when she was older was the organist at St. John's.

Unfortunately, Otilia did not live long either, for she died when she was only 27 and is buried in the Kuhnert plot in Waukegan with her other sisters who didn't survive infancy.



## RUDOLPH

Rudolph, the only son of Bertha and Charles, was born in 1881. There are no pictures of Rudolph as a baby and it was many years before I even knew that a half-brother, Rudolph, existed.



Otilia and Rudolph with Bertha and their father Charles.

## THE JOHNSBURG BUILDING

Charles moved to Johnsbury around 1873/1874 and took over the building on the land for a general store. The residence for the family was over the store. This building still exists today and is being restored to the way it was originally.



Along with having a general store, Charles was also the postmaster. This lasted until 1897 when the Post Office was moved across the street. Charles no longer owned the building or the land at that time.

Charles is remembered as having a team of white horses. I think that the white horse in front of the building was one of them even though the picture is of a later date. His granddaughter remembered how proud he was of driving his buggy to McHenry

headed by this white horse. White horses at this time were not a common sight.

Those who are involved in the restoration are trying to keep it as close to the original as possible. Below is a solid brick wall that is inside the store. It could have been an outside wall as one can see it resembles the main part of the building with the tall façade and could have been the original structure without the side section. Needless to say the front and the side you can see are all brick. The building could be nearing 150 years old as Charles Kuhnert



bought it at least 130 years ago.

In the back on the inside is the stairway to the basement. The cooler for the meat is still there and will be kept. This is an eerie feeling to know that one's great

grandfather walked these steps and was the proprietor and postmaster of these grounds so many years ago. In fact his safe is still there. I'm sure the papers are not his but you can see, the date of the safe is 1877 exactly when he owned the store.



The stairs to the living quarters was in the back of the building and one can be sure the outhouse was in the back of the land. At that time, chamber pots were used during the night and I know that Minnie used one, for I remember that she still had it in McHenry.

Upstairs it looks like there were two bedrooms. This means that Josie and Minnie would have shared one bedroom and the children of Bertha would be with her and Charles in their bedroom. Possibly Otilia shared the bedroom with the girls as she

was only seven at the time they married. Rudolph was just a toddler when the wedding took place so he probably was still in his parents' room.

I'm sure there were a large kitchen, a dining room, and a parlor. Those rooms are still here. Plumbing did not exist. These were the accommodations for Josie and Minnie before they married.

I never knew much about their time in Johnsburg. Minnie never talked about it so I was very surprised to find that she and Josie lived in this building above the store for eight years.

Charles remained as owner of the property until he sold the property in 1895 when he planned to open a hardware store in McHenry.

Unfortunately the night before he was to open he died of a heart attack. He had been staying with his daughter Josie and her husband at the McHenry House when he became quite ill and by the time the doctor arrived it was too late.

So Charles Kuhnert was the owner of the general store and postmaster for 23 years in Johnsburg, IL.

## THE WEDDINGS OF JOSIE AND MINNIE

The sisters were so close they decided to get married together on the same day, so on the 22nd of May 1882, Josephine married Joseph Heimer and Wilhelmina married John Schueneman at St. John the Baptist Church in Johnsburg.



Josephine and Joe



Wilhelmina and John

The dresses look the same and if there were differences they were very subtle. Although the photographs were in sepia, I am quite sure the dresses were in black, the German custom of the day. Perhaps the most flamboyant difference in the two was a long chain with beads at intervals that Minnie wore, whereas Josie wore none. Perhaps Minnie was exercising her personality with this contrast. The veils looked to be exactly the same and even the curls on their foreheads were identical.

The wedding was just another example of their devotion to each other. Although it must have been a huge affair, there was no mention of it in the English language paper, the Plaindealer. It could have been written up in a German paper because the community was all of German descent, including the grooms whose families were as prominent as the Kuhnert family.

