

# Wheatland as the New Wunderthausen

## The Special Connection Between Two Rural Communities

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*Wunderthausen, Germany*

*Today a part of the town of Bad Berleburg in the district of Siegen-Wittgenstein, state of North Rhine-Westphalia. During most of the period of emigration it was in the province of Westphalia of the state and kingdom of Prussia. A unified German state existed only after 1871. Before 1800, Wunderthausen was a possession of the Counts of the independent County of Wittgenstein-Berleburg.*

## Wheatland as the New Wunderthausen

No history of Wheatland would be complete without a review of the extraordinary migration to this community from one small region of Germany between 1850 and 1880. During this period, well over 100 souls from the village of Wunderthausen came to call Wheatland home, if only for a while.<sup>1</sup> They were joined by others from the neighboring villages of Diedenshausen and Girkhausen, all in the district of Wittgenstein. Most were farmers so were not literally citizens of the town, but Wheatland and its German Reformed church were at their center.

The *Wunderthäuser*, in the German expression, formed the majority of Wheatland's large German community and were the dominant force in founding and sustaining St. Paul's church. Easily a third of the gravestones in St. Paul's Cemetery contain names that are still common in the cemetery of Wunderthausen today. Personal ties to "the old country" have long faded, as has the once unmistakably German character of St. Paul's church. Nevertheless, the story of the emigration from one rural village in Germany to another on the Iowa frontier merits remembering.

The purpose of this essay is to outline that. This is not the place for reporting genealogical details.<sup>2</sup> Rather, our focus is on the unfolding historical processes that created a unique, flourishing community around Wheatland. If your family tree includes people with names such as Riedesel, Homrighausen, Schneider, Strackbein, Knoche or selected others from the Wheatland area, this story is yours.

### *Wheatland in the Period of Emigration*

Iowa achieved statehood in 1846, though Clinton County had been organized in 1840. What became the Spring Rock Township (including Wheatland) in 1852 was originally part of the Liberty Township, one of only six organized as of 1840.<sup>3</sup> Wheatland was incorporated in 1858.

In 1850 Iowa had a total non-Indian population of barely 190,000 people, of whom 2,822 lived in Clinton County. The 1850 Census tallied 215 residents in the Liberty Township, none of whom reported being born in Germany. As the following figures show, the area around Wheatland was soon to absorb many German-born emigrants, though they were never the majority.<sup>4</sup> Tallies of those of Irish origin are shown for contrast.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to "Wheatland" in this paper implicitly include the farms around the town itself. Most lay in the Spring Rock Township of Clinton County, but the larger community extended into the Liberty Township of Clinton County and to adjacent areas of Scott and Cedar Counties as well.

<sup>2</sup> The author, however, has extensive genealogical information on most of these German emigrants and their ancestors that he is happy to share.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, L. P., *History of Clinton County, Iowa, Containing A History of the County, its Cities, Towns, Etc. and Biographical Sketches of Citizens, War Record of its Volunteers in the late Rebellion, General and Local Statistics, Portraits of Early Settlers and Prominent Men, History of the Northwest, History of Iowa, Map of Clinton County, Constitution of the United States, Miscellaneous Matters, &c, &c., Illustrated.* Chicago IL; Western Historical Company, 1879.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Tabulations performed manually on computer databases of Census records.

	Total Population	Place of Birth		Percent of Total Population Born In:	
		Germany*	Ireland	Germany*	Ireland
<b>1860</b>					
Spring Rock Township, including town of Wheatland	756	140	72	19%	9%
<b>1870</b>					
Town of Wheatland	788	182	23	23%	3%
Spring Rock Township	906	169	51	19%	6%
Combined town and township	1,694	351	74	21%	4%
<b>1880</b>					
Town of Wheatland	727	148	6	20%	1%
Spring Rock Township	707	126	29	18%	4%
Combined town and township	1,434	274	35	19%	2%

\*This includes all the various German states at the time, primarily Prussia and Holstein.

By 1880, many of the emigrants had children who were born in the U.S., so the ethnic flavor of Wheatland is better revealed by looking at the heads of household that year. We counted 269 households in the combined town and township, of whom 40 percent had German-born heads. Seven percent of the heads were born in Ireland. Throughout this period, almost all of the remaining population was American-born.

As a river town and eventual county seat, Clinton soon developed as a commercial center. Its businessmen and professionals dominated public affairs, though they were out-numbered by the many independent farmers in the central and western reaches of the county. By our count, only eleven percent of the heads of household in Clinton city in 1880 were natives of the German states. Between 1861 and 1870, the county operated under a Board of Supervisors, with representatives elected from each township. No representative from Spring Rock Township during this time was German.<sup>5</sup>

Wheatland had its businesses as well, but was always a farm center first and foremost. And it was the life of an independent farmer that most of the swelling number of emigrants from Wunderthausen sought.

### *The Old Country*

Across half the continent of North America, across the Atlantic, across a swath of Western Europe was the remote state of Wittgenstein. Though small, it was an independent member of the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" ruled by the Sayn-Wittgenstein family. As *Grafs* (Counts) they were considered to be minor nobility, though out-ranking Barons and mere Knights. From their fortified palaces in the towns of Berleburg and Laasphe, the Counts had full sovereignty over the peasants of the surrounding villages. All land was theirs; it was parceled out to the peasants in what we may think of as tenancies. The rights to a tenancy passed within the family, but the common people owned little more than a few tools and their clothing. In exchange for the right to work the land and have a house to live in, they owed a portion of their produce, considerable labor, and other taxes to the Counts. Such was the feudal order until around 1800.

