

# a place for freedom *the Ott's & Kalbs*

THE STORY OF THE OTT AND KALB FAMILIES, THE OTTS BEING OF TREIER, CHICAGO, AND

INDIANA AND THE KALBS BEING OF BAVARIA



## Clemens Ott and the Ott family of Kell and Chicago (Ott-Dorschied Line)

*Lineal genealogy of the paternal Ott name to Clemens Ott, the father of Margaret.*

### V

**Adam Ott**, also known as Oth, was born in 1747 to unknown parents near the town of Reinsfeld in the Osburg Hochwald. He married **Barbara Schue** of Hinzert, daughter of Nikolaus and Marguerithe, on September 24, 1780. His occupation in records is noted as "Ludimagister Costodis Boum." Barbara and he had ten children together before she died March 24, 1812 in Reinsfeld. He married Katharina Huwer after the death of Barbara. Adam died June 7, 1836 in Reinsfeld.

### IV

**Matthias Ott**, of Reinsfeld, the youngest son of Adam Ott and Barbara Schue, was born October 1, 1800, in Reinsfeld. He also used the name spelled "Oth" and "Otto." On January 19, 1825, he married Margarethe Schue of Holzerath. She died after bearing him two sons, the first being born in Holserath and the second being born in Kell. On February 12, 1832, in the town of Kell he married **Eva Schmitt** of Kell, daughter of Matthias and Helena Schneider. Matthias worked as a shepherd. He and Eva had four children known to history before she died February 27, 1852, in Kell. He followed her in death January 7, 1864. Matthias is the first Ott of his line to live and work in Kell am See, a town just east of Trier in the Osburg Hochwald.

### III

**Nikolaus Ott**, was the first child born to Matthias and Eva Schmitt. He was Matthias' third son though. He was born in Kell April 16, 1833. On November 11, 1856, he married **Anne Marie Dorscheid** in Kell. Anne Marie was of a well-established Kell family, the daughter of tax-collector, Peter and Elisabeth Dengler of Boerfink. Nikolaus worked as a cobbler until he died



ILLUSTRATION OF A GERMAN COBBLER.

young on January 15, 1860, in Kell. His widow, having born him two children, married another unrelated Nicolas Ott. The second Nicolas is the first Ott to traverse the ocean and take root

in America.

### II

**Clemens "Mark" Ott**, the first child of Nikolaus the cobbler and Anne Marie Dorschied, was born September 14, 1857, in Kell. He arrived with his step-father in America in October of 1871 and settled in Chicago. While working as a laborer, at St. Michael Church, he married a maid named **Anne Marie Ott**, also of Kell by way of Jefferson, Wisconsin, but of no known relation. They had two children until Anne Marie died February 12, 1885, shortly after the birth of her second daughter. Clemens married her friend Mary Wilger later that year, November 10, 1885, at St. Adolphus Church in Chicago. They had several daughters and one son, the last few being born in Indiana. Clemens moved the family from Chicago to the town of Kniman in Walker Township, Jasper County, Indiana, around 1900. He managed a large farm here with his wife until he died July 31, 1926.

## In depth: Clemens Ott: the father of the Ott family in America

Before I began my research Clemens Ott was a mystery. I had seen what supposedly were photographs of him and heard a couple stories from his daughter, my Aunt Fritz, but mostly he was a name. Starting from here, I began my research with only his name, his birthday, and little else. As I removed record after record from the dusty archives of three states, I began to see the picture of an extraordinary, but very American life. Starting from nothing as a stranger to America, Clemens worked hard to find better opportunities and to make something of himself, lovingly preparing the way



CLEMENS OTT (CENTER IN OVERALLS) ON HIS FARM IN KNIMAN, INDIANA, IN HIS LATER YEARS.

## places

# TRIER

• pop. (2004) 100400

Trier, the center of culture in the Hochwald region from which the Otts come, was named for its original inhabitants, the Celtic Treveri. Living along both banks of the Moselle River in modern-day Luxembourg and Germany, the word from Latin means “water crossers.”