## **Joseph Heimer**

Joe Heimer was born on the old Heimer homestead in Johnsborg on 7 February 1858 which made him the same age as his bride. When he was twenty he went to Chicago and worked for the packing firm of Tobey & Booth. He didn't stay long for he soon started his own hardware business there.

It was probably during his visits to his family that he met Josie. After they were married, he and his bride moved to Chicago where he had his business. It was during this time in Chicago that a son, Charles, was born in 1885.

Joe and Josie stayed in Chicago until Joe bought the McHenry House in McHenry in the spring of 1892. He and Josie made the hotel one of the most popular in the county. Joe prospered until he became ill and had to sell the McHenry House in 1907.

He died in 1908 and Josie was the first of the two sisters to lose a husband. The period while Joe owned the McHenry House was the only time the sisters were separated by distance.

## **John Schueneman**

John Schueneman was born in Chicago 31 May 1850. His father, also John, bought land in McHenry County in 1855.

Although the younger John was reared on this farm, his dream was always to return to Chicago. His brothers and sisters married and bought their own farms but John, when he married Minnie, took his bride to Chicago where he was employed and was making a good living.

Minnie's family continued to grow. Charles was born in 1883, Henry in 1885, Leo in 1887, and the only girl, Elvera Ann, in 1893.

The children were all very active at Boniface school and church.

When Joe Heimer bought the McHenry House in 1892, I'm sure it must have been a difficult time for these sisters to be separated.

This period is the only time the sisters were separated, with Minnie in Chicago and Josie in McHenry. Their father was still in Johnsborg.

## CHAPTER IV LOSING SONS

### THE KUHNERT FAMILY AROUND 1907



Back row left to right: Tall man in back Charles Heimer,  
Louis-Lena-August-Imogene-Margaret-Carl Jr.-Louis Jr.-Leota  
Center row:  
Joe Heimer-Josie-Bertha-Minnie-John Schueneman  
Front row: Schueneman children & Carrie Kuhnert  
Elvera-Henry-Carrie Kuhnert-Leo-Edna Hunter-Charles Jr.

Here we have the Kuhnert family of Josie and Minnie intact but missing only Charles, the father, who died in 1895. Josie and Minnie are on either side of their stepmother Bertha. The eldest brother, now Charles instead of Carl, is with his wife Margaret. Louis and his wife Lena and their two children were there with Louis Jr. and his wife Leota, and Louis' daughter Carrie who is in the front row. August and his wife Imogene who never had any children were there. Josie and her husband were together as was

their son, Charlie, the tallest one in the back. I'm not sure but I think his wife to be could be the female I designated as Edna Hunter. Minnie and John Schueneman have the largest family and they are all unmarried. Charles is the eldest, then Henry, then Leo, with Elvera the youngest of the group. This picture was in the family for years after Elvera died without anyone knowing who and what the group signified. I unraveled the mystery after delving into the family history.

I think, but I have no way of actually being sure, that it is to celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of Josie and Minnie. The account of their wedding in 1882 is in Chapter III and this family picture was taken very close to that 25th anniversary date.

The brothers Charles, Louis, and August Kuhnert were all living in Chicago. I do not know the occupation of Charles, but Louis was quite successful in the wallpaper business and was quite active socially in Chicago events. I have no record of the business or occupation of August.

At the time of the picture, Joe Heimer, husband of Josie, had just sold the McHenry House because of ill health but he and Josie were still in McHenry. Their only child Charlie was probably in Chicago, for in 1910 he was a postal clerk for the government. I do know that Joe became a large investor in Remien and Kuhnert, the company of Louis.

John and Minnie lived in Chicago on Hermitage Avenue with their unmarried family of four. The story in the family is that John's father gave each one of his sons money to buy a farm but John never wanted to farm and John would not be excluded. I think this is when John bought his house on Hermitage Avenue.

Although in these 16 years, 1892 to 1907, that the distance from Chicago to McHenry separated Josie and Minnie, I'm sure there were many visits between the families. No one could have had any premonition of the tragedies that would soon befall them.

