The Krieger–Sterkel Story:
From Norka, Russia to Lincoln, Nebraska

Childhood Visits to Lincoln

Bill Sallee (William L), first-born grandson of Blanche and Louis Krieger, recalls childhood visits to see them: "In the 1950s, my family would visit my grandparents in Havelock (Lincoln), Nebraska. We would stay with Mom's parents, my Grandma and Grandpa Blanche and Louis Krieger, at 6902 Ballard Ave. Louie's parents, Great Grandpa George (deceased 1955) and Great Grandma Catherine Krieger, lived next door at 6912 Ballard Ave. Dad's father, Grandpa Bill Sallee, and his wife, Elsie, lived on the same street at 6744 Ballard.

"Mom, Dad and my sisters slept at Blanche and Louie's house and I got to sleep next door in Great Grandma Krieger's spare bedroom. I was still in grade school at the time and considered myself very special and important. Those seasonal visits were nearly seventy years ago.

"Each morning Grandma Krieger and I chatted about various things as she pointed out photographs from the 1890s and 1900s. She talked about her childhood in Russia and the boat trip to America. There were wedding pictures and sports photos of Great Grandpa Krieger as a young man. There were also high school photos of her son, my Grandpa Louie, along with football photos and awards from Havelock High School.

"I listened politely but had little interest in details about her life in Russia and in the early 1900s–it was less than sixty years before, but that seemed like ancient history to me, a ten-year-old.

"Eventually I became curious about her life, but by that time she was gone. I learned that our ancestors were Germans who had moved to Russia in the 1760s to farm the barren Russian frontier land near the Volga River."

Russian Empress Catherine's Manifesto

At the time our ancestors emigrated to Russia, Germany was a haphazard gathering of principalities, each ruled by its lord, with peasants subject to his whims. (Germany did not become unified until more than 100 years later, in 1871.) Our ancestors lived in Hessen, a principality that included Frankfurt.

Map of Germany showing location of Hessen (in lavender)

During the same period in faraway Russia, Sophia Augusta Frederika of Germany ascended

the throne as Empress Catherine II in 1762. Russia had accumulated numerous huge territories in recent years, remote and unsettled, subject to lawlessness and general disarray. Catherine, in an attempt to lure fellow Germans to settle these Russian territories, issued a series of manifestos, the second of which was very successful. She granted Germans who would emigrate to Russia special rights and privileges: free transportation, grants and loans to build, no taxes, and most important of all, no requirement to serve in the military; this was especially appealing to those from Hessen, including the Kriegers and Sterkels. They could also keep their language and culture with no requirement to assimilate. Large numbers of Germans jumped at the possibility, and made plans to migrate.

Painting of Catherine the Great, circa 1763–1766 by Stefano Torelli (1712–1784). Source: Wikimedia Commons
https://www.norkarussia.info/recruitment-1766.html

Kriegers and Sterkels: Founding Families

In the spring of 1766, an important season for our family, two weddings took place. In April, 27-year-old Conrad Krieger married 26-year-old Katarina Schmidt. In June, 22-year-olds Wilhelm Sterkel and Maria Catherina Junger were also married—the Sterkels were ancestors of Grandma Krieger, whose maiden name was "Sterkel." Both weddings took place at Mariankirche (Saint Mary's Church) in a city named Budingen in the Principality of Hesse in The Holy Roman Empire. It had been a Roman Catholic Church until soon after 1517 when Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation in nearby Wittenberg.

View of the Marienkirche in Büdingen, Germany
Source: Wikimedia Commons - Von Sven Teschke - Eigenes Werk, CC BY-SA 2.0 de.
https://www.norkarussia.info/marriages-prior-to-emigration-1766.html

The church in Budingen was a busy wedding destination in 1766. Catharine II, empress of the Russian Empire, had made a very attractive offer to induce German people to settle her undeveloped land along the Volga River southeast of Moscow. Benefits were greater for

married couples because they ensured greater stability.

According to the research completed by Jerry Krieger, the original Krieger immigrant to Norka was Conrad Krieger, a Roman Catholic from Gulda, a small city in the principality of Hesse. He was a gardener and baker, probably born in 1733. Enticed by the generous opportunities offered by Empress Catherine, Conrad sold his possessions, packed his belongings, and set off on foot for the 40-mile trek to the village of Budingen, the gathering place for those wishing to go to Russia.

Conrad was 36 years old at this time, and probably a widower. Because married couples were given preference in empress Catherine's program, Conrad married Katharina Schmidt, about 26, who had a two-year-old daughter Anna Maria. 375 couples were united in matrimony between 4 March and 1 July that spring and summer, with as many as 13 couples joined in a single ceremony. The family joined other young couples for the arduous journey, arriving in Norka in late summer 1767. Young Anna Maria died somewhere along the way.

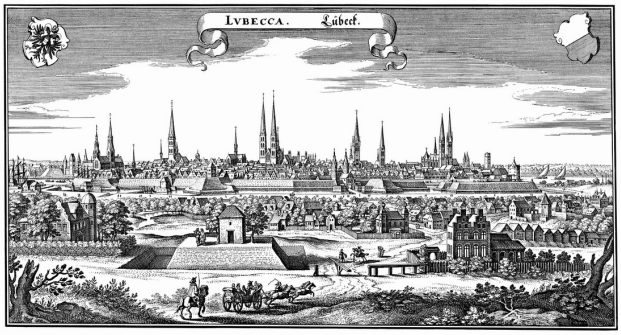
In the first official Russian enumeration of the settlers on 15 August 1767, Conrad is listed as the 276th male and Katharina as the 273rd female in Norka household No. 163. Katharina died prior to the census of 1775, by which time Conrad had married Maria Margartha Eichorn. By this time, according to the census, Conrad had accumulated two horses, a colt, four sheep, a plow and wagon, a pitchfork, two scythes, two axes, two horse collars and two bridles. He owned his own house and stable.

The Sterkels, following their marriage in Büdingen, traveled to Lübeck where they sailed to Oranienbaum aboard the ship Apollo. They arrived in Oranienbaum on August 29, 1766. They arrived in Norka on August 15, 1767 and are recorded there on the 1767 census in Household #122. Note that the difficult journey over land, rivers and lakes took colonists more than one year.

https://www.norkarussia.info/voyage-to-russia-1766.html
(Researched by Maggie Hein, Brent Mai, and Ruth Schultz www.norkarussia.info/founders.html.)

Journey from Hessen to Norka

Most of the Germans who settled in the Volga region came from either Hessen or Isenberg. They likely gathered to begin their trek in the town of Büdingen; traveled northeast by wagon almost 400 miles to Magdeburg; and then by boat on the Elbe River to the port city of Lübeck. Lübeck had good relations with Catherine II and had long traded successfully with Russia.



Drawing of Lübeck created by Matthäus Merian the elder in the 17th century. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
https://www.norkarussia.info/uploads/3/7/7/9/37792067/5424688_orig.jpg

The colonists were housed in Lübeck for several weeks or months depending on the weather and availability of boats to transport them, for the city was overwhelmed with German settlers who had taken up Catherine's offer to resettle. While lists of passengers were painstakingly made, they have been lost.

Sailing the 900 miles across the Baltic Sea from Lübeck to Kronstadt, Russia would normally take about nine days, but with inclement weather or poor wind conditions, the journey could extend to weeks. There were so many settlers that some were transported on cargo ships not suited for passengers–such a long and difficult voyage it must have been into largely unknown territory. One can imagine how challenging it was for many of the settlers to say goodbye to Germany and their familiar towns.

Since most of the settlers had never traveled by sea, they had trouble standing on the ships or keeping their balance. The ships carried far too many passengers, so they were packed in like sardines in a can. A number of settlers, including children and infants, died in the long voyages.

From Kronstadt they were taken on the short voyage to Oranienbaum on the mainland. Lists of families and their origins were made here but those lists depend on the accuracy of Russian clerks, many with limited understanding of German dialects, working in their own language and Cyrillic script. These lists have various spellings for surnames, inconsistent first names, and occasional contradictory information about towns of origin.

Colonists stayed in Oranienbaum for a few months learning about Russian culture and laws and preparing for their journey ahead. (It appears the Sterkels stayed much longer than that.) They were also required to swear an oath of loyalty to the Russian crown. They received medical care as needed, an allowance, winter clothing and household items. The Sterkels arrived in August 1766, but did not get to Norka aboard the Apollo until almost a year later on August 15, 1767, the founding day for the Norka community. We are not certain whether the Conrad Kriegers arrived on the same transport, but they arrived in Norka about the same time among the founding families.

Life in Norka

The Early Years: Norka Becomes A Successful Colony

https://www.norkarussia.info/early-years-1767-1769.html
https://www.norkarussia.info/wilhelm-staerkel.html

As set out earlier in this narrative, Johann Wilhelm Sterkel and his wife Maria Katherina Junger were among the first group arriving in Norka on August 15, 1767. (Unlike the Kriegers, who have many branches almost impossible to sort out, all the Sterkels seem to stem back to this couple, so we can be more certain of the facts.) Johann was listed as a tailor, so it's possible the Sterkel family did not begin life in Russia as farmers. (Johann Wilhelm and Maria Catherina Sterkel were Catherine Sterkel's great-great grandparents.)

Norka is situated on the hilly west side of the Volga River, about 45 miles southwest of Saratov, which is located about 450 miles southeast of Moscow. Saratov is also the name of the province in which Norka is located. (Norka, now called Nekrasovo, is only 877 miles northeast of the Donbas region of Ukraine, and 1200 miles east of Ukraine's capital Kiev.)

The settlers dealt with many challenges in the early years, for the lands were ruled by renegade groups and tribes who had been exiled to the area and roamed in robber bands. The conditions were much worse on the east side of the river, so our ancestors were fortunate in being settled on the relatively calmer west side.

The Kontora, supervisors of the settlements, gave each family 25 rubles, horses, oxen, wagons, lumber and other materials. These supplies were in the form of a loan to be repaid to the Russian government in three installments after ten years.

Records show there were a few log cabins in the Crown colonies (Norka was one of these), but not enough for all the families who arrived. It is likely the colonists built sod huts, situated partially underground for insulation, in order to survive the first winter. Once the first winter passed, the settlers were able to build improved housing.

Each family was allotted land for a dwelling, but the large areas of farmland were owned jointly by the community. That first year it was too late to plant crops except for winter rye, so each family prepared only about ⅔ of an acre. Not all of the settlers were experienced farmers, so it was very rough for them. The fact that most Norka families came from Hessen with a common culture and language helped to make Norka one of the largest, most successful and enduring settlements. While all the settlers spoke German, there were significant differences among dialects, so settlers from different regions of Germany could not necessarily understand one another.

Droughts were common in the Volga region and there were several during the early years, most notably in 1769. The settlers relied upon the Kontora to provide grain for seed and food during those times.

Norka was fortunate to be located near plentiful water and fertile land, though the Volga River was not nearby. They were a homogeneous group with a variety of skill sets and they lived not far from the Kontora, where they could get relief and support when necessary. These factors, combined with the hard work of the colonists, led to their success.

Count Gregory Orlov, who was checking on the settlements for the Crown in 1769, reported that in Norka, 172 residences had been built. There were 118 barns and 168 horse stables. A church and school were also built during these early years. It was a well established colony.

Peter Simon Pallas, a distinguished Russian naturalist, traveled through central Russia in August 1773 and visited the colonies of Norka

and Huck. He was favorably impressed with the progress that had been made in only six years: "These colonies have since their founding produced their own grain not only for food, but for sale. They have procured for themselves all sorts of convenience and have even built their own granaries."

