



# KNOW YOUR ROOTS

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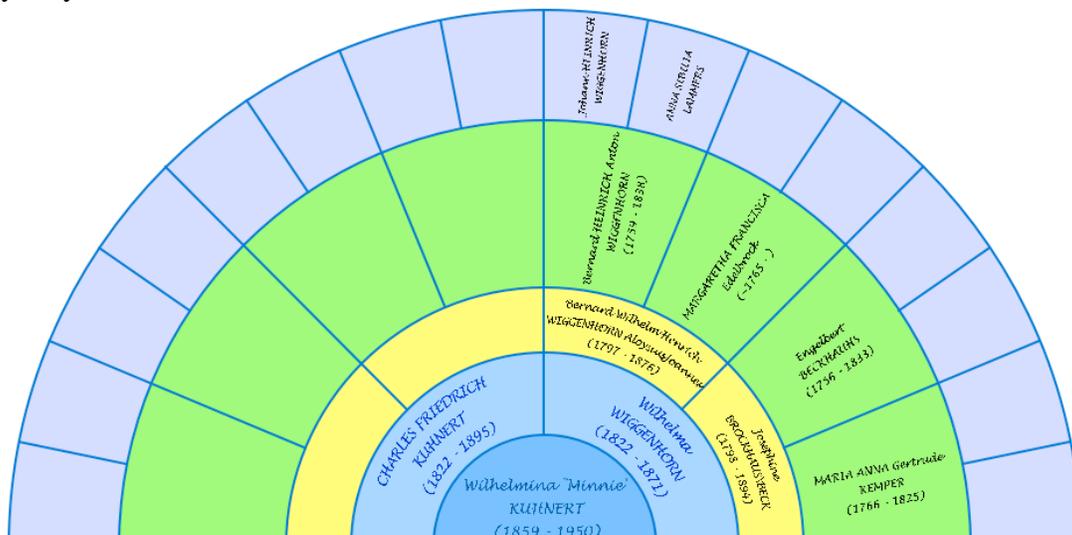
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## BRICK WALL MYSTERIES

In genealogy terms, when an ancestor is elusive and cannot be traced, it's called a "brick wall." The family of our grandfather Charles Kuhnert is one of my brick walls. He remains one of the mysteries of the family. I have spent hours trying to find his parents in Germany to no avail. I even have a contact in Germany who has been helping me. On Minnie's chart, even though Minnie's mother died young, her heritage is a long one as you can see on the right side of the chart. But on the left side, that of her father, there is nothing. Mystery.....



Nothing of his family in Germany can be found. Grandma Minnie had told me her father had either deserted or left Germany so as not to have to serve in the army. Because conditions were very bad at that time, everyone had to serve in the military. She also told me he was from the north. Whether this story about the military is true or not we may never know. I cannot find a ship's record of his passage, and in order to leave Germany, one had to have permission. This has to be the answer to my not being able to find his passage; he must have walked across the border and left from another country. However, he was from the north so he could have left from Bremen and many of those records are lost. Nevertheless I do know, regardless, that he arrived with funds.

We may never know about his family in Germany, but the life of our grandfather Charles Kuhnert here in the United States also is mysterious. According to the History of McHenry County, Old Settlers of McHenry County, written in 1885, he arrived in McHenry County August 10, 1848. His obituary says he was born in 1822, which means he was 26

when he showed up in McHenry County. This is the earliest date, 1848, that I can find any information about him here or in Germany. Where was he for 26 years? Mystery....

We know that when he was naturalized in McHenry County in 1854, he swore to renounce and abjure all allegiance to the Grand Duke of Brunswick. In his obituary, it also said he was from Blankenburg, Germany. I found this very small town in the Duchy of Brunswick, a German State at the time, but my source tells me that there is no record of a Charles Kuhnert in Blankenburg. I can't find anything in the records of the Mormon Church, which is the definitive source for German records. So this is another mystery. I was told the Kuhnert family was very prominent in Germany. He came to this country with funds; we know that because he bought land. Why did he select McHenry County over any other place? Another mystery....



This photograph is a “Carte de Vista” which is a small photo on cardboard 2 inches by 3 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. You have seen it before in past newsletters. I believe it might have been taken in Chicago in 1866 when he applied for a passport. Carte de Vistas were popular from 1859 to 1890. As you can see, he is a very handsome, genteel looking young man. He was 5 feet 9 inches tall. His hair was light brown and his eyes were blue. He had a high forehead with no distinguishing marks. His complexion was light and his chin was round. All these characteristics were noted in his application for a passport. He had already been naturalized but he still had to take another oath of allegiance to this country. Grandma Minnie did tell me that he went back to Germany at that time because his mother was ill. I believe his mother died while he was there, but I'm not sure. I cannot find a record of his mother. Mystery....

Those mysteries mentioned are not the only ones about this elusive grandfather. The next date after 1848 that I have for him is 1850 in Watertown, Wisconsin when he married Wilhelma Wiggerhorn. Where and how in the world did he meet her? Even though her family also arrived in 1848, they came from a completely different area. While our Charles was from the north of Germany, Wilhelma was from Westfalia, in the Kingdom of Prussia in the west. He spoke “high German;” she spoke “low German,” completely different dialects from different areas of Germany. He was Lutheran; she was Catholic. This must be yet another untold love story in the family because of so many differences between the two. The marriage was an anomaly at the time. The mystery is in how they came to meet each other, given all these differences. Also, he traveled from Illinois to Wisconsin to marry her, which was a long distance in those times.

Once they were married, he did not move back to McHenry County until 1854 when he bought land. Their first child, Charles, was born in Belvidere, Boone County, Illinois, in September 1851. Why there? I may have that answer, but you'll just have to wait for the October newsletter because it is much too lengthy to include with this one.

Enjoy your visit with our handsome grandfather and just keep in mind there is more to come about him.

Note: Look for the next issue October 1.

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