

Henry Vornkahl, Warsaw, Hancock County, Illinois, U.S.A., a.k.a. Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Vornkahl, Nettlingen, Niedersachsen, Germany

The following quotation is taken from an announcement of the death of Henry Vornkahl in the *Warsaw (Illinois) Bulletin* on 3 March 1922.^[3099] His death is reported to have occurred on 1 March 1922.

“Henry Vornkahl was among the first Germans to locate in Warsaw. He was born October 9, 1834 at Netling, [sic] Kingdom of Hanover, and with his parents came to this country in 1845, landing in New Orleans. They were seventy days on the ocean. Coming up the Mississippi, the family first located in Fort Madison but came to Warsaw in the spring of 1846, the decedent remaining here until his death. He was married in 1859 to Mary Lange who preceded him in death. To them seven children were born, two of whom died in infancy. Four sons – Henry, John, George and Fred – died in adult life. The only surviving member of the family is Mrs. Matilda Raich, who is in the state hospital at Jacksonville. Vornkahl was 87 years, 4 months and 20 days old.”

Much of this brief summary of Henry Vornkahl’s life is confirmed by census data and other historical documents, most of which we had collected before this newspaper announcement came to our attention. According to this announcement, Henry was born in Germany in 9 Oct 1834.^[3099] The parish records for births in Nettlingen show that Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Vornkahl was, indeed, born there on that date.^[1098] He was the “unehelich” (illegitimate) son of Christian Vornkahl and Bernhardine Stolle. A note added in a different handwriting states, “Nach Amerika ausgewandert” (“emigrated to America”). It is not possible to trace his ancestry further back in Germany because it is not clear which of several Christian Vornkahls living in Nettlingen at the time was his father.

The newspaper statement that Henry arrived in the United States with his parents was baffling at first because we had not found any references in this country to either a Christian Vornkahl or a Bernhardine (Stolle) Vornkahl. However, a possible explanation can be pieced together from additional research and some plausible assumptions.

We had not previously found Henry’s name in the 1860 U.S. census although other information showed that he had come to this country before this time. A page by page search of the Warsaw, Illinois, census for 1860 was required to reveal a badly spelled entry that almost certainly is for Henry and his wife Mary (Marie Lange). On the eighth page of the census of Ward 3 of the city of Warsaw are found the following names and descriptions: Henry Fenican, age 25, a carpenter from Hanover and his wife, Mary L., age 18, from Hesse, Detenstadt (sic)^[3099] (from her obituary we learn that Marie Lange was born 10 Sep 1842 in Buchenberg, Germany^[3100]). The age difference of seven years between Henry and Mary is consistent with later census records. The census further recorded that living in the same house with Henry and Mary were Henry and Christina Wamboldt and their two children, Frederick (age 16) and Herman (age 14), all of whom were born in “Hanover.”^[3099] From this and other records, we can suggest that Henry and Christina Wamboldt were the “parents” that Henry Vornkahl accompanied when he immigrated to the United States.

From other records, we find the following information:

1. On 27 Nov 1835, Johann Heinrich Friedrich Warnbold and Augusta Conradine Stolle were married in the village of Nettlingen, Germany.^[3102] They both were 25 years old when they were married and, therefore, were born in 1810.

2. In the birth records for 1810, we find entries for both. Augusta Conradine Stolle (born on 1 Dec 1810)^[3103] and Johann Heinrich Friedrich Warnbold (born on 23 May 1810),^[891] both in Nettlingen.

3. Johann Heinrich Warnbold and Dina Stolle are named as the parents of a daughter, Friederike Wihelmine, born in Nettlingen on 18 Feb 1837.^[1121]

4. Heinrich Warnbold was the father of a son (born in Germany), Johann Heinrich Friedrich, born 14 Apr 1843.^[3104] The mother's name is given as Bernhardine Stolle.^[3104] We assume the difference in name from the marriage record (Conradine) to the birth record was an error in record keeping. We further assume that this son is the Frederick, age 16, recorded in the 1860 U.S. census.

5. If the woman Heinrich Warnbold married had been named Bernhardine instead of Conradine Stolle, there should be a record for the birth of a Bernhardine Stolle in the Nettlingen parish records. No such record has been found.