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<sup>5</sup> Allen, *ibid*.



*The County (Grafschaft) of Wittgenstein in 1648 showing neighboring states. Cologne (Köln) is roughly 70 miles to the west and Frankfurt is about the same distance to the south and east.*

Napoleon Bonaparte had taken control of Wittgenstein, along with the Rhineland, in the early 1800s. The Napoleonic order came to an end with the defeat of the French at Waterloo in 1815. The victorious powers took the opportunity to reorganize what had been a hodge-podge of over 300 minor German states, cities, sovereign bishoprics, etc. into a few larger states. It was the fate of Wittgenstein to become subject to the great military power of Prussia.

The Prussian state itself was situated in the east, with Berlin as its capital. But for most of the nineteenth century, the political identity of the Wittgensteiners (and our ancestors) was as Prussians. There was still no unified state of Germany until 1871 when, after a series of wars and diplomatic efforts led by Chancellor Bismarck, a new German empire came into being that was ruled by the King of Prussia.

Peasant life changed over the centuries, of course—the Counts converted their subjects to the Reformed (Calvinist) faith early in the 1500s, the introduction of the potato from the New World in the 1720s greatly improved the diet, the rise of industry elsewhere created a demand for charcoal made from the abundant forests of Wittgenstein—but the larger pattern of life was constant. The climate is unfavorable for growing wheat, so bread was made from oats or rye. It was always a gamble whether the short growing season would provide a sufficient harvest of

fruits, vegetables, and hay to get through the year. A peasant family needed a few cattle for milk, traction, and fertilizer. The diet was bland and unvaried. Small livestock, including pigs, provided some meat, but meat was not a staple.

Winters are harsh with considerable snowfall. Wittgenstein, and particularly the northeastern corner where Wunderthausen lies, was and is geographically isolated. There was relatively little commerce with the outside world, and even the railroads were late in coming to the area.

One of the most far-reaching changes did take place in the first half of the 1800s. Prussian rule was thorough and bureaucratic with compulsory military conscription and high rates of taxation, but it was not feudal. In a process that took many years to implement, the common people of Wittgenstein were allowed to purchase their lands and houses from the Sayn-Wittgensteins. The latter no longer had any call on feudal rents and services, though did retain possession of the region's most valuable resources—the forests—their palaces, and their title.

For the peasants, the disappearance of the feudal order meant new opportunities. They were freer to leave and seek employment elsewhere. They were freer to subdivide their limited lands among children. They were freer to build new houses. In Wunderthausen, for instance, the population grew from 350 to 450 between 1800 and 1850, with the number of houses almost doubling.<sup>6</sup> One thing that changed little was the carrying capacity of the land. With rising standards of living and higher prices elsewhere in the German states (and then German Empire) associated with industrialization, those remaining in rural areas became relatively poorer.

Younger siblings who had no chance to inherit a tenancy had long drifted away from Wittgenstein. Emigration to America was not unheard of in the 1700s, but most of those emigrants had motives that were as much religious as economic. The easy answer to the common question of "Why did people come to America?" is simply "Because they were poor." Yet the citizen farmer of 1840 was not as impoverished as the feudal peasant of 1740 or 1640, and the latter rarely emigrated to America or anywhere else.

What changed in the latter half of the 1800s was the *opportunity* to go somewhere else. With a system of trans-Atlantic shipping in place and a growing network of railroads on both sides of the ocean, the physical means of getting to the New World were much more convenient than they ever had been. The German states no longer placed expensive hurdles in the paths of would-be emigrants, and the American states often competed to take them in. Higher degrees of literacy and a growing press meant that even in backwater districts such as Wittgenstein, people were increasingly aware of what lay beyond the Atlantic, and how to get there.

But what of Wunderthausen itself?

The village lies in the northeast corner of Wittgenstein, amid forested hills. Its first documented mention was in 1303, though a settlement probably existed for several prior centuries. Two small streams converge in the village and provided the necessary water supply. Its layout, with the houses and outbuildings clustered together in the village, is the opposite of Iowa farmland. The

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<sup>6</sup> Wrede, Gunther. *Territorialgeschichte der Grafschaft Wittgenstein*. N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagbuchhandlung. Marburg, 1927.

fields are scattered in all directions. In summer months, cattle had to be led to pasture daily, and that land was often an hour or two away from the village. Its population during the period of emigration was around 450-500.



*Church in Wunderthausen*

A church has stood in Wunderthausen for centuries. The Counts converted to the Reformed/Calvinist doctrine in the 1500s, and that has remained the dominant faith. The current church was constructed in 1957 though in the traditional style. The first dedicated school building was erected in 1862; it was replaced in 1895. The latter was torn down and replaced by a modern building on another site in 1964. A model of the 1895 school was built in time for Wunderthausen's 700 year celebration in 2003.

The slightly smaller village of Diedenshausen lies only a couple of kilometers south and east from Wunderthausen. A certain degree of rivalry has always existed, but their histories have much in common. Intermarriage was not unusual, and since the 1890s they have formed a single parish. The larger village of Girkhausen is north and west of Wunderthausen, and could only be reached by a path through the forest known as the *Kirchweg*. For centuries the priest, then pastor, in Girkhausen was also responsible for the two other villages. The faithful trudged the *Kirchweg* to attend Sunday services, as did the youth in preparation for their confirmation.