The Treveri make their first appearance in history in 55 B.C. when Julius Caesar marched into the area to put down an internal uprising between the tribesmen that was upsetting his plans to conquer Britain for the Romans.

The city itself was founded around 15 B.C. by the Romans at the site of a large bridge over the Moselle. The city today houses countless Latin ruins and archaeological sites. The Germanic Allemans, over the course of hundreds of years, conquered the local Roman capital. By the third century, Trier had become the center of the Catholic Church in northwest Europe. The city was the birthplace of several saints, including Saint Ambrose. Trier was one of the most important cities of the Medieval Age because of this.

The Protestant Reformation caused major disruptions in the city. The Middle Class, led by the Weavers’ Guild, protested the bishop. Their attempts proved unsuccessful since the church was so entrenched in the city’s culture and politics. They left the city in the late 1500’s.



A 19TH CENTURY MAP OF THE TRIER REGION. THE CITY IS PICTURED IN RED. THE OTT FAMILY HAILED FROM KELL.

outbreak of the French Revolution. France officially conquered the region following a long siege that stretched from 1794 to 1797’s Treaty of Campo-Formino. The French occupation was agreeable to the German-speaking residents of Trier since the French shared the Trevians’ Catholic faith and brought to the city levels of democracy, modernization, and political order. Under Napoleon’s France Trier enjoyed a



THE CENTER MARKET IN TRIER AROUND 1870.

for his family to succeed in this country.

Clemens Ott was born September 14th, 1857 in the town of Kell am See<sup>1</sup>, once part of the independent electorate called Hochwald whose center was the ancient city of Trier. The entire area was part of the old Palatinate, known to Germans as the Pfalzland, an area rich in agriculture. The politics of the country was dominated for centuries by religious strife between Protestants and Roman Catholics. The same years that Clemens Ott and his future wife’s family made their way to America in 1868 and 1871 respectively, this strife was coming once again to boil.

### Recent history of Trier region

The Hochwald region was dominated socially by French emigres since the

strong, vibrant economy both industrially and agriculturally. The Otts too profited due to the French domination. Clemens’ great-grandfather Adam Ott served as a local magistrate for the new government in the town of Reinsfeld<sup>2</sup>, overseeing improvements, while his maternal grandfather Peter Dorschied, worked as a tax collector in Kell<sup>3</sup>.

In 1815, after Napoleon suffered his final defeat at Waterloo, Prussian troops marched into Hochwald and after much bloodshed conquered Trier, renaming it Rheinprovinz. Prussian Germany officially acquired the territory as a result of 1816’s Congress of Vienna meetings. This heralded for Europe a new age of conservatism and monarchy and for Trier, so accustomed to the liberal environment of France, a new era of repression. The Prussian military camped several regiments in the city. Democratic intellectuals were chased out of the area, many emigrating to the U.S. All young men were forced to serve in the Prussian military, where they were drilled hard and learned how to be good, disciplined Germans. The forced service was scorned by Trevians, who to this day use the word “Prussian” to describe bossy, unreasonable people. The area suffered economically as well. Trevians were forced to watch their wealthy Luxemburger neighbors, under Catholic Austrian control, profit while they suffered hardship. Many Trevians, since they were believers in “Deutscher Bund,” that is that there was a bond between all Germans, wished desperately to become part of the German-speaking Austrian empire because it was less repressive than that of the Prussians and most importantly because the Austrians were Catholic.

### Clemens becomes fatherless at age three

This was the tenuous environment into which Clemens was born humbly to a poor, young cobbler<sup>4</sup> named Nikolaus Ott and his wife Anna Marie Dorschied, named for the famous empress of Catholic Austria, the daughter of a supporter of the Catholic cause. His parents had been married in Kell on November 11th, 1856<sup>5</sup>, one year before his birth in September of 1857, and were just setting up their young household in Kell. The couple would have one more child together, Elisabeth (in 1859)<sup>6</sup> before Nikolaus died in the cold January winter of 1860 at the age of twenty-seven.<sup>7</sup> Anna Marie, with two young children, was left a widow at the age of twenty-four.

