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# KNOW YOUR ROOTS

*A Family That Doesn't Know Its Past Doesn't Understand Itself*

VOLUME III NUMBER 4 KUHNER/WIGGENHORN OCTOBER 1998

## "MINNIE"



WILHELMINA KUHNERT  
1859 - 1950

## MEMMORIES OF MINNIE

The very beautiful young woman on the cover was known as Minnie although her true name was Wilhelmina. It was only discovered recently that she was named after her mother Wilhelma although Minnie never mentioned that she was named for her mother. Now after searching the records, one can see that her mother, Wilhelma, was named after her father, Wilhelm Wiggernhorn so the name was carried down.

But this is not a story about Wilhelma, it is a story about Minnie who was the beloved grandmother remembered often by her living grandchildren.

Minnie was born August 17, 1859 in Woodstock, Il. the daughter of Charles Kuhnert and Wilhelma known as "Mena." She was the youngest of a family of five, three older brothers, Carl, August, and Louis and one older sister Josephine whom she always referred to as Josie.

Very little is known about her childhood and the only existing picture of her as a child is in the family picture below.

Minnie is the one on the left, then her mother and father and then Josie. Her brothers are in the back.

Mena died July 14, 1871. Minnie did talk about when her mother died. She said only she and Josie were very young. That would make Minnie 12 at the time. Soon after Mena's death, Minnie's father had to return to Germany to attend his mother's funeral so her father boarded both Minnie and Josie in the Immaculate Conception Convent in Waukegan. Her brothers were 20, 17, 15, and probably considered not old enough to take care of their sisters. Carl Jr. did help his father in the vinegar factory.

She didn't talk much about that period of her life because when her father returned he married Bertha Zeese May 25, 1872 not quite a year after her mother died.

It is not certain when Minnie was baptized into the catholic church. She had always said she was a convert even though her mother was Catholic. We know that Charles was Lutheran. It could have been when she was at the convent or it could have been when her



father married Bertha who was also a Catholic. Minnie remained in the Catholic Church throughout her life.

She told us her life with Bertha was not a happy one. She always said Bertha did not like her. Whether she continued to go to school at the convent is not known. However, Minnie seemed to be very well educated for a young girl of the time having gone to school until she was age 14. She loved to read and pursued that interest throughout her life.

Her handwriting was very interesting, as it was very much like the German script, which leaves one to believe she was taught by German speakers.

The family remained in Waukegan until 1874. During that time Charles or Carl had a vinegar factory and his eldest son Carl Jr. who would be in his early twenties worked with him.



The photo above shows Minnie as a young adult. Her father moved the family to Johnsburg some time between 1874 and 1876 when daughters of Carl and Bertha were born in Johnsburg. That would make Minnie around 17

when the move was made and the photo could have been taken about that time.

Remember that Minnie was the youngest child of Carl and Mena and was probably spoiled by her brothers. When Bertha and Carl started another family and Minnie was no longer the youngest of the family, this could account for her feeling about her stepmother.

The records of St. John the Baptist church in Johnsburg, note that Helena and Bertha Otilia were baptized in 1880 along with another child Adelia Emilie bore 1878. Minnie would have been age 21. Minnie did talk about her stepsister Otilia who died in 1903. She never mentioned the others.

Another child was born to Carl and Bertha in 1881. This last brother of Minnie, Rudolph, was just nine months old when Minnie and Josie married. How strange that this family of stepsiblings was only discovered through St. John's records and not through any information from Minnie.



Otilia and Rudolph

Josie and Minnie continued to be not only sisters as they were very close in age, just 16 months apart, but also best of friends. They were inseparable. The next photo was probably taken before the two were married. Josie on the left and Minnie on the right.



In fact they were so close that they had a double wedding at St. John the Baptist Church on the 22 of May 1882. Minnie married John Schuenemann of Chicago and Josie married Joseph Heimer of Johnsburg. Both of them were married in black dresses but the dresses were not identical. Both couples moved to Chicago until Josie and her husband bought the McHenry House in McHenry.



*Minnie and John on their  
Wedding day*

Minnie and John would often visit Josie and Joe after they moved to McHenry. In later year Josie would

move back to Chicago to be with Minnie.

All was well in Minnie's life. She had four children, three boys and 1 girl. All of their children went to St. Boniface school and church. Minnie had a treadle sewing machine and sewed many things for her daughter, Elvera.

She baked bread every Saturday a custom she continued for many years.