It was only around 1680 that the churches in Wittgenstein began to keep registers of births and baptisms, with records for deaths and burials beginning in 1740. Prior to those dates, there are no solid genealogical records for the peasants. Earlier tax records have been used to infer lines of descent. The records for the people of Wunderthausen, Diedenshausen, and Girkhausen were all kept in the ancient church in the latter village. By agreement among the princes, the sovereign of a territory had the right to determine its religious practices. The Sayn-Wittgensteins chose the Reformed (Calvinist) doctrine, and maintained close control over the pastors, churches, and schools.<sup>7</sup>

Each village had its unique traits, history and even dialect, but in the big picture there was nothing distinctive about Wunderthausen or any compelling reason why it would become the source of so much immigration to the southwest corner of Clinton County. As was typically the case, a chain of migration followed those early settlers who just happened to buy land around Wheatland.

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<sup>7</sup> In the early 1700s, the Counts did in fact tolerate a small group of Pietists. Those led by Alexander Mack became what we now know as the Church of the Brethren after the toleration subsided and they were forced to leave. Small populations of Roma (Gypsies) and Jews also lived in Wittgenstein under the sufferance of the Counts. Most were deported and killed during World War II.



### *The Journey Begins*

If there is a single locus for the connection to Wheatland, it is the small house in Wunderthausen that was then known locally as "Haase," and whose inhabitants were a family of Riedesels. In the previous generation, the tenant was Georg Hermann Althaus. By the prevailing legal code, the house passed to his *oldest* child, who was Florentine Althaus (born 1792). In 1818, Florentine married Ludwig Riedesel (born 1784 in another house in Wunderthausen).



*Haase Haus in Wunderthausen*

The younger couple lived in the house with her parents and their own children—and the other unmarried Althaus children. These included Florentine's younger sisters, Maria Elisabeth (born 1807) and Elisabeth Gertraudt (born 1795). The latter had a child who bore his father's last name—Dürr—though the couple never married.

Maria Elisabeth Althaus came to America and married Christian Gerhardt, who was from the nearby village of Elsoff.<sup>8</sup> By 1837 the couple was living in Ohio, and they were in Crawford County, Ohio as of the 1850 Census.

It was in 1844 that Johann Ludwig Riedesel (born 1822) and his first cousin, Ludwig Dürr (born 1823) left Haase house for America. Nothing else is known about their voyage or route into the American interior, but their destination was Crawford County. The following year, the rest of the Riedesel family came to Ohio as well. This included the parents, Ludwig and Florentine, the four living siblings of J. Ludwig, two of whom were married, and one of whom had two children. Ludwig Dürr's mother, Elisabeth Gertraudt Althaus, was almost certainly in the party as well but no traces of her are found. And with the Riedesels came Catherine Schneider from Wunderthausen, who was engaged to J. Ludwig. They married in July 1845.



*The four Riedesel brothers from Haase house stood at the head of the chain of migration from Wunderthausen to the Wheatland area. Left to right: L. Henry, J. Ludwig, George, John.*

<sup>8</sup> An "M.E. Alhaus" and brother Ludwig are on a ship's passenger list from 1833. This could be our Maria Elisabeth and her brother Johann Georg Ludwig who disappeared from the Wunderthausen records and is believed to have emigrated as well.

At this time, western Ohio was still something of a frontier. There was no system of registering births and deaths. What we know is that between 1847-1848, several members of the emigrant band died. Influenza and cholera epidemics often took their toll, and this may have been the case again.<sup>9</sup> The old couple died. The wife of the oldest son, L. Henry<sup>10</sup>, died as did one of his children. It is possible that Ludwig Dürr's mother was also among the victims. They would have been buried in some country churchyard, but no records or stones are known to exist.



*Franz Homrighausen and his wife, born Anna Riedesel and a sister of the four brothers (center, front row), were also among the earliest settlers.*

In 1848, the parents and remaining siblings of Catherine Schneider (now married to J. Ludwig Riedesel) sold their interest in the house known as "Altehäusers" in Wunderthausen and joined the Riedesel/Gerhardt/Dürr cluster in Crawford County, Ohio. This was Johann Georg (George) Schneider (born 1802) and his wife who was born Luise Florentine Wetter in 1803. Their other German-born offspring included George Jr., Louis Henry, Caroline, Phillip, Mina, Flora, and John Henry. George Schneider Jr. was married in 1848 to Wilhelmine Riedesel from Gabels house (apparently before traveling to America). Caroline married Ludwig Dürr.

As near as can be determined from available records, the emigrants to Crawford County (save the Gerhardts, who had been in the country for years) worked for other people or rented land. But they had a plan. That plan was to buy farmland out west.

"Out west" included Iowa. In 1850, the brothers L. Henry and George Riedesel walked from Ohio to eastern Iowa. A Davenport-based land agent took them to the area that was to become Wheatland in the Spring Rock Township of Clinton County. They agreed to purchase adjoining property near the Wapsipinicon River. Before returning to their families, they walked to Iowa City to register the deeds. The story is that the land cost less than they expected so they could afford to return by riverboat rather than walking; this took them down the Mississippi and then up the Ohio River. In 1851, George Schneider Sr. and his son, Henry, made the same journey to Iowa and bought land.

