

THE WITTKOPF FAMILY HISTORY

The Wittkopf history is, from what I have read typical of many families living in Germany during the seventeen and eighteen hundreds. War, famine and unemployment were serious problems as they are in many places in the world today. The exception in those days was there were places to go to better oneself. The United States was one choice. This is a story of parents losing their sons who went to America; children (grown men) failing to keep in touch with parents; and parents growing old with little communication with their children. As the story develops, you will see two of these ancestors were free spirits and lacked family responsibilities. A third son did at least correspond with his parents intermittently and was a responsible husband and father. The latter is our direct line of descendance. Other than names, dates, and places, I have not found any information prior to the mid seventeen hundreds so that is where we begin.

Franz Heinrich Wittkopf lived in a small town called Equard that is near Peine in northern Germany just east of Hanover. He died before 1818.

I have written to the church parish but have not had a reply as to his

vocation, marriage date, etc. Franz Heinrich had a son, Christian

Friedrick Nicolaus Wittkopf born in 1797. CFN Wittkopf was a

property owner (unusual in those days) and lived north of the church

in Bulkau. He must have entered the army at an early age as he fought

in the Battle of Waterloo as a member of the Bremen Husaren Regiment in

1815 when he was eighteen. As a horse cavalryman, he carried the rank

of Husar, a very respected rank. I have no information regarding his

wife.

Johann Simon Gronau was born about 1768. He was a property owner in

the north east area of Dobrock in the church parish of Cadenberge.

This is in the northern part of Germany, south east of Cuxhaven.

Johann Simon was a shoemaker. A divorce from his first wife left him

with a son, William, who came to America in the 1830's. William lived

for a time in New York City at Canal and Washington Sts.

Catharina Elisabeth Schade was born on March 15, 1759. Her family had

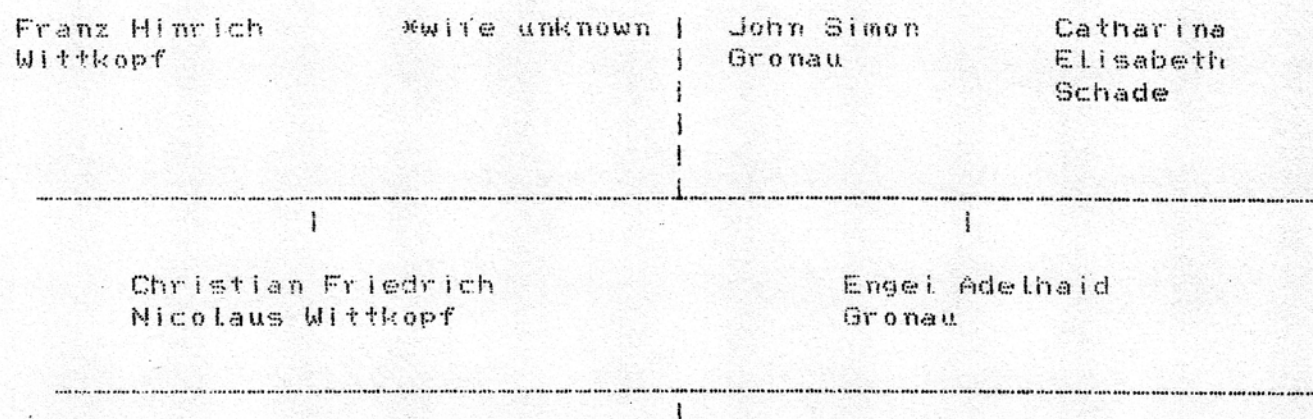
lived in Bulkau at least since the early 1700's. Bulkau is also in the

area of Germany near Cadenberge. Catharina and Johann Gronau were

married on February 21, 1792. This marriage produced twins, Engel

Adelheid and Johann Peter born on October 31, 1799.

Engel Adelhaide Gronau married Christian Friedrich Nicolaus Wittkopf on
March 26, 1818 in Butkau. This marriage produced three sons. *This
is how the family tree looked in 1823.



B-March 19, 1819 Heinrich August Friedrich (August)

B-April 18, 1921 Johann Willian Simon (Johann)

B-April 26, 1823 Christian Friedrich Nicolaus (Fritz)

In the early 1850's all three sons immigrated to the U.S.

The Wittkopfs lived in Bolkau, Ottendorf and moved to Altenwalde where
CFN Senior worked for the road department. This last move was made
about 1845 when they moved into a new apartment near the Schleswig-
Holstein border which they called the frontier.

Johann was married in Germany before coming to the States. He came first and then sent for his wife. As a wedding present his parents

(CFN and Engel Alelhaid) gave his wife a bed to take with her. After going to America the daughter-in-law never contacted her husband's parents again and Johann did not write his parents for many years.

