



Jacob Mohr, His Journal, and a Silent Night

~ Originally printed in the Quad City Times, December 22, 2013, by Alma Gaul. Reprinted with permission

Mohrs own tie to priest who wrote the lyrics

“Silent Night” is possibly the most widely known and beloved of all Christmas carols.

For members of various Mohr families in the Quad-City region, it is occasionally used as a funeral song as well, sung in German.

That is because the Mohrs claim a family connection to ‘Stille Nacht,’ and singing it at the solemn occasion of a relative’s passing recalls that common heritage.

The connection is made through Jacob Mohr, a man born in 1819 in what is now Germany and who immigrated to America in 1847, arriving in Hampton the next year.

Jacob’s father was a cousin of Josef Mohr, the priest who wrote the words to the song that was first performed in 1818 at Oberndorf, Austria. (The melody was composed by Franz Gruber, a teacher and organist.)

“I remember as a kid all the relatives singing ‘Silent Night’ at Christmas,” said Brian Ritter of Davenport, a great-great-grandson of Jacob Mohr.

“Also for most of the funerals that I attended for my grandmother and her siblings, they sang ‘Silent Night’ at the funeral. The last of the 15 siblings to die was Lucille Mohr Wolf. She was 98 and died in early 2012. At her burial, they sang ‘Silent Night’ in German.”

Although the genealogy is difficult to follow, going back five generations for Ritter, the tradition is solid, a proud connection to a song that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization declared in 2011 to be an intangible cultural heritage.

Journal Describes Life from 1847 to 1900

*Description of Early Days is
Particularly Compelling*

In addition to the connection to “Silent Night,” Jacob Mohr left his family another legacy.

In his later years, he wrote a journal recalling important events from the time he left Germany in his 20s, headed for Hampton, until several years before his death in 1908 at the age of 89.

In small, finely penned script, he recorded 96 pages with no paragraphs and scant punctuation.

In the beginning, he describes how he felt leaving his mother in 1847. “Oh, I still feel the press of my mother’s hand and her last words: ‘Don’t forget your faith in your new home.’ I turned around once more for another farewell, never to return.”

~ Continued on page 5

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<i>Crosses of Distinction will return next month: Hunted by real-life Karl Litzmann, Hansi, Ad- amina, and Adelaide have deserted into France to get to America to rejoin Harimann. But unknown to them, Harimann is now helping France. He believes doing so will help Germany.</i>	

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Deadlines for Submissions

Dec 15 for Jan/Feb Issue
Feb 15 for Mar/Apr Issue
Apr 15 for May/June Issue
Jun 15 for Jul/Aug Issue
Aug 15 for Sep/Oct Issue
Oct 15 for Nov/Dec Issue

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Policy: ASHHS provides research assistance for its members only. Members who desire this assistance should contact the genealogy director by regular mail or e-mail. The ASHHS genealogy director maintains and utilizes access to a variety of available genealogical resources to assist in all research activities. The genealogy staff will strive to locate information and assist members in their searches. However, if the desired information cannot be located, the genealogy director may provide the member with a list of alternative research sources. Members are expected to pay for any expenses (such as photocopies, printing and postage) associated with a search. The ASHHS genealogy staff will provide 3 hours free research to members, after which there is a minimal fee if further research is desired. The e-mail address of Karen Puck, the ASHHS genealogy director, is kpuck2015@gmail.com.

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Gönne/Goenne Family from Bredenbek to Davenport

~ By Hans-Werner Hamann

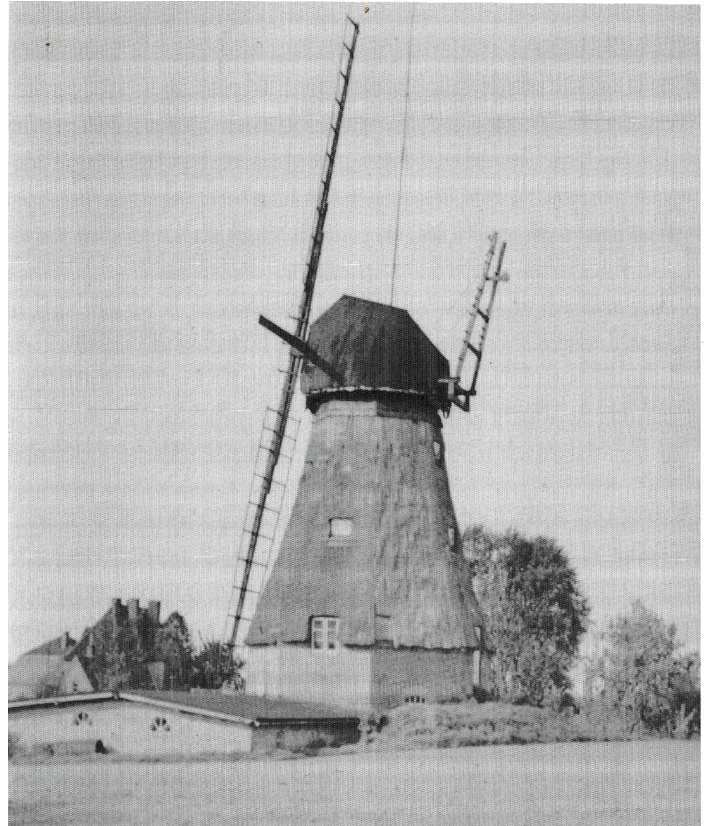
Ernst Christian Goenne was born November 13, 1851 in Bredenbek at the Rolfshörner wood/forest. His parents were Dietrich Johann Goenne born December 27, 1815 in Bosseerschoor near lake Westensee (died July 17, 1862 in Bredenbek) and Charlotte Dorothea Catharina Kühl born on March 2, 1814 in Wentorf in the parish of Sehestedt (died July 4, 1886 in Klein-Nordsee). They married on February 18, 1837 in the Church of St. Peter and Paul in Sehestedt, which is today located directly on the Kiel Canal. With Ernst Christian they had a total of five children, one daughter and four sons. All of them were very successful in their own way.