The Schneider land was south of what became Wheatland, as were the substantial holdings of Franz Homrighausen (husband of sister Anna Elisabeth Riedesel). The brothers L. Henry, George and John Riedesel farmed immediately east and north of town, while J. Ludwig lived further north in the Liberty Township.

These pioneer families included several children who were born in Germany. The emigrant children of George Schneider, Sr. and his wife, born Florentine Wetter, were: Catherine, George, Jr., Louis Henry, Caroline, Phillip, Wilhelmina, Florentine, and John Henry. L. Henry Riedesel had one son, J. Louis, from his first marriage. Henry had married again, and his descendants around Wheatland are from this second marriage.

<sup>9</sup> One family history writes of a terrible "plague" that went through the community. Whatever the disease, it was not literally the plague.

<sup>10</sup> He was christened Ludwig Heinrich, but like many was called by his middle name. For the balance of this document I will refer to emigrants by the names they were known as in America.



### *The 1850s: Building the New Wunderthausen*

The Riedesels from Haase house and the Schneiders from Altehäusers were the nucleus of what became a "New Wunderthausen" in a sparsely-settled corner of Clinton County. "Chain migration" is what demographers call the pattern that emerged around Wheatland. Young Ludwig Riedesel and Ludwig Dürr/Duerr joined their aunt in Ohio. Their immediate family followed, as did the Schneiders. They were not predestined to settle at what became Wheatland, but by chance they did. It was *not* by chance that dozens more from Wunderthausen came to call Wheatland home, at least for a while, as they now had personal connections in this vast country. Correspondence must have trickled back to the old country. Later emigrants would have had advice about getting to the port of departure (most likely Bremen), and how to get from the eastern U.S. seaports (first Baltimore and later New York) out to Iowa.

One early arrival was Henry Riedesel from Gabels house. He left the old country in 1855 and worked his way up the Mississippi River to Clinton County. There he was to marry Flora Schneider (Altehäusers) in 1862. They farmed on the western edge of the Spring Rock Township but spent their last years in Carroll County, Iowa. In a not-unusual pairing, his sister Wilhelmine had married Flora's brother George, Jr. several years before.

In November 1857, a group of 16 men met to organize the "German Presbyterian Community." The Presbyterian churches were theologically related to the German Reformed church that the Wunderthäuser knew, but there were differences that led to the dissolution of the initial organization and the subsequent founding of St. Paul's church in 1861.<sup>11</sup>

Six of the 16 founders in 1857 were from Wunderthausen: Ludwig Duerr, L. Henry Riedesel, Franz Homrighausen, J. Ludwig Riedesel, George Schneider, Sr. and George Schneider, Jr.

In 1858, a building committee was formed, and all three members were Wunderthausen emigrants (Ludwig Duerr, L. Henry Riedesel, and Henry Schneider). They not only petitioned town founder John Bennett for a lot to build on and raised money, but L. Henry Riedesel contributed a half acre of his own land to serve as the cemetery. When the decision was made in 1861 to cut ties with the Presbyterians and associate with the German Reformed Church, the first three Trustees, both Elders, and both Deacons were all Wunderthausen emigrants.

Records indicate that Wunderthausen sent a large number of its folk to Wheatland in 1857. Louis Schneider (Altehäusers) was the younger brother of George Sr. He and his wife, born Amalia Mörchen (Häusches) and their children (John Phillip, Louis, George, and Henry W.) came to Wheatland that year. These two brothers were the ancestors of many people around Wheatland in the following century and a half, and this family group is well documented in Emma Wetter Hobbs' 1947 genealogy.<sup>12</sup> What can be confusing to researchers is that they were joined by a second family group of close cousins

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<sup>11</sup> Rev. John Gatermann, *Denkschrift zum Fünfzigjährigen Jubiläum der Deutschen Ref. St. Pauls Gemeinde zu Wheatland, Iowa*; p. 7. 1911.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Wetter Hobbs, *History of the Wetter-Miller-Schneider-Riedesel Families in Europe and America*. Ogallala, Nebraska, 1947.

The man known as George F. (or perhaps D.) Schneider from the house called "Hanphilippses" came with his wife Flora Mörchen (am Gefälle) in 1857 along with three children (George, Jr., Catherine, and Christine/Tinni). He was a first cousin of George Schneider Sr. from Altehäusers. The same year, George F.'s brother, Henry A. Schneider, came with his wife Flora Beitzel (hinter der Huthe); they had one daughter at the time, Catherine. A third brother, known as Franz, actually went to America first in 1854, but lived a few years at Oxford, New Jersey. It was 1861 when he came to the Wheatland community (and served on the board of the newly-formed German Reformed church).



*Flora Mörchen was already married to George Schneider (Hanphilippses) when they came with three children in 1857.*

The Mörchen name, which was from Wunderthausen, did not last around Wheatland (for one thing, German names using umlauts were soon modified, and this one became Merchen.) The family of John Mörchen/Merchen from "Am Gefälle" and Elisabeth Bernhardt (Schneidemühle) arrived in 1857 with their children George and L. Henry, and lived in Cedar County. Several more children were born in Iowa. When John died in 1877, the widow and several children moved first to Wheatland, and then on to Knox County, Nebraska, near the South Dakota border, where descendants still live.

