

August and Albertina Schwinkie Gast

By Neoma Laken

August Carl Gast, Sr. was born May 20, 1844 at Stolp, Pomerania, then a Dutchy of Prussia. His childhood and early manhood were spent in Pomerania. August was a telegraph operator by trade in Pomerania.

Albertina Wilhelmenia Schwinkie (also spelled Schwienke, Schwinke and Schwenke) was born on February 28, 1850 at at Stolp, Pomerania.

On May 26, 1871 August Carl Gast, Sr. married Albertina Wilhelmenia Schwinkie at Stolp, Pomerania. They were 27 and 21 years of age, respectively.

Pomerania, from the Slavic po (along) morze (sea) was an historic region of northeastern Europe lying along the Baltic Sea coastal plain, between the Oder and Vistula rivers. The region was flat and there were numerous small rivers and, along the east coast, many lakes. Originally the area was settled by Goths, Vandals and Slavs. Later by an invasion of the French. An early King of Scandinavia was Karl of Pomerania. Pomerania was an independent dutchy until it was ceded to Sweden. Danzip, now Gdansk, was its major city. German immigration into western and central regions of Pomerania began in the late 12th century. This resulted in the Germanization of the towns and later of the nobility and the countryside.

Sweden received Western Pomerania in 1648. A part was returned to Brandenburg-Prussia in 1720. The remainder was recovered by Prussia in 1815 when Denmark abandoned Pomerania to Prussia. Prussia united western and central Pomerania into one province called Pommern. Eastern Pomerania was annexed in 1772 by Prussia and made into the province of West Prussia. (*Note: Pommern then became a province in Pomerania and clears up the problem of the two names we have heard about.)

Germany in the 1850's was a loosely connected country of principalities, following the 1848 revolution in Germany. Pomerania was one of those principalities. Arranged marriages were common in the 1850's in Germany, even brother to half-sister. In 1851 Germany fell back into a confederation.

Prussia defeated Austria in 1866 and peace was sought. In 1870-1871, the Prussian ruler promoted a class of businessmen and brought Otto von Bismarck to power. He united the German speaking dutchies, placing Pomerania under his rule. However, Bismarck was a severe taskmaster and oppressor. The 1870's brought a new wave of German immigrants to the United States, fleeing the oppression of Bismarck in Germany.

Part of Pomerania was restored to Poland after World War I and the remainder, together with central Pomerania, became Polish in 1945. The German population of eastern and central Pomerania was then expelled westward and replaced by Poles. Western Pomerania was incorporated into the German Democratic Republic. (Note: However, the area our ancestors came from is now in Poland, not Germany. See various maps following text.)

August and Albertina came from the city of Stolp in German, known as Slupsk in Polish. Beginning as an 8th century Slavic stronghold, Stolp was united with Poland in the 10th century as part of Pomerania. It was repeatedly attached by the Germans and the 18th century brought a long period of Germanization. Stolp was finally returned to Poland in 1945 and now known as Slupsk.

Today Stolp/Slupsk is the capital city of Slupsk province in northern Poland. It is on the Slupia river, 11 miles from the Baltic Sea coast. It is situated on the Gdynia-Szczecin Railway line. It is located near Danzig in German now called Gdansk in Polish. It's a manufacturing center today, producing primarily furniture for export.

Germans brought with them to the United States a spirit of social reform which flavored politics for all time. The Germans thought they should be of sound mind and body. They believed education to be very important and the printed word to be powerful. They also believed culture (opera, arts, music etc) to be of utmost importance. Many German Americans possessed cultural talents and interests.

Paul W. Gast, son of August and Albertina, was a staunch believer in education. It had great priority in his life and good grades were also important. Immigrants must become useful citizens in this new nation. He was a great promoter of education all his life. The Gast Orchestra, organized by Art Gast, and the family's apparent gift for the violin were natural means for their musical expression.

Historically speaking, German immigrants of the 1880's were of a high socio-economic level. German laws enabled emigrants from the northern provinces to sell land and property at reasonable values. Thus the immigrants were able to purchase steamship tickets and arrive in America with cash for down payment on farms or businesses. German immigrants were usually literate and many were well educated.