The eldest brother Friedrich August Goenne of Ernst Christian Goenne married Elisabeth Maria Krey, the daughter of the Bredenbeker mill owner and innkeeper Hans Christan Detlef Krey at the church “Maria-Magdalenen-Kirche” in Bovenau.

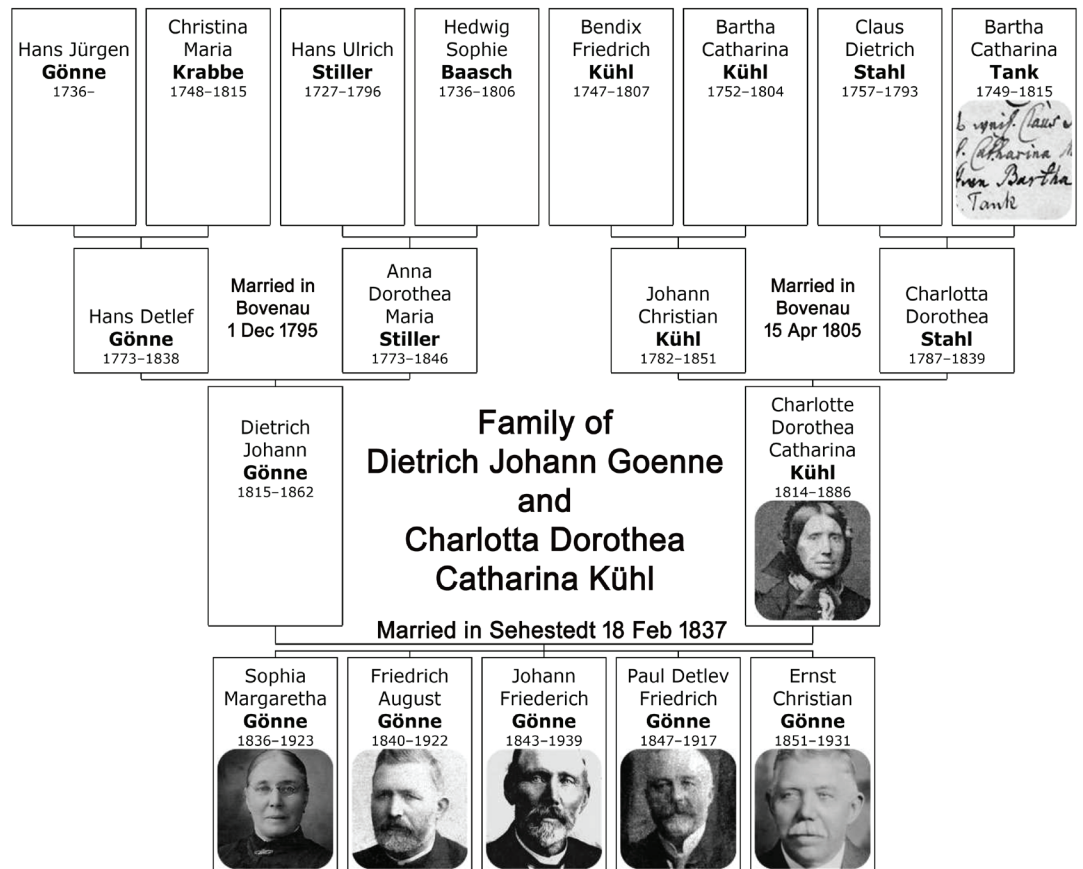
Johann Friedrich Goenne married Margaretha Carstens from Breiholz and founded a family with her in Brandsbek where he ran the mill and built the Goennehaus. A son, Christian Friedrich Goenne, and a daughter, Dorothea Elisabeth Goenne, also immigrated to America and died later in Clinton and Rock Island, respectively.

