

# ***KNOW YOUR ROOTS***

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

Volume VIII Issue 4 KUHNER/WIGGENHORN October 2003

## OTILIA KUHNERT

1876-1903



## VIEWS OF OTILIA KUHNERT

Minnie and Josie always spoke of their half-sister, Otilia, with much affection. Otilia was the first child born of the second marriage of Charles Kuhnert after his first wife, Mena Kuhnert, died 14 July 1871. Mena was the mother of Minnie and Josie and their three brothers Charles Jr., August, and Louis.

Perhaps it was because Charles married Bertha Zeese in less than a year after Mena died, or perhaps it was because Minnie had been the youngest of the family, Minnie always said her new stepmother was mean to her. However when one considers that Minnie was twelve when her mother died and thirteen when her father remarried, it is easy to see how she might have been reluctant to accept Bertha so soon.

Between 1874 and 1875 Charles Kuhnert moved his family from Waukegan to Johnsburg.

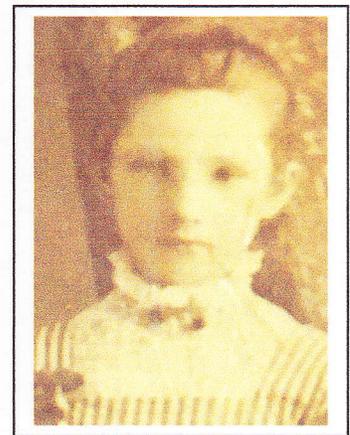
Otilia was born 18 April 1875 in that little German village. Following the birth of Otilia there were two other girls who didn't survive, and one son, Rudolph, who did. All these children were born in Johnsburg but are interred in Waukegan. Minnie and Josie never talked about Rudolph, but they did talk about Otilia.

The first picture we have of Otilia is a tintype with her doll. It has always been a favorite of mine. She looks to be about five years old, because Rudolph was born in 1881 and there are no baby pictures of Rudolph.

It is easy to see how Josie and Minnie would be attached to this very pretty child born when they were 18 and 17 respectively.



A while later tintypes were abandoned and cabinet cards became popular. I find a picture of Otilia with her parents and Rudolph on one of these cards. I estimate that Otilia would have been nine or ten.



Otilia was growing up to be a very beautiful child and a very talented one also. I know that she was taking piano lessons because as she grew older she played the organ in St. John the Baptist church in Johnsburg. This was told to me by her sister Minnie who was still at home.

The picture below of Otilia is one from her First Communion. At that time children didn't make their first communions until they were twelve so this picture illustrates how she looked at that time. She had the same pixie face and her dress was quite elaborate. She looked almost like a bride. Again, what surprises me is that there are no pictures of Rudolph.

Her sisters at the time of her first communion had been married in 1882. Josie and her husband were owners of the McHenry House in McHenry, and Minnie and her husband, John Schueneman, were living in Chicago.

You have all seen these pictures in the newsletters except the one on the cover. I have no idea when it was taken or where. As you can see she is a very beautiful young woman.

How long she continued to play the organ in St. John the Baptist church or even how long she continued to live in Johnsburg I do not know.

The only thing I do know for sure is that she died in 1903. She was unmarried and age 28. That picture must have been taken a short time before her death because women were still wearing long dresses.

Nor do I know what she died of. I have tried to find her death certificate but to no avail. The only reason I have her death date is because she was buried in the family plot in Waukegan but as you will learn in the next story, there is not even a visible head stone.



## THE CEMETERY PLOT OF CHARLES KUHNERT

In Waukegan, Illinois surrounded by the railroad tracks and a super highway are two cemeteries, Oakwood and St. Mary's. It is St. Mary's that contains the Charles Kuhnert family.

You first heard about this family plot in the Kuhnert 1999 issue in which I gave you the following list.

1. Pa. Charles Kuhnert, buried 2/14/1895, age 72
2. Ma. Williamine Kuhnert, buried 7/14/1871, age 49
3. Ma. Kuhnert, (probably Bertha)
4. Otilia Kuhnert, 1876-1903 daughter of Charles & Bertha
5. Infant
6. Cabbie Kuhnert
7. Adele Kuhnert, daughter of Charles and Bertha
8. Still-born infant
9. Charles Kuhnert 1851-1942
10. Margaret 1855-1924

Since that issue I have learned that the date of the death of Charles Kuhnert is indeed correct, although his birth date was 1822.

As you can see both wives were interred there, except there is no date for the Ma Kuhnert who was probably Bertha.

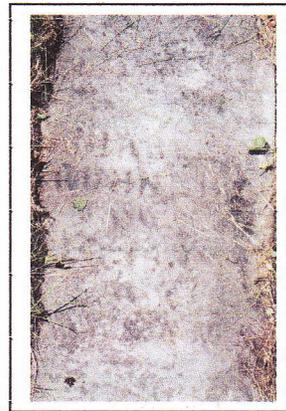
I know that there was a daughter Helena who could be #5. Infant but I have no idea who Cabbie is unless it is Rudolph. I have no trace of Rudolph at all or when Bertha died or where.