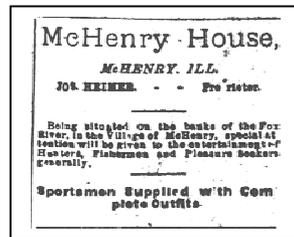
## THE FIRST TRAGEDY

### JOSIE LOSES HER HUSBAND JOE HEIMER

Unfortunately, Joe Heimer had been in ill health for some time. This forced him to sell the McHenry House in 1907 because he was too ill to continue running it. The sale took place in August of 1907. If the reunion picture of the Kuhnerts was commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> wedding of Josie and Minnie, it would have to have been taken in May 1907 or thereabouts. This means that Joe was ill at the time of the picture and sold the McHenry House shortly after.

To reiterate, Joe and Josie moved to McHenry in the spring of 1892. That was when he purchased the McHenry House. Through hard work, he and Josie succeeded in making the place one of the most popular hotels in the county.

They had many social activities celebrating all the holidays. When Joe Heimer died in 1908 after a long illness, he was remembered by everyone as being beyond equal. His popularity was unmatched in the county.



But Josie's future was to be changed back to Chicago. Her son lived in Chicago and her sister Minnie and her family were in Chicago. Her brother also lived in Chicago so it seemed most propitious for Josie to once again return to Chicago with her son and to be with Minnie specifically and also with her brothers.

It is at this time that Josie, because of her assets, probably bought her house on Hermitage Avenue. Josie and Minnie both would own houses on Hermitage Ave.

This was the way it was for a few more years. The company of Remien and Kuhnert flourished, which means that Josie also benefited. But the Kuhnert family in a few years would suffer the pain of more losses.

## THE LOUIS KUHNERT DRAMA

The next one in the family to suffer a great loss was Louis Kuhnert. By now he was quite distinguished in the annals of Chicago. He appeared in Who's Who, the book of outstanding businessmen in Chicago and he belonged to all the best social clubs. The current newspapers photographed his daughter Carrie constantly.

After Joe's death, Josie made the change to return to Chicago. Not only would she once again have the companionship of her sister Minnie, but her brothers were all there also.

Josie's son Charles married Edna Hunter in this period of time and they were in Chicago. A close bond soon developed between Josie and Edna.

But on 17 January 1917 disaster struck the Louis Kuhnert family. His son, Louis Jr., committed suicide. His death certificate stated "death by shocking while temporarily insane." He left a wife and a five year old daughter.

There was an inquest and as a relative, I could have

requested a copy. I'm sure the entire family was terribly upset at that time; this would be a stigma for the family. Neither Minnie or Josie nor their families ever spoke about it and I just discovered it because of my research into the Kuhnerts.

I'm assuming that his suicide might have had some effect on the company Remien and Kuhnert because the occupation on the death certificate was Wall Paper Merchant.

Josie and Minnie's brother Louis died in 1917 and when his estate was probated his debts far exceeded his assets. Josie did get repaid for the investment Joe Heimer made but her income was severely curtailed.

I understand that her son, who was by now a postal clerk for the railroad, took up this slack and helped his mother out.

John Schueneman who had never invested in Remien and Kuhnert was not affected financially by Louis' death.

## FAMILIES SHARING



This family picture was taken in the summer of 1921 and illustrates how close the families were after the death of Josie's husband. Although Minnie had a much larger family, Josie and her small family were always included in everything.

In the back row on the left is Elvera with Mary, her daughter, her husband Harry Durland, and Henry, Minnie's son.

In the front row on the left is Josie with Minnie's grandson Henry Jr. Then

Helen, who was the wife of Leo, another son, and Florence, wife of Henry holding her son George. Next to Florence is Edna Heimer, the daughter-in-law of Josie. The young girl is Audrey, daughter of Leo and Helen. Minnie had her hand on Audrey, and John Schueneman is on the right. Leo was probably the one taking the picture.

Minnie always brought her family together and, as you can see, Josie and Edna were always included.