Unmarried women sometimes made the journey to America and Clinton County, though certainly in the company of others and with arrangements in place to live with and work for a family. One was Elisabeth Knoche (Bormanns), who came in 1857 and married John Riedesel (Haase) two years later. Another newcomer in 1857 was Amalia Knebel from "Schmeds." Other family members moved to Wheatland a few years later. She was to marry John Koch, a non-Wunderthausen German. A third single woman in the "class of '57" was Anna Catherine Delcourt (house uncertain); she married George Strackbein (Langes) in 1865.

This George Strackbein (there were others) is believed to have come to America in 1854. He farmed in the Springfield Township of Cedar County.

### *The 1860s*

The decade of the 1860s saw a steady stream of families and young adults from Wunderthausen who came to build new lives on the fertile soil around Wheatland. They and their children tended to marry within the German community centered around St. Paul's church.

The man known as John H. Riedesel was born in Schreiners/Großeludwigs house in Wunderthausen and located at Wheatland around 1860 after a stay in Iowa City. He married Flora Mörchen from the Wunderthausen mill. Their small farm bordered the Liberty Township.

To my knowledge, only two Wunderthausen emigrants served the Union in the Civil War. One was Louis Strackbein from the house "Hutheschäfers."<sup>13</sup> Strackbein came to the U.S. in 1854 and apparently lived at Red Bud, Illinois. It was there that he enlisted in the Seventh Illinois Cavalry. Strackbein was captured at Coldwater, Mississippi, on November 3, 1863, and held at the infamous Andersonville prison. He survived and was mustered out in April, 1865. He was soon in Wheatland, however, where he married Maria Homrighausen in 1868 (daughter of Franz Homrighausen, from Haasebergers). They farmed near Big Rock.



*The Louis Strackbein (Hutheschäfers) family. He survived the Confederate prison at Andersonville.*

The Wetter family was an unusual type of pioneer. Gabriel Wetter, from a homestead called Petersgrund just outside Wunderthausen, had taken his family to Baltimore in 1831\*. They went back to Wunderthausen in 1833, but returned to America to stay in 1845 and settled at Sherrill, Iowa. The oldest son, George Wetter, bought a farm in the Liberty Township in 1861. His wife, Sophia Miller, was born in Gersweiler, Germany. They had five more children while living at Wheatland. Among them was Emma (later to marry E. L. Hobbs) who first tied together many of these Wunderthausen families in her 1947 genealogy referenced above. The elder Wetters and several children eventually moved on to Carroll County.

A rather curious story surrounds a family with close relations to the *Wunderthäuser* that moved to the area around 1860. A Johannes Riedesel from Weymers house left for America in the 1830s. As did a few others, he settled at Oxford, New Jersey, where he married Catherine Repp. And he came to be called "John Radle." I doubt that this was his idea, but Oxford was not an insular German enclave where the unfamiliar pronunciation of the name (Reet'-ayzl, in German) would have much chance of surviving. Tiring perhaps of industrial work, he moved inland to Wheatland in the 1860s. What his fellow *Wunderthäuser* called him is not certain, but the 1870 Census lists him as Radle. Catherine died at Wheatland in 1869 and was buried in St. Paul's cemetery—as a Riedesel. John and the younger Radles then moved on to Cherokee County where he is buried and the Radle name flourished for a while longer.

\* (Since this paper was written, we have discovered that the Wetters left Germany and returned in 1833.

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<sup>13</sup> The other was Henry C. Wetter of Sherrill, brother of Gabriel Wetter described in the next paragraph.

Three more brothers of John H. Riedesel (Schreiners/Großeludwigs) came to the Wheatland area shortly after the Civil War. Curiously, all took "D" as a middle initial though this was unrelated to their birth names.<sup>14</sup> George D. Riedesel was to marry Susannah Mörchen, daughter of John Mörchen/ Merchen. They had five children at Wheatland before moving to Oklahoma in 1900. He lived to be 88 years old. Henry D. Riedesel came to America with other family members in 1867, and lived first at Kansas City before coming to Wheatland; Henry married Katherine Knebel (Schmeds/Franzose house) in 1871. She had left for America in 1867. It is not clear where she lived prior to her marriage, but it can be assumed that it was with other Wunderthäuser. Katherine died young, and Henry married again to Louise Rixe.



*George D. Riedesel lived to be 88 years old, but had moved to Oklahoma by then.*



Finally, brother Louis D. Riedesel came to America in 1866. He worked at first for a relative in Kansas City. In 1868, he took the train and steamboat to Davenport. It was in 1870, that the three brothers, Louis D., George D. and Henry D. Riedesel, bought farmland southwest of Wheatland. Louis bought his own place about the time of his marriage to Anna Wagner in 1880. She only came to America that year, having been born in "Wagners" house in Wunderhausen.

*Louis D. Riedesel was one of four brothers from Schreiners/Großeludwigs house to live around Wheatland. He stayed.*

A further representative of the Riedesel clan was known as Louis C.<sup>15</sup> He was the younger brother of Henry and Wilhelmine Riedesel from Gabels, and had married Katherine Peter of neighboring Diedenshausen before they came to America in 1867. They farmed across the Cedar County line. Their 13 children were a lot even in those days. The oldest, Frederick, was born in Germany and stayed in the Wheatland community where he worked on the railroad.