The brother, Paul Detlev Friedrich Goenne, went to Berlin and married Elisabeth Alexandrine Luise Wintzer in 1872; this couple had six children, five sons and one daughter. He died there in Berlin on July 14, 1917. His sister, Sophia Margaretha Goenne, remained unmarried and followed her brother Ernst to the USA on April 15, 1892. She died in Davenport on August 8, 1923.

~ Continued on page 11



Bredenbeker Mill circa 1900 – 1935



From the President

By Michael Kearney



Moin!

Even though ASHHS is non-political, it is interesting to think that Germany is likely to be the only country in the world to have a "traffic light" government: red, yellow, & green. [Editor: This refers to a coalition between Germany's major Democratic parties: Social, Free, and Environmental]. We will see if this is the ultimate outcome. Whatever happens, we all wish Germany a good result. The rest of us, meanwhile, hope for expanded vaccinations to keep COVID at bay.

We are now entering perhaps the two busiest months of the year and hope that everyone can see family and friends.

Since this will be in the November/December newsletter, I wish everyone a very Happy Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. I hope to see a strong turnout at our November meeting.

Yours truly
President



November 2021 Quarterly Meeting Info

AMERICAN/SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN HERITAGE SOCIETY (ASHHS) ANNUAL MEETING

DATE: Sunday, November 21, 2021
TIME: 1:30 pm

PLACE: Walcott American Legion
121 W. Bryant St., Walcott, IA

PROGRAM

Speaker will be Dr. Wolf Koch regarding Hausbarns in Schleswig-Holstein and the two Hausbarns brought to Iowa.

Light refreshments will be provided.
The program is free and open to the public.

For more information
call Mary Ann Muller 563-284-6640

Speaker information can be found at: <http://wolfkoch.com/>

New Email Address

The ASHHS office now has a new email address. please make note of it.
It is: ashhswalcott@gmail.com

Jacob Mohr, His Journal and Silent Night

~ Continued from page 1

He tells of the ocean journey to America and people getting sick. “The ship was tossed about so that one thought it would be smashed to smithereens.”

Although he had some money, he also had expenses, so he had to work as he made his way. He recounts his despair of finding work in America: “Fourteen weeks have passed that I found no work. I’ll never be happy again. You, my brothers, take advice from me, live where you were born.”

Mohr’s plan was to get to Hampton to join the Scherschel brothers, people he had known in Germany. By the time he finally arrives, he is on foot, having exhausted his money. But the Scherschels put him to work making wood shingles and he is soon making 1,000 a day. In time, he sets out to find a wife and, locating a “virtuous, well-mannered girl trained in every household task,” he asks her father for her hand.

They marry at St. Anthony’s Church in Davenport. Pauline is 14 years old.

The two begin farming and Pauline begins bearing children. Time after time, Mohr recounts the deaths of babies shortly after birth. In all, nine die and three survive. The last to die is laid in the grave with his mother.

Today, Mohr’s pioneer journal is in the hands of Gene Mohr of rural East Moline, a great-grandson of its author.

But Gene didn’t even know the journal existed until after a first cousin of his father’s died in 1997. Several years later, his widow asked if he wanted it.

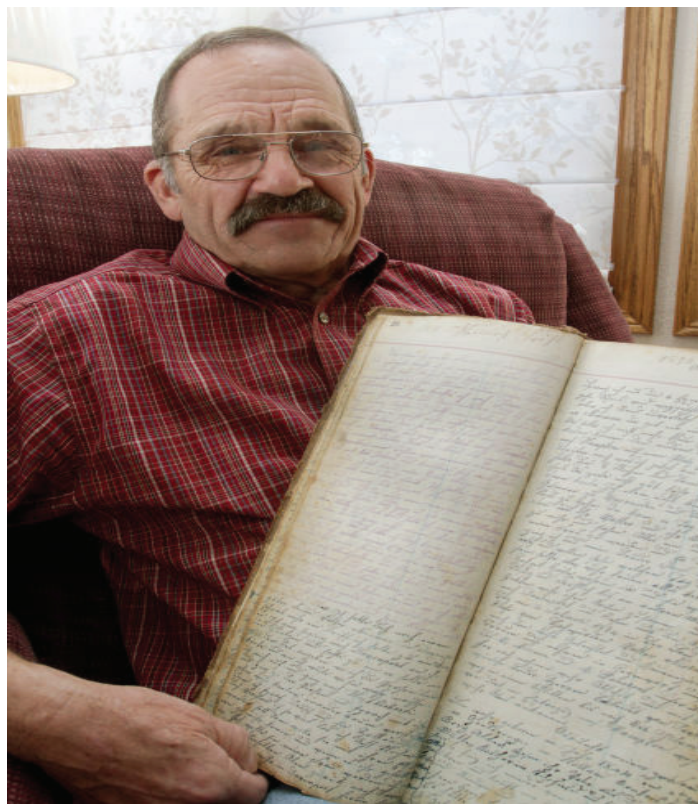
“I didn’t know about it, and I’m pretty sure Dad didn’t know about it,” Gene said. “He would loved to have seen it.”