# 8 the stillborn infant could have been either Mena's or Bertha's. There is no date either for that burial.

Otilia you will note is # 4, which is the only date I have for her death.

# 9 Charles is the eldest son of the father Charles and Margaret is his wife. Sadly those headstones are the only ones visible.

I had heard that all the old headstones in St. Mary's were to be raised. When I visited the cemetery a while back I could find the stone of Charles the father but only that one. It had not been raised.



These pictures were taken by Janet Smith and, as you can see, the entire size of the headstone on the right is very small. I doubt if you can make out the writing of the stone on the left. The stone itself is very worn and is almost impossible to read. The only somewhat legible name was Kuhnert.

Charles Sr. was buried in 1895; undoubtedly the headstone of Mena would be nigh on impossible to decipher if it would be raised. I talked with the office of Mr. Roth, the curator, and he was to call me back if it were possible to raise all the others.

So as of today, the only one discernible is that of Charles Sr. and of course, his son Charles and his wife Margaret.

Certainly Otilia could be read if raised, but if not, all the others seem to be doomed to be buried.

## SERENDIPITY, HOW SWEET IT IS

I thought it would be interesting for everyone to know how serendipity has played a part in my Wiggenhorn research. It all began when I received a letter from my mother in 1968 after I had asked her about what she knew of the Wiggenhorns. I already knew that Grandma Minnie's mother was Wilhelmina Wiggenhorn but that was all I knew at that time.

In her letter mother mentioned several names in California. Most turned out to be a dead end. She mentioned one in Watertown, Wisconsin. That was the first time I had heard of Watertown. However, another name she gave me was that of a Wiggenhorn who had been a librarian in Billings, Montana. I knew Billings wasn't a large city, and I also knew that a second cousin on the Durland side lived in Billings. I had her address so I wrote her looking for this Wiggenhorn that mother mentioned in her letter. This was the first time serendipity played a part in the beginning of my quest.

Enclosed in another letter from mother dated September 1981 was a clipping from the History of McHenry County, which told the story of Rudolph Diesel, who married Rosalie Wiggenhorn. This was new information. The article said Rosalie was married in Woodstock, Illinois. Woodstock is where Grandma Minnie was born. I felt I was making progress.

But it had taken me from 1968 to 1988 to finally get some information about the librarian. Mary Durland Roberts, answering my plea, gave me the name of Ruth Wiggenhorn, now Mrs. Wm. Hicks who had graduated from

Billings High School in 1937. She now lived in Renton, Washington.

Thanks to Ruth Hicks, my journey cross-country became very fruitful. Her kind letter of March 1989 referred me to a niece who was also interested in the Wiggenhorn family. This niece lived in South Nyack, New York. So from Texas, to Montana, to Washington, to New York, my requests about the Wiggenhorns crossed many states.

I didn't hear from the niece, Julia, for a few months and I was beginning to think my efforts were to no avail. But one day in July of 1989, I received a big packet from S. Nyack, New York. Would wonders never cease! In this packet were numerous letters and copies of material going back to 1410 AD about the Wiggenhorns. No wonder she had taken so long to answer my letter.

I quote from her letter, "you have hit pay dirt. I will tell you what I know and you can pursue it further with some people whose names I'll give you."

One of the names was that of a Wiggenhorn descendant, Klaudia Emmons, in Sima, California. So back across the U. S. I went.

A letter to Klaudia produced an interesting fact that proved to be false. Through the Mormon Church she had done an extensive search on the Wiggenhorn family and her research showed that Wilhelmina had died in Germany. No wonder there was little or no information about her.

I hastened to inform her that Wilhelmina did not die in Germany and I was part of a big family of her descendants.

The other name that Julia gave me was that of Charles Wallman in Watertown, Wisconsin.

Again, serendipity played a big role. Charles Wallman was most gracious when I wrote him and although he wrote that he was not a genealogist, he was the author of a book, "The 48ers of Watertown, Wisconsin." which included some history of the Wiggenhorn family. He was generous with his letters, although he knew nothing of Wilhelmina Wiggenhorn (our ancestor) or Karl Kuhnert. However, he sent me a myriad of material, which is the basis of most of the knowledge I have of our Wiggenhorn family. He is the one who sent me the excerpt of the Golden Wedding, the story that follows.

But one day I received another letter from him and again I quote:

*"Dear Mary,  
This may end up being a fun day for you—what was Lew Carroll's line in the 'Jabbewock? Oh frabjous day, callou, callay,' or something like that. A paper that I had gotten a couple of years ago from a professional genealogist who is a specialist in Jefferson County regarding the Wiggenhorns fell out of a folder today by accident... To make the long story short, I found this entry in Book 'C' Page 112 of the county's marriage records of 1850.*

*I hereby certify that I have solemnized marriage between Mr. Charles Coonheart and Miss Wilhelmine Wiggenhorn in the presence of the latties [sic] Brother and Sister it appearing from oath of Mr. Charles Coohear[sic] that no legal impediment existed thereto.*

*Rev. John Healy*

*Recorded June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1850."*

Fell out of the folder by accident!

Charles Wallman went on to say that it didn't take much detective instinct to know that Coonheart was the phonetic spelling of Kuhnert! Finally some definitive information about Carl Kuhnert and Wilhelmine Wiggenhorn.

