

## The Grandparents Plassmeyer at Deer Creek Farm

There is an accumulating collection of documents that give glimpses of my ancestors, and I have for some time mulled the possibility of assembling the pile into some kind of coherent order. There are obstacles to progress in such a project, as I find it difficult to maintain the discipline necessary to stay on track and not spend time in pursuit of obscure but interesting details from the available source documents. Nonetheless I will begin here to try to tell some things about my Plassmeyer ancestors and the place they lived, based on what I think I know from items that are available to me and from my personal recollection.

In April of 1947 I was an eight-year-old third grader at Winkelman School, living in the house on the Plassmeyer farm that my parents and three brothers shared with my grandparents and Aunt Agnes. So consideration of my observations of my grandfather Martin, who died on April 15, 1947, should account for whatever limitations that youthful existence may impose. I remember him being in the bedroom on the southeast corner of the house in an extremely weakened condition when his children, my aunts and uncles, came to visit in his final days. There were questions about his ability to recognize them and his responses to them were very weak. The wake, or visitation, was held in the living room at the house, and the funeral Mass was at St. Joseph's Church in Westphalia. Martin used a full-length walking stick to help him get around at home, had a saddle horse and a Nash car, prayed in German and frequently went to Freeburg on bank business. That's about what remains of the memory of an eight year old after sixty years of distraction.

Martin was a grandson of Johan Heinrich Nienkemper Plassmeyer and Elizabeth Heckemeyer Plassmeyer, who came with their six children to America in 1847 aboard the Bremenship Anna Delius from Bremen to New Orleans. Although the family left for America bearing the name Plassmeyer, the name came to them (and us) more by lineage of place than person. As it happened, Elizabeth Heckemeyer married an Anton Plassmeyer on November 6, 1832 at Wadersloh, but Anton died leaving Elizabeth a widow. Elizabeth then married Johan Heinrich Nienkemper on February 10, 1835 and Nienkemper "takes over from his wife, the widow Plassmeyer, the name Plassmeyer, because both live on the old Kotterfarm of Plassmeyer". (corresp. Catholic Pastor of Wadersloh to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. M. L. Plassmeyer, 1960). Readers will be spared the additional confusion surrounding the name, except to mention that Johan Heinrich Nienkemper should really be called Lutke-Hackenkamp in any search for blood relatives. It is also interesting to know that it was

necessary in the process of securing permission to emigrate, to show that the two older sons were not leaving merely to avoid the military service to which they would have been bound. State records at Munster reveal that the oldest son, Anton had his military service delayed for one year because of identified illness of his father, and the second son, Johan Hermann was learning the woodshoemaker trade so he could be a support to his parents. "That this time the intention to emigration was planned is very doubting, at least I don't know anything about it. The family is very diligent and saving, but the little land of 14 Morgen (acre) exist of very bad ground, partly heideboden (heathground) and because of the father's long and still continuing illness, the circumstances were very bad and went backward, so that the land now without the hereditary tenure, is charged with more than 600 Rthl. debt. The p. Plasmeyer sold the Kotten (land) and after having paid off his debt, he will have about 600 Rthl. left."

The Magistrate at Munster also added the comment that "Out of the farmstead Benteler and the nearby community, more families emigrate to America, which had there more relatives who emigrated a long time ago, they found their good advancement, and their emigration came up, because of their fear to become poor through the Bocker-Mastholte drain matters." So out of a desire to improve their prospects Heinrich and Elizabeth Plasmeyer (as they are now identified) and their six children aged 21, 19, 17, 14, 10, and 5 left for Missouri. They arrived during the Christmas holidays, "bringing with them all kinds of furniture, even bedding, and four hundred dollars in cash". Heinrich died in 1868, having survived ten years after the voyage to New Orleans and the journey to Westphalia. Elizabeth died in 1890 at age 81. Joseph, the third son who was 17 when they left Prussia, was the father of Martin, my grandfather.

The family made their way by water up the Mississippi to the Missouri to the Osage, and then up the Maries to the Westphalia landing, where they met Caspar Heckemeyer, the brother of Elizabeth. They stayed initially on the Heckemeyer farm south of Westphalia. I have no detail as to how that came about, but apparently Joseph was employed as a farmhand at the Heckemeyer place for a while. Sometime in 1860 or 1861 Joseph and some others organized to go gold digging at Pike's Peak, Colorado, but turned back after meeting people on the trail west of Council Bluffs, Iowa who told discouraging

tales of starvation, murder and robbery. They came home disappointed, sold out their oxen, oxcart, tools and provisions, and joined the Union Army.