Though Gene was honored to get the book, its contents were locked in a language and an obsolete script that neither he nor anyone he knew could read.

Then, by happenstance, Gene connected with one of perhaps only four people in the entire Quad City area who could read and translate the script: Prudent Coussens.

Now 94 and living in Rapids City, Coussens had learned the Gothic script during the 1930s from teachers in a Chicago-area seminary who still used it. He went on to teach languages at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, retiring in 1979.

In his later years, Coussens served as the organist at the Catholic church in Orion, Ill., that also was attended by one of Gene’s nephews, Mike. Connections were made and, in January 2007, Coussens — described by all as a brilliant mind and linguist — began work on Jacob’s journal.



Gene Mohr of rural East Moline holds a journal kept by his great-grandfather, Jacob Mohr, who immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1847 and ended up in Hampton. Jacob's father was a cousin of Josef Mohr, the priest who wrote the lyrics to "Silent Night."

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Jacob Mohr, His Journal and Silent Night

~ Continued from previous page

Deciphering the phonetic spellings and translating the old script in modern German, and then into English, Coussens finished the work in three months.

When asked what impresses him most about the journal, Gene Mohr replies, “Just the troubles and the life they had.

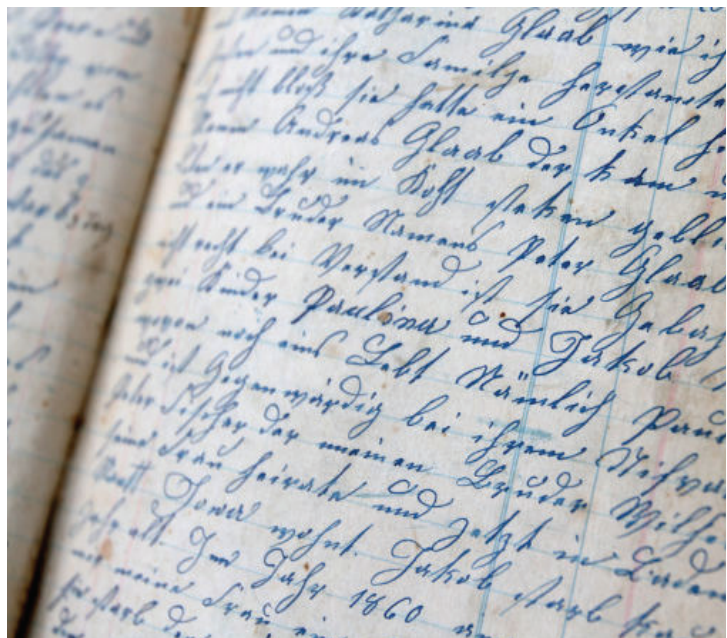
“How hard the times must have been, and to just walk away from everything (Germany and his family) and know you’d never see them again.

“He [Jacob Mohr] walked and carried his stuff, and then he was robbed [having left his trunk with a family in Dixon, he never saw it again] and he literally had nothing.

“But then he ended up making money and giving his kids money.”

As for the death of so many children, Coussens said that was not uncommon for the time.

“Every year there was one child after another,” he said. “Many families had a lot of children who died; that was not unusual. People had a lot of children because they didn’t keep that many. And it was a time when women weren’t considered very much. It was a different world back then.”



This close-up of Jacob Mohr's journal shows how he wrote from side of the page to the other without paragraphs and little punctuation. It is written in German in a script that ceased to be used after World War I. The journal is a ledger book, about 6 inches wide and 15 and 1/4 inches high.

As time passed, Jacob Mohr wrote about his second marriage and family, about his farming and coal mining interests and – increasingly – about the weather and political events.

A devout Catholic, Mohr also meticulously recorded births, baptisms and baptismal sponsors, and he reported as much genealogy as he knew about people who married into the family.

On May 30, 1898, about 10 years before his death, he wrote about his failing eyesight and his hope that the journal would be continued.

“When I am no longer here ... write things down so that our connection may proceed from generation to generation,” he wrote. “In my last years and after my death I will particularly bless the hands that continue this book as long as the name of Mohr exists.”

Although that has not happened, he left a memorable written account and another connection for future generations, the tradition of “Stille Nacht.”

Entries cover family life, weather, politics

Here are 10 entries from Jacob Mohr's journal.

Traveling from Albany to Rochester, NY, on a canal boat: “It was a miserable craft, and full of lice and junk. Besides that, there were over 100 sheep on board and they gave off an awful smell. Progress was slow because the boat was horse-drawn.”

Setting up housekeeping with his first wife: “Early the following year we bought 40 acres for \$250. There was an outside baking oven, a barn and a chicken house. One acre was cleared and the rest grown over with heavy timber. We bought a stove, house furnishings and in summer a yoke of oxen for \$80. Bought a wagon in Davenport and paid for it in shingles. We cleared several acres and planted corn and potatoes.”