Fritz, the youngest son, was quite another case altogether. He was married before leaving Germany and had a son, Fritz Nicolaus, born in 1847. Fritz did not send for his wife to join him in America and on May 1, 1860 she died leaving their son to live with the grandparents (CFN and EA). Not only did Fritz leave his wife, but he also abandoned his son. Fritz never wrote to his parents or to his son. In November 1855 Fritz was in Easton, Pa. and traveled to New Orleans about 1859-1860.

Heinrich August Friedrich our direct line of descendance must have come to America about 1848-1850. It is doubtful in my mind that August met his wife in Germany. Although I have no documentation at this time, I believe August came through Baltimore, met Eleanor Hellwig and married. This is assumed because August's parents (CFN and EA) did not know his wife and were glad to hear that she was from a good family, plus the fact that Eleanor's brother J.W. Hellwig lived in Baltimore. JW and Eleanor Hellwig had a sister Eliese, a brother George and a young

brother Carl, who in 1869 had just finished his apprenticeship in business in Melsungen, where their parents were living.

August and Eleanor settled in Romulus, Mich. By 1865 it had been eleven years since he had written to his parents and they thought he had died. By this time the Civil War was over in the U.S. and in Germany the Austrians and Prussians had defeated the Danes.

The family had 40 acres in Romulus and 160 acres in LaPeer, Mich. The 1870 Romulus census showed their land valued at \$1500 and personal possessions of \$300.

By March, 1866, the family was harvesting good crops and had begun to butcher their home grown livestock. August wrote to his parents that he had salt and oil on his property and would not sell it for \$50,000.

(Encyclopedia Britannica shows large deposits of salt in and around

~~Detroit~~ ^{reIT}). The parents wanted very much for August to return to

Germany. He had promised his parents he was going to America only for Ten years and then would return. They said August could live like a king in Germany on \$50,000.

Many Germans were going to America from that area because they did not

want to serve in the military and because of poor economic conditions.

Germany had had its share of war and famine. It must have been difficult for the parents in Germany.

In 1866 the German league had been destroyed and Hanover was controlled by the King of Prussia. CFN and EA were hoping they would become Hanoverians once again. That outlook was not very bright as France and Russia were getting ready for war that would almost certainly involve Germany. In Germany that year the winter was very mild and as a result the mice and rat population was not depleted and they destroyed the crops to the extent that there was only one half the normal harvest. Many people were going to America and in the month of August, 1866, 7438 people went to N.Y. from Hanover alone. Fritz (the grandson) wanted to immigrate and if his Uncle August had not written him to stay home, Fritz would have left in the fall of 1866. (Comment why would August not want Fritz to immigrate?)

Johann had finally written his parents in early 1866 advising them he was the sole heir to their estate since his brothers were dead. The parents, being very upset, knew this to be false since they were

corresponding with August. Their small estate was 200 thaler and they said they would give 100 to Johann and the rest to their grandson, Fritz. (In 1865 the thaler was worth 67 cents.) I suppose they thought August was doing well enough and did not need any money.

By March 18, 1866, August and Eleanor had four children. Adelaide born Oct. 18, 1853 (per death certificate,) 1857 per 1900 census.

Adelaide is our direct line of descendance.

Christiana 1857-58

Johann 1860

Otto 1863

Between Nov. 2, 1866 and Oct. 20, 1867 the fifth child named William was born.

The parents in Germany were still longing to see August and his family. They were now saying, not if you come to visit us, but when you come to visit. CFN was now 70 years old and Engel A. was 68 years old.

The golden wedding anniversary of CFNW and Engel was celebrated in fine style on March 26, 1868. Following is the account of the event.

Altenwalde, April 14, 1868

Dear August!