First they lived on Ashland Street in Chicago until her father-in-law died and then bought a home on Hermitage Ave. in Ravenswood. It is there where she and her husband, John, celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in 1910.



The 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Photo

In the meantime, when World War I began, the sentiment against Germans was very strong. German ceased to be taught in the schools and the German community was very suspect

The sons married and Elvera, the daughter, lived at home and worked while her husband went to war.

After the war, Minnie and John decided to move to McHenry where they bought a house on Riverside Drive. Her husband died in 1928 and Minnie lived alone until 1931 when her daughter's family joined her in McHenry.

This was an enjoyable time for all. Minnie's house was remodeled and it became once again the place where

the all the families gathered on every holiday.

Minnie kept up with her German traditions. With the aid of her family members she continued to make Panhaus every winter. Her bread baking on Saturday along with the honey buns and apple kuchen were occasions for friends to visit.

Her sister Josie by this time had settled in McHenry also. Josie was alone except for a brother Karl because both her husband and son had died so she was included in all the family gatherings. Aunt Jo, as her great nieces and nephews called her always had a treat. So the children loved to visit.



Minnie was often the arbitrator in family arguments. When her grandchildren were punished she surreptitiously took them meals or managed to soften the outcome.

However, this is not to say she was not the matriarch of the family. Lunch was always at 12 and dinner at 6, except on Sunday when it was at 1 because of church. Her motto was waste not and this frugality was passed on to everyone.

During those years the wash was always hung to dry in the yard but because the yard was in full view of the street, she was adamant about the placing of the articles. The sheets had to go along the street side and the panties and other underclothing had to go in the back where no one could see them.

She was there always to comfort and console those who needed her. She was a teacher and a confidant. And the boys who came to visit her granddaughters loved her.

There was no way to do a slipshod job of cleaning when Minnie supervised. In fact, she herself would get down on her knees to scrub the kitchen floor.

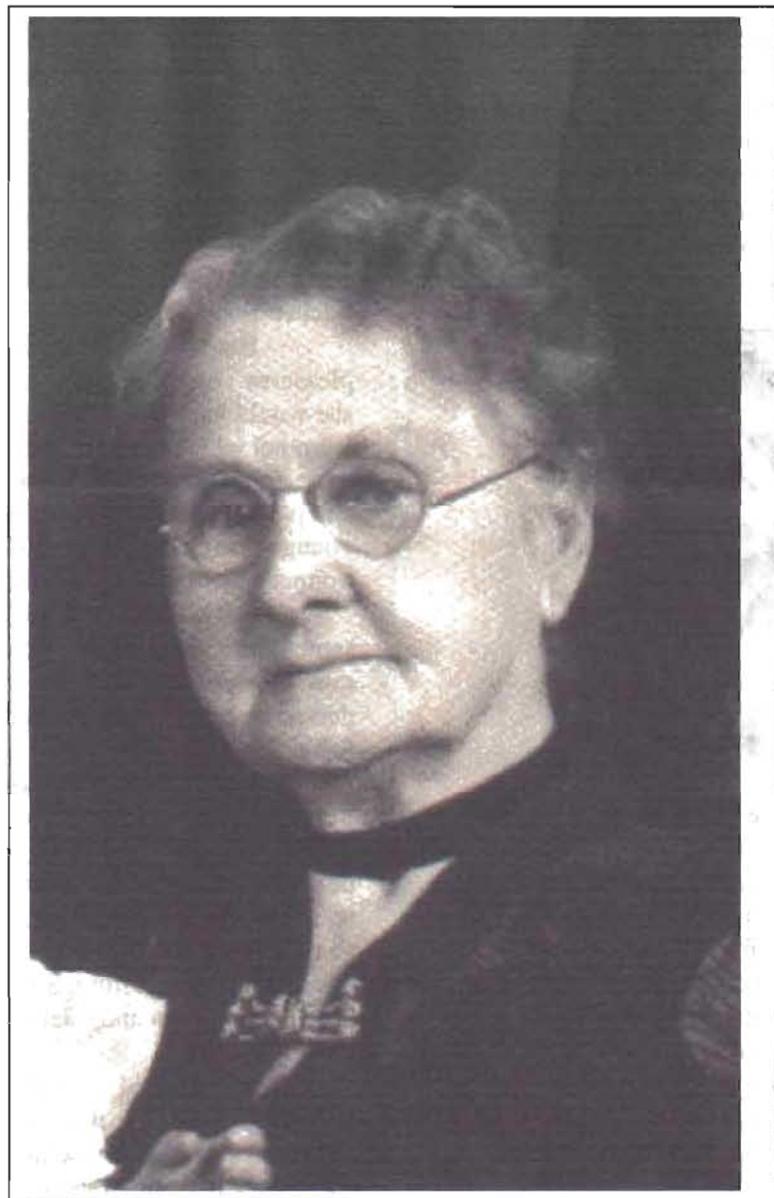
But she was not without pleasures. Every night before retiring she would have her little glass of Kümmel which she kept in her closet. Also, she played bridge with her cronies and pinochle for money with much younger family members and very often trounced them and collected the pot.