Life in 1868: “On July 11 my wife bore me a son whom I still have. After that it went better each year and I had hard work to do. My wife was always sick, the children were small, so I got to be grumpy. Be we prospered and I cleared almost \$3000 in five years.”

Death of his first wife in 1872: “On November 11 she bore me her 12th child and her last ... I kept standing by her bed, taking care of her and letting

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no tears flow. I didn't want to burden her last hour. I told the others to do the same. I gathered the children around her bed so they could watch their mother die."

Health of Nicholas: "I received notice that my son Nicholas had an ulcerated leg. He was with his grandfather again so I went over there and saw that things were very bad. He lay there three months. Dr. McCartney was treating him without success. I paid the doctor \$30 and took him home and applied molasses and rye meal." (Finally he received holy water from a spring in Germany and that helped.)

The winter of 1881: "This year we've had the longest winter and snowbanks like no one can remember. It lasted all the way from November till today, March 12, when I write this. The last snow melted on May 1st and the ice went out on the Mississippi River on April 24."

Election of Grover Cleveland in 1884: "We elected the first Democratic president in 24 years. His name is Cleveland, a wonderful man and one of the best presidents ever. He's bringing all the swindling to an end."

The times of 1893: "These are also bad times. No bank is lending any more money and there is no work. If things don't improve there will be wailing and misery."

The times of 1898: "So now our country has debts upon debts and foodstuffs are expensive for poor people. They have no work but the big shots don't care about that. They make plenty of money while the poor and the middle class suffer."

Why Mohr left Germany

Jacob Mohr left Germany because he was a miner, a dangerous occupation in which he "could be buried alive at any moment," he wrote in his journal.

Over family objections, he and his brother John Adam immigrated to America, making their way to Rochester, NY, where his brother stayed, becoming an apprentice to a cabinetmaker.

Jacob, though, "wanted to get away to (Hampton) Illinois" to join the Scherschel brothers, whom he knew in Germany.

Receiving \$20 from the Scherschels in the mail—it's not clear how they knew where to send it—he

Last entry: "It's February 26, 1902, as I write and I am well but my eyesight is failing."

(Note from translator Prudent Coussens: "This is the last page of the continuous journal. The remaining is mostly financial.")

Jacob Mohr died six years later, in March 1908, at age 89. The headline in the Moline Daily Dispatch read: "Jacob Mohr Dead: Hampton Pioneer."



In this photograph, Jacob Mohr sits next to his second wife, Bernadina Hazen, in front of their home in rural East Moline. The home still stands today and looks much the same except the front porch has been enclosed. The house dates to the mid-1800s.

left Rochester and his brother and booked passage through the Great Lakes to Chicago.

The captain stopped in Ohio, though, and said he wasn't going any farther. "The scoundrel had deceived me and taken my money," Mohr wrote.

He made it to Dixon, Ill., before his money ran out and he was forced to walk and ask for food and a place to sleep along the way. Finally, in the summer of 1848, he arrived in Hampton.

Later that year, he was joined by John Adam and the next year by their brother Frederick William. Additional relatives followed in later years.

German Holidays, Festivals, and Observations

~ By Kathi Hofmann

German Holidays and Observances in October and November

While Americans are looking forward to Thanksgiving in November, the German harvest festival (*Erntedank*) is observed on the first Sunday in October. Fruits, vegetables, and grains are displayed on the altar during church services. Some towns have parades or festivals. Germany's newest holiday is also in October. Since 1990 when East & West Germany united to again become one country, October 3 has been celebrated as the Day of German Unity. (*Tag der deutschen Einheit*.)

Until about 25 years ago, most Germans had probably never seen a Jack-O'Lantern and didn't know much about Halloween. Now, especially in areas around US military bases, you will see pumpkins for sale and ads for Halloween costume parties. Some German children have even started to go door to door trick or treating, but unless your German neighbors know about the US custom, they will not be ready for visitors on October 31. The German translation of Trick or Treat is *Süsses oder es gibt Saures*. Reformation Day (*Reformationstag*), commemorating Martin Luther is a holiday in some of the German states. It also falls on October 31.

November in Germany is a month of mostly solemn, reflective observances. November 1, All Saints Day (*Allerheiligen*), is a Catholic holiday and is not observed in some German states where the majority of people are Protestants. Family graves are decorated

with fall arrangements and there are many special church services to remember the saints not accorded special days in the church calendar and also Christian martyrs. November 2 is All Souls Day (*Allerseelen*), which is dedicated to the memory of all those who have died. It is not a holiday, but these are very somber and reflective days.

The Protestant Repentance and Prayer Day (*Buss- und Bettag*) is always on a Wednesday in November (November 17 in 2021). It is also a regional holiday. The Sunday before Repentance Day is the National Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*). It is dedicated to remembering victims of Nazi terror and the dead of the two World Wars. Memorial events take place at monuments and elsewhere. The Sunday after Repentance Day is known as *Totensonntag*. This is the traditional day for Protestants to visit the graves of their friends and family members. Because of the solemn nature of these observances, no street festivals or parades are allowed during these weekends or on Repentance Day. No loud music should be played outside.