Joseph, along with several others from Osage County, joined the 26<sup>th</sup> Missouri Volunteer Infantry in September of 1861 as a corporal. He engaged in major action culminating at the battle of Iuka, Mississippi in September of 1862, where he was overcome with heat exhaustion and possibly wounded. He was sent to the hospital at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri in November and discharged on December 16, 1862 with "valvular disease of the heart contracted at Corinth, Mississippi". As a twenty one year old immigrant and combat veteran he had experienced enough to provide material for a book, but there was much more to come in this amazing life. There are records of an application for a pension in 1880 based on his disability, setting off a process that ended in 1926 with notification of entitlement to seventy-two dollars per month commencing December 16, 1925. This may have been an increase over an amount he previously received, but records to verify that are not readily available. A final encounter with military overtones occurred in the fall of 1864 when the Confederate army was advancing through Osage County toward Jefferson City. Joseph, employed as a teamster, was wearing part of his Union soldier's uniform and attracted the attention of the Confederates while on the road from Westphalia to Koeltztown. He was arrested and taken before General Jo Shelby who made his headquarters at Westphalia for investigation, but later released on the testimony of his peaceful intentions by the Jesuit pastor. Osage County was not an entirely safe place during the years of the rebellion, as there are recorded cases of young men being shot and hanged for not complying with the demands of "bushwhackers", who were confederate sympathizers not connected with the regular army.

Details of Joseph's life in the years immediately following his discharge from the army are sketchy, but it is believed that he was engaged as a farmhand at the home of his parents and perhaps others, and also found employment as a teamster that led him to the encounter with the Confederate army in 1864. It is highly likely, if not certain, that he made the acquaintance of Gerhard Winkelman and his wife Margaret (Bode) during that time. However the events played out, Joseph's life took a major turn when Gerhard Winkelman died in March of 1865, leaving behind Margaret and her infant sons Bernard and Herman.

On February 5, 1867 Joseph and Margaret, the widow Winkelman, were married, following (somewhat) the pattern set by Joseph's father in 1835, except that Joseph retained the Plassmeyer name. He was also appointed guardian and curator of the estates of Bernard and Herman Winkelman by order of the court of Osage County. And in August 1867 he purchased the farm property of Gerhard Winkelman, it having been offered for sale by auction at the Osage County Court House to settle Gerhard's estate. Joseph paid \$2975 for property appraised at \$2000, so apparently there were other bidders. The source of his funds to acquire this and other property is unknown. The property of 138 acres included a two-room log cabin situated on a low hill above a spring and out of reach of the floodwaters of the nearby Maries River. In 1868 he acquired the upland property homesteaded by William and Elizabeth Massey, and in 1882 and 1905 property that had been homesteaded by Gerhard and John Luebbering and Joseph Heimann was added. Records show that subsequent acquisition and trading in real estate brought the farm up to a total of 544 acres when Joseph and Elizabeth Plassmeyer sold it to Martin for \$8000 in 1911.

Henry, the first child of Joseph and Margaret, was born on March 28, 1868. The need for expanded living quarters became apparent and a new log house with attached workshop was built in about 1870. That building, now known as the summer kitchen, was most likely there to welcome and comfort Martin, our grandfather, on February 4, 1871. As a major improvement to the water supply and cool storage, a cistern of stone and masonry construction was installed. Mary, born November 12, 1872 and Clara, born March 28, 1878, along with Henry and Martin and the two Winkelman half brothers would have made for a lively time in that home, which did have provision for stove heat. A large barn built to accommodate threshing and storing grain and hay was built around 1872. In 1880 the large two-story house that remains proof that Joseph did not think in small terms was built of brick made on the farm and lumber salvaged from oaks uprooted in a cyclone in 1878. The farmstead also included an icehouse on a high bank close to the Maries, built at a time unknown to store ice harvested in winter.

In 1882 a typhoid epidemic struck the Westphalia community and claimed the life of Margaret Bode Winkelman Plassmeyer on February 12, after she had been assisting neighbors, including the Melies family, in their time of tragedy. Bernard Winkelman also

died in 1882, leaving Joseph with the big house and a family of five. Apparently other members of the family also contracted the disease but managed to survive. About fifteen months after the death of Margaret, Joseph married Elizabeth Morfeld of Westphalia on May 1, 1883. Their son, Joseph, known later as “The Colonel”, was born June 6, 1884.