But married by an Irish priest - why? I conjured up lots of stories about why this would happen. Maybe she married without her parent's permission because she was from a Catholic family and Carl was Lutheran. Maybe the German priest would not marry them because of the church laws against mixed marriages.

I never did find the answer to this quandary until once again, serendipity found a way. The mystery was solved when I made a visit to Watertown a few years ago with Janet Smith and Joan Larkin. By then I knew that St. Henry's was the German church but it was locked. We decided to pay a visit to the Irish church, St. Bernard, for information.

The church office was open and soon we were telling the kind housekeeper of our dilemma. She brought out a thick history book of St. Bernard's. She showed us where it chronicled Fr. Healy was the only pastor of the town, not only of the Irish but of the other ethnic groups as well. There was no German church in 1850, but there was a wooden church building at the Buena Vista House, which had no roof. This was to become St. Henry's, the German Catholic Church of Watertown in 1853. Even St. Bernard's had not been built or dedicated until December 1, 1850.

So Charles Kuhnert (Coonheart) and Wilhemine(Mena) Wiggenhorn were married by Fr. Healy on June 10, 1850 in the make-shift church at the Wiggenhorn Buena Vista House!

## A GOLDEN WEDDING

And a Bit of History

This account was sent to me by Charles Wallman whom I mentioned in the story before this one. It was from the Watertown Republican of September 6, 1871. The historical reference to when William and Josephine were married in 1821 in Germany was particularly interesting, as were the feelings of the writer of the day.

**A Golden Wedding** —The rare and beautiful incident of a Golden Wedding took place in this city on Monday the 4th of September, 1871. The parties were Mr. WILLIAM and Mrs. JOSEPHINE WIGGENHORN, and the last ceremony was celebrated at St. Henri's Church, in the presence of seven surviving children and thirty-nine grand children. The festivities were observed at the residence of EUGENE WIGGENHORN, in the First Ward. The first marriage was solemnized in the Kingdom of Westphalia, in 1821, just fifty years ago, and the second in the State of Wisconsin—which then had no name on the map, as Westphalia has none now. One State has disappeared from the political world, and the other has arisen to be a great and flourishing commonwealth—the adopted home of the venerable couple and their descendants. Three quarters of a century is a long period in human life, but a short one in the career of nations. What wonderful events have happened in that time! In 1797, when Mr. WIGGENHORN was born, the First NAPOLEON was almost at the summit of his greatness; not only has his own empire passed away, but that of his nephew lies in ruins around the exiled usurper. Prussia has emerged from its terrible humiliation, and taken the place of France as the leading nation of Europe. If we turn to America, equally marvellous is the historic picture which the scene presents to eyes that can look back into the close of the century of WASHINGTON. The contrast is so amazing as to make one seem transformed into a new world of men and nations—of thought, feeling, activity and civilization. May the evening of the life of the aged pilgrims be peaceful and happy—serene and cheerful, as they journey on in the declining radiance of the setting sun.

## MARY'S MESSAGES



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The wedding of David Griffith was simply beautiful. No detail was left undone. On Friday night before the wedding the rehearsal dinner was held, a fun party with mariachis and lots of Mexican food.

The next day, the sister of the bride Susan Byrd gave a luncheon at one of the exclusive restaurants in Austin. Each attendant was to wear a hat. It was formal and lovely. Only females were invited.

The day of the wedding was hot but the chapel was temporarily air conditioned by David so the ceremony couldn't have been nicer. The flowers, the flower girls, the bride's attendants, and of course the bride were arrayed in beautiful outfits.

The reception was without parallel. Little butterflies with Texas wildflower seeds were on every table. I congratulate both David and Ellen for not leaving one stone unturned. I hope they will have a long and happy life together.

As promised, I want to give special mention to Andrew Cuda. By the time you receive this newsletter he will have begun his university education at Michigan State. I know that he received many honors when he

graduated but I particularly want to explain one that has special bearing on all the research I've been doing on the family. The award, Sons of the American Revolution, or SAR, is given to the outstanding student of the current graduating class. What makes it apropos to all the family history is that Andrew is a real son of the American Revolution. Many of his ancestors fought for our independence and even though the SAR committee didn't know that when they chose him, it was a double honor.

I know he received many scholastic honors also. However, I don't have the list. Suffice it to say, he was valedictorian of his class and gave an inspiring address to the audience at commencement. I just know Andrew will achieve his goals and I wish him the best.

Nana Day was a resounding success although there were many missing. The rain didn't dampen the spirits of all who attended because we retired to the beautiful home of John and Janet Smith and finished out the day. The food was great and the company greater.

But I need to mention the golf outing on Saturday under the direction of Ted Schueneman. I know everyone had a wonderful time but I don't know who was the winner. In the evening we had a pizza party and the kids had a fun time with karaoke.

It was decided there would be another Nana Day in five years. My generation is not in charge so you will have to get the particulars from the next generation.

I'm working on the next booklet but as of now I haven't received too many orders for the Slip Case. There will be more news in the Schueneman newsletter coming up next.