

**Blossoms on the Thistle:  
An Account of the Lives and Christian Ministry  
of the Rev. and Mrs. Charles H. Riedesel 1871 to 1960  
(Portions)**

Gerhard A. Riedesel, 1975

*Editor's note: This extract is used with permission of the family. The original book chronicles the life of Rev. Charles Riedesel (1871-1960) and his wife, Elise Marie Zipf (1871-1949). Charles was the son of L. Henry Riedesel, one of the earliest immigrants from Wunderthausen. Gerhard (1904-1996) was a son of Charles and Elise Riedesel.*

**I. Before Charlie's Birth.**

The father of Charles Henry Riedesel was Ludwig Heinrich Riedesel, usually known as L. Henry Riedesel. Born in 1818 in Wunderthausen, a small village in Westphalia, Germany, he married Amalia Beitzel and soon had a number of children. [*One son and one daughter, ed.*]. They lived in a house with a thatched roof--a roof that covered the family's living quarters, the livestock, the farm equipment and the crops that were raised on the few acres they tilled outside the village. To add to the family's meager income the men of the household carved wooden spoons at night and during the winter. The spoons were carried on foot to nearby villages and traded for food and clothing--which in turn were carried home on foot.

The family were devout and active in the Reformed Church and worshipped in a small church building that in 1970, still stood neat and well kept on a grassy plot in the center of the village.

In 1845 Ludwig Heinrich, with his wife and several small children [*One son and one daughter, ed.*]. migrated to America and settled in Crawford County, Ohio, not far from Galion. With this family came his father and mother, Ludwig and Florentine (Althaus) Riedesel; two brothers, George and John; a sister Anna with her husband Franz Homrighausen and their children; and a young lady Catherine Schneider who was betrothed to Johannes Riedesel, brother of Ludwig Heinrich, who had come to America several years earlier [*actually a year earlier, ed.*]. Together they made quite an addition to the population of Crawford County where they started to farm.

In about 1847 a deadly plague [*possibly cholera, ed.*] struck the community. In the Riedesel family it struck down the elder Ludwig and Florentine Riedesel, father and mother of Ludwig Heinrich; Amalia, the wife of Ludwig Heinrich, and several of their children. Other relatives and friends died too. The victims were buried in what was called the 'Settlement Cemetery.' The graves were not well marked and soon became unidentified; the part of the cemetery received little care or maintenance and soon grew up in brush and woods.

The plague left Henry (as he will hereafter be called) with two sons, six year old Louis who had been born in Germany, and tiny baby John. In 1854 Henry married Elizabeth Schumacher, born in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, the daughter of a Pennsylvania Dutch [*i.e. Deutsch=German, ed.*] family.

In about 1850 Henry and his brother George set out on foot from Galion to a promising land called Iowa to find available farm land and place where they could live more prosperously. They were gone many weeks until their families at home became very concerned. Thru the observations of an acquaintance with a 'divining rod' the families were informed that the two men were safe and would soon return by way of a river boat; that they had found and secured land. The diviner described the land and the new location. Before long the two men returned by way of a boat on the Ohio River, and then by railroad. They described the results of their long trip and confirmed the information that the diviner had given.

In 1855 Henry and George moved their families to new homes in Iowa, to Clinton County about 30 miles northwest of Davenport. Henry's land lay on the edge of the village of Wheatland, on the Wapsi (Wapsipinicon) River. Here he built a log house and established his home.

Many of the settlers in Wheatland and the vicinity were devout members of the German Reformed Church who brought with them their bibles, catechisms and hymn books, and used them. Before a congregation was organized or a house of worship built they met in homes and conducted their worship services. The men took turns in preaching the sermon. Henry and his brothers were well versed in the bible and in the doctrines of the reformed faith. They were leaders in worship and Christian training.

In 1858 the Reformed faith families joined with the Presbyterians in the village to organize a German Presbyterian church affiliated with the Iowa City Presbytery. They erected a log church; the records say it was 36 feet long and 26 feet wide. Henry donated a parcel of land for the burial plot. A youthful Reformed minister, Rev. J. C. Klar was called and a small parsonage provided.

In 1861 the relationship with the Iowa City Presbytery was dissolved and St. Paul's German Reformed Church of Wheatland was organized. The new congregation issued a check for \$230 to the Iowa City Presbytery, thereby purchasing the little log church with its two lots and discharging an indenture of mortgage to the presbytery. The young pastor was retained--to be paid \$200 per year for three years, plus flour, potatoes and fire wood. All these details were recorded in the minutes of their meeting, kept in both English and German.