Pugachev Rebellion and J. W. Sterkel, 1774
(Details from Jacob Dietz *History of the Volga German Colonists* CH 7, pp. 84–86.)

By 1774 Wilhelm and Maria Catherina Sterkel had three children: 7-year-old Heinrich, 4-year-old Conrad (Great Grandma Catherine's great grandfather) and infant Catherine.

About the time their daughter Catherine was born, Emelian Pugachev, a charismatic rebel leader with great practical and strategic experience, convinced many Russian peasants to rise up in rebellion against the Crown. He managed to invade and take over nearby Saratov. He looted the treasury and invaded the Kontora (the main office supporting the colonists), leaving Norka and the other colonies without support or protection.

18th-century portrait of Emelian Pugachev
Source: Wikimedia Commons
https://www.norkarussia.info/pugachev-raid-1774.html

Extreme class inequality and the ravages of peasant life led to popular uprisings such as this one. The burdens of taxes and fees on the peasants, who were bound to the land but did not own it; the greed and corruption of the landowners and bureaucrats; public corporal punishment of peasants, including torture, floggings and exile to Siberia, paved the way for numerous rebellions. Pugachev's rebellion, arising from such savage conditions, implemented similar techniques against anyone who stood in the way, terrorizing the German colonists on its rampage.

After Pugachev and his followers looted and occupied Saratov, about 45 miles from Norka, he avoided the Volga River where he might be ambushed and instead headed inland to the German colonies where there were sufficient

people, horses, food and supplies. Norka founder Wilhelm Sterkel reported the following story.

Upon their arrival to Norka in 1774, Pugachev's rebels demanded that carters be chosen by lottery to transfer their looted treasures to the nearest town. Sterkel drew the proverbial short straw and was chosen with another companion for the task. Instead of stopping at the nearest town, however, they forced him to go even further and ordered Sterkel and his companion to bury the treasure. They were promised rewards for this work. That evening the two companions were given a large amount of money, but they were not allowed to return home.

Drunken festivities of the rebels followed that evening, during which time a Russian woman went to Sterkel and whispered, "You, Saxon, try to get out of here because they want to hang you tonight." Terror-stricken, Sterkel managed to steal away and hide under a barrel in the cellar. Eventually, his absence was noticed and several rebels searched for him with their pikes, intending to kill him. The barrel saved him, and the pursuers eventually abandoned their search. He hid under the barrel until the middle of the following day. He was horrified upon emerging from his hiding place to see the body of his companion hanging from the gates. Thus an unknown Russian peasant woman saved the life of our ancestor, affecting our family line in one of its earlier phases.

Emelian Pugachev and his followers terrorize a village.
Source: Unknown
https://www.norkarussia.info/pugachev-raid-1774.html

But Sterkel's adventures did not end there. He managed to gallop away on a nearby horse and headed for Norka. The next day, though, he encountered another of Pugachev's detachments, and was forced to stay with them and fight off an attack by government forces. The rebels were no match for the better trained government troops, known as Cossacks, and a chaotic bloody rout ensued, leaving many dead and wounded behind. One of those wounded was Sterkel, who had been stabbed in the shoulder by one of the troops and played dead in order to avoid further injury.

A few Cossack troops stayed behind to take care of the wounded and dead; they proceeded to kill any rebels they found. A Cossack came upon Sterkel, raised his pike and prepared to finish him off, when Sterkel leapt up and tore the pike from the soldier's hand. An officer rode up to check on the situation and Sterkel begged for mercy, reiterating that he was forced to fight for the rebels, knew where the treasure was buried, and

would take them to it. He was taken prisoner, but once again he had escaped death. (There is no information on whether the treasure was recovered.)

Prison guards absconded with Wilhelm's clothing, including a significant sum of money sewn into the seams, and replaced it with prison cloth. Many of the prisoners starved in the terrible conditions in which they were held for several months. The only special treatment Sterkel received was being allotted additional food, thus he avoided starvation.

After several months the prisoners were transferred to Saratov on a large barge. Since the barge was traveling against the current, prisoners were required to tow it, a very difficult and slow journey. Among those towing the barge were Sterkel and a couple of other colonists, all contemplating methods of escape once they approached Saratov. They each managed to disembark, headed frantically for a nearby forest and managed to get away. They reached a Russian village where they were fed—they ate voraciously, consuming a large kettle of hot kasha (a cooked grain similar to buckwheat)—and left immediately, fearing their pursuers were not far behind.

Once again, good fortune followed Sterkel, but his companions were not so lucky. They had gone only a short way when both of Wilhelm's companions dropped dead, evidently from consuming so much hot food in a short time after being deprived of nutrition for so long. Sterkel was saved by the fact that he had received special treatment and better food, so did not succumb as his companions did. He went on to several colonies in which friends and relatives helped him return to Norka. How his family must have rejoiced to see him arrive home after a five-month absence. Doubtless they had long assumed him dead.

I know our ancestor's story reads like some adventure novel, but it was probably even more harrowing at the time than it now sounds so many years later. What baffles me is how Wilhelm managed to talk and listen his way out of so many scrapes when he did not speak the same language as his pursuers and rescuers. The German colonists lived among themselves and had limited fluency in the Russian language. I wonder if Catherine's great-great-grandfather was an exception and had managed to pick up enough Russian to understand the warning he received from the peasant woman and to communicate with the troops who were about to kill him and then held him prisoner. Or perhaps many of the colonists picked up enough Russian in their long travels to communicate basic needs and wants.

In any case, Wilhelm Sterkel was not only a lucky man but also a fast-thinking and fast-moving strategist who could keep his head even in desperate and fearful situations. Had he not managed to survive his ordeal, the entire trajectory of our family would have changed, for he had three more children following his return.

And what happened to Pugachev and his rebels? Eventually the rebellion was crushed near the end

of 1774 at Tsaritsyn, about 300 miles south of Norka. Pugachev was captured not long afterwards and was executed in Moscow in January 1776. The colonists along the Volga were considerably reduced in number and suffered enormous financial losses as a result of Pugachev's terrorizing raid.

Additional dangers came from surrounding robber bands and Tartar tribes of Kirghiz and Kalmucks. The countryside had for years harbored robber bands who terrorized the countryside for two centuries before they were finally subdued. While Norka was a successful settlement relative to many of the other colonies, the Norkans had always to be on the lookout and prepared for dangers.

Daily Life on Norkan Farms

Most of these details were drawn from Amelia Krieger Werre's narrative.
https://www.norkarussia.info/a-history-of-the-krieger-family.html

Amelia is related to us, for her family and ours were both relatives of Johannes Krieger, the scout.

Painting of Volga German homes by the noted artist Jakob Weber
https://www.norkarussia.info/homesites.html

Life in Norka for most farming families consisted of hard work on the farm and in the house with relatively little time to play or be entertained. Their work and life were determined by the seasons. The warm season, from mid-May to mid-September, was long and comfortable, with a good growing period. It could become humid in July, but not as much as in Nebraska where they would eventually emigrate. The cold season, however, from late November to late February was frigid and snowy, with temperatures falling as low as –24º F. Certainly the climate was not as difficult as in the northern parts of Russia, such as Siberia, but the winters could be long and hard, sometimes dangerously so.

Out of necessity Norka farming families strove to be as self-sufficient as possible, supported by the village. Each family had enough livestock for their meat, milk, wool and transportation. The livestock were sheltered at night for protection from wandering packs of wolves. Various sausages and cheeses were made on the farm, and rye bread, a staple, was baked almost daily—white bread, a luxury, was reserved for special occasions. Bacon and ham were also staples of the diet. Root crops and potatoes were stored for the winter while cabbage, cucumbers, and even small watermelons were pickled. Hot meals including soups from lentils and split peas flavored with bacon or ham were prepared in large iron pots, which were then placed on the table where everyone took their share using big wooden spoons. Metal cutlery was not available.

Norkan Georg Schmer wearing a Russian style hat, a "dulup" (Russian style sheepskin coat) and "fellstiefel" (felt boots) about 1912. Source: AHSGR Journal, Summer 1985.
https://www.norkarussia.info/clothing.html

Keeping warm in the winter was challenging. Heavy material was purchased for overcoats made by itinerant tailors. The hides of animals were tanned to make coats and caps, with wool on the inside for warmth. All the sewing was done by hand, for there were no machines. Goose feathers were used for down pillows and covers.

The settlers went barefoot as much as possible to preserve valuable leather shoes made by cobblers. The optimal footwear for winter were made from felted wool, coaxed and melded into one-piece boots. These were made by itinerant crafters who went from house to house making boots for each member of the family. All travel was done by sleigh as snow could lay on the ground for months.

Drawing of a typical Volga German classroom
Source: "Das Lied vom Küster Deis" by David Kufeld, published 1914.
https://www.norkarussia.info/uploads/3/7/7/9/37792067/editor/415440.jpg?1510853632

Fuel was always in short supply, for wood was scarce in the steppes (grasslands) of Russia. In the late spring farmers hauled the manure accumulated over the winter, laid it out on hard ground and worked straw into it using horses. The manure was hardened and dried, and then cut into allotments for each family to use as fuel. The value of manure as fertilizer had not yet been discovered, so the soil was further depleted with each year's crop. That, combined with lack of rainfall some years, could bring about complete crop failures. Even so the frugal Norka families managed to save enough grain to carry them through the winter.

"Spring in Norka" by Jerry Krieger

Finally the long, hard winter gave way to spring. Early spring still found the ground covered with snow, but the hours of daylight were longer and the sun shined most of the time.

The people left their small houses for fresh air. The men had too much time on their hands during

winter and failed to improvise enough work for themselves, especially during the latter days of the Volga Republic.

During winter women knitted, spun and mended clothes for their families, while the men repaired boots and shoes, but spent most of the time playing cards and smoking. Spring gave them a chance to stretch their muscles, breath fresh air and once again engage in useful activity.

Easter followed shortly with the advent of spring. Church regulations were more severe and generally adhered to with considerable devotion, as most villagers diligently observed the rules of the penance, fasting and prayer. Weekly church attendance picked up. Fasting was taken for granted, at least in the Catholic villages. The lard tub remained covered until the end of the lenten season. The long religious season had its milestones—Palm Sunday, Good Friday and finally Easter.

When Easter came special dishes were prepared. Drinks were served and Easter greetings exchanged. The men played cards and the women gossiped, while the young people laughed, sang songs and danced on dirt floors to the music of a fiddler. The songs they sang were brought from Germany, although the Volga Germans did produce a few folk songs.

As spring progressed the farmers moved to their fields, often located ten to 15 miles from their villages. At first, and especially during the time of raids, they commuted daily, but when the area became pacified they established summer camps on their distant farms.

Source: Norka Newsletter, Spring 2015.