The only family member who was not in this picture was Charles Schueneman, Minnie's son, who never had any children and could have been at work.

Charles Heimer and Edna had married in 1911 and were also living on Hermitage Avenue.

Charles Heimer, Josie's son, was undoubtedly on one of his runs as post clerk on the postal station on the railroad. He and Edna had no children.

Josie who had returned to Chicago was living very close to Minnie. I cannot read the exact address but it was also on Hermitage Avenue, but not with her son. After the death of her brother Louis and losing her money, she took in boarders. Harry Durland was one of those boarders and became friends with Henry Schueneman. A romance ensued between Harry and Henry's sister Elvera at one of their parties.

In one of Harry's letters to his mother he passed on his mother's greeting to Mrs. Heimer (Josie). This is how the family could make the connection between Harry and Henry that ultimately led to the marriage of Harry and

Elvera. Yet one more coincidence in the families of Josie and Minnie.

John Schueneman decided to retire and move to McHenry. He sold his house on Hermitage Avenue in 1926 and he and Minnie bought the house on Riverside Drive which also included a riverfront lot across the street. It was a big enough house for Minnie to have her family from Chicago come to visit.

I remember the house well. There was a chicken coop in the back so Minnie always had fresh eggs. In the kitchen was a pump, for the house was not hooked up to McHenry's municipal sewer, if there was one. John had a crystal radio set by his desk. His chair still exists in the family.

There is no date on record but Josie moved to McHenry if not the same year very soon after. She lived up the hill very close by.

This way Josie and Minnie could visit easily every day. They had the same friends, and played bridge in the same group. Minnie shared her family when they came to visit. All was well until September 1928.

## MINNIE LOSES HER HUSBAND

### JOHN SCHUENEMAN

Elvera received a call in September 1928 that her father had died. There were four children at home, the youngest Joan still an infant.

John Schueneman had been born in Chicago and spent his whole life there with the exception of his childhood when he lived on the farm of his parents. In Chicago he had an uncle, Bernhard Schuenemann who was quite successful as a businessman. Bernhard had seven children so he was not without family with all those cousins.

His oldest brother Henry was also in Chicago for a short time before he moved to Waukegan, Illinois. There is no doubt that John worked and supported himself.

While he was there a momentous event occurred in Chicago, the Chicago Fire. It happened in 1871 and destroyed so much of Chicago. A descendant of Bernhard wrote me that he lost everything in the fire.

John Schueneman was twenty-one at the time.

Of course he could leave the town quickly but I have no record of how he withstood the fire or where he was at the time. They all had to get out of the way of the flames and many scurried to the water in order not to get burned.

Others packed up their belongings with wagons or any article that had wheels and tried to get away. Many just pushed their things into the water and just stood there and watched the flames envelop the small city.

I regret that no one thought to ask Minnie what John did at the time. She may not have known because she was only twelve and was in the convent school in Waukegan when it all happened.

Bernhard did recoup his losses and built a brick building which still stands today over 100 years old.

It stands to reason that John Schueneman would have met Minnie Kuhnert in Johnsbury when he would be visiting his parents. Josie and

Minnie moved to Johnsburg with their father when the girls were teenagers. The Schuenemans, the Heimers, and the Kuhnerts were all parishioners of St. John the Baptist church.

When John and Minnie married in 1882, Minnie was 23 but John was 32, almost 10 years older. He was well enough established so that he and his bride could begin a life together in Chicago. Josie and her husband were there also.

From everything included on the censuses, John was not a big wage earner although his daughter wrote in one of her letters that he was earning \$100 weekly as a carpenter when she was 17 years old in 1910.

When he died on September 19, 1928, his death certificate says he died of a heart attack along with a contributing factor, cirrhosis of the liver. John did like his beer and every day in McHenry he would walk two blocks to the tavern to get his pitcher of beer for the day. This habit no doubt did him no good.