However, the Germans believed preservation of their native language to be of great importance. So in 1890, in the United States, any German worth anything, voted against the Republican party because the Republicans wanted and mandated English to be spoken in schools.

However in Paul Gast's home this was not the case. He even left some of his German accent behind, insisting his children learn English. In fact, he was so stern about this, German was rarely spoken in his home so his daughter, Grace Gast Laken never learned the German language.

August and Albertina Gast were married May 26, 1871. The following children were born to them while they were still in Pomerania.

Bertha, born September 29, 1871 and died September 12, 1943

August Carl, Jr, born December 13, 1872 and died April 18, 1950

Paul Frederick Wilhelm, born May 3, 1877 and died November 10, 1946

Charles Ludvig, born April 17, 1879 and died July 6, 1952
Anna Marie Augusta, born October 6, 1880 and died August 19, 1944
Ida Albertine, born December 14, 1881 and died December 14, 1935

Some time after July 5, 1887, August and Albertina Gast and their family emigrated to the United States. This is based on a German bible brought to this country by Paul Gast. The translated inscription in the Bible reads "Gift of the Waldon Foundation as a remembrance of the school years. Stolp/Pomm. 5 July, 1887 and signed Schmidt".

August and Albertina Gast and their family homesteaded the southeast quarter of section 20 in Marsh Grove Township, Marshall County, Minnesota approximately 50 miles south of the Canadian border.

Two more children were born to August and Albertina Gast after they came to the United States.

Willie Otto, aka as William and Bill, born August 22, 1888, died December 7, 1951
Arthur, born July 1, 1894 and died June 16, 1958

In the United States, August Carl Gast, Sr. became a farmer, leaving his career as a telegraph operator behind in Germany.

The year 1891 witnessed the marriage of the eldest daughter when Bertha Gast married Hilmer Bergner, formerly of Wisconsin. Bertha and Hilmer settled on a farm near Argyle, Minnesota and later moved into the village of Argyle.

On March 22, 1898, the eldest son, August Carl Gast, Jr. married his first cousin, Bertha Knitter. They made their home on a farm in Marsh Grove township, moved to Argyle for a time and then back to their farm.

On December 17, 1901, Anna Marie Augusta Gast married Ole Ihle. They lived in Thief River Falls, Minnesota for many years.

Charles L. Gast took for his wife, Clara Ophus, on June 22, 1904 at Warren, Minnesota. Charles and Clara lived in Argyle for a short time and then moved to Hallock, Minnesota where they made their permanent home.

IN February 1905 the youngest daughter, Ida Albertina Gast, married Ole M. Knutson. They lived in Argyle for a time and later in Crookston, Minnesota.

On November 15, 1905, Paul Frederick Wilhelm Gast married Anna Steffen. They lived in Argyle until moving to their farm in January, 1906. However, the meat market Paul sold in Argyle was going in arrears by the fall of 1907, so Paul and family moved back to Argyle until the market was again prospering. January 1910 he moved back to his farm where he spent the remainder of his life.

The two remaining Gast children also married but the dates of their marriages are not available.

Willi Otto Gast married Irene Keye. They lived in Argyle and operated the Gast Meat Market for many years. Later they moved to Portland, Oregon where they lived for the rest of their lives.

Arthur Gast married Beulah Eaton. They moved to Omaha, Nebraska where they lived for the rest of their lives.

In 1907, after living on their homestead for twenty years, August and Albertina Gast moved to Argyle, Minnesota where they lived until their deaths. In January 1910, August and his son, William, purchased the Gast Meat Market in Argyle from son, Paul. William did most of the active operating of the market. During his residents in Argyle, August Gast, Sr. busied himself at truck gardening. He maintained a counter at the Meat Market and took great pride in keeping it well supplied with early seasonable vegetables from which numerous homes in Argyle were stocked.

In March, 1919, Albertina Schwinkie Gast at age 69 died in Argyle, Minnesota. Albertina's obituary follows:

Mrs. August Gast died at her home in this city on Monday morning at 2 o'clock. She had not been well for several months past, and considering her advanced age, her recovery was not expected.