Anne Marie did remarry one year later, in January of 1861, to another man named Nicolaus Ott. Nothing is known about how Anna Marie managed to keep the family fed and clothed during the year she spent alone. Her father died four years before her husband so she could find no help there. Her dead husband’s father, Matthias, was still alive, but he was elderly and barely scraping by as a shepherd.<sup>8</sup> It is safe to assume that she knew her second Nicolaus Ott, the future step-father of Clemens, throughout her widowed years. It is safe also to assume that he took care of her during that time, since all evidence points to the fact that he worked as a truck farmer in Kell.<sup>9</sup> It seems Anna Marie was only waiting for a year to pass for mourning before remarrying in Kell.

### Kulturkampf: the end for the Otts in Trier

1864 saw even more chaos enter into the lives of the young family as the Prussians, led by Otto von Bismarck, a dedicated nationalist whose main goal was a united Germany, declared war on their competitors in the German world, the Austrians. Austria's Luxemburger allies fought Prussian armies in the region for control of the Rhine valley. War disrupted everything. Young men were forced to serve the very Prussian army that most Trevians despised. Bismarck called them in the name of "Deutscher Bund." Trevians were not so focused, though on nationalism as Bismarck was, and secretly aided their Catholic enemies. The religious strife that had rocked the area for centuries was about to flare up again. This time it would mean the end for the Otts in Germany.

Kaiser Wilhelm, at the advice of Bismarck who noted the Trevian sympathies toward Catholic Austria, called on the Trevians to "pray" for Prussian troops. But the Catholics of Trier refused. Furthermore, in 1870 the Catholics organized an opposition political party called the Catholic Center, a party supported by foreign interests in Bavaria.<sup>10</sup>

When Pope Pius IX declared the dogma of papal

schools to give their children a non-Prussian (and therefore pro-Trevian) education. Bismarck's attempt to crush his political enemies in the Center party had by now disaffected Germans across the Catholic regions of the Rhineland.



AN 1885 POLITICAL CARTOON SHOWS BISMARCK AND POPE LEO BATTLING FOR GERMAN SOULS OVER A CHESS BOARD.

The closing of the Catholic schools seemed to deeply affect the father of Clemens' future wife, Matthias Ott. Matthias, a successful farmer in Kell, at this point packed up his things and moved to Wisconsin, where his children dutifully attended St. Collette's Catholic School in Jefferson.

***Bismarck would not have priests and nuns "poisoning the minds of German youth," so his next step was to shut down all Catholic schools.***

"infallibility," Bismarck lost his patience. He feared the pope's power to sway Catholics in matters of politics. It was a competition he could not bear.<sup>11</sup>

After it was clear that the Prussians would be victorious over their Austrian foes, Bismarck responded to Catholic infidelity with "Kulturkampf." The policy was directed against Catholicism in all lands dominated by the Prussians. His efforts were meant to unify all of Germany under one, common religion and to destroy any loyalties German subjects held to anything besides the Prussian state. Its repressive effects were devastating and often violent for Catholics, especially the loyal Catholics of Trier.

He began by shutting down the Catholic Department of the state ministry of culture, thereby ending official recognition of the Catholic church. He followed this up by working to deport all priests of the Jesuit order since they worked in the influential field of education. Bismarck would not have priests and nuns "poisoning the minds of the German youth," so his next step was to shut down all Catholic schools in the area. This step met with great resistance by Trevians who depended on the Catholic

(See page ?? for his biography.) Clemens' step-father Nikolaus and his mother, Anna Marie, by now were the proud parents of their own five children: Margareth Susan (1860), Anna Marie (1864), Nicolaus (1867), Matthias (1870), and Michael (1870.) The family decided to sit through the initial storm of Kulturkampf on their farm in Kell.

By 1870, though, nuns were being arrested and deported for educating youth outside of state supervision. Catholic religious services like marriage were outlawed in public and forced underground. The Church of Trier resisted every step. Priests, nuns, and lay people filled the prisons as the Catholic Center party grew stronger and stronger. Kulturkampf was having the opposite effect Bismarck had intended. The Catholic will and Catholic opposition to Prussian rule under the newly unified Germany increased dramatically, and the center of the opposition rested in the diocese of Trier.