One of the oldest Wunderthäuser to move across the ocean and to Wheatland was John Knebel (Schmeds/Franzose). Descendants of this family came to spell the name "Knabel." He was 60 years old when he arrived in 1864 with his wife, born Anna Elisabeth Schneider in Altehäusers (and hence the sister of the early settlers, George and Louis Schneider from that house). One daughter (Amelia) had preceded them, and four more children were to join the Wheatland community in 1866, according to what is known.

- The younger John Knebel came with his wife, Anna Elisabeth Bender (Petersgrund, successors to the Wetters). With them were their children Elizabeth and William. They had land in the old rural school district number one.

<sup>14</sup> It has been told to the author that it was the bank that insisted that they take middle initials to distinguish the several bearers of duplicate German names.

<sup>15</sup> The several groups of Riedesels around Wheatland do in fact share an ancestry that converges in the Riedesel line in the early 1700s and is known back to 1600. However, they would have felt no special kinship.

- Daughter Catherine married Henry D. Riedesel (Schreiners) a few years after her arrival.
- Daughter Anna was to marry George Fey (Hanphilippses).
- What became of a third daughter, Flora, is unknown to this writer.



A brother-in-law of the older John Knebel, Johannes Homrighausen, came to America as a widower in 1866 and died only four years later. His son, George Homrighausen, had apparently preceded him by several years. George married and had several children in Baltimore before locating to Wheatland in the 1860s. He farmed just to the south of L. Henry Riedesel, around the old train depot. They left Wheatland some time after 1880.

*Young Wilhelm Knebel came with his parents in 1866, but died shortly after his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.*

Another son of this family was Ludwig Homrighausen. I believe that his farm was near the Schneider land southwest of town. And brother Lewis Henry Homrighausen only farmed at Wheatland for a dozen years or so before moving on to Howell County, Missouri. I now believe that two more siblings came to America in 1857, though I am not sure when they came to Wheatland. They were Maria Elisabeth, who married the Bavarian Nicholas Riess (both of whom died in the early 1870s), and brother Johannes, who died single at the age of 40.

Another Knebel came around 1860 as well. This was Henry, from the Wunderthausen house called Schwarze. Henry worked first with a family near Kansas City, but spent the balance of his life in Wheatland, living with and working for other families. He appears not to have married.

The larger neighboring village of Girkhausen also sent a handful of people to Wheatland. The first I know of was John Henry Homrighausen, who came in 1864. He and other members of the family are buried in the small "Homrighausen Cemetery" south of town. His wife, Marie Peek, was one of several immigrants to the area from Ilserheide, Germany.

The name "Dickel" is found on several gravestones in St. Paul's cemetery. It is the most-common family name in Girkhausen, and was brought to Wheatland by two brothers in 1867. The older was Charles, who never married. The younger was Henry Dickel. His wife, Elisabeth Pott from Mannes house in Wunderthausen, is believed to have come here the next year. Henry eventually owned a farm in the northwest corner of the Spring Rock Township.

Another *Girkhäuser* to arrive in the decade of the '60s was Friedrich Dienst, in 1869. His bride was Lisette Peek, also from Ilserheide, and a sister of Christine Peek. The sisters' mother was born a Penningroth; the latter family had been a part of the emigrant community in Crawford County, Ohio (the Penningroth name originated around Minden, Germany). Dienst farmed in the Liberty Township.

Who she traveled with is unknown, but a single woman was apparently the first native of Diedenshausen to live in Wheatland. She was Katherine Keller. Her first husband was John Henry Schneider, the German-born son of Henry A. Schneider (Hanphilippses). After he died, she married again to a recent emigrant from Girkhausen, George Homrighausen.

Maria Knoche from the house called Brückeweymers was the first of several siblings to settle around Wheatland, coming in 1865. Two years later she married Louis Schneider of Althäusers, one of the earlier settlers. The next sibling from this Knoche family to arrive was George, in 1868. His future bride, Elisabeth Mörchen (from the Wunderthausen mill), also came in 1868. They were married in 1873 and had a large family. As of 1874, George owned 80 acres along today's Y4e, and by 1900 had over 250 acres.



*Elisabeth (born Mörchen) and George Knoche (Brückeweymers) came to Wheatland in 1868.*

Henry Strackbein was the younger brother of Civil War veteran Louis Strackbein, both of Hutheschäfers house. Henry arrived in 1865 and was married to Maria Homrighausen from Schäfers house in Wunderthausen (the same name as his brother's wife, but a different woman!). I know that they lived in Iowa for a few years, but have no actual record of their presence around Wheatland—but living near his brother would have been the most logical choice. By the early 1870s, this family moved on to Paola, Kansas (Miami County), which was another, relatively large, gathering place for Wunderthausen emigrants.

The younger sister of Louis and Henry Strackbein, Katherine, arrived in Wheatland in 1868. She was to marry John Albert Riedesel, the Ohio-born son of L. Henry Riedesel from Haase. The couple lived first at Tingley, Iowa, but settled at Idalia, Colorado.

The Schneider family from Hanphilippes was represented in Wheatland by the three brothers described earlier (George, Henry A., and Franz). Back in Wunderthausen, their sister Flora had married a Henry Fey from Girkhausen. He died in 1866, and two years later, the widow packed up the children and moved to America. Of the children:

- George Fey married Anna Knebel from Schmeds.
- Henry Fey married Anna Elisabeth Lückel of Girkhausen, who arrived in 1881.
- Daughter Anna Fey remained single.
- Philipp died single (as far as we know) in Baltimore.

