



KNOW YOUR ROOTS

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THEY BEGAN THEIR MARRIAGES TOGETHER IN 1882

Our direct grandmother Minnie Kuhnert and grandfather John Schueneman were married the 22nd of May 1882 in a double ceremony with Minnie's sister Josephine Kuhnert and Joseph Heimer. The sisters' lives were chronicled in the booklet *SISTERS* in the year 2005, but not much was written about their respective husbands. Because Minnie and Josephine's paths were so different after their marriages, this is an account of how their lives developed.

I found a parallel with the bridegrooms' families. They both were sons of farmers who elected not to follow farming but instead both went to Chicago to work. Their ages present an interesting discrepancy. Our grandfather John was born in 1850 and Joe Heimer was born in 1858. Because of this difference in ages, their lives probably did not intertwine until a much later date, even though they both were from farms in the same area and their families attended the same church.

I don't know exactly what year John went to Chicago because I couldn't find him on any 1870 census, but in 1860 he was still living at home with his parents, Johann Heinrich Schuenemann and Maria Catherine Greitenevert, on the farm. The next account I can find for him before his marriage is in the 1880 census when he was a boarder in the household of his uncle Bernhard. Bernhard was the brother of Johann Heinrich. Both Johann and Bernhard were weavers in Ochtrup before coming to the U.S. but since Johann Heinrich married a farmer's daughter, Maria Catherine, he must have decided to farm. Bernhard did not, and so he began his life in Chicago and the census lists him as a grocer. In that same census John's occupation was listed as carpenter. Interestingly, Bernhard is the one who built the Schuenemann building that is still standing in Chicago (see Vol. IV Issue 4, 1999: Pages 4 and 5). This picture of John is an early one. It must have been taken during those years for which I have no record. It does predate the wedding which was in 1882.

Joseph Heimer left his father's farm when he was 20 years old to work for the packing firm of Tobey & Booth in Chicago. I'm not sure of his parents because for some



reason the Heimers' census information is unobtainable. Joe worked at this company just for a short time before he started his own hardware business in Chicago which he still had at the time of his marriage.

There is a lot to compare with the bridegrooms that leads to much speculation. First of all, the men must have met the Kuhnert women probably through the church in Johnsburg, but the span of their ages was so large that one would not think they were close friends. At the time of the wedding, John was 32 and Minnie was 23. Joseph was 24 and Josephine was 24. So we have to conclude that John was a bachelor for a long time,

I never asked Grandma Minnie why she and Aunt Jo had a double wedding, and today I wonder about it a lot. I know the two sisters were very close. There is a story there that we shall never know.

The double wedding took place in Johnsburg, close to McHenry, on May 22, 1882 at St. John's Church. The two sisters, after their double wedding, began their lives in Chicago where the grooms lived. They either lived in the same house or next to one another. Minnie had the first child, John Charles, born in 1883. Then Josephine's only child, also named Charles, was born in January 1885 and Minnie's Henry was born in July 1885. Thus the two sisters' lives began with their families. Both Charles were named after Charles Kuhnert, father of the sisters.

However, this was soon to change. In 1892 Joseph purchased the McHenry House in McHenry, Illinois. For the first time, the sisters were separated, and financially Josephine's husband prospered in the hotel business while Minnie's husband, though according to his daughter Elvera, earned a good wage, never attained the financial level of Joseph Heimer. During the time Joseph and Josephine owned the McHenry House, Minnie and John were adding to their family. Another boy, Leo, was born in 1887 and Elvera, their only daughter, was born in 1893.

While Josephine's husband prospered financially, tragedy struck their lives. First Joseph had to sell the McHenry House, a very profitable venture, because of ill health. Then just shortly after the sisters' twenty-fifth wedding anniversaries in 1907, Joseph died rather suddenly in 1908. However, because of Joseph's astute business ability, Josephine was left well provided for.

When Joseph died, Josephine decided to return to Chicago where not only Minnie lived, but also three Kuhnert brothers. Joseph had invested a large sum of money in the company Luis owned, namely Remien and Kuhnert, a very successful wallpaper business. But another misfortune befell Josephine. Her brother Luis died in 1920, but she did receive the \$6800 Joseph had invested. Personal tragedy continued to follow the two girls. Josephine lost her only son, and Minnie too lost a son.

In the interim, John retired so Minnie and he moved to McHenry, and Josephine followed and lived in an apartment in the McHenry House, the establishment her husband once owned. A few years after the move, John died and Minnie's daughter and family moved in with her so she wouldn't be alone. Aunt Jo and Minnie were inseparable.

We know the story of the sisters and their lives together, but this is only the story of their husbands, where they came from, where they both grew into manhood, and what happened after they married sisters. The anecdotes surrounding their romances that resulted in the double wedding shall remain a mystery.

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