Eventually the anti-Catholic laws were abandoned, but by now it was too late. Trier regained their bishop in 1881 when Pope Leo XIII made a personal plea to Bismarck to ease the hardship of the Kulturkampf, which left 197 area parishes without priests or community buildings.

Fed up, perhaps, with the bad times brought about by the Kulturkampf and the Prussian occupation, the Otts had already fled Germany. In the summer of 1871, Nikolaus Ott and his family, including his oldest step-son Clemens, were bound for America via the Atlantic Ocean. The politics of Europe were far behind them now. The exciting challenges and prospects of life in America lied ahead.



LEADERS WHO MADE AN IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF THE OTTS IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY. LTOR: NAPOLEON III, POPE LEO XIII, KAISER WILHELM, OTTO VON BISMARCK

### Why did the Otts leave Kell am See?

It is hard to say exactly why the Ott family left Kell

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### Why did the Ott's leave Kell am See?

It is hard to say exactly why the Ott family left Kell am See. Many families were leaving at the time for reasons besides the repressive Kulturkampf. The area was plagued by violent economic cycles. Depressions were common and a wide gap existed between the rich and the poor. The region was in the midst of industrialization, which historically has produced such economic troubles.

In the entire Rhine region, many left for better economic opportunity. In America, a farmer of moderate wealth in Europe, was able to purchase a sizeable piece of land that he, himself, would own and that he, himself, would farm. This sort of opportunity was not as commonplace in the homeland.

More and more young men in the Rhineland were being forced by circumstances to work in the factories. The lifestyle of punch clocks, whistles, and fourteen hour workdays was, obviously, not an appealing one for poor Trevians. Many moved to protect the sort of liberty that comes with working the field.

When these sorts of problems are accompanied by a repressive government, as was the case in 1870's Rhineland, people are bound to move on to better things. America, at the time, seemed like a better thing. Advertisements abounded in the region proclaiming the wealth that could be obtained in the New World. Images on these ads showed poor German farmers looking with relief toward a rising sun over the sea or showed farmers working their own fields with much success. Usually these ads were placed by American factory owners in need of cheap immigrant labor, shipping companies looking for a few paying passengers, or real estate agents hoping to unload abundant American land.

The pull was too great. There seemed nothing but trouble brewing for poor farmers in the Rhineland. This is not far from what actually happened either. In 1884 Kell's economy was strengthened by the introduction of a railroad stop. By 1909, the region's economic instability had largely subsided as huge German steel trusts like Krupp and Thyssen dominated the region's job market with plenty of work. The sons of Trier's farmers were now fashioning weaponry for the Prussian and French armies. Their work at rearming jealous and distrusting European powers set the stage for World War I, a war that destroyed the region. The worldwide depression of the 1930's and Nazi domination that followed also left the region in shambles. Entire towns were lost in bombings. The

region was a major battlefield throughout both wars.

So, although we cannot be certain why Nikolaus Ott and his family left for America in 1871, it can be safely assumed that many factors led to the fateful decision that brought them to America's shores.

### Chicago: 1871

Later election registration and census records indicate that the Ott family made it to their destination in Chicago's Northside German ghetto in the summer of 1871. Clemens, the oldest child in the family, was fourteen years old. The youngest children were the twins, Matthias and Michael, at the time of the move a little over seven months old.

Chicago in 1871 was exploding into its destiny as a metropolis. The stockyards were finished in 1864, making Chicago the new "hog butcher" to the world. Senator Stephen Douglas, by that time, had also managed to make Chicago, thirty years before a rural French-speaking trading post, the focus of western American railroad freighting. Factories sprung up all over the city. People spilled in from the railroad stations, almost all of them looking for a few dollars any way they could get it.

The city was an unorganized, clogged, stuffy labyrinth of brick and wood. The only refuge lied in the endless prairie on the outskirts where the more wealthy followed railroad tracks and moved out, supplanting occasional farms, to escape the festering trouble that brewed every night in the city streets. The poor, on the other hand, were forced to remain in the city center, close to work. Naturally the German ghetto directly north of the Chicago River, wherein the Ott's first made their home, was crime-ridden. It was not the place promised in the advertisements.