6. The burial record for the Lutheran Cemetery of Warsaw includes the names of Dena Wambolt, b. 1800, d. 1860, and Henry Wambolt, b. 1796, d. 1881.^[3105]

Despite discrepancies in dates of birth and in the names – Christine, Conradine, and Bernhardine – it is reasonable to suggest that, after the birth of her son Johann Heinrich Wilhelm in 1834, Bernhardine Stolle married Heinrich Warnbold, who in turn adopted her son. Consequently, it is plausible to believe that Henry Vornkahl came to the United States with his mother and step-father, *i.e.*, the “parents” to whom reference is made in the statement in the *Warsaw Bulletin*.

Henry Vornkahl's family in the United States. As outlined above, Henry and Mary Fenican (Vornkahl) were listed by the 1860 U.S. census as husband and wife living in the household of Henry Wamboldt and his family.^[3099] Their marriage therefore had occurred before the census was taken in the summer of 1860. The next reference to their family is the 1870 U.S. census where the surname is spelled Vorenkolz.^[3106] By this time, Henry and Marie (Mary) were the parents of four children: Henry (age 8), Frederick (age 3), Matilda (age 1) and Oscar (age, one month; possibly John in later 1880 census), all born in Illinois.

In the 1880 census,^[3107] Frederick (age 13) and Matilda (11) remained at home. The name Oscar has been replaced by John (10) and one more child, George (age 5), has been added to the family. The oldest son, Henry (17), is described as working as an “engineer on boat.”

A brief newspaper item in December, 1887, reports that “Henry Vornkahl is at home for the winter, the steamer *Pittsburgh*, on which he was engineer, having gone into winter quarters.”^[3108]

The 1900 U.S. census was more ambitious in asking questions, one of which was how many children had been born to the household and how many had survived as of 1900.^[3109] The answers for the Henry Vornkahl household were seven and four meaning that of the five children in the 1880 census, only four – Frederick, Matilda, John, and George – were still living in 1900. The three still not living were two children who died in infancy^[3110] and, as is described below, the eldest son, Henry, who had died in 1895. Two children, Frederick and Matilda, were still living with their parents.^[3109] Matilda, although living at home, presumably was married because she is recorded with the surname, Raish.^[3109] She was employed as a “bottler.” Both father Henry and son, Frederick, worked as coopers.

In 1900, George was single and living as a boarder in another household.^[3111] His occupation was barkeeper.^[3111] John was married and had two step-children. His wife's name was Mary (b. Apr 1864) and his step-children were Bertha (b. Mar 1884) and Harry (or Henry; b. Jun 1889) Trautvetter. John's occupation also was a barkeeper.^[3112]

A short news item in the *Quincy Daily Journal* of 4 Dec 1909 began with the headline, “Golden Wedding of a Pioneer Warsaw Couple.” The couple to which reference was made was Mr. and Mrs. Henry Vornkahl whose

Henry Vornkahl, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Vornkahl, of this city, died suddenly at his home in St. Louis Thursday of last week. Henry had long been ill, and the nature of his disease made recovery impossible, but he had recently recuperated so remarkably that it made those nearest to him hopeful. The day preceding his death he had visited the place where he had worked so long, and on the day of his demise he took his eldest child and visited one of the city parks. Returning home he seemed unusually bright, but on sitting down to the supper table he was stricken with a hemorrhage and expired in a few moments. The deceased was born in Warsaw June 21, 1862. When but a youth he went on the river and became a steamboat engineer, following the vocation until he was married to Miss Mattie Caliban, when he took a position as engineer with a St. Louis lumber company. He leaves a wife and three children—Clarence, Harvey and Erwy—a father, mother, brothers, sister and many friends to mourn his demise. He was buried in St. Louis last Sunday with the honors of Odd Fellowship, of which order he was a member.

Warsaw Bulletin, 21 Jun 1895

Figure 84. Notice of the death of Henry Vornkahl, son of Henry and Marie Vornkahl of Warsaw, Illinois.

marriage had taken place in Warsaw on December 1, fifty years earlier. The article further stated that “Mr. Vornkahl was born in Netling (sic), Kingdom of Hanover, Oct 9, 1834, and Mrs. Vornkahl was born in Bevenborch, Hesse Darmstadt, Germany, Sept. 10, 1842. He came to Warsaw in May, 1846, and she came in March, 1847, being among the earliest German settlers, and of these they are the oldest now living. Indeed there are few, native or otherwise, whose coming antedates that of Mr. and Mrs. Vornkahl. They were pioneers. Both are in good health and should be spared for many years to come.”^[3113] The story originated from the *Warsaw Bulletin*.

In the 1910 census, Marie stated that only two of her seven children were still living,^[3114] Matilda and Frederick. By the 1920 census, only the father, Henry, was living.^[3115] His wife Mary (Marie) had died on 16 Aug 1919 at the age of 76.^[3116] Henry died 1 Mar 1922 at the age of 87.^[3099]

Children of Henry and Marie Vornkahl.