Although complete records have not been located, it is probable that all children of the household attended Winkelman School, a one-room institution of the type common in rural Missouri at the time. After attaining his majority in 1885, Herman Winkelman went to the area of Wardsville in Cole County, married Johanna Melies (of the family attended by Margaret Plassmeyer during the 1882 epidemic) and established a family on a farm along the Osage River. In 1887 Joseph Plassmeyer paid Herman Winkelman \$2500 in a final settlement of the obligations due Herman by Joseph as guardian and curator.

We have a limited glimpse of Joseph from his letter of March 9, 1928, written in a firm and clearly legible hand in English to “Dier Son Theodosius” (Henry Plassmeyer), in Superior, Wisconsin. He says, “my relatives folks heir are all in good halt”. “I’m 87 now an not able to work much but I can split oure stoff wood”. In March 1919 he wrote a letter in German to his son Joseph who was serving in the U. S. Army in Germany, giving directions to the old home place at Wadersloh. Copies of his responses to questions concerning his eligibility for a pension arising from his military service also survive and are interesting. (Example: Are you now living with your wife, or has there been a separation? Answer. I live with my Wife an no separation has taken place an never will because we git long all right.) Joseph was involved in community activity beyond his obligations to farm and family, having served as president of the Bank of Westphalia. Apparently he saw the value of education, as Henry, the oldest son became Fr. Theodosius, a Franciscan priest, and Joseph, the youngest, graduated from the U. S. Military Academy at West Point after preparing at St. Louis University. Martin attended high school at Linn and apparently left well prepared for life in the business world. Mary was married to Herman Adrian and Clara married Ben Schwartz, and both lived on neighboring farms. Joseph and Elizabeth moved to Westphalia after selling the farm to Martin in 1911, and Elizabeth died December 31, 1925. Joseph survived until May 3, 1930 at age 89. He left \$42,563 in notes (loans) to individuals, \$9322 in Certificates of Deposit in the Bank of Westphalia and \$4377 in the Bank of Freeburg to be distributed to his five heirs.

Martin Plassmeyer was born on February 4, 1871. Information from his early years is very limited, or at least yet to be located by your author. However, since his older brother Henry, born March 28, 1868, has written of his experience at Winkelman School, it can be safely assumed that Martin attended there also. Henry (Fr. Theodosius) referred to “playground battles of Andy Over, Baseball, Batball, and Stink Goal, and an all-boys fistfight between “Radicals” and “Rebels” to decide the campaign of Hayes and Tilden”. Although it was not considered mandatory at the time, Martin attended High School at Linn, where he probably boarded with a private family during the school term, the distance being too great for a daily commute. After finishing High School he went to Wardsville and for a time took up residence with Herman Winkelman and his wife, the former Johanna Melies. In 1895 Martin purchased the general store at Wardsville (M. S. Plassmeyer, Dealer In Dry Goods, Notions, Fine Groceries. Morley’s Family Medicines, the Best on Earth) and also became the postmaster as well as a livestock dealer.

On June 4, 1901 the wedding of Martin Plassmeyer and Anna K. Heislen of Wardsville took place, and first son Vincent was born on June 5, 1902, followed by William on November 14, 1906 and Margaret on December 12, 1908. Apparently the business in Wardsville continued to prosper, but in 1911 the store was sold to Al and Marie Markway and the Plassmeyers moved back to the farm in Osage County. Records show that Joseph And Elizabeth Plassmeyer sold 544 acres in Osage County to Martin Plassmeyer for \$8000. Joseph and Elizabeth moved to Westphalia, and Martin and Anne along with Vincent, William and Margaret began their residence and operation at the farm. I remember Grandma Anne speaking of riding to the farm in a wagon when they made the move, using nine farm wagons in the process—it made a lasting impression on her. Paul was born on March 6, 1912, Mary Louise on January 30, 1917, and Agnes on May 14, 1921. Angeline, born February 18, 1914 survived only until December 29, 1914. Martin went to work on the farm and in the community. He acquired stock in the Bank of Freeburg and was elected to the board of directors in 1918 and remained on the board until his death in 1947, having served a good part of that time as president. The Bank of Freeburg was one of the few survivors of the banking crisis in the early 1930’s. Although there are no immediately available records to verify it, I believe he was also active in the movement to

bring rural electric power to the community, and to establish the daily mail route from Freeburg, thus identifying the farm and family with the Freeburg community.