November 11 is significant for two reasons. Children make lanterns and parade through town remembering Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, who died around 400 AD. He was known for his kindness to the poor. In many restaurants you will see *Martinsganz* (Martin's goose) on the menus in November. It is customary to eat goose at this time of the year. The other observance on November 11 doesn't fit in with all the solemnity at all. The Carnival or Mardi Gras season officially starts at 11:11 AM on the eleventh

~ Help Wanted ~

Do you enjoy genealogy, ancestry and research?

ASHHS is looking for a volunteer to assist Karen Puck with genealogy.

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German Holidays, Festivals, and Observations

day of the eleventh month. Especially in the Rheinland (Bonn, Cologne, and Mainz) you might run into people dressed in wild costumes on that day. Carnival or *Fasching* as it is called here in the South of Germany, reaches its high point in February. Other than on this one day in November, you won't hear much about it again until mid-January.

German Holidays and Festivals in December

Christmas in Germany! The country seems made for this holiday. November 28 is the first Sunday of Advent in 2021 and the official beginning of the Christmas season. Christmas markets in many German towns will open that weekend. As in the USA, chocolate Santas and Christmas decorations show up on the store shelves as early as October. The most famous Christmas market is the Christkindlesmarkt in Nürnberg, but every city has one. Many smaller towns have them on week-ends. They sell many decorations and some craft and gift items. Wooden nutcrackers, Christmas pyramids which turn when their candles are lit, incense smoker men and wooden ornaments of all kinds are available everywhere. These were originally from the Erzgebirge region in eastern Germany. People put up outdoor lights and decorations early, but the Christmas trees are not usually put up inside the house until Christmas Eve. Many people use only white lights although colored ones have become more popular in recent years. Real candles are often used on the indoor trees. Usually they are only lit for a short time on Christmas Eve.

On the eve of December 6, St. Nicholas Day, children put out their shoes and find small gifts in them the next morning. The German St. Nicholas dresses in the costume of a bishop with a tall hat. In some regions Nicholas is accompanied by *Knecht Ruprecht* or *Krampus*, depending where in Germany you live, who gives coal or sticks to children who were bad that year.

The big gift-opening time is on December 24 (*Heiliger Abend*). In southern Germany these gifts are brought by the *Christkind*, a mysterious figure, who seldom makes any concrete appearances. The *Christkind* is thought of as resembling an angel and not as

being identical with the baby Jesus. In some other regions the gifts are brought by the *Weihnachtsmann* (Christmas man), who is much like the American Santa. He has especially gained ground in the last years because of the influence of the advertising and candy industry.

Family traditions vary from region to region. Usually stores close around noon on the twenty-fourth so that last preparations for the holidays can be completed. Both December 25 and 26 are legal holidays which are spent with family and friends.

Germans don't bake cookies any time of the year except Christmas. Then watch out. It is not unusual for German women to bake a dozen varieties of fancy small cookies the weeks before the holidays. Other specialties you'll find only at this time of the year are *Lebkuchen* (Gingerbread), *Stollen* (a coffee cake with fruit and nuts in it), and *Früchtebrot* (much like American fruit cake).

New Year's Eve, called *Silvester* in German, in honor Pope Silvester I, the Roman Catholic saint of December 31. It is a time to attend parties and celebrate with family and friends. At midnight many people set off firecrackers and rockets which are legal on this evening. They go outside and wish their neighbors *Prost Neu Jahr* or *Einen guten Rutsch*, a toast to the new year as they enjoy the fireworks.

Merry Christmas is *Fröhliche Weihnachten*.

Happy New Year is *Ein gutes* (or *glückliches*) *Neues Jahr*.

There is a wealth of information in English about holidays and festivals in Germany as well as much more on other topics at:

<https://www.german-way.com/history-and-culture/holidays-and-celebrations/>

The Christkindlesmarkt Nürnberg website is in German and English: <https://www.christkindlesmarkt.de/en/>

Gönne/Goenne family from Bredembek to Davenport

~ By Hans-Werner Hamann

The youngest child of Dietrich Johann Goenne and his wife, Charlotte Dorothea Catharina Kühl, was Ernst Christian Goenne. He emigrated without permission from Hamburg to New York on May 18, 1872 at the age of 20, where he arrived on June 11, 1872. Since Schleswig-Holstein belonged to Prussia after the Danish-German War in 1864, he would have had to join the military. On April 23, 1878, he married Bertha Juliane Albertine Lönser / Loenser in Rock Island. She was born on August 14, 1856 in Czersk in West Prussia. That place had about 10,000 inhabitants and is located on the river Weichsel in Pomerania. It is now part of Poland.

Ernst Christian Goenne and his wife had six children, three daughters and three sons. The first son Gustavus died in Annawan as a child of 4 years-old. For the first few years after the wedding, they lived in Annawan, Illinois, about 40 miles east of Moline.