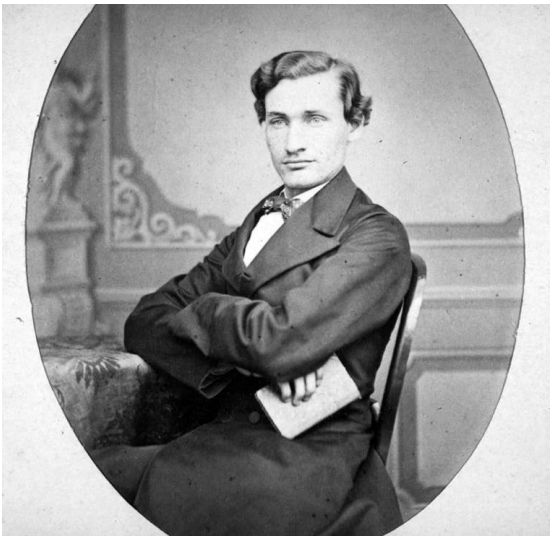
"Norka Sunset" by artist Michael Boss. The Giebelhaus mill is depicted in the background.
https://www.norkarussia.info/agriculture.html

Pastor Wilhelm Sterkel

Source of factual information:
https://www.norkarussia.info/wilhelm-staerkel.html

Among all of the Krieger-Sterkel ancestors, Wilhelm Sterkel is the most striking historically. If you recall founder Wilhelm Sterkel and his narrow escape during the Pugachev Rebellion in 1774, the son born after his escape was Christoph, born June 2, 1776—about the time of the United States founding that we celebrate every July 4th.

Christoph's son, Heinrich (born 1805), married Amalie Knippel in 1825. Their 8th child, Wilhelm, was born in Norka on December 13, 1839.



Portrait of Wilhelm Stärkel in 1864
Used with permission of the Basel Mission Archives, Reference: BMA QS-30.001.0423.01.

According to contemporary observations, Wilhelm was destined to become a preacher from an early age. Reverend Bonwetsch, the preacher in Norka at the time, identified his talents early and encouraged him to pursue studies in the seminary. Wilhelm began his studies at the Evangelical Mission Society in Basel, Switzerland in 1859 and was ordained on July 17, 1864 in Ravensburg Germany.

One of the tests all seminarians underwent included preaching a sermon on a given Biblical text in front of a board of examiners. When Wilhelm arrived at the pulpit to begin his sermon, he found only a blank piece of paper. Unflappable even under such pressure, he commented in German, "Here is nothing, there is nothing. From nothing God created the universe." From there he launched into a sermon that caused everyone in the room to sit up and take notice. The professors on the board of examiners assured young Sterkel that the Holy Spirit was indeed with him, and sent back a message to the colonies: "Please send us more of these Sterkels."

It was common practice at the time that many of the newly ordained were sent to serve in the Lutheran missions, including in North America. Shortly after he was ordained, Wilhelm was called to serve in Wisconsin, where he arrived in 1864 during the height of the American Civil War. He served a parish in Kenosha, Wisconsin from 1864 to 1867, and then in Burlington, Wisconsin from 1867 to 1868.

Then, rather suddenly, he left his parish duties. According to the records of the Evangelical Society, Wilhelm sailed from New York on April 28, 1868, arriving in Hamburg on May 13th. From there he returned to his home in Norka. His abrupt departure from Wisconsin was prompted by the theological beliefs he was propagating, relating to the end times. He had published booklets espousing these beliefs, which contradicted Lutheran teachings on the subject. His superiors tried to convince him to retract his beliefs and "see the light," but Wilhelm would not budge, making a decision to return home rather than change his beliefs or face disciplinary action. Wilhelm stood by his beliefs about the end times to his death.

Finally, after serving in other posts, he was called to serve as pastor in Norka beginning on December 21, 1877. By this time our great grandmother Catherine Sterkel, born on

December 1, 1875, was two years old. Pastor Sterkel, then, was a prominent local religious leader throughout Catherine's formative years in Norka.

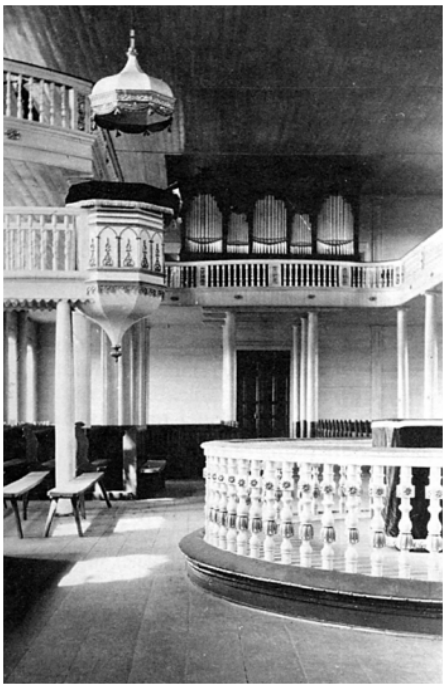
Under Pastor Sterkel's leadership, construction of the third and last church in Norka began in 1880. The new church, dedicated in 1882, seated 2,500 people.

The third Norka church was completed in 1882. This photograph was taken in 1912 and is used with permission of AHSGR.

Men from the colony supplied the labor for building the church. Johannes Krieger, deacon of the church, oversaw the construction of the building. Johannes was a great uncle to our great grandfather George Krieger, Catherine Sterkel's future husband.

Because the church was built using few mechanical devices, it took over three years to complete. One of its most striking features was the side pulpit suspended in mid-air by thick iron rods. The pulpit was accessed from below by a winding staircase accessible from outside the church. When it was time for the service to begin, bell ringers would ring the bells continuously until Pastor Sterkel arrived from his home into the pulpit. When the service was over, the process repeated until he was back home.

Also notable in the church was a suspended choir loft and pipe organ, built in 1891, after our Sterkel and Krieger ancestors emigrated to the United States and settled in Lincoln, Nebraska.



Photograph from 1912 of the interior of the church looking from the altar, past the Communion Table to the entry door. This photo shows both the suspended pulpit and organ suspended over the entry door.

Source: ***AHSGR Journal*** **, Summer 1985.**

Considering that Wilhelm Sterkel was pastor and Deacon Johannes Krieger charged with

overseeing the construction of the new church, it is likely that the Krieger and Sterkel families were closely linked in Norka. Both families probably lived in the middle section of town, not far from where the church was built. Catherine and George both worshiped there with their families; both families descended from founders and were involved in the leadership of the community.

Pastor Wilhelm Sterkel's reputation spread far and wide in the colonies, including stories about his abilities to stop wildfires in their tracks, and to bring congregations to see things his way on more than one occasion. It seems he was an exceptional administrator, powerful orator, and strong leader.

Because he had experience in America and knew the farming conditions well, Wilhelm was a prominent voice supporting Norkans' plans to emigrate. He knew there was rich farmland, and he knew the benefits of the Homestead Act signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1862. If he were a farmer, he would head to America. One can easily imagine both the Krieger and Sterkel families listening to his encouraging words. The Krieger and Sterkel families emigrated just ahead of the great famine of the early 1890s—their timing was fortuitous, for conditions in the Russian colonies continued to decline into the 20th century.

Reverend Sterkel continued as Pastor of the Church in Norka until 1908 when several ailments, including encroaching blindness, made it impossible for him to continue serving. During his thirty-year tenure from 1878 to 1908 many of his parishioners, including our ancestors, emigrated to the United States.

Reverend Sterkel died in Norka on July 10, 1915. Reuben Brauer wrote in *One of Many* that Sterkel was a person "whose name echoed the length and breadth of the Volga region and is still remembered today wherever German-Russians are found."

Bauer, Reuben A. *One of Many* (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Imprimerie La Survivance Printing Ltd., 1965), pp. 36–39.
https://www.norkarussia.info/church-buildings.html

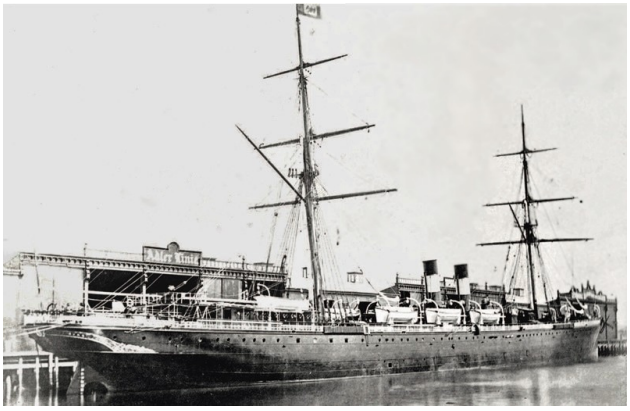
Troubled Times for Volga Germans: Scouting Trip to America 1874

Germany finally unified as a nation for the first time in 1871. This unification was unsettling to other European nations and Russia. Increasing nationalism in Russia led to greater suspicion of foreigners, prompting actions against them. While the Germans had been in the Volga for more than a century, they were still seen by Russian citizens as outsiders—colonists who had special privileges—and many Russians resented them for it.

On June 4, 1871, the Imperial Russian Government issued a decree repealing Catherine's Manifesto. This decree rescinded the special privileges the German colonists had enjoyed for more than a century. The Germans saw this as utter betrayal, for Catherine's Manifesto was supposed to last "forever." The colonists were granted a period of ten years when they could emigrate freely—very unusual in Russia where freedom of movement was rarely allowed.

The final blow for the colonists came in January 1874 when the government issued a second decree instituting compulsory military conscription for the German colonists. Recall that enforced conscription into the armies of various German lords is part of what prompted these families to emigrate from Hessen a century earlier.

These German colonists, especially those in the larger more established colonies such as Norka, were outraged that a sacred promise from Catherine had been rescinded. Once again they would be forced to fight for a cause not their own. This time, though, rather than leave in hordes and head to an uncertain future, the Volgan Germans elected a small group of 14 scouts to journey to America, check out the conditions and determine whether to recommend the immense migration. They chose 14 scouts of different occupations including several farmers and a teacher from various colonies, two of them from Norka: Johannes Nolde and Johannes Krieger, great uncle of 4-year-old George Krieger.



The German steamship *Schiller* brought the first Volga German scouts to America. Image source: Wikipedia.

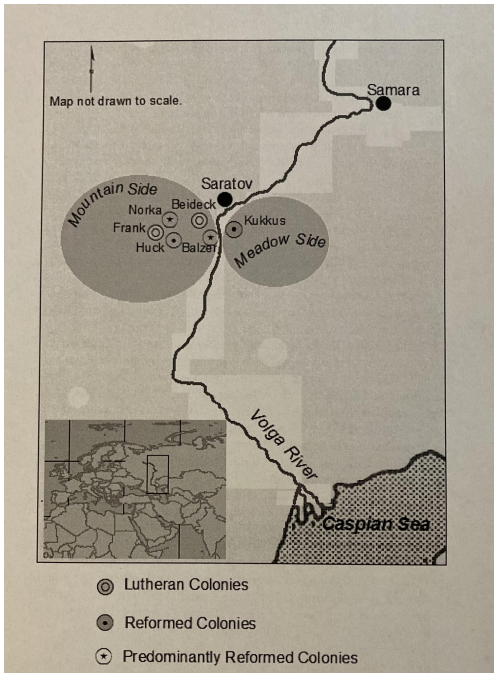
The fourteen scouts departed together on the steamship *Schiller*, arriving in New York on July 15, 1874. The Norkans, dressed in heavy Russian boots, caps and sheepskin coats, drew immediate attention, not all of it flattering. Stories were that jeers followed them through the streets. They traveled to the Midwest, including Kansas City, Ohio and Iowa.

While the reports of the scouts were not unanimous, with farmers in particular taking issue with the soil and farming conditions they found, they were encouraging enough that some colonists began to emigrate to the United States and Canada.