George and Henry Fey had farms close to that of their brother-in-law Franz, southwest of Wheatland.

Slightly north of the core village of Wunderthausen are the houses "Im obern Sohl." In 1868, George Homrighausen is described in German records as having left for Wheatland with his wife, Elisabeth Riedesel from nearby Rehseifen. There is a slight possibility that they were part of the Wheatland community at some point. Census records show them in Illinois in 1870, in Bremer County by 1880, and in Black Hawk County in 1900.



The name "Lauber" is a distinctive Wittgenstein name, but I know of only one carrier of that name who lived around Wheatland: Friedrich (Fred) Lauber of Beitzels house came to America in 1866. His wife, Louise C. Goedelmann, was born in Red Bud, Illinois, an area that also had numerous connections to Wunderthausen (though the Goedelmanns originated elsewhere). They lived near Lowden. He died young at age 40 in 1878, leaving three children.

### *The 1870s*

By 1870, the original families had been in America for a generation. The population of the combined town of Wheatland and Spring Rock Township had more than doubled in ten years. Large families were the norm, and there was no way every young man could take up farming around Wheatland. Many children moved further west, as did some of the older farmers.

Back in Germany, the forces that led to the wave of cross-Atlantic migration were beginning to ease. The years of peace and greater prosperity that followed German unification in 1871 meant that young people had less motivation to emigrate. Some continued to come to America—and to the Wheatland community—but not in the same numbers.<sup>16</sup>



*The J. Louis Strackbein (Langes) family.*

Sixteen years after his brother, George, arrived, Louis Strackbein (Langes) came to farm near Lowden in 1870. Within a half dozen years he had married a native-born American woman (Sara Anderson) who presumably spoke little or no German.

In 1871, several more residents of the village of Diedenshausen moved to the area. These families intermarried with the Wunderthäuser and were from the same religious confession. Phillip Homrighausen was a teacher in Diedenshausen, a respected occupation in status-conscious Germany, but one that village economies could support only meagerly. His wife was Caroline Keller (sister of Katherine Keller, mentioned above). With them were four children (Wilhelmine, Phillip Jr, Katherine, and Henry), and they had at least three more in Wheatland.<sup>17</sup> Traveling with the Phillip Homrighausen family and living with them the rest of her life was Caroline Zecher from the village of Schwarzenau. Phillip owned 100 acres in the southwest corner of the Spring Rock Township.

John Keller had been widowed back in Diedenshausen, but was to marry Minnie Schneider (Altehäusers) in 1871. He was a blacksmith at Lowden but eventually moved into Wheatland. Two more Keller siblings who came to America about the same time were Henry, who remained single, and August, who may or may not have been in Wheatland for any length of time.

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<sup>16</sup> A significant number of Wunderthäuser went directly to Miami County, Kansas, around Paola. The American frontier had moved further west.

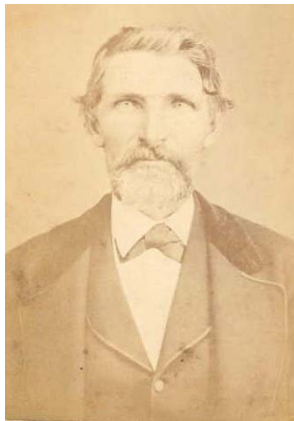
<sup>17</sup> The eminent theologian and seminarian, Elmer G. Homrighausen, was a grandson of this couple.



The Knoche family from Brückeweyers in Wunderthausen continued to arrive, if somewhat piecemeal. Maria and George had joined the Wheatland community in the mid-1860s. The situation was that their father had died in 1859. Finally in 1871, the widow Maria Amalia (Strackbein, born in Schäfers) Knoche came as well. It is certain that her daughter Florentine was on the same ship, but Catherine and Louis are also believed to have come the same year. Catherine remained single, while Louis and Florentine married second-generation Wunderthäuser. As was common, the newcomers lived and worked on George's farm, but Louis eventually owned adjoining land.

Another George Strackbein from the house Hutheschäfers came to America in 1871 as well. He lived for about a year with his brother, Louis, at Wheatland before moving on to St. Louis and much later Milwaukee where he worked as a mason. Late in life he came back to Wheatland and lived with relatives.

The brothers George and Louis Fox (originally Fuchs) from Lotzes house arrived in America in the 1850s, but only settled in Wheatland in 1871. They lived first in New Jersey, then sailed for California to dig for gold. George never married, but Louis married twice. Katherine Schneider from the Hanphilippes branch lived only a few years. Wilhelmine Homrighausen from Diedenshausen survived until 1941. The brothers owned considerable land close to the border with Cedar County.



*George Fox (left) came to Wheatland with his brother Louis about 1871 after prospecting for gold in California. They acquired considerable land near Cedar County. Louis is shown with his second wife, born Wilhelmine Homrighausen, from the village of Diedenshausen.*



*Fred Fox was the nephew of George and Louis and arrived in 1880. He married Katherine Maria Homrighausen from the village of Diedenshausen. She came to the area with her parents in 1871.*

### *1880 and Later*

A few more Wunderthäuser made the journey to America late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, industrialization in the united German state meant ever greater economic opportunities close to home. Fred Fox was the nephew of George and Louis Fox, and came to Wheatland in 1880. He was to marry Maria Katherine Homrighausen, who had come from Diedenshausen as a girl; Fred's acreage was in the southwest corner of the Spring Rock Township.