John's death meant that both Josie and Minnie were widows but they were

in the same town together. However, their losses were not over. A cruel twist of fate was yet to befall the sisters.

## JOSIE LOSES HER ONLY SON

Josie experienced a terrible shock on February 4, 1934. Her only child who was always known as Charlie accidentally shot himself while on duty for the postal service in the postal car of the Chicago and Milwaukee railroad. He died at age 49.

Charlie had been a postal clerk since 1904 and because he was taking care of the mail in the railroad car, he was allowed to carry a gun. The gun accidentally discharged while he was busy sorting and taking care of the mail.

Minnie was in San Diego tending to business and could not get to Chicago for the services. However, Minnie was able to leave the train at Joliet where a special car would be waiting in order for her to reach McHenry for the burial service.

Can you imagine not only the grief of Josie not having her sister with her but also the grief of Minnie who had to spend days alone on the train and could not be with her sister until the burial on February 8, 1934?

## MINNIE LOSES A SON ALSO

Yes, Minnie had three sons but she was doomed also to lose an adult child, Leo, who had been so successful as a businessman in Chicago.

He had made a career of the bowling business that he started when he was just a young man. He was the third of Minnie's sons, but the most successful of all three.

He owned many companies at the time of his death, possibly three bowling alleys. He was also president and chairman of LaFayette Building Corporation and a director of the Logan Square Commercial and Savings Bank.

Like his uncle Louis Kuhnert before him, he could be found in the Who's Who of Chicago.

Minnie had a little time to be prepared for Leo's death. He developed kidney trouble, which was fatal at that time, and died April 12, 1935 at the age of 48.

So these sisters both shared the grief of losing an adult son.

“For there is no friend like a sister in calm or stormy weather”  
    “to cheer one on the tedious way”  
    “to fetch one if one goes astray”  
    “to lift one if one totters down,”  
    “to strengthen whilst one stands...”  
    “Sisters know you inside and out”  
“but love you in spite of the little flaws they see.”  
    “Friends come and go but sisters are forever.”

Quotations from the little book  
THE WONDER OF SISTERS

By  
C.R.GIBSON  
1999  
London

## CHAPTER V

# THE SISTERS' FINAL DAYS



This is a photo of elderly Josie and Minnie. Minnie is in the middle between her daughter Elvera on the far left and her daughter-in-law Florence, with Josie on the far right.

The sisters' strong bond was never questioned by the family. Where there was one, there were two.

When one had to be

chauffeured, the other did too. When one was invited out, the other was too. Same social activities, same pick-up for church every Sunday, same presents for both of them. No exceptions.

It was truly a wonderful relationship, but not that they never disagreed. Oh yes, many times, but never with any anger.

# THIS STORY IS A TRIBUTE TO TWO REMARKABLE SISTERS WHOSE RELATIONSHIP WAS INDEED AN EXAMPLE OF TRUE LOVE AND DEVOTION

**JOSIE**  
**1858-1946**

## Friends Mourn Loss Of Josephine Heimer After Short Illness

One of McHenry's most respected residents passed away last week at the age of 88. She was Mrs. Josephine Heimer, who had lived in this community almost entirely since childhood, growing up with the many changes and improvements which have taken place.

Josephine Theresa Kuhnert was born on April 17, 1858, in Woodstock, later moving with her family to Waukegan, where she attended immaculate Conception school. While still a young girl, the family again moved, this time to Johnsburg, where her father operated the post office and a general store for many years. For four years she taught in the parochial school there prior to the arrival of the Sisters.

On May 8, 1882, in a double nuptial ceremony, Miss Kuhnert became the bride of Joseph Heimer of this city at the same time that her sis-

ter, Minnie, was united in marriage to John Scheuneman. Following the ceremony, both couples went to Chicago, where they resided for a short time.

Upon coming back to McHenry a few years later, Mr. and Mrs. Heimer purchased the McHenry House on Riverside Drive, now known as the Town House. This they operated with much success for many years, until Mr. Heimer's poor health forced their retirement from business life.

