

Our Family News Letter

Issue 123

Greendale, Wisconsin

December 2023

Photos from a Distant “Non-Cousin”

In past issues of Our Family News Letter I had presented in detail Johann Heck, my great-great grandfather and his second marriage to Susannah Sebenbrunner Zeren. Susannah was the widow of Nicholas Zeren when she married Johann Heck, also a widower, at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church on 26 June 1856.

The new family moved to Swan Lake, Nicollet County, Minnesota in 1857. One of the members of the new family was Peter Zeren who was four years old in 1857. This article is about the descendants of Peter Zeren. In the title above I used the term “Non-Cousin” because none of Peter nor his descendants were/are blood line relatives of me. Peter Zeren was the step-son of Johann Heck.

Several years ago I received a letter from Steve Zeren from Boulder, Colorado containing several pictures of his ancestors all the way back to Peter Zeren 1853-1907. The photo story of his ancestors follows along with excerpts from Howard Walter Heck’s book, “The Hecks From Alendorf, Germany” published in 1991.

Peter Zeren was born on July 24 1853, in Paris Township, Kenosha County, Wisconsin. He came to Minnesota with his mother and step-father and their family in 1857, where they homesteaded near Swan Lake. The family moved back to Wisconsin at the outbreak of the Sioux uprising and stayed there until 1870. They moved back to the Swan Lake area near their previous farm. Peter, as a young man, worked on the family farm during the summer, and in the winter he worked in the “Pineries” (most likely

logging) in Michigan.



The inscriptions on the photos read, “Peter Zeren, William’s Dad, Joe’s Grandfather” and “Gertrude (Stacken) Zeren, Peter’s wife and Joe’s Grandmother”.

Peter Zeren married Gertrude Stacken on October 19, 1873, in the Swan Lake Catholic Church. Gertrude was born in Germany on December 2, 1853, to Cornelius Stacken and Anna Katherina Rademacher. She came to America with her parents at an early age, and the family farmed near Swan Lake.

Peter and Gertrude purchased a farm in West Newton Township after their marriage and farmed there until 1885, when they sold and moved to Chaska, Minnesota. Peter was a carpenter there for twelve years, and then moved to Renville County, where he rented a farm in Cairo Township near Fairfax. He was in poor health for four years before his death, and was in a hospital in St. Peter, Minnesota, during that entire time. He passed away in the hospital on May 9, 1907. Gertrude was living in the St. Alexander Home for the Aged in New Ulm at the time of her death on March 28, 1928. They are buried in the Catholic cemetery in Fairfax. They had eleven children.

In order to provide a “road map” of this story, following is a chart of descendants from Peter Zeren to Steve Zeren.

Peter Zeren - Gertrude Stacken
William Zeren - Gertrude Imelda Amberg
Joseph D Zeren - Peggy Jo Pastore
Steve Zeren



William Zeren and Gertrude Imelda Amberg

William Zeren was born on 11 January 1883 at Saint George, Benton County, Minnesota. In 1904, at the age of 21 years, he married Gertrude Imelda Amberg. She was born on 15 November 1891 at Janesville, Waseca County, Minnesota. She was the daughter of Peter J. Amberg and “Lizzie” Elizabeth Veronica Kahnke. Gertrude was just 13 years old when she married William. Gertrude and William had seven children as follows: Dorothy Mary Zeren (Hinshaw), Irene Imelda Zeren, Kevin John Zeren, Gloria Rita Zeren (Maddox), Thelma T. Zeren (Speirer), Delores Margaret Zeren (Black), and Joseph Donald Zeren. Note: Names shown in Parentheses () are the married names of four of the female children.

William Zeren had 10 siblings and Gertrude Imelda Amberg had 15 siblings. Their family get togethers had to be huge.

Gertrude died on 11 March 1984 at Boulder, Boulder County, Colorado. William died on 2 September 1959 at Boulder, Boulder County, Colorado.



Joseph Donald Zeren - Peggy Jo Pastore

Joseph Donald Zeren was born on 12 December 1933 at Boulder, Boulder County, Colorado. He was the last child of William Zeren and Gertrude Imelda Amberg and had six siblings. Obituary from Crist Mortuary, Boulder, Colorado.

Joe attended Sacred Heart Elementary School, Casey Junior High and Boulder High School. After high school, he joined the Air National Guard and then the Navy Seabees. When his commission was finished, Joe returned to Boulder where he had several different occupations.