Portrait of Johannes and Katharina Maria Krieger and their daughter, Katharina Elisabeth, taken in Sutton, Nebraska.
Photo courtesy of Jerry Krieger.
https://www.norkarussia.info/uploads/3/7/7/9/37792067/johannes_and_katharina_krieger.jpg

Johannes returned to Norka and resumed his life there, acting as deacon of the church and overseeing construction of the new church. He and his family did not leave Norka for the United States until 1890 during the great famine that struck the Volga region.

The map below shows the location of Norka in relation to the other colonies and the Volga River. Norka was predominantly a Dutch Reformed Church Colony.



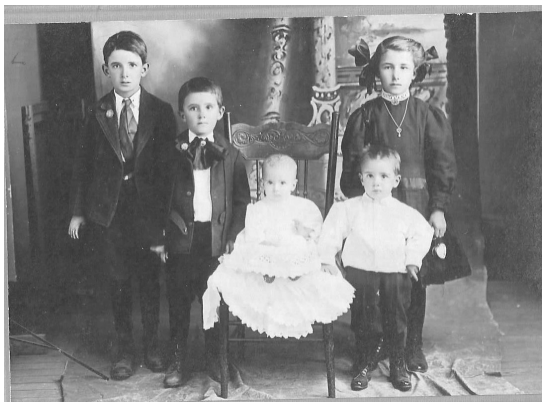
German Russian Colonies along the Volga River
Source: *Life in the Russian Bottoms* by Kurt E. Kinbacher p.31.

George Krieger's Early Life and Immigration

(research by Jerry Krieger)

Johan Georg (later George) Krieger was born February 7, 1870 in Norka, Russia, the second son of Carl Krieger and his wife Katharina Lehl. 1874 was to be a tragic year for the family. On September 22, Katharina experienced her second stillborn delivery. Early in November the eldest surviving daughter, Magdalena (born 1858), died. A few weeks later, on December 16th, her husband Johann Carl also died. According to oral family history, there was some sort of epidemic and he contracted the disease while tending to other members of the village.

A few years later Katharina married Ludwig Hohnstein, a widower with five children, and George grew up with that family. Katharina had another boy and girl with Ludiweg, resulting in a family of 11 children.



Members of the Hohnstein Family

Originally it was believed that George emigrated in 1890, the same year as his great uncle Johannes Krieger, but it now appears he came to Sutton, Nebraska earlier, in 1887 or 1889, perhaps to avoid service in the Russian army. He was the first of his siblings to emigrate from Russia. George remained in Sutton for a few years, earning a living cobbling shoes. In the early 1890s he moved to the large German-Russian colony in Lincoln.

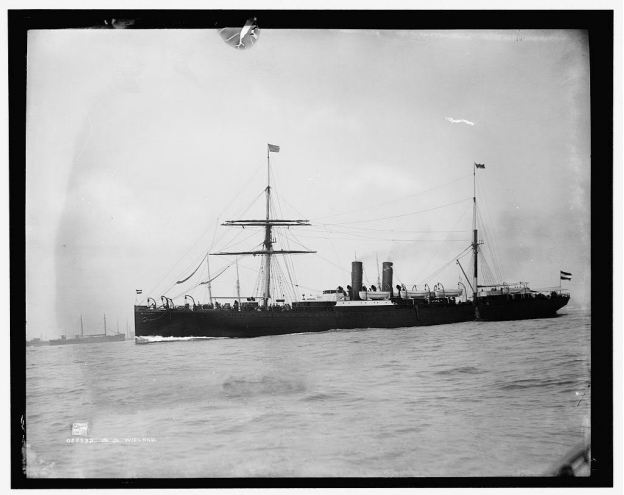
Top to Bottom: George Krieger's trunk, wallet, and baptismal-confirmation certification completed by Reverend Wilhelm Sterkel (Catherine's great uncle)

Once George was established in Lincoln, his older brother Philip (b. 1867) and younger sister Christina Elizabeth (b. 1872) came in 1892. Their eldest sibling Anna Maria came in 1894, the same year George and Katherine Krieger married. Mother Katharina Krieger survived until December 17, 1895 when she suffered a fatal heart attack while attending church.

The Sterkel Family Immigrates to America

According to our uncle Jerry Krieger's essay "I Wish I Had Known My Great-grandfather" (Norka Newsletter, Summer 2009), Peter Sterkel called on his distant cousin Wilhelm Sterkel, pastor of the church in Norka on May 11, 1887. Peter had obtained a passport allowing him to leave Russia with his family and travel to America. He needed from his cousin a parochial certificate, which verified the family was in good standing in the church. It included all the family member names, birth places and dates as well as baptismal and confirmation dates.

Their family included Peter, 42, his wife Anna Maria (*nee* Glantz), 39, and five children: Johannes, 18; Katherine, 11; Maria Barbara, 7; Louis (Ludwig), 5; and Jacob, 2. Once all their paperwork was in order, the Sterkel family left Norka, Russia, the only home they had ever known, journeying almost 1,800 miles to Hamburg, Germany where Peter presented himself to the American consulate. At this consulate the family was cleared for admittance to the United States. They departed Hamburg June 5 on the steamer *Wieland* and landed at New York 12 days later (not at Ellis Island, which did not open until January 1, 1892).



Ocean Liner *SS Wieland*
(public domain)

Once more on solid land, Peter and his family climbed aboard a train for the long journey to Marion, Kansas, about 175 miles southwest of Kansas City. Numerous Germans from Russia had already settled in this wheat belt country reminiscent of the Russian steppes. The Sterkels settled in to farm the land with fellow immigrants.

Tragically, the Sterkels lost their eldest son Johannes in 1887 at some point shortly after they reached Kansas. He is buried in Herrington, Kansas about 20 miles from Marion. We have no details about his death, but surely it was a blow to the family as they reached new land. It is possible that protecting Johannes from serving in the Russian army was one of the primary motivations for the move.

The Sterkels Move to Lincoln, Nebraska

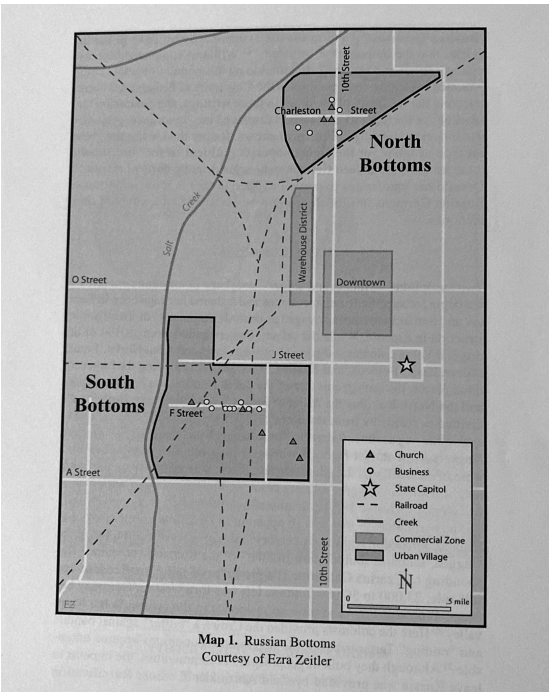
On November 3, 1891 Peter appeared before the clerk of court in Marion and began the process of becoming an American citizen. The first step was renouncing allegiance to the Czar of Russia. The following month the family left the farm behind and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska. Thus, George Krieger and the Sterkel family probably arrived in Lincoln about the same time, just ahead of George's siblings, who began arriving in 1892. The Sterkels' first known address from the 1900 census is 905 North 8th Street in the North Bottoms of Lincoln. (The 1890 census was destroyed in a fire, so there is a gap in our information.)

Katherine (also Catherine), or Kate as she was usually called, was Peter and Emma's (Anna Marie was usually called "Emma") oldest daughter. As such, she must have been a source of help to her mother as they made their long trip from the Volga to Kansas. When they arrived in Lincoln she worked as a housemaid for various well-to-do families, and also in a dressmaker's sweatshop, dutifully handing over all the money she earned to her parents, as was the custom in those days.

The Peter Sterkels were members of the Salem Evangelical Church. Peter received his final citizenship papers on October 2, 1900 in Lancaster County District Court.

Urban Villages: North and South Bottoms

The Volga Germans, including those from Norka, settled on the southwest edge of Lincoln in Salt River in urban villages that became known as the South Bottoms and North Bottoms.



Map 1. Russian Bottoms
Courtesy of Ezra Zeitler

The Russian Bottoms, Lincoln NE
Source: *Life in the Russian Bottoms* by Kurt E. Kinbacher p. 29.

Like the group that came in 1876, these Volga Germans were seen as outsiders in their sheepskin coats, felt boots, wide-brimmed hats, and black shawls worn even in the heat and humidity of Nebraska summers. Uncomfortable with their appearance, strange language and social customs, many Lincolnites derisively called them "Rooshians," "dirty Rooshians" or "dumb" Russians (*Life in the Russian Bottoms*, Kinbacher p. 27).

The South Bottoms evolved with the first settlers who came in the 1870s. The North Bottoms, where most of the Norkans settled, began in 1888 as railroad personnel moved closer to the Burlington roundhouse. The Norkans generally followed the same habits and inclinations they had as settlers in Russia.

They ordered their space in the same way, building summer kitchens for example; they clustered in family units; they continued to prize working, almost for its own sake; they kept to themselves and were extremely religious. While they may have been discriminated against, their work ethic was quickly acknowledged and sometimes exploited.

Acquisition of land and home ownership were goals for most families, and many achieved those goals relatively quickly. Many immigrants worked as day laborers and eventually for the railroad, the largest employer in the area at the time.

Though we have come across numerous observations about the German-Russian immigrants standing out by their dress within the Lincoln community, it appears George Krieger adapted quickly to contemporary American dress and was pleased to do so.

Young George Krieger (left) with friend, circa 1892

Our research suggests that the German-Russians were very isolated in their colonies, almost like a collection of Rip Van Winkles who woke up after 100 years and found themselves in new and strange surroundings. But there have also been numerous observations that once they were exposed to new ways and ideas, the Germans from Russia were able to adapt readily even as they hung on to many of their values and traditions. That complexity captures both George Krieger and Catherine Sterkel very well.

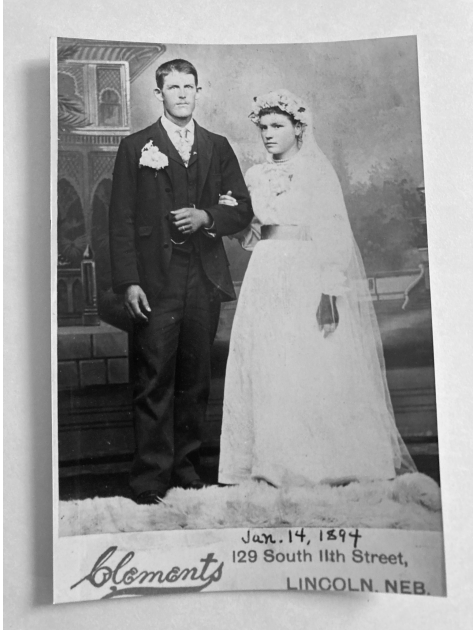
German porcelain pipe belonging to George Krieger (may have been brought from Russia)

By this time the Sterkels' eldest daughter Catherine had married George Krieger (1894) and Mary Barbara had married Johannes Spahn (1897). Their younger sons Louis, 18, and Jacob, 15, still lived with them. Peter Sterkel worked as a day laborer, one who works and is paid by the day, often in construction or similar situations, including for the railroad.