We hope that our letter will find you in good health; as far as we are concerned, thank God we are in good health and good spirits. Every day, we look for a letter from you, and it may be that one is already on the way, but so far we haven't received one yet, and we also expected you constantly around the 18th of March, but you were in error, dear August, our wedding day was not on March 18th but on the 26th, and we celebrated our Golden Wedding in good health and with enjoyment. Now, we must tell you a little about our Golden Wedding. The festivities began at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Sixteen little girls were dressed all in white and had a green wreath on their heads and around their dress and a little basket of flowers in their hands. Twelve Musicians and the 16 wreath maidens came for us to our house and escorted us to the wedding house; at 5 o'clock, we started off again with music and went to the church and the little wreath maidens walked behind the musicians and strewed flowers; in the church, we first sang two verses of the hymn, 'Bis hierher hat mich Gott gebracht' (God brought me safely to this place) etc., then the wedding sermon was preached. After that, the Pastor presented us with a pretty Bible from the old Queen Elisabeth of Prussia, Gilt-edged and with a golden cross on one side and a golden chalice on the other, and inside three pictures, Elisabeth and her husband, who has been dead, however, since 1860, and DR. Martin Luther. After that the last verse of the hymn mentioned was sung, and thereafter we returned from church to the wedding house with music and the little wreath maidens who strewed flowers again. They honored us very solemnly in Altenwalde, and the little girls in their white garb looked very pretty; the church door and the altar were adorned with green garlands and golden bows in between, and the door of the wedding house and the sofa on which we sat were also wreathed with greens and the table had golden ornamental strips, and Mother had a golden wreath upon her head, and the two of us had a small golden bouquet on the left side of the bodice. Four persons arranged the event, and 325 people participated; the oldest guests said that never as long as they could remember had there been such a wedding in Altenwalde and surely would never be seen again which made us very happy. Among the presents we received were 10 Thalers from the present King, Wilhelm I of Prussia, and from the wedding, after expenses were met, 53 Thaler, and he who stood for the father in church, Ytjen by name, gave us 4 Thaler, altogether, including several smaller presents we received 70 Thaler, which will serve to take care of us in our old age; our joy would have been even greater if all of you had been with us, but our hope was in vain, for there was no relative other than my brother Christoffer with his daughter, he manages the Stender Farm near Otterndorf.

Signed
Fritz

As the grandparents grew older, they wished for one of August's daughters to take care of them. His wife Eleanor apparently volunteered to do this either by having the parents come to America or by going to Germany. I suspect she may have been tired of living on the farm. There was still no word from Johann and Fritz, August's brothers.

Meanwhile back in Germany in 1868 Fritz Nicolaus now 21 years of age had signed up to enter the Prussian Army, however he fractured his leg in a farm accident and was unable to go. Later he became exempted from service because of the injury and was very much relieved that he did not have to serve. Fritz' grandparents were depending on him to take care of them in their old age. (This seemed to be a major concern to them). Without their permission he married a girl from Altenbruch. He was now in Ritzelbittel working for a farmer, Gustav Schleirer, and earning fifty thaler per year. Fritz also asked his uncle August to come to Germany for a visit. In 1870 Fritz Nicolaus and his wife had a child and named him August, apparently after his uncle for whom he had a great deal of admiration.

In late 1868 or January 1869, J.W. Hellwig, Eleanor's brother, who was living in Baltimore, visited the Wittkopf's in Michigan. Adelhaide, the oldest daughter of August and Eleanor must not have like living on the farm, and when J.W. Hellwig returned from his visit, Adelhaide returned with him. They left Detroit on the Great Western Railroad, from the Michigan Southern Depot. The train traveled through Cleveland, and Lima, Ohio; Pittsburgh, and Harrisburg Pa. to Baltimore.

Monday - Left Detroit 5:30 p.m.

Arrived Lima 12:00 p.m.

Tuesday - Left Lima 6:00 a.m.

Arrived Pittsburgh 4:00 p.m. thru Harrisburg

Wednesday - Arrived Baltimore 7:30 a.m.

Within 1/2 hour were at home.

Mrs. Hellwig purchased all new clothes for Adelhaide, including hat, gloves, and stockings. Adelhaide said she was not homesick and did not want to go back to Michigan.

During this period the Wittkopf family was involved with some sort of crude oil drilling venture. It failed in 1868, and the venture was to be extended to next year.

On February 2, 1869, the last child Sophia A. was born. The parents in Germany still had not heard a word from Johann since 1866, and still nothing from Fritz. August had written to ask for the family bible and the Waterloo book, and also one thaler, another souvenir of Waterloo. The parents said this would be kept for August, because they did not know how to send it to America. The grandson, Fritz, also sent his picture to August and Eleanor. (Perhaps Fritz's son's family may still have the Waterloo book and bible. If Fritz's son had any children they could possibly still be living today.)

In the late 1800's Michigan suffered many economic ups and downs. The timber industry was going at full blast, and there were many speculators and con men. August and Eleanor were apparently in some financial trouble. In February, 1871, J.W. Hellwig wrote August and Eleanor to find out why they had not acknowledged the \$20 J.W. had sent them. The letter was marked with the usual address, Taylor Center Post Office, Wayne County, Michigan.

By March, 1871, the parents in Germany had not heard from August since June 1868. Fritz, the grandson, now married, as noted previously. The grandparents had depended on him to take care of them in their old age,

and now he was asking for help. Fritz's son is a year old. CFNW was 74 years old and still working hard. His wife was now 72 and they are still hoping that one of August's daughters will come to take care of them.

In the early 1870's, the U.S. was in a depression. (Assumption) The family apparently lost almost everything they had and moved to Baltimore County, Maryland, in what was then the third election district of Baltimore County. The 1880 census lists August, Eleanor, Christiana, Otto William, and Sophia. Adelheid was married to Robert Clark in 1875 and there is no trace of Johann.

TO BE CONTINUED