In 1955, Joe married Peggy Jo Pastore. After the wedding, Joe and Peggy worked the Pastore tungsten mines. That following fall, they both attended Colorado State University. Joe was hired by Dow Chemical (later Rockwell International) where he worked for thirty years. During that time he received several patents for his inventions. He retired as a senior engineer/ associate scientist.

Joe was a very talented man. He enjoyed working, but also had several hobbies. He was an avid hunter, and fisherman. Joe’s love of hunting lead to his invention of the original expanding broadhead, which he eventually had patented. He also created many different versions of expanding broadheads. Joe also loved gardening, planting many trees and flowers from seeds. He made

beautiful rock gardens with roses, bushes and spring flowers. He always said, "When I die, I hope it is in the Spring!"

Even though Joe was a very accomplished man, he always made it clear that what was most important to him was his family. He loved being a husband, raising his children, and watching his family grow. He was very proud of his family and their accomplishments.

Joe passed away on March 31st, 2018. He was preceded in death by his son Michael William, sisters Dorothy, Gloria, Irene, Thelma and Dolores, brother John, and an infant great granddaughter.

Joe is survived by his wife Peggy, son Steven, daughter Jodie (Larry). He has three grandchildren (Ryan, Danielle, and Donovan) and four great grandchildren (Cooper, Zayla, Nolan, and River.)

Steve Zeren: My "Non-Cousin"

I don't know much about Steve Zeren but I do want to thank him for sharing the photos of his family.

Steve Zeren was born on 16 May 1964 at Boulder, Boulder County, Colorado, the son of Joseph Donald Zeren and Peggy Jo Pastore.



This photo from Steve Zeren shows five of the daughters and one daughter-in-law of Peter Zeren and Gertrude Stacken. The names of those

seated in the back are "Kate" Kathryn, Mary, Emma Julius (Wife of Nels Zeren), "Lizzie" Elizabeth, Margaretha, and in front is "Gertie" Gertrude Zeren.

"What The Heck" Facebook Group Web Page

How To Join "What the HECK"

If you would like to learn more about our family, join our **Heck Family Facebook Group**. Log onto Facebook and search **GROUPS** for "**What the HECK.**" You can then request to join the Group. All we ask is that you state how you are related to the Heck family. For example: My grandfather was Alvin Heck or I married Jim Heck. Either Cheryl Heck or Bob Heck will approve you for access. There is no charge to be a member of the Heck Family Facebook Group. Included in the "**What the Heck**" site are many photographs, document images, video clips, and family news.

Here is the web address for our group page:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Whattheheckfamilygroup/>
Here is the address in larger letters:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Whattheheckfamilygroup/>

Following is a sample of what you can find at our What The Heck family Group page. This is simply a page and a half of a five page history of our family.

And Now For Some Family History Lessons

We established that our family branch is descendant from Robert Steven Heck and Margaret Frederika Henningfeld. Their children in order of birth were as follows: Clarence Henry Heck 1905, William Harold Heck 1907, Robert Gerald Heck 1909, Alvin James Heck 1911, Lilly Heck 1915, Rose Heck 1915, Edward Heck 1916, and Bernice Mary Heck 1919.

Robert Steven Heck was born on December 14, 1879 at Brighton, Kenosha County, Wisconsin. He was the sixth of eight children born to Henry Heck and Mary Ann McNulty. Henry Heck was born at Alendorf, Prussia, now known as Germany, on February 10, 1839. He was the son of Johann Heck and Anna Barbara Schaefer.

Johann and Anna had five children. In May, 1853, Johann Heck, along with his wife Anna Barbara and their children arrived in America at the port of Castle Garden in New York. The family settled in Brighton, Kenosha County, Wisconsin that same year.

Their original home at Brighton lies just outside of the Bong Recreation Center on the northern edge. In 1855, Anna Barbara Schaefer Heck unexpectedly died and was buried at the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church at Brighton. Johann remarried in 1856 to Susannah Sebenbrunner Zeren, a widow of Nicholas Zeren.

Where On Earth Is Alendorf?

Generally the most difficult part of genealogical research is finding the "bridge" to the ancestral home of the early immigrants. More often than not American references for birth, marriage, the census and death simply indicate the place of birth as Germany or Prussia for our German-born ancestors. This was also the case for many of the records used to trace the origins of the Heck family.