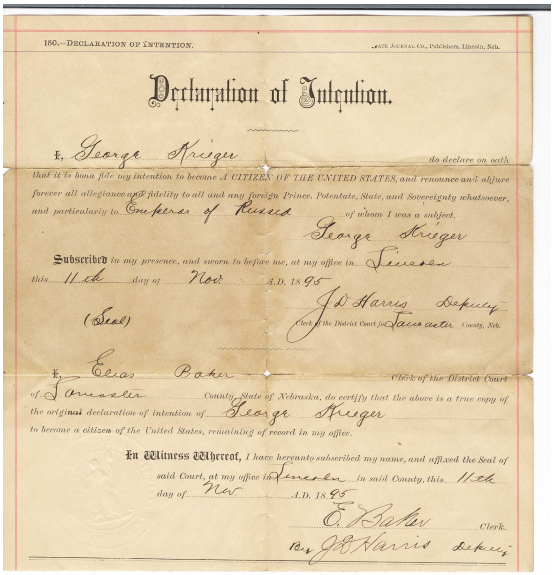
Peter Sterkel Family, circa 1900
Back row: Barbara, Louis, Catherine
Front Row: Jacob, Anna Marie, Peter

George and Catherine Krieger's Early Years

Catherine Sterkel married George Krieger on January 14, 1894. It would not surprise me to learn that Catherine made her own wedding gown, perhaps with help from her mother, but we have no way of knowing for certain.



Wedding Photo: George and Catherine Krieger



160.—DECLARATION OF INTENTION. JOURNAL CO., Publishers, Lincoln, Neb.

Declaration of Intention.

I, George Krieger do declare on oath that it is bona fide my intention to become A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES, and renounce and abjure forever all allegiance and fidelity to all and any foreign Prince, Potentate, State, and Sovereignty whatsoever, and particularly to Emperor of Russia of whom I was a subject.

George Krieger

Subscribed in my presence, and sworn to before me, at my office in Lincoln this 11th day of Nov A.D. 1895

(Seal) J.D. Harris Deputy

Clerk of the District Court for Lancaster County, Neb.

I, Elias Baker Clerk of the District Court of Lancaster County, State of Nebraska, do certify that the above is a true copy of the original declaration of intention of George Krieger to become a citizen of the United States, remaining of record in my office.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name, and affixed the Seal of said Court, at my office in Lincoln in said County, this 11th day of Nov A.D. 1895

E. Baker Clerk.

By J.D. Harris Deputy

George Krieger renounces allegiance to the emperor of Russia in his first step to become a US citizen, November 11, 1895.

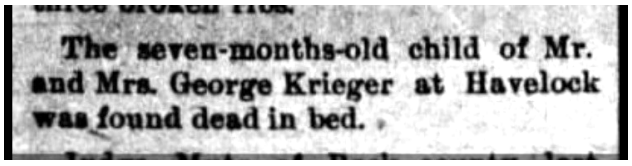
These were the early years of formal photography, and studios were becoming more commonplace. You may wonder why people in these early photographs never seemed to smile. Exposure times were so long that it was not practical to maintain a natural smile long enough; rather subjects had to remain as still as possible–hence the "frozen-in-time" appearance.

Not long after they were married, George applied for citizenship in the United States, beginning the process with this Declaration of Intention:

Chances are good that the Kriegers began their married life in the North Bottoms, but that is difficult to confirm. Their first child, Carl George, was born on December 30, 1894 but lived only a few months to February 14, 1895. Their first daughter Anna Marie was born June 7, 1896; Louis, our grandfather, on August 9, 1898 (notice the symmetry in the date: 8-9-98); and Esther Lillian on April 15, 1900.

Photograph from 1900: George, Louis, Anna, Esther, Catherine

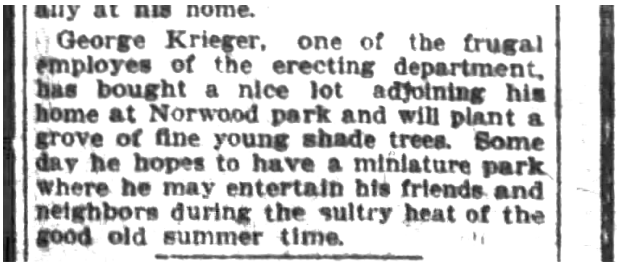
According to the 1900 census, the year this family photograph was taken, the George Krieger family was living in Havelock at Norwood Park where George was employed as a machinist's helper. Esther, an infant in the photograph, died on November 22, 1900, only seven months old.


The seven-months-old child of Mr. and Mrs. George Krieger at Havelock was found dead in bed.

Brief item in Beaver Valley Tribune, March 1901.

House in Norwood Park where Louie Krieger was born in 1898
(House was torn down to make way for a new school.)

At some point before Louie was born, George and Catherine bought a home on Bishop Street in the Norwood Park area of Havelock (east of 70th Avenue in present-day Lincoln). The notice below in the Lincoln Journal Star suggests they were true to their German-Russian values of owning home and land within a close community, just like their ancestors in Norka. What a wonderful idea: buying the lot next to their home in Norwood Park and planting a grove of young shade trees for a miniature park to be shared with friends and family.


ally at his home.

George Krieger, one of the frugal employes of the erecting department, has bought a nice lot adjoining his home at Norwood park and will plant a grove of fine young shade trees. Some day he hopes to have a miniature park where he may entertain his friends and neighbors during the sultry heat of the good old summer time.

Lincoln Journal Star, October 6, 1903 (p. 8).

Louis and Anna, circa 1902

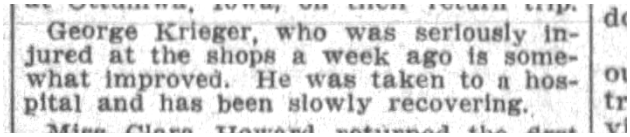
The Burlington Railroad opened repair shops in Havelock in 1891. Seventy steam locomotives were built there between 1895 and 1913. During this time "the shops" as they were called was a primary employer, making Havelock a popular place for workers to live.

George and Catherine Krieger about the time they lived in Norwood Park

George Krieger (front left) with friends, circa 1903

According to the 1910 census the Kriegers were living on Bishop Street in Norwood Park, Havelock with Anna and Louis. George was a laborer, probably in the erecting department as the news article indicates in the Burlington shops. There's a good chance he began working there not long after they opened in the early 1890s.

Probably around the time this census information was collected (always in advance of the actual census date) and less than a month after Louie's 11th birthday, George was seriously injured in an accident, probably a fall, at the shops. This announcement is from the Lincoln Star Journal on September 9, 1909.



George Krieger, who was seriously injured at the shops a week ago is somewhat improved. He was taken to a hospital and has been slowly recovering.

Lincoln Star Journal, p. 9.

We do not have additional records about the accident, except that George suffered a serious brain injury that kept him from being able to work in skilled labor as he had done up until this time.

While George's accident was a devastating setback for the family in many ways, it did not appear to leave the family in financial need. According to Jerry Krieger, about the time of his disability, George and Catherine purchased several lots on an empty block in Havelock, built a home on one corner in 1912 (eventually becoming 6902 Ballard) and sold off the rest. Later in the 1920s they built a nice place in the same block (6912 Ballard) which included a fireplace and a beautiful crystal chandelier.

Dress Factory workers downtown Lincoln circa 1912
Catherine back row, second from left

It appears Catherine began work shortly after George's accident, if not before, and was at one point employed at a dress factory in downtown Lincoln. She was an excellent seamstress and accomplished knitter—in fact she excelled at all manner of domestic arts, eventually knitting dresses on commission and giving knitting lessons at Gold's department store in Lincoln.

Marriage of Anna Krieger

MARRIAGE OF MISS KREIGER. AND GRAHAM H. FINDLEY.

Miss Anna Marie Kreiger, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Kreiger, of Havelock, was maried at high noon today to Mr. Graham H. Findley at the home of the bride's parents, 2100 N street, Havelock. Rev. David Tudor, pastor of the Havelock Congregational church, performed the ceremony. The bride woe a gown of white georgette crepe over white messaline. Her bridal veil of white net was caught with orange blossoms and she carried a bouquet of brides roses. Miss Frances Seibert of Havelock, attended the bride and wore yellow crepe de chine and carried yellow roses. Mrs. John McKean, nephew of the groom, acted as best man. Little Marie Spahn, cousin of the bride, was flower girl and Marguerite Clark carried the ring in a white rose.

The ceremony was perfomed in the living room under an archway made of smilax and white roses. During the ceremony, Miss Elizabeth Kreiger, cousin of the bride, played the wedding music from Lohengren. The Kreiger home was decorated throughout with potted plants, ferns, red roses and peonies. Immediately following the ceremony, a four-course dinner was served, Mrs. John Spahn, Mrs. Frank Seibert, Miss Margaret Roup and Mrs. Frank Clark assisting Mrs. Kreiger in the serving. Miss Elizabeth and Lydia Pfahn and Mr. Paul Pfahn gave a musical program during the dinner hour.

Mr. and Mrs. Findley left this afternoon for Chicago and Milwaukee. They will be at home to their friends after July 1 at 2100 N street, Havelock.

Wedding announcement June 6, 1916, Lincoln Star Journal.

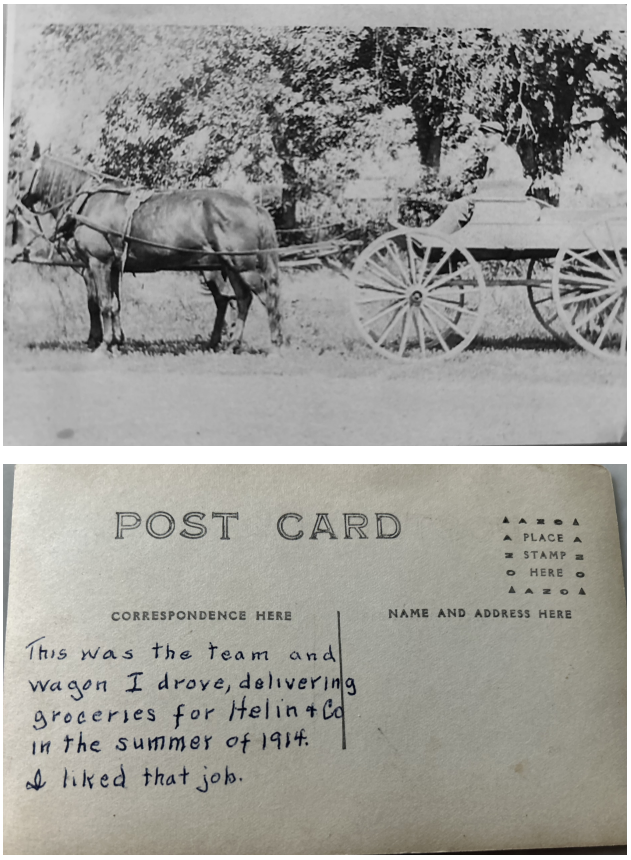
About the same time that Louie graduated from Havelock High School in 1916, his older sister Anna, born 1896, married Graham H. ("Scotty") Findlay. It seems Catherine and George made a gift of their lot of land on Ballard (eventually 6912) for the wedding.

Clearly, Catherine and her family and friends went all out for the celebration as detailed in the announcement above. 2100 N Street, their home address where the wedding was held, later became 6902 Ballard (following the annexation of Havelock by Lincoln in 1930).