When the brick house was built starting in 1880, it did not include central heat, plumbing, or electricity. So in the late 1920's a new basement, kitchen, bathrooms, and upstairs bedroom were added, along with a new front porch. In addition a large rectangular cistern of poured concrete construction was installed to provide for a consistent water supply. A central heating system using a wood-fired furnace and hot water radiators was installed and remained in service until the 1980's. Natural forces drove the system, as it did not require electrical pumps and fans to help keep the house warm. For a while a lighting system using carbide gas was employed. It was later replaced by an electric generating system, and that gave way to electric power from Three Rivers Electric Cooperative. The new kitchen included a wood fired cook stove, a sink with hot and cold running water, and a refrigerator powered by kerosene. I have a faint scar remaining from slicing off a bit of my thumb while whittling with my pocketknife at the wood box. Having been born in 1938, I do not remember the experience of living without electricity or indoor plumbing. Improvements to the farm were also undertaken under Martin's watch. Major additions to the cattle barn were constructed so cattle could be brought inside for feeding in winter. A livestock scale was installed in an addition to the horse barn, and a garage to keep the car was built from lumber from a big sycamore tree. The terraces built in the upland field were among the first in Missouri. Vincent and Paul laid out the terracing plan, presumably under the supervision of someone, using a field level that we still have.

In 1917 Martin purchased 20.78 acres from Stephan Adrian, adding the "Adrian pasture" to the southeast corner of the farm. A big ditch ran across most of that and a concrete spillway was installed to stop the eroding progress of the ditch. The spillway served it's purpose until it collapsed sometime in the 1940's and was replaced by a "morning glory tube", which was replaced sometime around 1980 with a steel tube and box structure welded together on site by your author. There was a substantial apple orchard at the upper end of the branch bottom, established at a time unknown to me and lasting in part until the early 1970's.

Paul married Monica Melies on June 10, 1935 at her home at Koeltztown, and they took up residence at the farm, sharing the house with Martin, Anna, and Agnes. Paul

joined the farming operation with Martin, and was in residence at the house from his birth in 1912 until he and Monica built a house on Route T and moved in January of 1972.

Martin died at home on April 15, 1947, after an illness of several months, and I have faint memory of visitors coming to the house to pay their respects in the living room temporarily converted to a funeral parlor. Sometime after the death of Martin, Grandma Anne moved to Westphalia and took up residence with Aunt Mary Adrian, her sister-in-law, leaving Paul and Monica and four boys as occupants of the farm. A farm auction was conducted to settle the estate of Martin, with household items, as well as cattle and horses, but no swine, sold to the highest bidder. Mr. Wenzel of Vienna was the auctioneer, and I vaguely remember scenes of the auction in progress as gross sales of \$12,041.95 were tallied up. Tally sheets from the sale show that Paul bought some, but not all, of the livestock in addition to other selected items necessary to continuing operations on the farm. Paul and Monica purchased the farm in 1951, and began to add improvements of their own. The wood cook stove in the kitchen was replaced with an electric range purchased from Herb Gordon in Jefferson City, and a silo was built next to the cattle barn. The horse barn was converted to a two-story chicken house complete with electric elevator, and the cowherd was gradually converted from Shorthorn to Angus. That was a good move as I remember being chased across the clover field below the house by a mean Shorthorn bull, and that never happened with the Angus.

At this point, details of life on the farm blossom exponentially and beyond the scope of this little narrative. But to fill in a few points, Paul and Monica raised four sons: Martin (Lloyd) born March 17, 1936, Norbert (me) born August 13, 1938, Frederick born June 22, 1941, and Bernard born May 5, 1945. The first three of us did some time at Winkelman School and we all attended Fatima High School at Westphalia before going off on our separate adventures, each with a story that will have to be told separately.

Eileen (Wade) and I were married on November 11, 1960 at Jefferson City. After a tour to Huntsville, Alabama where I worked for NASA; Akron, Ohio where I was employed with Goodyear Aerospace Corporation; and the St. Louis area where McDonnell-Douglas and later Forge Aerospace made it possible to pay our bills, we accepted an invitation to return to the farm. We loaded a rental truck, a farm pickup, and two trailers with our stuff and Susan, John, Mary, and Anne and headed for Osage County



in time to celebrate July 4, 1971 at the farm. We purchased an undivided half interest in the place, formed a partnership, and called it Deer Creek Farm. And on and on, but not ad infinitum.

Norb Plassmeyer

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Sources:

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