The city that had gone up in such a hurry would come down much quicker. On the evening of October 8, 1871, only a few months after the Ott family found their way to the city, the city experienced its greatest disaster.

### The Great Chicago Fire of 1871

An inch of rain had fallen since the time the Ott's moved to Chicago. The entire Great Lakes region was experiencing the greatest drought on record and the dry prairie grass was ripe for one its famous fires. Early in the cities history notable fires had blazed far out in the prairie. It was a natural phenomenon. But now the city had stretched into the prairie. Whether it



CHICAGO IN 1871 BEFORE THE FIRE.



PANIC FILLS THE STREETS AS THE WIND WHIPS FIRE DOWN THE ALLEYS.

was this or Mrs. O'Leary's cow, the entire city was engulfed in flames by night's end.

Of the city's sixty thousand buildings, it is written, two-thirds were constructed entirely of wood.<sup>12</sup> Even the sidewalks were constructed of wood. The drought had left all of this wood vulnerable to any hint of fire.

As the fire spread, competing fire departments rushed to the scene only to find that they had too few

**After the fire burned out, three days later, two hundred fifty bodies were found.**

supplies and men to control the it. The wind caused by the fire's heat reached tornado speeds, at times, carrying the flames great distances were they caught a roof here and a roof there until every part of the city was up in flames. Even the river's water, covered with a film of oil, was on fire. For many, only the waters of Lake Michigan would offer salvation. People emerged from houses and tenements with whatever they could carry, trampling each other in the streets in terror.

Herbert Asbury's often over-dramatic account of the night paints a picture of the terror:

"Ahead of the reaching flames surged great masses of homeless and bewildered people, blistered and scorched by the terrific heat, carrying bundles and babies and invalids, dragging trunks and carts, stumbling, falling, trampling women and children, fighting, cursing, and screaming in such a frenzy of terror that sometimes their cries could be heard above the thunderous tumult of the fire."<sup>13</sup>

The courthouse bell rang urgent until the courthouse, itself, was eaten away from under it.<sup>14</sup> Marshall Field's store, a testament to the opulence of the Gilded Age, was engulfed minutes later. The *Tribune* building lit like a tinderbox. The fire left nothing untouched, no house, no business, and no life.

As what eyewitnesses described as a "vast ocean of flames"<sup>15</sup> crossed the main branch of the

river and headed north into the German neighborhoods, its ferocity strengthened, fueled by the dilapidated tenements. The entire neighborhood fell victim to the fire as it made its way north to Fullerton Avenue where it finally was kept in check by the lake.

### The Ott family and the days after the Fire

The Otts were strangers in a strange land. Only three months after they arrived in America, they underwent one of the greatest disasters in American history. It is not known exactly where the Otts lived at the time of the fire, but they were evidently parishoners at St. Michael Catholic Church. The entire North Town neighborhood, mainly composed of German immigrants, that surrounded St. Michael's was destroyed. The church itself was gutted. Its walls and tower stood, though scorched, providing for what the *Daily Tribune* called "the most imposing ruins on the north side."<sup>16</sup> Taking the total destruction of their neighborhood into consideration, it is safe to assume that the Ott home was destroyed.

After the fire burned out, three days later, two hundred fifty bodies were found. Many more were turned to ash by the power of the flames. One hundred thousand were left homeless. \$200 million of property was



CHICAGO IN RUINS IN 1871.

destroyed.<sup>17</sup> It was discovered that fires raged the same night in other Midwestern towns, more particularly in the Pestigo area of Wisconsin and in Michigan's northwoods. Many kept their heads up, despite the mess.

John McKnight opened a fruit stand in the middle of the rubble. Hundreds of temporary structures went up only days after the fire.

