

This Kroh Flew Away Twice

Paul Riedesel

Not for circulation. This manuscript is a rough English translation of a paper I am writing for publication in a German regional magazine and assumes readers who are familiar with places in Wittgenstein but less so with American practices.

In the course of history, it has not been unusual for emigrants to wish to return eventually to their homelands. Given enough money and homesickness, they would prefer to spend their final days back on the familiar streets from which they came. This phenomenon was rare for Wittgenstein, however. Decade after decade, the poor soil could only feed a limited number of mouths while the rest were forced to seek their daily bread elsewhere. No one knows exactly how much of the population of Wittgenstein had to leave there forever. To emigrate, one was supposed to get permission from the Count and pay a substantial fee, but surreptitious emigration was common. In a 1958 publication, Dr. Otto Lucas estimated that 12,000 Wittgensteiners left for America between 1719 and 1819. Eberhard Bauer made a similar estimate of 11,000 people for the 18th century. Whether from Dillenburg [just over the southern border], Wuppertal [part of the industrial Ruhr area) or Pennsylvania, why would young men or women or families return permanently to Wittgenstein? Even if they had some money, buying land was scarcely possible. In my many years of research on dozens of emigrants from Wunderthausen to America, cases of them returning are rare.

Heinrich Imhof has described one of these cases. In early 1833, the family of Georg Gabriel Wetter sailed to Baltimore via the port of Bremen from their home called "Petersgrund" near Wunderthausen. All was in order with permissions, passports and fees. In Baltimore, Wetter had a brother and possibly other Wittgenstein connections as well. It seems unbelievable but after only a few months in America the family returned to Europe! The two young sons of the family (among them my great-great grandfather Johann Georg Wetter) were presented with a new sister on the voyage back. The senior Wetter had to request permission to once again occupy the family house and lands [which they really only rented, not owned]. There they lived until 1845 with a growing number of children to provide for—until the decision was reached to make a third voyage. This time they debarked in New Orleans and followed the Mississippi up to St. Louis and eventually to Sherrill, Iowa where they farmed successfully.

Our subject is another native of Wunderthausen who immigrated twice to America, **Georg Ludwig Kroh**, who was born in 1863. The name Kroh came to Wunderthausen with his father, Heinrich Kroh(e) of Wemlighausen who had married Anna Elisabeth Knebel, the heiress to "Schwarze" house [the rule was that a tenancy passed to the oldest child of either gender]. The family name is a variant of "Krähe" which means "crow" in English. Georg Kroh was the fifth of seven children. Having received permission to emigrate in 1881 at the age of 18, he must have been exempted from military service. Along with a number of contemporaries from Wunderthausen, he crossed the Atlantic on the ship "Salier" out of Bremen and landed in New York on October 4 of that year. Although he would eventually belong to the large community of people from Wunderthausen around Wheatland, available documents give conflicting accounts of where he lived at first. According to his 1927 obituary, he lived for a couple years around Paola, Kansas. Several immigrants from neighboring houses in Wunderthausen had settled earlier in this area. Had he found work among them, it would hardly have been a surprise. On the other hand, in a passport application in 1899 Kroh stated that he had lived exclusively in the states of Illinois and Iowa since his arrival in the U.S. There were several families with roots in Wunderthausen who settled in southern Illinois, just east of St. Louis.

Beginning in 1885 or so, Kroh lived in the neighborhood of Wheatland and became a member of the emigrant community there. For perhaps a year he worked in the (wheat) rolling mill of L. H. Homrighausen in Wheatland [I am not positive of his identity]. Then he acquired an 80-acre farm—quite large by the standards of his native village but on the small side locally. As was normal, he had taken a mortgage on the property and had to work hard to make the payments and support himself [to this day, mortgages are much rarer in Germany]. We have to assume that he was successful as a farmer for in 1891 he was able to marry Anna Susannah Homrighausen. She was the daughter of local patriarch Franz Homrighausen and his wife Anna Elisabeth née Riedesel. That was a fortunate marriage as Homrighausen was a prosperous and generous man. By 1898 the Krohs had had three children. Then in May of that year the young mother died at the age of 35. This terrible blow must have crushed the hopes and spirit of George Kroh [I use the English spelling from here on]. He was to leave everything and return with his three small children to Germany. In order to make such a journey, he had to apply for a U.S. passport. It stated that he was 5'4" tall and had brown eyes and brown hair. He had been naturalized in

Clinton County in 1886. According to the application it was his intent to remain in Germany only for a visit of two-three years and then resume his duties as an American citizen.

