

John and Mary Bruhns House 436 S. First St

My maternal grandmother was named Mary Albertina (Neuendorf) Bruhns. She was born on June 20th, 1862 in Livingston County, Michigan. The youngest of Louis and Christine (Schroeder) Neuendorf's children, she was the only one born in this country although she was conceived in Germany. The family stated "Mary was conceived in Germany to be born in the United States". She was the only family member to be a "Natural Born Citizen".

When Mary was born, Abraham Lincoln was President. Forts Donaldson and Henry had surrendered to General Grant 130 days earlier, the Monitor and the Merimac had met approximately 100 days earlier, the Battle of Shilo or Pittsburg Landing had been fought some 75 days earlier, and The Seven Days Battle was currently raging near the Confederate capital of Richmond.

The Neuendorf family eventually settled on a 60 acre farm on McClements Road in Brighton Township. The Livingston County Conservation and Sports Assn. now occupies that land. Louis and Christine separated in 1881. To our knowledge they never divorced but they never lived together again. Mary and her mother moved to Brighton where Mary supported and cared for her mother for the rest of her life. Christine died in 1906 and is buried in Fairview Cemetery on Old Flint Rd in Brighton. Louis died on February 13, 1896 and is buried in St. George's Cemetery in Genoa Township, Livingston County, Michigan.

John Henry Bruhns was born in the village of Gruenwald on April 6th, 1870., near the city of Hamburg Germany. He immigrated to the United States twice, the first time by sailing ship in 1890. He returned to Germany in 1894 for family business. He immigrated the second time in 1896 and started his citizenship process shortly thereafter. He courted and married Mary Neuendorf on December 29, 1898 in Brighton. John and Mary along with Christine settled on a 40 acre farm on Begin Rd in Osceola Township where my aunt, Leora Christine, was born in 1900 and my mother, Lucile Grace Marie, was born in 1903. In 1908 the family moved to an 80 acre farm on Van Buren Rd. South of the village of Fowlerville, Michigan where they prospered. At the time of the move, the farm house was present but none of the outbuildings. John built the barn in 1909. We presently possess that barn (or what is left of it), and it is our intention to rebuild it on our homestead in Hamburg Township.

In the spring of 1917 the family consisted of my aunt (Leora Christine Bruhns age 16), my mother, (Lucile Grace Marie Bruhns age 14) my grandmother (Mary Albertina Neuendorf Bruhns age 54) and my grandfather (John Henry Bruhns age 47). On April 6th, 1917, (my grandfather's 47th birthday!!) the United States Congress declared war on Germany, and a wave of anti-German sentiment and violence swept across the country. Some 15 or 16 months later during the late summer of 1918, my grandparents received a handwritten note in pencil, on lined paper, signed by "The Committee", and warning that "these damned Germans had better get out of town if they know what was good for them." Never mind that my grandfather had bought more WAR BONDS than the rest of Fowlerville put together or that one of the major

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reasons that John Bruhns had returned to the United States was to get away from the Kaiser's militarism. That did not change the fact that John was the only non-native born member of the family, i.e. "the feriner" Shortly after that, the family was visited by mounted "Night Riders" who arrived after midnight wearing robes and hoods, and carrying flaming torches. The men were searching for my grandfather who was not at home. The riders broke down doors, generally trashed the house, terrorized the women and then left without finding my grandfather. John Henry Bruhns was in the basement of the house, sitting alone in the dark while cradling the fully loaded shotgun in his lap, and vowing to take at least six or eight of the "Sons-of-B_____" with him if they succeeded in finding him, which they did not. The only entrance to the basement was through a door on the outside of the building, and in the confusion, chaos, darkness, and dim light that entrance was quite simply overlooked. Within a day or two after the incident, John and the two daughters left for Ann Arbor while Mary remained behind to sell the farm. The reason that Ann Arbor was chosen was because of the large German community located therein. And, once again, the family prospered.

About 1920, my grandparents purchased the Bethlehem School property on South First Street in Ann Arbor. This was one of the original German language schools in Ann Arbor, and dated from the time of the Civil War. The family subsequently disassembled the building and used the recycled materials including the foundation stones to build three houses at 428, 430 and 436 S. First St. The Bruhns family lived in 428 S. First St while they worked on the other 2 houses. Lucile stated she spent a summer hammering nails out of the original lath so the lath could be reused. The oak floors and the woodwork in 436 are from the Old School as are several other interior structures. All 3 houses have stone porches constructed by a stone mason of the time named Ollie Weinberg with his signature "stone star" formation. The family moved into the 3rd house at 436 S. First St. in 1922. This house has the original front door from the Old School plus one additional large, heavy interior door

John Henry Bruhns worked as a highly skilled carpenter on many projects around Ann Arbor including "Old Main" University Hospital during its construction. There he not only performed carpentry but also stepped in to reverse a shutdown by repairing a large construction lifting rope which had broken and resulted in all efforts coming to a halt. Utilizing the skills which he learned during his first sailing ship trans-Atlantic passage in 1890, he spliced the ropes together and restarted construction on the hospital. Reportedly, his supervisors were so happy that they rewarded him with a week's paid holiday.

My grandparents lived in 436 S. First until their deaths in 1961. My grandmother died at 4PM on June 4th, 1961, just before her 99th birthday. Sixteen days later on what would have been my grandmother's 99th birthday my grandfather died. On June 19th, my grandfather asked my mother "Lucile is momma really gone?" to which she answered "Yes Dad, mother is really gone".

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Twelve hours later , at 4AM in the same room and in the same bed, John Henry Bruhns died. He was 91 years, 2 months and 2 weeks of age. John and Mary were married for 62 1/2 years. In the words of my grandmother, " That's an awful long time to live with one man!"

The house has remained in the family ever since. Lucile Grace Marie Bruhns Zemke inherited the house from her parents . The Old West Side neighborhood was always near and dear to her. Lucile was involved in the formation of the Historic District. Ownership of the house passed to us, Dr. W. John Zemke and Mrs. Anne C. Zemke upon Lucile's death in 1993.