Mrs. Gast, whose maiden name was Albertina Schwinkie was born in Germany, February 28th 1850 and consequently was 69 years old at death. She was married to August Gast on May 20th, 1911 in the land of her berth. They immigrated to American in 1887, coming to Marshall County and settled on a farm in Marsh Grove. Some years later they removed to Argyle which had since been her home.

The deceased was the mother of eleven children. Of that number eight survive to mourn with the husband her demise. They are: Mrs. Hilmer Bergner, Argyle, August and Paul, Marsh Grove; Charley, Hallock; Mrs. Ole Ihle, Thief River Falls; Mrs. O. M. Knutson, William and Arthur, Argyle. All were present at the funeral. She is also survived by one brother, August Schwinkie and one sister, Mrs. Fred Knitter. There are nineteen grand children and one great grand child.

When Mrs. Gast came to American the great republic secured another inhabitant that was most worthy to enjoy the blessings of liberty. She was an energetic toiler and worked hard to make her home a happy place for her children and to educate and instruct them so that they would be good and useful men and women.

After 69 years she laid down the burden of life and has been called to her reward.

The funeral services were conducted Wednesday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock at the Lutheran church by Rev. Carl E. Hanson, and many friends paid last respects to the departed good old mother whom they sincerely loved and honored. The expressions of sympathy for the sorrowing ones is very full and generous. Internment was made in the Argyle Cemetery.

The pall-bearers were Henry Keye, Otto Stoltz, E. I. Amundgaard, J. M. Ryan, C. J. Robertson and Ernest Cleem.

Albertina is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Argyle, Minnesota. The cause of her death was attributed to heart problems.

Albertina was fondly remembered by her granddaughter, Grace Gast Laken who used to visit her often. Grace said Albertina's house was very tidy and she seemed to be a gracious lady. However, both grandparents spoke only German, which isolated them somewhat from their non-German speaking relatives and the community.

However, Grace would speak to Albertina in English, which Albertina apparently understood. Albertina would respond in German and Grace's mother would interpret. Albertina frequently gave Grace a gift when she left, a glass, a cup, etc. One precious remembrance remains with Grace's daughter, Neoma, a ruby buttons and arches drinking goblet with 'Argyle, Minn.' On it. Neoma has instructed this to be passed on to a Gast descendent upon her death, so great-grandmother Albertina can continue to be remembered.

Following Albertina's death, August, Sr. made his home with his son, Arthur in Argyle and kept himself busy with his truck gardening. On November 16, 1922 at age 79, August Carl Gast, Sr. passed away at the home of his son, Arthur in Argyle, Minnesota from complications following an attack of pleurisy. Interment was made in Woodlawn Cemetery at Argyle beside the woman who had been his beloved wife. Either of their eleven children survived August and Albertina. August's obituary follows:

AUGUST C GAST, SR DIED AT AGE OF 79

August C. Gast, Sr., aged 79 years died at the home of his son, Arthur in This city last Thursday night, Nov. 10th. He was a well preserved man having enjoyed excellent health until two weeks before his death, when he was attacked with pleurisy. A few days after he was taken ill he was at death's door, but rallied and for a time it was thought he had passed the crisis and was well on the way to recovery but the disease renewed its attack and he gradually weakened until the final summons came Thursday night.

Mr. Gast was born at Pommern, Germany in 1844. He came to this country in 1886 and settled on a homestead in Marsh Grove. After living there for 20 years he moved with his family to Argyle, where he had since resided. Since the death of his wife four years ago he had made his home with his son Arthur. During his residence in Argyle Mr. Gast busied himself at truck gardening and maintaining a counter at the meat market of his son which he took great pride in keeping well supplied with early seasonable vegetables and from which numerous home of Argyle were supplied. He was a man of consistent life esteemed and respected by all who knew him.

There are eight surviving children, namely Mrs. Hilmer Bergner, Mrs. O. M. Knutson, William and Arthur, Argyle; Mrs. O. L. Ihle, Thief River Falls; Chas. L. Gast, Hallock; Aug. C. Gast, and Paul Gast, Newfolden.

The funeral services were held Sunday afternoon at the Norwegian Lutheran church and were conducted by Rev. H. K. Narum who preached a comforting and consoling sermon.

Beautiful music was rendered by the church choir. The large attendance and procession attested the high esteem in which he was held.