21-year old Anna Wagner from Wagners house in Wunderthausen was another of the class of '80. That fall she married Louis D. Riedesel (Schreiners), and it is likely that the marriage was agreed to before she emigrated.

George Homrighausen from Girkhausen was the third known emigrant from 1880. He married the Diedenshausen-born, Katherine Keller in 1884, then the widow of John Henry Schneider (Altehäusers). If I am correct, his farm adjoined the land of the older Fox brothers.

One last large batch of *Wunderthäuser* moved to Wheatland in 1881. George Louis, Henry, and Elizabeth Riedesel were born in a house known as Försters hinter der Huthe. Only Henry (who took the middle initial "F.") was to remain in the community. He and his wife, the American-born Emma Puetsch, had no children. George, so the story goes, met his wife Elizabeth Wilder when she was teaching him English in Wheatland. They moved on to Denver, Iowa. Sister Elizabeth married a Monroe Daniels, and they moved to Florida.



*Three Riedesel siblings from Försters hinter der Huthe house in Wunderthausen came to Wheatland. Henry (left) remained in the area. Elizabeth (center) married and moved to Florida. Louis raised his family in nearby Denver, Iowa.*

Henry Wagner (Wagners house) and his wife, born Anna Beitzel (Esch) arrived in 1881 with two children: Elisabeth and Albert. They lived in Wheatland where Henry was a stonemason, and Albert eventually became a mail carrier.

*Henry Wagner and his wife, born Elizabeth Beitzel, arrived relatively late (1881) with their two oldest children, Elizabeth and Albert.*



*An even older Elizabeth Mörchen Knoche (right) and her sister Amalia (left). Amalia had married Ludwig Homrighausen.*

Maria Strackbein from Hutheschäfers already had several older siblings living around Wheatland. Her future husband, Hans Kelting, was one of the Germans from the state of Holstein in the area. Another single woman was Molly Mörchen from the Wunderthausen mill whose older sister, Elizabeth was already settled and married. Coincidentally or not, Molly was to marry a fellow 1881 emigrant, Louis Homrighausen from the house Unter der Laye. The latter couple moved on to Marsland, Nebraska.

One more woman who may well have come to be a bride was Anna Lückel from Girkhausen, who was only 18 when she arrived. The next year she married Henry Fey of the Hanphilppses family. They had at least ten children.

George Kroh was born in "Schwarze" house in Wunderthausen, and first came to the U.S. in 1881 and farmed in the section southeast of the old Lizard School. Following the death of his first wife in 1899, he returned to Germany. There he married Lisetta Riedesel from Weymers house, and they came back to Wheatland to live with their daughter, Erna. The rest of her family followed a few years later. The second time around, George owned land near that of the Fox brothers.

It is possible though not certain that two Strackbein brothers from Mannes house lived at least briefly at Wheatland. Both Fred and "Big George" ultimately settled in Woodbury County around Battle Creek. They arrived in 1881 as well. The following year, yet another George Strackbein came to Iowa from Kurts house. He was called "Little George", and like "Big George" was to settle in Woodbury County.<sup>18</sup>

To my knowledge, this was the end of emigration from Wunderthausen to Wheatland for twenty years. In the centenary year of 1900, George Kroh had married Lisetta Riedesel (Weymers) in Wunderthausen. As noted above, he moved again to Wheatland in 1902. Four years later, in 1906, Lisetta's parents and living siblings made the move to America.

The father of the family was George Riedesel, and his wife, Catherine, was also born a Riedesel in the hamlet called Rüsselsbach. The children were: Catherine, Luise, Anna, George, Louis, Fred, Emma, Gus, and Adolph. Many of them married first- or second-generation Wunderthäuser. George Sr. bought land southeast of Wheatland.



*The last to come from Wunderthausen were the Riedesels from Weymers house. Front: Adolph Emiel, Catherine, George (Sr.), Emma, Gustav. Rear: Louis, Catherine, George, Anna, and Fred.*



*Weymers house in Wunderthausen about 1906.*

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<sup>18</sup> Yet another emigrant to Woodbury County was "Green George" Strackbein.

### *In Closing*

The emigration of this Riedesel family completed a process that unfolded over half a century in which well over 100 sons and daughters of tiny Wunderthausen came to call Wheatland home. They represented over two dozen of the houses in Wunderthausen. The intricate family connections between them are no surprise at all, given that the marriages in the village were usually endogenous, and given the phenomenon of chain migration.

That the contributions of the *Wunderthäuser* to Wheatland (genetic and otherwise) have so long been neglected is understandable, yet regrettable. A full century has passed since the last family moved to Wheatland; three or four generations of assimilation and marriage outside the sub-community of Wunderthäuser since then have loosened the old identities. The German Reformed Church was absorbed into the United Church of Christ with which St. Paul's is now affiliated. Two world wars with Germany as the enemy made German ethnicity suspect.

Yet a stroll through St. Paul's Cemetery (on land originally donated by L. Henry Riedesel) bears witness to the unmistakable fundament of the Wheatland community that was the emigration from Wunderthausen. However forgotten it may now be, it was very real.



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For further historical and genealogical information about these families, feel free to contact the author at [paul@riedesel.org](mailto:paul@riedesel.org), or at 1501 Franklin Avenue SE/Minneapolis, MN 55414.

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