Her son-in-law who lived in the same house very well respected her and even though sometimes she was quite demanding, he always yielded to Mother Schueneman.

Yes, there was sadness in her life but she never dwelled on it. She lost a son at age 47, which must have devastated her. For a short time her sight was completely gone. In the last few years she managed to have the sight of one eye partially restore. She loved all her grandchildren and treated them all alike

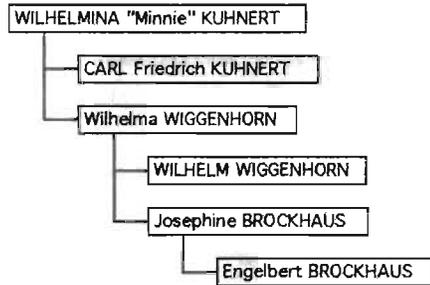
Minnie died Thursday, November 9, 1950 just short of her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Her obituary began by saying, "McHenry lost one of its most remarkable residents."

To Minnie, truly one of the finest human beings who ever lived, whose life on earth was an example of faith, humility, sternness with love, understanding with compassion, and giving of herself, I remember you with much love. May all your descendants through this little tribute know that their ancestor Minnie lives on through the lives she influenced.



## WHO ARE THE WIGGENHORNS?

Perhaps to answer that question, it would be easier to show you how the Wiggenhorns relate to Minnie the subject of the first story. The line is as follows:



As you can see, the mother of Minnie was Wilhelma Wiggenhorn a family that Minnie never talked about.

The Wiggenhorns settled in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1848. William Wiggenhorn, the father, was fifty-one years old when he arrived and soon bought a hotel, the Buena Vista.

Previously he had been a

merchant and a postmaster in Schöppingen, Germany. (See the 1997 Kuhnert issue about Schöppingen)

William encouraged his sons to go into the business of making cigars, a very lucrative business at that time. It only required a modest investment and while his sons were not helping him at the hotel, they made and sold these cigars.

Soon they had a beautiful, three-story building employing 50 people. Eventually the business was so prosperous they became the second largest manufacturer of cigars in Wisconsin and soon expanded to Montana.

The Wiggenhorns with their hotel and cigar factory were known as one of the German speaking 48ers, which were chronicled in the book by Charles J. Wallman, published in 1992. The title of the book is *The German Speaking 48ers, Builders of Watertown, Wisconsin*.



THE WIGGENHORN CIGAR FACTORY

## MUCH MORE ON CARL KUHNERT

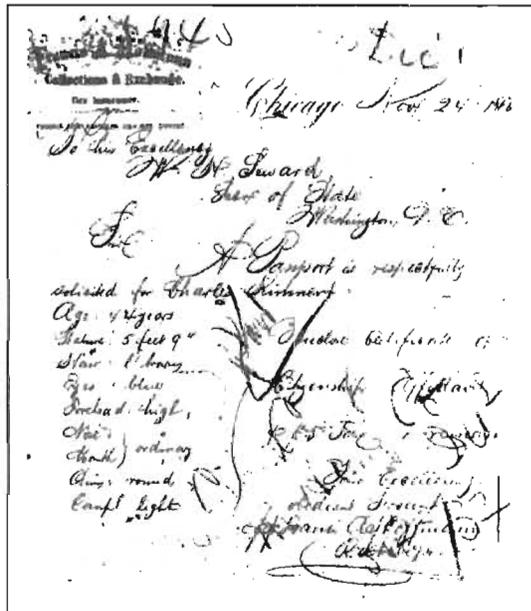
A little more research has revealed a few very interesting things on Carl or Charles Kuhnert. First a new picture was uncovered all of a sudden in some old files of his granddaughter. The picture had no identification but he is the only ancestor that is known to wear a beard. For comparison a much older photo which was definitely identified as Grandpa Kuhnert is presented side by side so you can see the resemblance.