Chances are good that Catherine made her daughter's wedding gown, though we can't be sure of that. It is clear she was in charge of the four-course meal, all the decorations, and the musical accompaniment by family and friends. Catherine Krieger was certainly the one to call on for such a feat, and I'm confident she did it without missing a beat. It would be fun to know the details of that four-course dinner.

Louis W. Krieger: Coming of Age

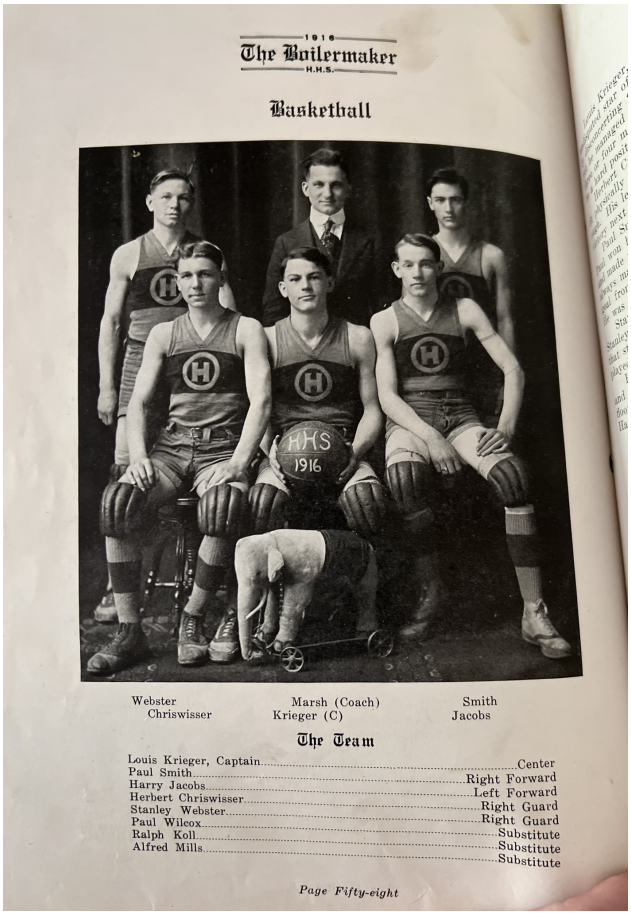
By this time Louis ("Louie") was attending Havelock High School where he excelled in all sports and worked summer jobs, such as delivering groceries for Helin and Company. As you can see from his note on the backside of the postcard, he liked this job.



1914 Postcard with Louie's note on the back

Louie towered over his classmates and was nicknamed "Sleuth-foot" from the size of his shoes. He earned varsity letters in football, basketball and baseball. As a senior he was captain of the basketball team.

Louis' class Havelock High School 1915–1916
Louis stands to the left of the blackboard.



1916
The Boilermaker
H.H.S.

Basketball

Webster
Chriswisser

Marsh (Coach)
Krieger (C)

Smith
Jacobs

The Team

Louis Krieger, Captain	Center
Paul Smith	Right Forward
Harry Jacobs	Left Forward
Herbert Chriswisser	Right Guard
Stanley Webster	Right Guard
Paul Wilcox	Substitute
Ralph Koll	Substitute
Alfred Mills	Substitute

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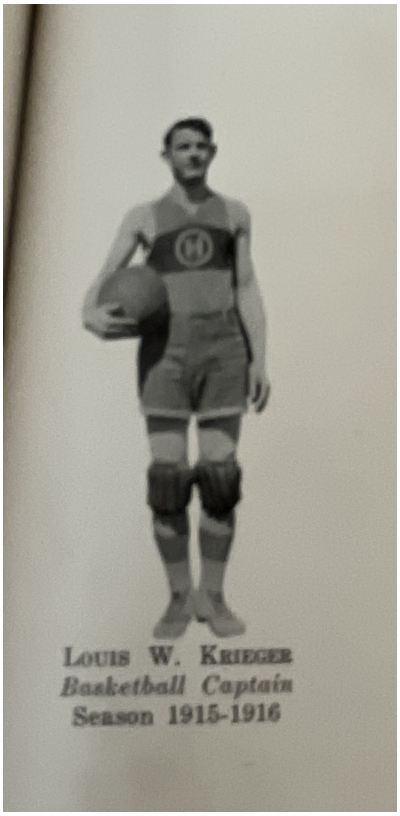
Basketball Team: Havelock High School *The Boilermaker,* 1916

The Boilermaker of 1916 narrates the strong season Louis Krieger had on the football field, where at one point he scored "touchdown after touchdown." His greatest expertise seems to be on the basketball court, though he was also first baseman on the baseball team.

Boys' Basketball

Louis Krieger, captain, center. Louis, in basket ball, as in foot ball, was the undisputed star of the season. He had a habit of making goals that was extremely disconcerting to the opponents. Although a little slow on the floor at times, yet he managed to force his way through to the goal and shoot baskets with three or four men on his arms. Who will take Louis' place next year? It will be a hard position to fill.

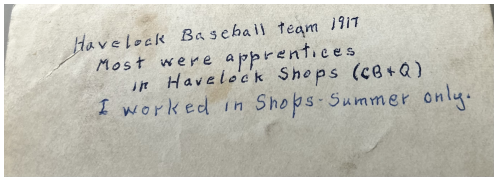


Havelock High School *The Boilermaker,* 1916

After graduating from high school, Louis enrolled in the University of Nebraska College of Engineering. He suffered a bout with pneumonia the following winter and never returned to school. He later commented that this bout of pneumonia was the sickest he had ever been. That illness also altered Louie's career plans considerably. Below is the Class Prophecy for Louis from the Havelock High School yearbook, *The Boilermaker*.

Louis Krieger's made his mark;
He's a Civil Engineer
And has built some piers and bridges,
That would make one drop a tear.
He's married, too, I'd like to add,
And lives in Norwood Park
And with his wife and family,

Closing line: "He's happy as a lark"--Norwood Park is the childhood home Louie remembered fondly.



Louie's note on backside of picture; Louie 4th from right

It appears Louie worked in the shops during the summers in 1915 and 1916, and then started in the boiler shops in 1917, following his bout with pneumonia and just as the United States declared war on Germany and entered World War I–called "The Great War" and dubbed "the war to end all wars"–in April 1917.

As Jerry Krieger comments in his narrative, "A nasty by-product of the patriotism unleashed by the war was a strong anti-German prejudice." Young men with German-sounding names were pressured to prove their loyalty. Louie enlisted in the Navy at Omaha on July 5, 1918. Shortly before enlisting, he played a baseball game in Wilbur and had his first date with Havelock girl Blanche Marie Rogers. They maintained close correspondence while he served in the Navy.

Louis Krieger following enlistment in U. S. Navy, 1917

Blanche Marie Rogers, circa 1917

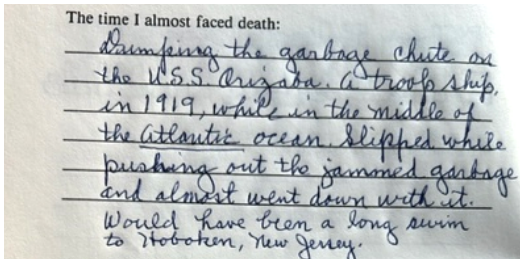
Service in the U. S. Navy, 1918-1919

Louis went through training at Mare Island, San Francisco and qualified as a gunner's mate,

responsible for maintenance of gun mounts and other ordnance systems. Although the war ended on November 11, 1918, Louis remained in the U. S. Navy and made seven trips across the Atlantic in the *U.S.S. Orizaba*, pictured below, carrying troops home from France. Throughout his service, he and Blanche maintained their close correspondence.

U.S.S. Orizaba

Grandpa Louie completed a series of "Grandpa Questions" for his granddaughter Ginger Krieger in 1983 and narrated this episode from his time on the *Orizaba*:


The time I almost faced death:
Dumping the garbage chute on the U.S.S. Orizaba. A troop ship in 1919, while in the middle of the Atlantic ocean. Slipped while pushing out the jammed garbage and almost went down with it. Would have been a long swim to Hoboken, New Jersey.

Louie's 1983 entry about a time he almost faced death
Text: "dumping the garbage chute on the *USS Orizaba*. A troop ship in 1919, while in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Slipped while pushing out the jammed garbage and almost went down with it. Would have been a long swim to Hoboken, NJ."

Blanche and Louie 1919–1922

After his discharge, Louis enrolled in the Lincoln School of Commerce where he studied bookkeeping. By this time his sister Anna and her husband Scotty gave birth to their first child, Laverna.

Louis Krieger and niece Laverna Findley, April 1919

Blanche and Louis seemed ideally matched and continued dating.

Blanche Rogers and Louis Krieger, circa 1919

One afternoon in April 1920, Louie borrowed his parents' car, picked up Blanche, drove out to the country, pulled over to the side of the road, presented her with a ring, and asked her to marry

him. They were married on July 2, 1920 in the home of Blanche's grandfather, John B. Reitz, on Touzalin Boulevard in Havelock. They honeymooned in Osceola, Nebraska.

Blanche Rogers and Louis Krieger wedding photo, 1920

A Clipping from the Havelock Post of July 8, 1920

Rogers-Krieger

A quiet but very pretty wedding took place Friday evening, July 2, at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Rogers, 132 South Touzalin avenue, when their daughter Blanche was married to Louis Krieger of this city, Rev. Miller officiating.

Only near relatives of the bride and groom were invited. Immediately after the ceremony making them man and wife and refreshments had been served, they took their departure for a short honeymoon, along with hearty congratulations and numerous nice presents.

Both the contracting parties are well known and popular young people, having graduated from Havelock high school. The bride groom saw fourteen months service in the navy during the World war. For the past year the bride has been employed in the office of Thomas E. Wheeler, register of deeds at the court house. They will make their home for the present with the groom's parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Krieger.

Blanche and Louis Wedding News

Blanche and Louie lived with George and Catherine after their marriage until 1922 when they built a brick California bungalow style home (aka "the brick house") which still stands today. Louie completed much of the work himself and it remained forever their special home, the home where all four of their children were born.

With his business education complete, Louis went to work with the Lincoln Material Company, first as a bookkeeper then as a building materials salesman.

Blanche on porch of brick house, Summer 1922

House where all four children of
Mr+Mrs Louis Wm Krieger, Sr. were born

Shirley Lou - Sept 21, 1922
Mary Jane - Nov 9, 1924
Louis Wm Jr - May 19, 1928
Geo. Jerome - July 7, 1931

House built summer of 1922 by
Louis Wm Krieger, Sr Born Aug 9, 1898
Blanche Marie (Rogers) Born April, 1901
Married July 2, 1920
Legal description of lot- East ½ lot 14 Blk 52
Address 2148 M St Havelock, before annexation
Present address 6958 Morrill Lincoln Ne 68507
Louis born in Havelock
Blanche born in Lincoln

Backside of photo with Grandpa Louie's notes

Fabric painting of brick house by Jack Peck in honor of 65th wedding anniversary (centerpiece of quilt created by Shirley Sallee)

Louis with first-born Shirley, 1922

Blanche and Louis had their first child, daughter Shirley Lou on September 21, 1922 shortly after they moved into the brick house.

In 1923 the building company where he worked was sold and Louis went to work as an office clerk at the Burlington shops. He enjoyed playing on the Burlington baseball team and in 1924 at the urging of the shop superintendent he was an unsuccessful candidate for city clerk, running as a Republican, no less! (Louis was a lifelong Democrat who once remarked to his grandson Bill that no working man should ever vote for anyone other than a democrat.)