The city was busy rebuilding itself. By 1873, the Germans in North Town had managed to rebuild St. Michael's. Real-estate offices were set up so that owners could re-establish their land claims. These offices were not friendly places for those who spoke no English like Nicolaus Ott. The city's poor immigrants were forced to find housing outside of the city, since the city council banned their wooden houses. The immigrant workers, including Nicolaus Ott and his son Clemens, circled the city's center in two-story frame houses. The Otts settled among their own near

St. Michael's, but were forced to remain north of Fullerton Avenue by the new fire laws.<sup>18</sup>

## Prohibition & Political Tumult

As time went on the brotherhood felt by fire victims gave way to scapegoating. The O'Leary family, an immigrant Irish family, was blamed for starting the blaze. The bread-winner of the family was a gambler and tavern owner. His immigrant status made him an easy target for nativist politicians. The nativists were anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, and anti-German. Since most of the crime came out of their poor neighborhoods, these strangers were looked at with contempt. Making matters worse for workers was the nation-wide depression of 1873. Those on the fringes of American society like Nicolaus not only mistrusted by locals, but were left jobless in crime-infested neighborhoods.

Despite their reputation the Germans worked hard when they could find work. Many were forced to work as day laborers. This was the fate of Nicolaus Ott, whose lifelong experience as a farmer was of no use to him in the city's stifling ghetto and who by 1880 was a widower. The census of that year records him as a widower and there is no record of Anna Marie's death in Germany.

As Anna Marie was left to fend for her family after her first husband died in 1860, Nicolaus was now left with a lot of tough decisions to make. His children were put to work in order for the family to survive.

Clemens, like his father, worked throughout his youth in Chicago, as a day laborer. By 1880, it seems as if he found steady work in a factory. His younger brother, Nick, worked in the poisonous environment of a paint shop. His three sisters helped the family pay the rent too, sewing for more wealthy clients well into the night. Only the twins went to school.<sup>19</sup>

Despite their hard work, the Otts suffered the fate of all Germans in Chicago during the 1870's and 1880's. They were not Americans. They did not speak English, although the children were certainly learning enough to get jobs and to pass through the little schooling they could afford. They were outsiders and they were suspect.

German immigrants not only brought a strange language and strange customs (like the Christmas tree), but they brought Roman Catholicism, perceived as a threat by Anglo-Americans since the foundations of the country. Despite Chicago's French-Catholic roots, the city's leading men in the mid-1800's were nativists.

The city had elected a variety of anti-immigrant mayors including Dr. Levi Boone, in 1855, who banned alcohol in an attempt to reduce violent crime. German saloon keepers and patrons, who thought of prohibition as a threat to their rights, marched on the city, meeting a hail of gunfire from police. Fifteen protestors died.<sup>20</sup>

Reformers and missionaries went into the

Catholic ghettos, plagued by brothels and gambling houses, but were never able to persuade the Germans to give up such sins as drinking beer and playing sports on the sabbath. Sunday was often the only day the immigrants had off of work and many took the opportunity to find various forms of entertainment after church. Sometimes the churches, themselves, provided beer gardens for parish organizations. The Ott church, St. Michael's, was named for the patron saint of its founder and greatest benefactor, a brewer named Michael Diversey.

Drinking beer was certainly not evil to the Germans. Most frequented saloons to catch up with friends.

But the prohibition issue was only a shroud. Immigrants like Clemens and his father worked cheap and often in dangerous situations. Their low wages kept many Anglo-Americans who competed for jobs unemployed. This was especially true in the years after the fire and 1873 depression, the Otts first years in the city. Anglos were also concerned that Germans at the saloons might be discussing politics or labor issues. This was a threat to those in power because the German immigrants formed the majority of the city's inhabitants. As they were naturalized and began voting, those in power feared the end of their reign and of law and order in the city. A power struggle soon ensued, at first focused over beer and later over labor issues.

In 1871, that benchmark year of the fire and the arrival of the family, Republican strongman and *Chicago Tribune* publisher Joseph Medill was elected mayor. He had no fondness for the German and Irish residents and put Mayor Boone's old prohibition back into effect, closing saloons on Sunday.

While many Germans simply flocked north into the saloons in suburbs like Niles Center and Lakeview, some held their ground in Chicago. Many Germans organized against Medill's law under famous gambler Mike McDonald's People's Party. McDonald ran a cleaner puppet for mayor named Harvey Colvin, who