The photo on the left is the newly discovered photo. The one on the right is the one that has been identified on the back as Grandpa Kuhnert by his granddaughter Elvera. The new one has a very determined look which only bears out the history of this man who erased his past when he immigrated to the United States. This is Minnie's father. The older man has a softer look. Perhaps Charles mellowed in his old age

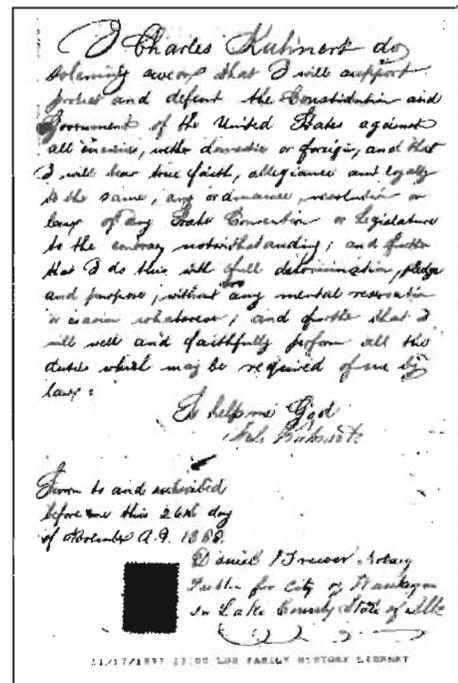
In the meantime a little more has been unearthed about this man who was rumored to have left Germany without serving his time in the military which was mandatory at that time. There are coins that are lost that Minnie had which might unravel the mystery, The coins must be some place.

Records show Charles Kuhnert was naturalized in McHenry County, Illinois on November 25, 1854. There was no place of birth given nor a date of birth. This information was found in the records of the LDS church in Salt lake City, Utah with other records.



On the left is an application for a passport for Charles Kuhnert. Note the physical characteristics that were given: age 44, stature 5 feet 9 inches, hair light brown, eyes blue, forehead high, nose and mouth ordinary, chin ordinary, complexion light. Enclosed was a certificate of citizenship and \$5.00. This was sent to Wm. H. Seward, Secretary of State, Washington, D. C. by a German Consul. It is dated November 24, 1866 from Chicago.

On the right is the pledge of allegiance that Charles made at the time Charles requested the passport. It was notarized in Lake County on November 26, 1866 and signed by Charles. Again, there is a mystery. If he were naturalized in 1854 in McHenry County, why would he have to pledge allegiance once again in 1866? Needless to say, the naturalization records have been destroyed in McHenry County. So there is no way of checking there. Supposedly they were on file in Washington. This is the next step, finding the papers in Washington. Little by little we are discovering more about Charles Kuhnert. Missing is the place in Germany where he was born. Until that is known, only his life in the U. S. is on record.



## MARY'S MESSAGES



The Schuenemann book finally is at the printers after 10 full proofs. It seems with each proof there were more irregularities that needed to be corrected plus the other changes that needed to be made. There were 8 complete ones that son George ran off his computer and 2 the printer ran off. George finally took the last proof to the printer himself and made the corrections right at the printers. I chose a dark green cloth binding with gold embossing.

We should have it by the middle of November if the binder doesn't hold it up.

Now the feelings of doubt commence. Will everyone like it? Will I be able to sell the number of copies I ordered? Only time will answer those questions.

I know all of you were happy with the Reunion. I received many thank you's and notes about what a wonderful time everyone had. All the committee members did a bang up job and it couldn't have been any better. I myself thank everyone for all his or her effort.

Just to bring you up to date on the DAR application. After all the preparation, dues paying, etc. Washington wrote back that I have to prove Robert was the son William Durland Jr. son of the Revolutionary

patriot. I was too busy with everything on the book and am just now getting back to it. They cashed my check though!

This is the last Newsletter for this year. I will do it again next year as I plan to get back in the groove writing letters, surfing the web, and researching all the related families and historical events. Researching takes lots of time but it's so much fun to discover the world and make-believe our ancestors were a part of all that transpired. Maybe their names are not mentioned but they were there nonetheless.

I still want to go to Watertown, Wisconsin as they have a genealogical society and since our ancestor was one of the town founders, I may find much more on William Wiggenhorn in their libraries.

I have some leads on getting to the bottom of Audrey Schueneman Flynn. I hope to discover more about her that will lead me to her son who has been lost to the family for many years.

The tribute to Grandma Minnie was long overdue, as she was such an influence on her grandchildren. She was a hard taskmaster but I for one felt her presence always.

I may not see all of you before the Holidays so Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and the very best in the coming New Year.

*Mary Durland*

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