A school house for religious instruction (now it would be called an educational unit) was erected in 1863 and the parsonage was enlarged. Henry Riedesel was on the first board of trustees and thereafter served as an elder.

In 1877 a new house of worship was built at a cost of \$4,000 plus much donated labor. That sanctuary served and stood as a landmark in the community for 82 years.

The great-grandfather of Charlie's mother was Jost Schumacher who came to Pennsylvania from the Rhine Valley in Germany in 1738. He landed at Philadelphia and migrated to Westmoreland County in western Pennsylvania near the town of New Stanton. There his son William and grandson Daniel made their homes and here Charlie's mother Elizabeth was born. With her parents and a brother she moved to Galion, Ohio in 1836. There she met and married Henry Riedesel and then moved with him to their new home at Wheatland, Iowa.

## **II. A Beginning in Wheatland, Iowa**

Charles Henry Riedesel--Charlie--was born in the log farm home at the edge of Wheatland on August 21, 1871. He joined a family which besides his mother and father consisted of two half-brothers, Louis and John, and three brothers, William, Theodore, and Albert. A sister, born in 1857, had died at the age of six. When Charlie was five years old a foster sister Lena Meyer, ten years old, was adopted into the family.

Charlie was baptized in the little old log church by Pastor Fred Dieckmann and confirmed by the Reverend Christian Baum. He attended the Wheatland public schools and graduated from high school in 1888. A report card dated 1882 records that he made good grades in reading, spelling, writing, geography and arithmetic and was rated third in a class of eleven. His teacher then was Anne Wirth.

In 1887 the Riedesel home was again left motherless. Elizabeth Schumacher Riedesel was called to a heavenly home and her body laid to rest in the St. Paul's cemetery by the family farm. The place of mother in the home was taken over the following years by 'Aunt Emma', when Miss Emma Meyer, sister of adopted Lena Meyer, became the bride of Charlie's brother Theodore.

Just out of school at the age of seventeen Charlie was offered the position of teacher of a small rural school near Wheatland. He did not accept. Influenced by the counsel and aspirations of his father and uncles he decided to become a minister of the gospel. In the fall of 1888 he entered Heidelberg University, of the German Reformed Church, in Tiffin, Ohio.

In college Charlie applied himself diligently to the studies of a liberal arts pre-seminary course. He studied music, excelled at the piano, and sang in the University glee club. As electives he studied mathematics and land surveying. He joined the Heidelberg Literary Society.

His summers were spent on the farm helping his father and brothers with the cows and crops and fishing in the Wapsi River that flowed thru the farm. After getting a BA degree he continued his theological training in the Theological Seminary at Heidelberg.

On July 31, 1894 Charlie's father passed away and was laid to rest in the St. Paul's cemetery. The farm and the home became the property of Brother Theodore. Charlie's share of the family estate was written off against the cost of his college training. After finishing two years of seminary work he did not return for the usual final third year but turned his attention to his chosen work. The youthful theologian accepted the duties and responsibilities of assistant pastor of his home church, St. Paul's, in Wheatland, under the direction of the regular pastor the Reverend Carl Gustaf Zipf. He was ordained by Ursinus Classis of the German Reformed Church in Wheatland on May 10, 1896. As part of his responsibility he was the part time pastor of two small rural churches near Wheatland.

Fourteen miles north of Wheatland, just northwest of the village of Lost Nation was the Smithtown rural church--the place of worship and burial ground of the St. John's German Reformed Church. The congregation had been organized in 1867, erected a frame wooden sanctuary in 1874, and by 1886 had affiliated themselves with the pastoral charge of St. Paul's in Wheatland. They shared in the salary and services of the Wheatland pastor. As an assistant

pastor for St. Paul's Charlie became their part time pastor. He traveled the fourteen miles between his home and the Smithtown church in a horse-drawn buggy or on horseback.