Later Louis served on the Havelock school board; it was always a point of pride that during his tenure lights were purchased for the Ballard Field, and Havelock High School became one of the first schools west of the Mississippi to play night football games.

Louis Krieger and Anton Sagl were elected to the board of education. The results of the board contest were: First ward, Krieger 265, Sagl 285, C. M. Cavender 298, J. W. Easton 219. Second ward: Krieger 332, Sagl 279. Cavender 250. Easton 207. Total vote: Krieger 597, Sagl 564, Cavender j 548. Easton 426.

Source: The Lincoln Evening Journal, Wednesday, April 3, 1929.

The pride of night football, though, was short-lived. In 1930 Havelock citizens voted to be annexed to Lincoln with the promise of lower taxes and improved services. The City of Lincoln was extended to include Havelock in September 1930. Ballard Field was officially turned over to the city of Lincoln with this annexation. Within a short time park department trucks arrived at the Ballard Field and began removing the historic lighting system, relocating it to tennis courts in Lincoln. Havelock citizens were aghast and felt

betrayed. Had they known this would happen, they would never have approved annexation. The loss of those lights remained a heated topic of debate for years to come. (Detail from McKee et.al. *Havelock: A Photo History and Walking Tour,* 1993, p. 53.)

Death of Peter Sterkel: Silver and Gold

According to family lore passed down by Jerry Krieger, sometime before his death in February 1922, Peter Sterkel summoned his eldest child Catherine—Great Grandma Krieger to us—to visit him. He accompanied her to the detached wash house in their backyard, a feature of many homes at the time. Once inside the structure, Peter raised some of the floorboards to reveal a collection of fruit jars stuffed with gold and silver coins (paper currency was less reliable at the time). "Here are my savings," Peter told her. "When your mother and I are gone, divide it with your brothers and sisters." Catherine, always the dutiful daughter, did exactly as her father wished and shared the legacy with her brothers and sisters, who in turn shared it with their children. Blanche and Louis, for example, received $50, which they used to purchase a mantel clock for their new home.

Eventually Jerry also learned that his grandparents George and Catherine had a sizable account with the local Savings and Loan, and that they held high interest loans on a toll bridge. When the stock market crash came in 1929 they settled the bonds for 10 cents on the dollar. When the Savings and Loan failed they received two houses in the settlement, which they rented out for several years.

Where did all that money come from? Did Peter Sterkel arrive in this country with money? His earnings here were not great, nor were those of George Krieger, especially after his accident at the shops. It remains an unanswered question, and the mystery of the past continues.

Winter 2004 Norka Newsletter Page 29

Four generations of Norka folks

The short rotund lady on the right is my great-grandmother Anna Maria **(Glantz) Sterkel.** She was usually called "Emma". My mother told me that Emma was a very jolly person who "shook like Jell-O" whenever she laughed.

Next to her is my grandmother, Katherine (Sterkel) **Krieger.** In my opinion she is one of the leading cookie makers of all time, and also made the best cabbage pies (sometimes known as kraut runzas) that I have ever tasted.

The seated lady is my aunt Anna Krieger who married Graham **Findlay,** a recently arrived Scots immigrant. The baby is Laverna Findlay, my only German-Russian first cousin.

If you have a four generation picture you want to share with our readers, along with any interesting information, let me know.—*Your Editor.*

Article by Jerry Krieger with a four-generation photo
Back Row: Catherine Krieger and her mother Anna Maria Sterkel
Front Row: Anna Krieger Findlay and her daughter Laverna

Peter Sterkel died on February 1, 1922 several months before Blanche and Louie's first child Shirley was born. His wife Anna Marie lived for two more years with Catherine and George, passing away in their home on March 13, 1924.

Sterkel—Anna Maria Sterkel, seventy-six years old, died at 7:30 p. m. Thursday at the home of her daughter, Mrs. George Krieger, 2100 N street, Havelock. She is survived by two sons, Lewis, of Lincoln and Jacob of Omaha, two daughters, Mrs. George Krieger of Havelock and Mrs. John Spahn of Lincoln and a brother, Conrad Glanz of Sutton, Neb. The body is being held at the home pending funeral arrangements.

Nebraska State Journal: March 15, 1924

Sterkel Grave at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska
"Gone but not Forgotten"

I saw this grave for the first time in October 2023 with siblings Bill and Maureen. We were struck by how pristine it looked even after 100 years. It clearly bears the design marks of Catherine Krieger—and was perhaps funded by coins in those jars!

The Depression Years: 1929–1938

The Wall Street markets crashed in October 1929 and the dark clouds of the Great Depression spread slowly west. In 1931, the year Jerry Krieger was born, the Burlington railroad moved their boiler works to Denver, and Louis's office job was eliminated.

1930 Burlington Baseball Team
Louis center back row, bow tie

Havelock Shops, 1930
Louis far left on ground, hand on hip, wearing bow tie

He took a cut in pay to become an outside laborer at the strip track where he helped to dismantle old boxcars—the second lowest paying job at the

railroad. Layoffs were frequent and often of long duration; Louis and his close friend Ralph Monia utilized scrap lumber from old boxcars to build garages, chicken coops and other structures. Louie also hung wallpaper and painted; during one particularly long layoff he dug water and sewer ditches for the new Veterans Hospital under construction on South 70th in Lincoln.

Blanche Krieger with Jerry and Bill on steps of brick house, circa 1934

Meanwhile, Blanche and Louis with their four children had outgrown the brick bungalow. Around 1934 they moved to a 1 ½ storey frame home at 7201 Havelock Avenue, which they swapped for the brick house (I believe Catherine and George ended up owning both homes).

All Dressed Up, circa 1935
Back row: Janie, Shirley; Front Row Jerry, Bill

Bill and Jerry Krieger, Easter 1938

In 1938 Louis had the opportunity to join the post office as a substitute clerk. Although the move meant a cut in hourly pay and a lengthy wait for a permanent appointment, he took the job. In 1940 the old Krieger family home at 6902

Ballard became available and Blanche and Louis purchased it on contract from his parents. (I recall Grandpa Louie telling us that he spent less for this house than he spent for his new Chevrolet in the 1950s!)

Blanche and Louie Become Grandparents: 1943–1966

Blanche and Louie, Easter Sunday, 1952

Blanche and Louie's eldest daughter **Shirley Lou** (1922–2011) married **William Martin ("Bill") Sallee** (1922–1994) on October 31st in 1942 in California where Bill was a U. S. Marine stationed at Camp Pendleton. Their first child, son **William Louis**, was born on November 13, 1943. Bill and Shirley had five more children in the years after World War II.

Diane Elizabeth February 25, 1949—November 3, 1953

Kathleen Anne September 21, 1951

Mary Lou December 15, 1952

Maureen Anne October 25, 1954

Cynthia Anne December 28, 1957

The Sallee Family, circa 1959
Back Row L to R: Young Bill, Shirley, Cynthia, Bill
Front Row L to R: Mary Lou, Kathleen, Maureen

Blanche and Louie's second child **Mary Jane ("Janie")** (1924–2011) married **John Davey ("Jack") Peck** (1923–2004) on July 15, 1944. Their first child, **Alison Jane,** was born on August 22, 1946. Jack and Janie had three more daughters.

Susan Jane February 9, 1948

Karin Jane April 30, 1953

Leslie Jane November 17, 1956—January 12, 2009

The Peck Family, circa 1960
L to R: Jack, Leslie, Alison, Karin, Susan, Janie

Blanche and Louie with their children, spouses and grandchildren, circa 1956

William Louis ("Bill") Krieger (1928–2011), Blanche and Louie's third child, married **Alice Marilyn ("Marilyn") Meline** (1936–2008) on September 8, 1957. Their first child, who did not survive, was **Melanie Sue** born April 16, 1958. Bill and Marilyn had three more children:
Virginia Marie ("Ginger") March 23, 1959
William Vincent ("Bill") July 8, 1960
Jamie Lou November 17, 1962

The Krieger Family 1979
L to R: Jamie, young Bill, Marilyn, Bill, Ginger

Blanche and Louie's youngest child, **George Jerome ("Jerry") Krieger** (1931–2017) married his high school sweetheart, **Barbara Jean ("Barb") Garrett** (1931–2023) on February 2, 1951. Barb and Jerry had two children:
Mark Jerome September 4, 1962
Michel Joy January 1, 1966

The Jerry Krieger Family, 1982
Back: Jerry and Mark Front: Barb and Michel with her dog Megan

Great Grandma Krieger in 1950s and 1960s

Even as a youngster, I was impressed by Great Grandma Krieger, the epitome of expertise and efficiency. She lived next door to Grandma Blanche and Grandpa Louie in the house she and her husband George built in the 1920s. (George died in 1955, so I have no direct memories of him.)

Grandma Krieger had expertise in so many areas: gardener, seamstress, knitter, quilter, breadmaker, baker, soapmaker, to name a few.

She was a model of self-reliance in the first half of the 20th century, for she actually seemed to make a living from her sewing and knitting skills.

Catherine, with dressmaking and alterations at one of the downtown department stores, and with a modest inheritance stretched by her frugality, acquired several properties in the neighborhood. I always thought of her when I bought those little green houses in our Monopoly games—I'm still not sure how she did it. She owned the family car that Blanche and Louie borrowed to take their kids to visit Aunt Cora's family in Omaha, and to take one of their only vacations to the Black Hills of South Dakota in the late 1930s.

Krieger Kids at Wind Cave South Dakota late 1930s
L to R: Bill, Janie, Jerry, Shirley

Louis with young Bill and Shirley at Mt. Rushmore

Catherine Sterkel Krieger, circa 1925

Her knitting skills were prodigious and impressive. It seemed a piece of knitting grew before my eyes, she was so fast. And she never seemed to look down at her work even when the pattern was intricate. Her tension and gauge, the hallmarks of an expert knitter, were impeccable. She knit dresses for the ladies in town, then turned around and knit slippers—with pom poms of course—for her 14 great grandchildren every Christmas using yarn leftovers from other projects.

In the sewing and alterations work, I believe she was paid by the number of thread spools or bobbins she used. This is amazing to me—and seems like highway robbery! I can count on one hand the number of thread spools I have finished in all my years of sewing—it almost never happens, even on a sizable project. To think that someone would only earn her fee when the spool was used up boggles the mind.

Whenever we visited, Grandma Krieger would show up for dinner, usually with a loaf of rye bread in hand. My sister Kathleen and I wanted to learn how to make it, but there was no recipe to be found, for that or most of the other German dishes she made. She did everything "by feel": add the flour until it looks and feels like this; knead it until it feels like this, or smells like that, and so on. Needless to say, most of her recipes are lost to the ages, as is her process for making soap, both for bathing and laundry.

As to her personality, I do not recall that she was talkative, but more quiet and observant. I always had the sense that she was a force to be reckoned with even though I do not ever recall her reprimanding or scolding. She could be a soft touch for door-to-door salesmen so common in the 1950s, ending up with movie magazines on her coffee table that my sisters and I loved to read and review.