When the present Town House was being remodeled to be used as an apartment building several years ago, Mrs. Heimer, then a widow, became the first tenant and resided there with her brother, Charles Kuhnert, until his death some time ago. Since then she had been residing there alone.

The deceased, and others in her family, were probably better acquainted with the early history of both St. Mary's and of St. John's churches than any other family still living in this community. Besides her own duties at the Johnsburg school, her step sister acted as organist and taught for some time before the Sisters came to St. Mary's

**MINNIE**  
**1859-1950**

## Minnie Scheuneman Laid To Rest This Thursday Morning

McHenry lost one of its most remarkable residents on Monday, Nov. 6, when Mrs. Minnie Scheuneman passed away in St. Theresa hospital following a short illness. Mrs. Scheuneman, 91 years old last August, remained in good health until two weeks ago. She had been confined to the hospital for about a week.

Few celebrations have been the occasion of such happiness as the ninety-first birthday of Mrs.

Scheuneman last summer. Gifts and cards from her host of friends and members of her family were sent from various parts of the country. A special gift was partial restoration of her eyesight through a recent operation. It permitted her to begin bright planning for future activities which she once more would be able to enjoy. With nimble step and keen mind she greeted the many who called to extend best wishes that memorable day.

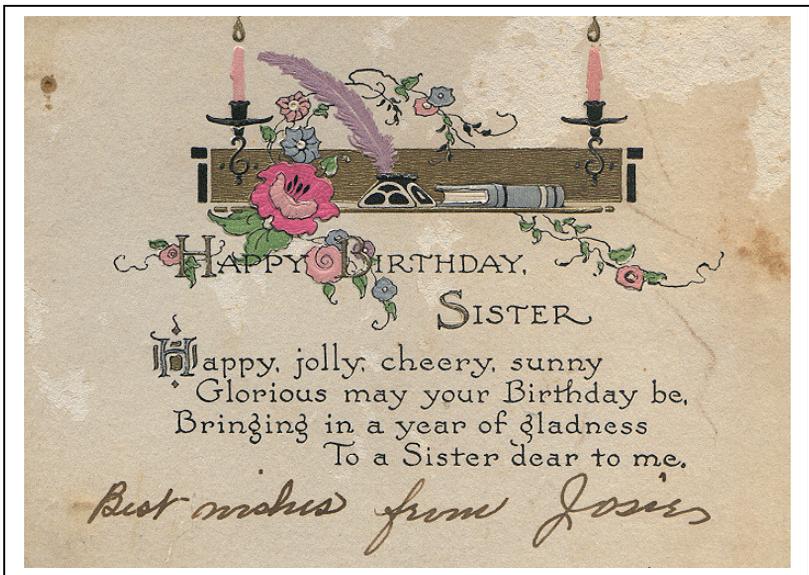
The deceased was born in Woodstock Aug. 17, 1859, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kuhnert. When still a baby the family moved to Johnsburg and three years later they took up residence in Waukegan, where the large school system provided the children with better educational benefits. When Minnie, youngest of the five children, had completed her studies at 14, the family returned to Johnsburg and her father took over management of a general store which also housed the community's postoffice.

The Scheunemann family later moved to Chicago but in 1895 the parents decided to return to their home community for their remaining years. The night before her father was scheduled to open his new general store on Riverside Drive, he died unexpectedly.

Other, more pleasant memories remained with Mrs. Scheuneman even in advanced years concerning the early days in and around McHenry. She was especially proud of her sister, Ottilia Kuhnert, who was first organist at St. Mary's church before the Sisters came to teach here.

In 1882, Minnie Kuhnert was united in marriage with John Scheuneman in a double service which also united her sister, Josephine, and Joseph Heimer of Johnsburg. Both couples lived in Chicago for many years following their wedding day.

Birthday card found in Minnie's effects after she died.  
She kept it as a treasure through the years.



# SISTERS

By

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Johnsburg data from Janet Smith