*{Historical Note: The Smithtown congregation disbanded in 1917 and the members joined the nearby Methodist and Reformed congregations. The building and grounds, including the large burial plot near the church have been accepted by a non-denominational agency for an historical shrine. In 1971 the buildings and grounds are well maintained and preserved.}*

The farming community of Big Rock was located about four miles south of Wheatland. Here St. Paul's church of Wheatland sponsored and conducted a mission with worship services provided by the pastor and elders of St. John's. Here as assistant pastor to St. Paul's, Charlie regularly preached to small worshipping groups and on October 18, 1896 baptized four children of Fred and Louise Riedesel. This mission was organized into the Immanuel German Reformed Church in 1911 and organized independently with their own pastor.

Charlie's carefully kept personal records show that while assistant pastor at St. Paul's between 1896 and 1897, in addition to preaching he officiated at 15 baptisms, two confirmations, four weddings, and nine funerals. Such was the work of his first charge.

### **III. About the Zipf Family**

In the farm village of Unterschefflenz, Baden, Germany, in the last half of the nineteenth century a small town businessman was intent on sending his eight children to college. There were three sons, Carl, Wilhelm, and Robert, and five daughters, Elise, Caroline, Mary, Philippine, and Wilhelmina. Each was given an opportunity and much encouragement for a college education. All except Wilhelmina migrated to the United States.

Carl Gustaf Zipf, born December 22, 1842, was given a liberal business education (probably at Heidelberg University, in Heidelberg, Germany) to prepare him for a business career--to carry on his father's business. After migrating to America he decided to enter the ministry of the German Reformed Church. He took his seminary training in Chicago and was examined and licensed in a group of four in Delaware, Ohio, in 1869. In August of that year in St. Paul's church in Wheatland, Iowa he was ordained to preach. On September 15, 1870, he took for his wife a nineteen year old farm girl, Christina Herr, of Galion, Ohio.

They made their first home in Marengo, Johnson County, Iowa. There in his first pastoral charge Carl served St. John's Reformed church and another congregation in nearby Homestead.

In Marengo, on July 20, 1871 a baby girl, called Elise Marie was born. Carl recorded, in their family bible, the birth date of their first daughter.

Soon came a call from the Third Reformed Church in Cleveland, Ohio, which Carl accepted. It was a small impoverished parish but the congregation grew and prospered. In the course of a twelve-year pastorate a large sanctuary was built. Then came a call to the First Reformed Church in Chicago--a commendable recognition for the young minister. He accepted but it was a difficult assignment--hard work, financial difficulties, and a materially-minded flock. Carl

suffered a nervous breakdown; he resigned and accepted a call to a parish in Wheatland, Iowa--St. Paul's. This was in 1889.

Elise remained the only child in the family--a beautiful, active, brilliant, tom-boyish type of a youngster. She attended the community public schools in Cleveland and Chicago and the German young people's Unterricht [*instruction, ed.*] of her church. Her advanced schooling was taken in the German American Young Ladies Institute in Ravenswood--a suburb of Chicago. Here she made a good record, was valedictorian of her class. After graduating she was employed by the school to teach mathematics. She inherited from her father, Carl, a talent for music both vocal and as a pianist. She was a master of both German and English composition and spoke French.

After her parents moved to Wheatland she left her position in the school in Ravenswood and became the bookkeeper at Lohman's Mercantile in Wheatland. She was very active in church and community social affairs and made the acquaintance of a young theology student Charlie Riedesel. A romance developed.

At the Easter morning service of the German Reformed Church, on April 18, 1897 the pastor Rev. Zipf, announced that there would be a marriage ceremony immediately after the service. The bride was Elise Marie, daughter of the pastor; the groom was the young assistant pastor of the congregation, Charlie Riedesel. The simple ceremony, before a packed house was impressive, and without the trimmings of a social affair. A reception was given for the bridal couple at the parsonage in the afternoon to which were invited many relatives and intimate friends.

Charlie moved his clothes and books from the farm home of his brother Theodore to the parsonage home of the Zipfs.

The mother of the new Mrs. Riedesel was born Christine Herr, the daughter of Henry and Elizabeth (Schneider) Herr of Galion, Ohio. Henry had come to this country from Germany with his parents about 1833. The family moved to Ohio, then to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where Christine was born and then returned to Galion, Ohio. Christine's mother, Elizabeth, came to this country from Hohensolms, Germany, with her parents in 1834. They landed in Baltimore, Maryland, and made the trip to Ohio on foot and by wagon. Her father's name was Johannes Schneider and her mother was Dorothea Mallord Schneider. They lived in a two-story log house near Galion, Ohio.