The Civil War records of Henry Heck and two of his brothers gave the first real clue to the name of their place of birth in Germany. These records listed the place of birth as Alendorf in Prussia, however several spellings were to be found which added confusion to the search. Variations of the spelling included Alendorf, Allendorf, and Ahlendorf. In the early stages of research the correct spelling was unknown. Usually one would only need to know the name of the German village and then consult an atlas or a gazetteer to locate it on a map. Armed with that in-

formation one could then check several other sources such as Meyer's Orts, to determine where the official civil and church records were kept for that particular village.

An initial search through an atlas yielded one Alendorf, however a further search through records at the Milwaukee County Library system indicated that there were 11 Alendorfs, all with variations in spelling. An additional search of LDS (Latter Day Saints) records added another 11 Alendorfs to the list which had now reached 22! It seemed that the more we searched, the bigger the list grew and the further we were from finding the "real" Alendorf. Howard Heck, from Minnesota, had sent letters to the Catholic Church pastors at nine or ten of the Alendorfs but each letter was either unanswered or answered with regrets.

Your Editor, Robert J. Heck, of Wisconsin, sent for microfilms of three of the Alendorfs through LDS but again without luck. Howard and Bob were co-researchers of the Heck family history and shared their research for several years.

The final breakthrough came on December 27, 1982 after two years of searching. An original copy of the 1869 marriage record of Henry Heck was found in a file box at the Kenosha County Court House by Bob. The 113 year old record was brown with age and crumbling at the edges. Carefully he opened the thin pages of the record of Henry's marriage to Mary Ann McNulty. He could hardly believe his eyes when he came to the section listing the place of birth. There, in crisp ink was the inscription "Born at: Alendorf, Lois Aachen, Bizerk Kreis Schleiden, Prussia". Translated, it proclaimed the birth place of Henry as Alendorf, near Aachen, in the district of Schleiden, in Prussia.

All Issues of Our Family News Letter are On-Line

Our Family News Letters are now available to you on-line and for free. There are 123 issues of

the newsletter covering the period from March 1993 (Issue 1) to December 2023 (Issue 123).

All of the issues are available now at the following web address:

<http://ourfamilynewsletter.com/>

Each issue of the newsletter is eight pages in length and is filled with the history of our family. The specific branches include, but are not limited to: Heck, Henningfeld, McNulty, Stratmann, Schaefer, Burgess, Richter, Guthoff, Chase, Heitkemper, Heinrichs, plus many more.

This newsletter is written and published by Robert J. Heck.

Our Family News Letter is published quarterly and is distributed without charge. My e-mail address is **HECK.BOB@gmail.com**

Please feel free to share this newsletter with your family members. If you have old photos and a story behind them that you would like to see in this newsletter, please contact me.

Contributions to keep Our Family News Letter going are always welcomed and can be sent to: **Robert J Heck, 4910 Steeple Drive, Greendale, WI 53129.**

Many thanks to our contributors who help keep this newsletter going. Here are the contributors since last Christmas:

Ellen R. Stiner, Pamela Wagner Kebis, Gary & Carol Heck, and Don & Sharon Heck.



From The Photo Album...

The photo at lower left shows my youngest son, Bill Heck riding "Wonder Horse" in about 1974. Wonder Horse had four springs on it and Bill probably put in several thousand hours riding it. As I recall he wore out at least three sets of springs. I even had our Model Makers at work make extra heavy duty springs to replace the ones that Bill wore out. I can still hear that non-stop squeaking coming from the living room.



The photo above shows Bill Heck and his brother Dave Heck playing baseball. Bill was clearly out in this shot.

Dave and Bill were both baseball pitchers and often competed with each other. They were both really good. Dave was a control pitcher while Bill was a speed pitcher. In Little League in Greendale, Wisconsin, a pitcher could only pitch three innings in a game. Dave decided to make a bet with Bill that Bill could not strike out the minimum of nine batters. The bet was for \$5.00, an amount that neither of them could afford. Bill took the bet.

During the first inning Bill struck out the first three batters. In the second inning he struck out all three of the batters that he faced. In the third inning Bill struck out the first two batters and had a two strike lead on his last batter. Dave was really nervous by that time and he asked me if he had to pay Bill \$5.00. I told him that yes he had to keep his promise. Bill wound up and threw a perfect pitch but the batter popped it up to Bill.

Neither wanted to pay so the bet was called off in order to keep peace in the family.

I was proud to nominate my brother Don...

This was my nomination story about Don Heck that I sent to Congressman Brian Steil for the 2023 Wisconsin Veteran of the Year.

