

Niehaus Family Newsletter

Indianapolis, Indiana

Vol. 5, July, 2010

Editor: Nancy Niehaus Hurley

Thanks for the History, Charles

I remember many years ago receiving a copy of our Niehaus history from my dad, probably in the 1960s. He told me that the story was written by Uncle Ben's son, Charles, and we talked about the family's origins in Northern Germany. I still have that yellowed copy.

At reunions since then I've heard that family story discussed and seen copies circulating. We hear mention of the towns of Riesenbeck and Emsdetten or Josef and Gertrude Niehaus, or other ancestral names, such as, Beerman and Wilmsen. For some of us this story brought up more questions and we are still pursuing the details. Whatever our level of interest, Charles' story gave us all a glimpse of our own personal history. For that reason, I thought it would be appropriate to reprint his story in our newsletter. Hopefully, some family members reading this remember thanking him in person for sharing his research. And perhaps there are a few who never had the opportunity to read his contribution.

But...first, let's talk about the author of the story. Charles, son of Bernard "Ben" and Kate Niehaus, was born in 1923 in Indianapolis. (Not to be confused with our other Charles Niehaus, son of John.) The story within the family is that he was adopted by Fred and Lena (Niehaus) Kleinsmith since they had no children and Uncle Ben's family was growing larger. The 1930 census confirms that at seven years of age he was living as the adopted son of the Kleinsmiths. We know of other stories in the family of caring for each other's children when help was needed.

I have limited information about Charles growing up. However, I do know that at 20 years old he was serving in the U. S. Coast Guard when his father died. I wonder when his interest in

exploring his heritage began. Maybe his aunts told him about their birthplace, since his dad was only four years old when the family emigrated. Whatever sparked his quest for the origins of his paternal family, by the time he was 32 he made a trip to Germany to see the towns and talk to remaining family. I found in my research the record of his return on the S. S. United States into New York harbor in July, 1955. Just after his trip, he recorded the richly informative history of our Niehaus family.

Maybe some of you can expand further on Charles' personal life history. Meanwhile, following is the interesting story he wrote for us 45 years ago.

Niehaus Family History as of 1955 *By Charles Niehaus*

The place of origin of the Niehaus family is the small village of Riesenbeck, situated in the Northwest part of Germany. The family name was originally Niehues, a spelling which continues to be used by members of the family still in Germany. The spelling Niehaus was adopted only by those who migrated to the United States. The meaning of the name in English is Newhouse. Niehues is the Low German dialect form commonly used in that part of Germany.

Josef Niehues, born in the early 19th century in Riesenbeck, married Anna Maria Beermann. They had three sons: Josef Heinrich (born 1848); Bernard Josef (born 1854); and Heinrich August (born 1850). Josef and Bernard migrated to the United States, while Heinrich remained in Riesenbeck. His descendants still live there today. Three of his sons were alive in 1955,

along with numerous grandchildren. The youngest brother, Bernard Josef, came to the United States and settled in Indianapolis in 1880. His occupation at the time of his leaving Germany was listed as carpenter. He was single at that time. He later married in Indianapolis, but had no children. The Niehaus family thus springs from the eldest son, Josef Heinrich, who followed his brother to the United States in the year 1885.

The Niehues family in Riesenbeck were members of the "kotter" or small landowner class. Such a person owned his house and a few acres and often did some kind of work such as weaving or carpentry. Josef became a "hausierer" or door-to-door merchant. He also owned a general store at the time he left Germany. Following his marriage to Gertrudis Willemsen of Emsdetten in 1873 in St. Pankratius church, he carried on his business in that town and the surrounding countryside. Emsdetten, a town of about 18,000 inhabitants in 1955, is about fifteen miles from Riesenbeck, and has long been a center of the weaving industry. Jute is the principal fabric made, but there are others as well. Many of the inhabitants were weavers, and it is from this background that the Niehaus tradition of rug weaving came. Josef very likely both made and sold rugs in Emsdetten. Following his marriage to Gertrudis Willemsen, Josef and his wife lived in a house in Emsdetten which had been built by her parents in 1847 or 1848. That house was still standing and being used as a dwelling in 1955. A family tradition says that Gertrudis Willemsen was of English descent. It is probably impossible ever to know whether this is true, but there would seem to be no reason for the existence of such a tradition unless it had some measure of truth in it. Her family name is said to have originally been Williamson.

The last half of the 19th century saw a great many Germans leave home for North and South America. The records contain many names of people from Emsdetten who left for the United States, Brazil and other countries. The two main reasons for this migration were the vision of a better life in America and the desire to escape compulsory military service. Westphalen, the province in which Emsdetten is located, was then part of Prussia, and military service was a universal requirement. The records are full of names of persons who literally left in the night

and without the consent of the State. Josef Niehues had already performed his military service during the Franco-Prussian War, which broke out in 1870, but he did not wish his sons to do the same. He also hoped for a better economic life in America. In 1885 he sold his store and left for the United States with his wife and seven children. Around 1890 he built the family home at 1135 S. West Street.

Note: We now know that Joseph and Gertrude's children numbered eight born in Germany and four born in the United States :

Gerhardt - birth 1874, Anna - 1875, Rosa - 1876, Mary Anna - 1878, Josephine - 1880, Bernard - 1881, Helena - 1883, Joseph - 1884, Clara - 1887, John - 1889, Francis - 1892, Wilhelmina - 1893.

Rest In Peace

Kari (Collins) Carr – wife of Frank Carr – 22 Aug 2008

Elizabeth (Schmaltz) Niehaus – wife of Harold Norris Niehaus - 3 Nov 2009

Donald F. Niehaus – son of Frank and Rosemary Niehaus - 18 Feb 2010

May the perpetual light shine upon them

2009 Niehaus Family Reunion

July 10 -- Mooresville Park

It's great that so many of the Niehaus family came together to share food and fun at the 2009 Annual Niehaus Reunion. Thanks to everyone who participated. Again, the chair-extraordinaire, Rosie Walters, put her finesse on the gathering. The reunion quilt, stitched with skill and love by Peg Stull, is now the treasured prize of Lisa Rhoades and family. A special touch to this reunion was that the family enjoyed celebrating the 90th birthdays of Nina Stull and Janie Hickman. What beautiful ladies!

Editor: Nancy Niehaus Hurley
nancyhurley1@gmail.com
317-473-8696