He had meanwhile learned to be a butcher and returned to Davenport with his family in 1897 where he opened a butcher shop. In 1908 he handed over his business to his son Ernst Arthur Goenne.

His other son, William Carl Goenne, married Norma Otto on Mar 24, 1916 in Davenport, their father was Ernst Wilhelm Otto from a family of musicians from Schönwalde near Bungsberg, the highest hill (168 meters!) in Schleswig-Holstein. William Carl Goenne became a medical doctor and opened a practice/clinic in Davenport.

His youngest daughter Hattie Goenne (born June 30, 1892) was not born in Annawan like her siblings. She was married on August 13, 1918 in Davenport to Carl Theodor Hilmers, born 12th January 1892, his father also came from Schleswig-Holstein, from Glücksburg near Flensburg. They had two children, a son and a daughter. From the marriage of their son, Paul Carl Hilmers, to Mathilda Dickey, a daughter and a son were born. Their son David Carl Hilmers was born January 28, 1950. He became an astronaut and doctor.

Astronaut David Carl Hilmers joined the Marine Corp in July 1972. He achieved the rank of Colonel. NASA accepted him into the astronaut corp in August of 1981. He flew in space four times:



The Ernst C Goenne Butcher Shop in 1905. Ernst is on the right



Das „Gönnehaus“, es lag gegenüber dem Landkrug Brandsbek.
The Gönnehaus

Gönne/Goenne family from Bredenk to Davenport

~ By Hans-Werner Hamann



Astronaut and Doctor David Carl Hilmers

His first flight was aboard the Space Shuttle *Atlantis* launched October 3, 1985. This was a classified Department of Defense mission.

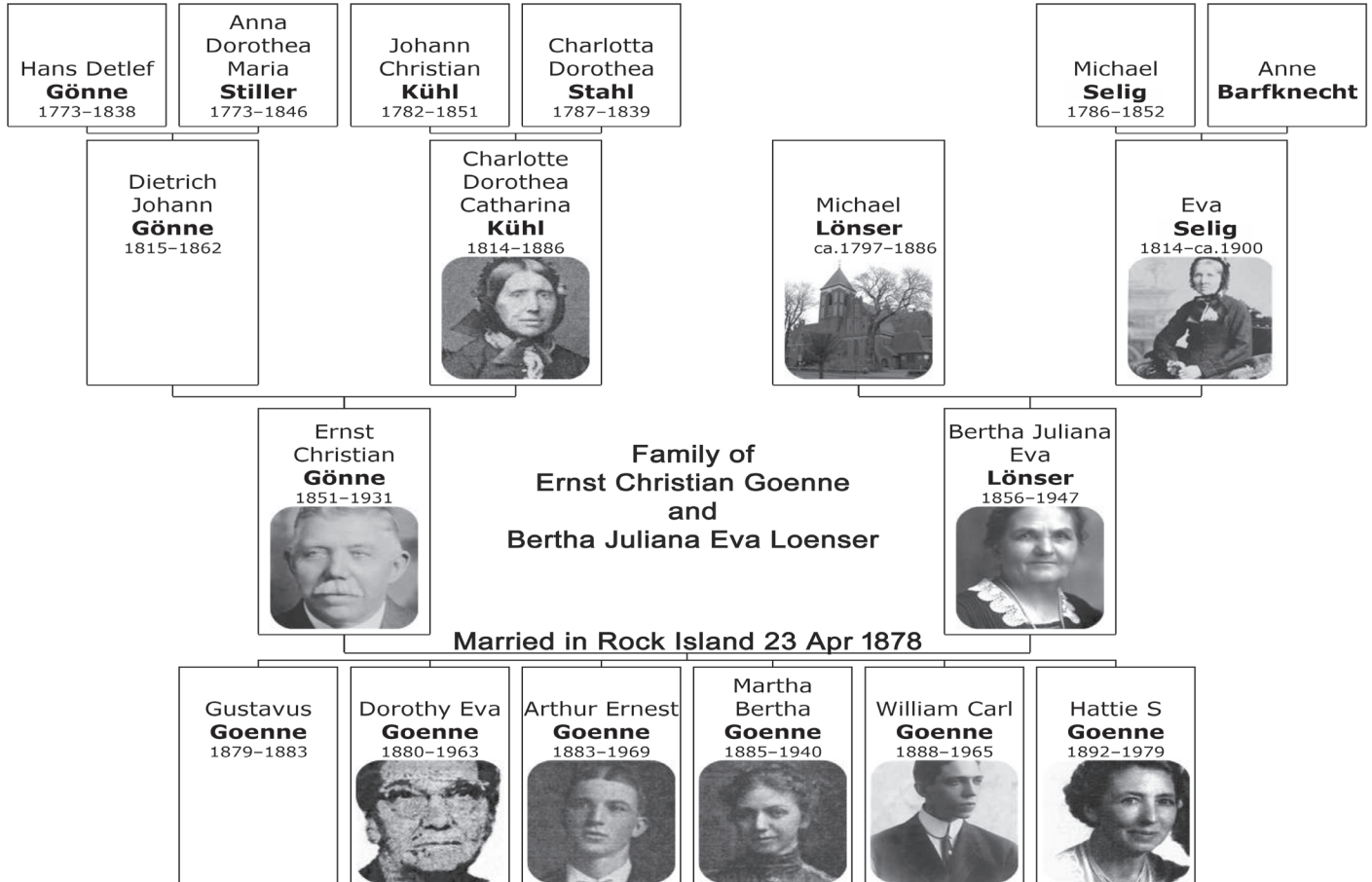
His second flight was the first space shuttle mission after the *Challenger* disaster. His flight on the *Discovery* launched September 29, 1988. He helped launch the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite.