Dear Congressman, Brian Steil,
I would like to nominate my younger brother, Donald Gerald Heck, for Veteran of the Year Award that you present to a deserving Veteran from Wisconsin.

My two brothers and I were all proud to have served our country. My older brother Gary and Don served in the U.S. Army while I served in the U.S. Air Force.

My younger brother, Don has gone far beyond what other Veterans have done. This is his story.

Don Heck, served in the U.S. Army in Viet Nam in 1966-1967, shortly after he and his wife Sharon were married in Racine. After his return to the United States and Racine he became active in veteran groups. Don was involved in helping disabled Veterans at the VA home in Union Grove, Wisconsin. Since the formation of the Honor Flights system he has been active in greeting the returning flights from Washington DC.

Don was seriously affected by Agent Orange while serving in Viet Nam. Most recently he has been confined to his power scooter and he is no longer able to drive a car. He can only walk about 20 feet with a walker but despite that handicap he is greatly involved in helping and supporting all Veterans.

In May, 2019, while volunteering to help clean up the area around the Viet Nam Veteran's Monument at Pritchard Park in Racine, Don thought that it was a shame that only the **names**

of those from Racine County were engraved on the stone. He wanted them to be remembered for much more. He wanted to put a face to each of the 47, so people would know them as real people and not just a name on a cold stone.

Don Heck worked for two years on collecting photos of the 47 men and finding relatives or friends of the deceased soldiers. He used school yearbooks, newspaper articles, and photos sent to him by the relatives of the 47. He put together a large display showing photos of each of the 47 killed in action along with their dates of service and their date of death.

Don helped to arrange for the mobile Viet Nam memorial wall to be displayed in Racine and invited a representative of each family to present a single red rose at the wall when each name was called out. Don's display was clearly welcomed by the many visitors. It was a very emotional event.

The display that Don created is now on permanent display at the Union Grove Veterans Administration home. Don volunteers at the facility helping Veterans participate in the many activities.

Even though Don is handicapped, I have never heard him complain about his health issues. This clearly has to inspire those Veterans at the VA facilities.

Don is a very active volunteer in the Vietnam Veterans of America Racine/Kenosha Chapter 767. The group is actively involved in supporting the Honor Flights and they are there to greet the returning Veterans from their day-long visit to our nation's capital in Washington D.C..

His Veteran friends in the photo on the next page help Don attend the ceremony at Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee by picking him up and driving him there.

We are all proud of the hard work and dedication that Don and his fellow Vets have shown to-

wards our American Veterans. I am proud to nominate Don for the Veteran of the Year Award.

Brian Steil at the memorial and Don Heck seated. Shown below is the chart that Don created.



My brother's address and contact information is as follows:

Donald G. Heck
 422 Cramford Drive
 Racine, WI 53402
 (262) 639-2124
 dgheck@sbcglobal.net

Thank you for your service and for your support of Veterans from Wisconsin.

Robert J Heck
 4910 Steeple Drive
 Greendale, WI 53129
 Heck.Bob@gmail.com

Some history about Alendorf, Germany, where our Heck ancestors lived since at least the 1670's.

In the dedication of his book, "The Heck Brothers, Alendorf, Germany to the USA" (published August 2008), Howard Walter Heck stated that I had assisted him in his research of the Heck family from 1982 through 2008. He stated, "Bob Heck's continuing search of his Heck ancestry resulted in his discovery of the 'Heck Brothers' in the USA. This book is the results of his expertise and persistent search of his roots."

The following text is from Howard's book. (Library of Congress Control Number 2008906430.