George and Catherine Krieger: An Era Ends

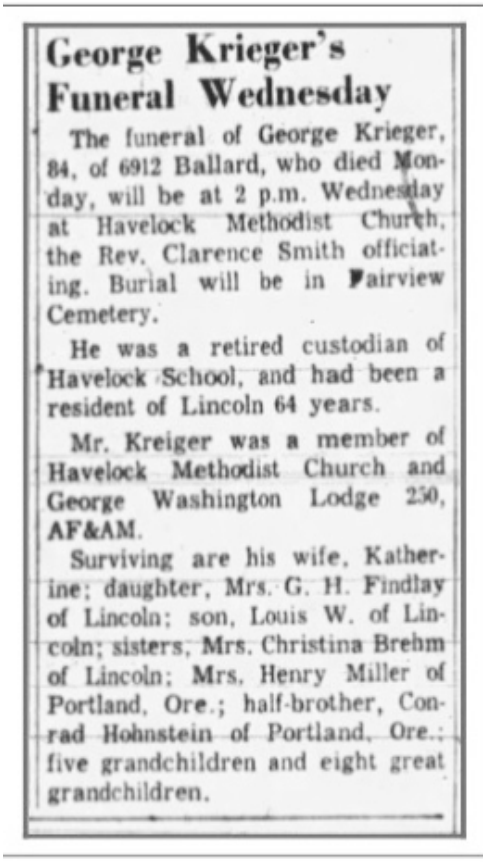
Catherine and George Krieger, circa 50th wedding anniversary

George and Catherine celebrated their golden wedding anniversary (the 50th) with a reception on January 16, 1944. Over 75 friends and family members signed the guest book, though younger men were mostly absent since WWII was still raging.

Then, in January 1954, the couple celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

George and Catherine on their 60th wedding anniversary, 1954

George passed away a day before their 61st anniversary on Sunday January 30, 1955. His grandson Bill, on his way back from San Francisco after getting out of the service, was visiting his sister Shirley and the Sallee family in Denver when he heard the news. He headed to Lincoln, and Bill and Shirley followed the next day. George Krieger's funeral was on Wednesday, February 2nd.



George Krieger's Funeral Wednesday

The funeral of George Krieger, 84, of 6912 Ballard, who died Monday, will be at 2 p.m. Wednesday at Havelock Methodist Church, the Rev. Clarence Smith officiating. Burial will be in Fairview Cemetery.

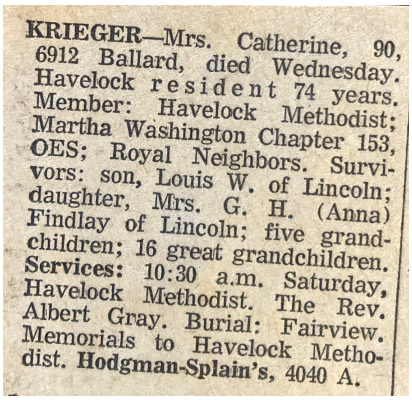
He was a retired custodian of Havelock School, and had been a resident of Lincoln 64 years.

Mr. Kreiger was a member of Havelock Methodist Church and George Washington Lodge 230, AF&AM.

Surviving are his wife, Katherine; daughter, Mrs. G. H. Findlay of Lincoln; son, Louis W. of Lincoln; sisters, Mrs. Christina Brehm of Lincoln; Mrs. Henry Miller of Portland, Ore.; half-brother, Conrad Hohnstein of Portland, Ore.; five grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

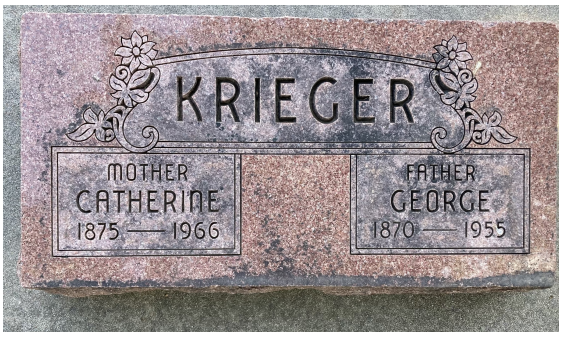
Lincoln Journal Star 1 February 1955

Catherine Krieger lived another eleven years, an abiding presence in the Krieger household since she lived next door and visited almost daily. She died at age 90 on November 23, 1966, the day before Thanksgiving, and is buried next to her husband at Fairview Cemetery. By the time of her death eleven years after her husband George, there were twice as many great grandchildren: from eight to sixteen.



KRIEGER—Mrs. Catherine, 90, 6912 Ballard, died Wednesday. Havelock resident 74 years. Member: Havelock Methodist; Martha Washington Chapter 153, OES; Royal Neighbors. Survivors: son, Louis W. of Lincoln; daughter, Mrs. G. H. (Anna) Findlay of Lincoln; five grandchildren; 16 great grandchildren. **Services:** 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Havelock Methodist. The Rev. Albert Gray. Burial: Fairview. Memorials to Havelock Methodist. **Hodgman-Splain's**, 4040 A.

Blanche Krieger's clipping of Catherine's death notice



Grave of Catherine and George Krieger
Fairview Cemetery, Lincoln, Nebraska

Extended Family Reunions "on the 5's"

By the time Blanche and Louis were preparing to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in 1970, their offspring and their families were spread across several states including Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota and Massachusetts. Since their anniversary was near the 4th of July when many families plan vacations, they decided to host a family reunion.

This first celebration was a simple but busy and festive affair. Those who traveled by car brought homemade desserts and cookies. Meals were kept as simple as possible: Kraut Runzas, Kentucky

Fried Chicken, footlong sandwiches–you get the idea. Pop and beer flowed freely with most gatherings, including a 4th of July celebration, in Blanche and Louie's backyard at 6902 Ballard.

The festivities were topped off by a reception for family and friends at the nearby Holiday Inn. This reunion was such a success that the families unanimously decided to hold one every five years, and the tradition began. The extended Krieger family hosted reunions in Havelock every five years until 1985.

Extended Krieger Family from 1970 Reunion
(before any great-grandchildren were born)

PAGE 6—Lincoln Sun Newspapers, June 11, 1980

Kriegers celebrate 60

Mr. and Mrs. Louis Krieger will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary at an open-house Sunday, June 15 from 2-4 p.m. at the Holiday Inn, Northeast. Friends and relatives are invited to attend without further invitation.

Hosts will be the couple's children: Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Krieger, of Mason City, Ia; Mr. and Mrs. Louis W. Krieger, Jr., of Aurora, Colo.; Mr. and Mrs. John (Janie) Peck, of Duluth, Minn.; and Mr. and Mrs. William (Shirley) Sallee, of Wausau, Wisc.

Louis W. Krieger and Blanche M. Rogers were married July 2, 1920 in Havelock, where they have been lifetime residents. They have 14 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Krieger . . . Lifetime Havelock residents. (SUN News Service).

Newspaper clipping announcing 60th wedding anniversary open house

Backyard fun at the 1985 Reunion
Grandpa Louie batting strong at 86

Passing of Grandpa Louie

There was one constant in the Krieger family: Grandpa Louie was a favorite of his grandchildren. He could be relied on for trips to the nearby candy store or park; little songs about green eggs and ham or Tootsie Wootsie chewing gum; a dish of corn candy near his chair; visits to "his" post office. He tirelessly pitched softball when he visited us in Colorado even when his arthritic hips barely allowed him to bend over. He was always looking for something that needed repair when he and Grandma Blanche came to town. His simple wisdom inspired us all. His motto I remember best: "If you don't have something kind to say, you should say nothing at all," and he led by example.

Louis suffered a heart attack in 1947 which kept him out of work for several months. He had both hips replaced in the early 1960s when the surgery was new. He was beginning to slow down slightly by the time of the 1985 reunion when he was almost 87—though you can see he still swings the bat with vigor. He suffered another heart attack in May 1987, briefly rallied, bidding farewell to Blanche and his children and making a request of his older son Bill: please continue to get the family together even when I am gone. Those family reunions were very special to him. Grandpa Louie passed away at St. Elizabeth's Hospital on May 24, 1987 at the age of 88.

Krieger — Louis W. Sr., 88, 6902 Ballard Ave., died Sunday. Lifelong Havelock resident. Born Havelock. Graduate, Havelock High School, 1918. Attended, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. WWI Navy veteran. Employed, Burlington Havelock Shops, 1922-1936, U.S. Postal Service, 1936-1966. Member, Barricks 0165, George Washington Lodge 250, AF&AM. Charter member, St. David's Episcopal Church. Survivors: wife, Blanche; daughters, Mrs. William (Shirley) Sallee, Wausau, Wis., Mrs. John (Mary Jane) Peck, Duluth, Minn.; sons, Louis W. Jr., Denver, Jerome, Mason City, Iowa; 14 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; niece. Services: Pending, ROPER AND SONS MORTUARY, 4300 O St.

Lincoln Journal Star 25 May 1987

Blanche Krieger Reaches a Milestone

As Grandpa Louie had requested, we continued large family gatherings, not necessarily "on the 5's" or on their anniversary, but with some regularity. Blanche remained in their home at 6902 Ballard in good health, continuing some travel to see her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She aspired to reach her 100th birthday and managed to do so on April 1, 2001. That called for a celebration, again with an open house, this time at the nearby Country Inn and Suites, which by now had replaced the Holiday Inn.

Blanche Krieger with her four children on her 100th Birthday
L to R: Shirley, Jerry, Bill, Janie

Blanche fell at home a few months after her birthday party, requiring a brief hospitalization—her first and only hospitalization in 100 years of life! With help from her children and grandchildren, she broke up her home of 60 years and moved to a nearby assisted living facility. She passed peacefully in her sleep on October 10, 2001. As had been the case with her husband Louis, family members came from across the country to lay her to rest.

Krieger — Blanche, 100, Lincoln, died Wednesday (10/10/01).

Services: 10:30 a.m. today, St. David's Episcopal Church, 8800 Holdrege St. Pallbearers: William Sallee, William Krieger, Mark Krieger, Timothy Jansson, John McCone, David Listiak. Visitation: one hour before services, church. Roper and Sons Mortuary, 4300 O St. Memorials to the church. Condolences may be e-mailed to contact@roperandsons.com. □

Lincoln Journal Star, October 13, 2001

Grave of Blanche and Louis Krieger Fairview Cemetery

An Era Ends but the Story Continues

All four of Blanche and Louie's children lived beyond their parents, though Shirley's husband William M. ("Bill") Sallee passed before Blanche on December 31, 1994. Janie's husband John D. ("Jack") Peck died on December 20, 2004; Bill's wife Marilyn passed away on October 14, 2008.

Shirley Lou Krieger Sallee was the first of her siblings to let go of life on April 26, 2011. As if her younger siblings were waiting for her to pave the way, younger brother William Louis ("Bill") succumbed barely a month later on May 31st. Younger sister Mary Jane ("Janie") Krieger Peck died later that same year or December 19th.

Youngest sibling Jerry Krieger went from being one of four to being the only sibling still alive in less than a year. He commented several times how hard that was for him but seemed always to look on the bright side, continuing with his work on the history of the Germans from Russia and his ongoing work in local theater—he played the mayor in Meredith Willson's *The Music Man* numerous times.

He gradually let go of these commitments, moved with his wife Barb into assisted living and passed away after a short illness on January 6, 2017. His wife Barbara Jean ("Barb") Garrett Krieger eventually moved closer to her daughter Michel McCone near Kansas City where she lived to the age of 92. She passed away earlier this year on July 16, 2023, bringing a close to that generation of Krieger offspring and their spouses.

The Krieger-Sterkel story is alive and well, carried forward by the next three generations and beyond. What has been sown and tended by our ancestors will continue to reap gratitude and blessings on those who are here and yet to come.

—Mary Lou Sallee
—William L. Sallee
November 2023