Once again, he flew the *Atlantis* that launched on February 28, 1990. Like his first mission, he helped deploy several Department of Defense payloads.

His final flight aboard the *Discovery* orbited the Earth 128 times. It launched on January 22, 1992. His team investigated the effects of microgravity upon various proteins and semiconductor crystals.

He is now a professor in the departments of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, the Center for Space Medicine, and Baylor Global Initiatives at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas.

For questions and/or additions to the Goenne family: E-mail: ha-wehamann@t-online.de or take a look at www.ancestry.com "Goenne-Krey aus Bredenk"



Christmas Celebrations and Family! Are We There Yet?

~ By Editor with material from the Deutsches Weihnachtsmuseum in Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Gerhard Lang would have remained a German of little to no renown had it not been for the threat he faced. But it was a threat he once used on his own parents. So, for him, the threat was known. In fact, it remains a constant threat that all parents face.

Imagine any parent traveling with their kids. Perhaps in a covered wagon traveling from spring to spring across a dry and wild American west. Or in some boat or on a train. Other cultures would have families travel by camel or elephant. How cool would it be to travel by camel or elephant? There were even 30 children aboard the Mayflower in 1620.

So for at least 400 years—and counting—parents have faced the unconquerable threat known as the "Are we there yet?" irritant that like the tiny knife of a thousand cuts slowly yet incessantly drives parents to find unique solutions to keep their kids engaged on long journeys.

But journeys are not only of distance but that of time. And like maps and measurements of distance, calendars are used to measure and track the passage of time.

Gerhard Lang was once a child, born in 1881. He loved Christmas and couldn't wait for it to arrive each year. Like most kids and the child I remember I was, we counted the days until Christmas.

Unfortunately such a solemn yet celebratory holiday has become consumed. Each day our favorite media outlets often remind us of how many shopping days remain until Christmas. But that is also what Gerhard wanted to know, probably not for shopping, but for the celebration he knew would arrive.

It was the arrival he awaited, known as Advent.

Warning: Dry boring material alert.

The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin *adventus* which translates to 'coming' or 'arrival.'

Okay. Story time resumes.

Like every child of his age, ages past, and ages today, he drove his mother crazy. So much so, that she baked him cookies. But these were special cookies. His mother sewed twenty-four cookies into the lid of a box. And once Advent season commenced, he was allowed to eat one cookie each day. Once he ate the last cookie. Yes, you guessed it. Advent arrived.

Taking his mother's gift of cookie knowledge to mark the passage of time, Gerhard, at 23 years old,

began to develop the first commercially available Advent calendar. Developed over four years and in collaboration with the famed illustrator Ernst Kepler, he produced and printed the first commercially available Advent calendar in 1908.

The calendar used the motif of "In the Land of the Christ Child."

But as noted by the researchers at the Weihnachtsmuseum other "calendars" existed before Lang's commercial entry.

From the website: <https://www.weihnachtsmuseum.de/en/die-ausstellung/advent/adventskalender/>:

One early evidence of a kind of Advent calendar comes from a children's book by Elise Averdieck dated 1851: "In the evening when little Elisabeth goes to bed, her mother always tells her a little bit about the Christmas story and they learn and sing lots of Christmas carols. Every evening a new picture is added to the wallpaper and the children know that when all twenty four pictures are hanging on the wallpaper then Christmas is here." Chalk marks on doors where one is wiped away every day or straws placed in the nativity crib every day were also used for children to count the days.

The first Advent calendars were still called "Nicholas calendars" as they were given out on the December 6, St. Nicholas' Day. Soon, however, the calendars started on December 1 and were called a "Christmas calendar" and then finally the name "Advent calendar" established itself, especially as some calendars appeared with the annually variable number of Advent days.

The oldest printed Advent calendar is also not a calendar in the classic sense but a clock. It is supposedly the "Christmas clock for children" from 1902 with rotating brass hand whose dial begins with 13 and whose panels mainly contain Christmas carol verses.

The following page shows some examples of early Advent calendars including a 1910 version of Gerhard Lang's calendar (top figure), another by Lang and Kepler (middle figure), and a 1933 Vom Himmel Hoch calendar (bottom figure).

Advent Calendars by Lang and Kepler, and Himmel



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