To create a life for himself again in Wunderthausen was not as difficult as it might have been for some. George's brother, Ludwig Heinrich Conrad, still lived in the family home with his wife but had no living children. There was work to do, but George now lacked a wife. Not long after his return, he took as his second wife **Emilie Lisette Riedesel**. They were married on April 1, 1900 in Wunderthausen. She was the daughter of Johann Georg and Katherine Riedesel who owned "Weymers" house in Wunderthausen [she was also a Riedesel by birth though not closely related]. Lisette was born in 1879. It is a good question whether they planned at the time to return to America. While he had committed to returning in his passport application, they in fact founded a new house in Wunderthausen; it was initially known as "Schwarzegartenhaus" though later was called "Lindefranzeshaus." In 1901 they celebrated the birth of a daughter [christened Auguste Erna though known by her middle name in the U.S.]. By this time, George Kroh knew very well the differences between life in an isolated German village and that on an Iowa farm. According to his American descendants, he had pronounced "Here in Germany you work hard and eat potatoes, potatoes and more potatoes. In America you get meat and potatoes." [This is a paraphrase of a couple statements I have seen, but makes the point clearly]. So began another chapter in the history of the Kroh family.

As a U.S. citizen, George Kroh did not need new permission to leave Germany. The first three children were American by birth under American law. Lisette and the new daughter would have to have received permission, but with no potential as soldiers, clearance to leave was routine. The almost-new house in Wunderthausen was sold to a Franz Homrighausen from "Linde" house. For the second time, George Kroh boarded a ship for America and this time it was the ship "Bremen" out of Bremen which landed in New York on September 24, 1902. As a modern steamship it was relatively comfortable in comparison to the slower and more hazardous sailing ships of previous centuries. Once again, an additional long journey to the Midwest lay ahead of them. No doubt they were received warmly by the Wheatland community, if only because they brought fresh news (and gossip!) from now-distant relatives in Germany. Kroh resumed the life of a farmer after he rented and eventually bought a larger farm [he bought the Paul Heuer farm but I don't have information on whether he first rented it or lived elsewhere]. A country school for the growing number children was not far away [viz. the "Red Oak" school in Section 32].

In the years that followed, the Kroh family experienced a mixture of joys and sorrows. Four additional children were born to the marriage, including a set of twins in 1904. The son born in 1904 died in childhood but the other seven children grew up and mostly settled around Wheatland. When her parents and siblings immigrated to Wheatland in 1906, Lisette again had her complete family around her. They had come on the ship "Rhein" out of Bremen and docked in New York on October 13, 1906. J. Georg Riedesel was born in 1842 and actually had two brothers already living in America, though not around Wheatland. He had owned "Weymers" house in Wunderthausen, a relatively valuable property. Nevertheless he had decided to sell it all and come to America; another daughter had emigrated in 1903, but eight more children between the ages of 11 and 30 still remained at home. Georg Riedesel and his family took over a farm south of Wheatland. Sadly, Katherine Riedesel (born in 1854 in the hamlet of Rüsselsbach) did not live to enjoy even two full years of life in America. She died in 1908 at the age of 53. Apparently the oldest daughter, Catherine, took over the roles of mother to the children, chief cook and laundress. She was to remain single though the younger children all found spouses in the Wunderthausen Diaspora. For instance, three of the daughters of the family married three Strackbein brothers! Their father had come from "Hütheschäfers" house in Wunderthausen.