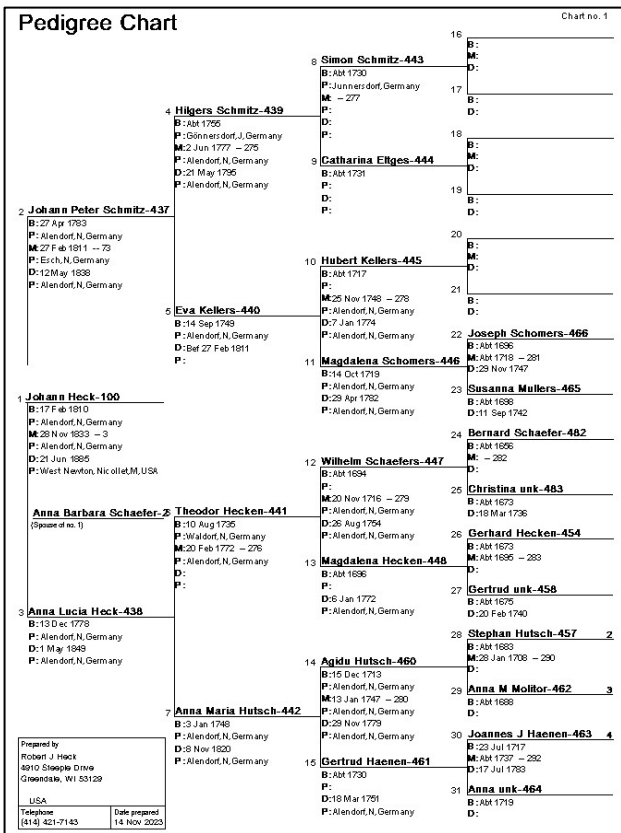
"The Heck family recorded history begins in the 1670's in a tiny village called Alendorf, nestled in a valley in the Eifel mountains of Western Germany about twelve miles from the present border with Belgium, and about thirty five miles south of Cologne. This mountainous area is commonly known as 'The Eifel'.

Alendorf and central Europe have been the scene of wars ever since the Romans colonized most of the area in the centuries before Christ. Alendorf has been ruled by the Franks, The Holy Roman Empire, Spain, France, Prussia, Germany, and probably others. The Vikings invaded this part of Germany in 845 A.D., and sacked and burned Cologne, Trier, and other cities. The Empire was devastated by the Thirty Year War and lay in the path of the many conflicts during the reign of Napoleon I. Alendorf was near the route taken by the German armies at the beginning of World War I, and was in the area of the jumping-off site of the Nazi divisions in the famous 'Battle of the Bulge' in World War II. Today, it is a village in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany and has never experienced a longer period of peace and prosperity.

The oldest surviving records of Alendorf list the first known Heck ancestor as Gerhard Hecken, who was born about 1673.

Our surname could have been Hecken, Schmitz, or Schaefer, depending on a strange custom in the area of Alendorf.

If a child was born out of wedlock, he or she would take the name of the mother. If the child was born legitimately he or she would take the name of the father. **Exception:** If the father and mother were living on land owned by the mother's family, the child was given the name of the mother. If the father and mother were living on land owned by the father's family, the child was given the name of the father.



Looking at the pedigree chart above, Johann Heck -100 was illegitimate and thus was given the name Heck from his mother, Anna Lucia Heck -438. His parents married one year after Johann was born. If his parents would have been married before his birth he would have been given the name Schmidt and all of us would carry the name Schmidt rather than Heck. Johann's brother and sister were born after his parents married and thus both were named Schmidt. **But,**

Theodor Hecken -441 changed the family name to Heck sometime between 1772 and 1778. Had he not changed the name we would all be Hecken today rather than Heck.

It gets even more confusing if you look at the parents of Theodor. Wilhelm Schaefer -447 married Magdalena Hecken -448 and all of their children were legitimate, however they lived on land owned by Magdalena's family and as a result all of their children were named Hecken after the mother rather than Schaefer after the father. Had they lived on land owned by Wilhelm's family, they would all be named Schaefer rather than Hecken. In that case Theodor Hecken would have been Theodor Schaefer and his daughter would have been Anna Lucia Schaefer, and her son would have been Johann Schaefer rather than Johann Heck and we would all be named Schaefer today rather than Heck.

Cynthia Heck
The first child of Mr. and Mrs. Gary Heck, 1212 1/2 Hagerer St., born Aug. 9 to the former Joan Marie Auterman, has been named Cynthia Susan, affectionately shortened by her family to "Cindy Sue." Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Heck and Mr. and Mrs. Louis T. Auterman. Mr. and Mrs. John Mikel and Mrs. Margaret Heck are great-grandparents. Cindy Sue's godparents are Jeanne Vanek and Robert J. Heck.



The announcement of the birth of Cynthia Susan Heck, daughter of Gary Heck and Joan Marie Auterman, born 9 August 1962. At right is a photo of Gary Michael Heck and Carol Jean Schneider on the occasion of their marriage on 21 October 1994. It is hard to believe that they just celebrated their 29th wedding anniversary this past October. Cindy nee Heck Landrum lives in West Pelzer, South Carolina and Gary and Carol Heck live in Westminster, South Carolina.