Then in 1914 the First World War began. Before and during his 1899-1902 stay in Wunderthausen, Georg Kroh would have known most the 120 soldiers in that war from Wunderthausen, of whom 31 were to lose their lives [from a village of fewer than 600 people]. As late as 1917, news of these casualties would have arrived regularly by mail in Wheatland. After the U.S. entered the war in 1917, the oldest son, George Jr., had to register for the draft. He was not called up but about 60 men from Wheatland did wear the uniform (among them various Riedesels, Homrighausens, Feys and Schneiders).

After the war, George Kroh took the opportunity to take over a larger farm of about 240 acres [the old Puetsch place]. The previous farm was sold on a contract and the economic recovery on the American side of the ocean promised a bright future. But in a series of three blows, the world around Lisette was to crumble. In January of 1927, her father died at the age of 84. He had lived a long life, though the last 20 as a widower. Then Georg Kroh took ill and died of complications of asthma and heart disease on March 3, 1927. He was only 63. His obituary states that he was a respected citizen and upright member of St. Paul's church [not that the Gazette ever had a harsh word to say in obituaries!]. Like his parents-in-law and one child, he was buried in St. Paul's

cemetery. Back at home, a few children [three I think] continued to live with their mother for a while to carry on the work of the farm. However, in a third major blow, this farm would be lost. Payments on the farm they had sold were not coming in and it was not possible to make mortgage payments on the new farm [I infer that this happened by 1930]. The worldwide Great Depression made life difficult for all, though the survivors of the Kroh family were able to live with and work for various relatives (of whom they had many nearby). Apparently, the widow did have [or recovered] enough money to eventually purchase yet another farm of 80 acres [the Fey place]. Here she lived with her son Fred and his family until her death in 1963 at the age of 83. Lisette Kroh was not the last emigrant from Wunderthausen to die in America; two brothers lived until 1973 and 1977). Nevertheless, the story of the George Kroh family represents a concluding chapter in the migration from Wunderthausen to the New World. With the exception of his in-laws, he was about the last to have set foot in the streets of Wunderthausen—and that was because he had flown away twice.

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Ship "Bremen" used in the 1902 Emigration

10865

No.....



Issued.....

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

State of Iowa,

ss:

County of Clinton.

I, George Kroh, a naturalized and loyal citizen of the United States, hereby apply to the Department of State, at Washington, for a passport for myself.

I solemnly swear that I was born at Wunderthausen, Province Westphalen, Germany, on or about the 28th day of October, 1863; that I emigrated to the United States, sailing on board the Salir, from Bremen, on or about the 21st day of September, 1881; that I resided 17 years, uninterruptedly, in the United States, from 1881 to 1899, in the States of Illinois and Iowa; that I was naturalized as a citizen of the United States before the Circuit Court of Clinton County, State of Iowa, on the 30th day of September, 1886, as shown by the accompanying Certificate of Naturalization; that I am the identical person described in said Certificate; that I am domiciled in the United States, my permanent residence being at Wheatland, in the State of Iowa, where I follow the occupation of farmer; that I am about to go abroad temporarily; and that I intend to return to the United States after two or three years with the purpose of residing and performing the duties of citizenship therein.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.

Further, I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion: SO HELP ME GOD.

George Kroh

Sworn to before me this First

day of August 1899.

Edward Guenther

Notary Public. In and for Clinton County, Iowa.

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICANT.

Age: 35 years. Mouth: Medium,
Stature: 5 feet, 4 inches, Chin: Small,
Forehead: Broad, Hair: Brown,
Eyes: Brown, Complexion: Light,
Nose: Regular, Face: Thin,

IDENTIFICATION.

I hereby certify that I know the above-named George Kroh personally, and know him to be the identical person referred to in the within-described Certificate of Naturalization, and that the facts stated in his affidavit are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Wheatland, Iowa
Address of Witness.

Applicant desires passport sent to the following address:

Edward Guenther,
Wheatland, Iowa.