Henry J. Vornkahl. The fate of the eldest child, Henry, can be pieced together from a variety of sources. In the 1889 and 1890 St. Louis, Missouri, City Directories [Gould Directory Co.], Henry J. Vornkahl is listed as an engineer living at the address of 909 St. Louis Avenue.^[3117] In 1895, a notice in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* for June

14 states that Henry J. Vornkahl died on June 13 of that year.^[3118] He was the husband of Mattie née Callahan and the father of three sons, Clarence, Harry, and Mrny. Later information suggests that “Mrny” was the son, Erwin (or Irwin).

A burial permit printed in the June 16 issue of the *Post Dispatch* states that Henry J. Vornkahl, 909 St. Louis, Ave., was 32 years of age and gives the cause of his death as haemoptysis.^[3119] An entry in the St. Louis register of deaths confirms this information and gives the place of burial as the Bellefontaine Cemetery.^[3120] From his age at the time of death, Henry would have been born in 1862-3. This corresponds closely to the date of birth that can be calculated for Henry and Marie Vornkahl’s eldest son, Henry.^[3106]

Other evidence that Henry J. was from Warsaw, Illinois, comes from the 1920 U.S. census. At that time, his son Harry J. Vornkahl was living in Salt Lake City, Utah.^[3121] The census recorded that (a) Harry J. was born in Missouri, (b) his father was born in Illinois, and (c) his mother was born in Tennessee. These facts are consistent with what is known about Henry J. and Mattie (Callahan) Vornkahl.

A death notice published in the *Warsaw Bulletin* on 21 Jun 1885^[3122] which we found after the above research confirms the preceding conclusions. A copy of the notice is shown in Figure 84. The notice provides the date of birth for Henry as 21 Jun 1862.

According to census records and the death notice for Henry J. Vornkahl, he and his wife Mattie Callahan, had three sons, Clarence, Harry J., and Irwin.

Clarence was the subject of a news story in the *Quincy Daily Journal* of 22 Aug 1900 (dateline, Warsaw, Ill.). The headline and story read: “Two St. Louis Boys Ran Away to Warsaw. Warsaw, Ill., Aug 22. – Clarence Vornkahl and Harry Danders, two neighbor boys of St. Louis, whose disappearance from their homes in that city created a sensation, arrived here yesterday and are now at the residence of Mrs. Henry Vornkahl, Clarence’s grandmother, in this place. When they decided to take the trip to Warsaw, they kept their own counsel. Young Vornkahl had been here before and knew the way. When he left, \$26 also disappeared from his mother’s room. Monday the anxious mothers reported the joint disappearance to the police of St. Louis. They came up the river on the *St. Paul*. Their relatives have been notified.”^[3123]

We have so far found very little other information concerning any Clarence Vornkahl. A Clarence G. Vornkahl is listed in the 1906 Denver, Colorado, city directory as an apprentice at the Great Western Machinery Company.^[3124] The following entry is found in a catalog of copyrights: Musical Compositions, Part 3, by the Library of Congress: “My Best Girl is Mother,” waltz song and chorus, words and music by Clarence Vornkahl [14499], © July 13, 1912; E 288920; Globe Music Co., New York. We can only speculate that this Clarence was the son of Henry and Mattie Vornkahl.

Harry J. Vornkahl. Scattered evidence is found for the Henry’s second son, Harry J. Vornkahl. He was married on 22 Apr 1918 to Loriela E. Little in Salt Lake City, Utah.^[3125] As noted above, there is an entry for him in the 1920 U.S. census for Salt Lake City, Utah. The data given with that entry are consistent with him being Henry and Mattie’s son. He is described as a lodger, age 37 (this is an error made by the census enumerator, he was born in 1892 and would have been 27 years old in 1920) and working as an auto mechanic.^[3121] Although listed in the census as married, there is no entry for his wife.^[3121] His full name, Harry James Vornkahl, and his date of birth, 18 Sep 1892, are included on his World War II draft registration card. Finally, the California Death Records have an entry for Harry J. Vornkohl stating that such a person died in Los Angeles on 18 Jul 1948.^[3126] The record further states that he was born 18 Sep 1892 in Missouri, that his mother’s maiden name was Callahan, and his father’s last name was Vornkohl.

Erwin Vornkahl. Henry J. Vornkahl’s widow, Mattie, was re-married on 27 Jan 1910 in Couer d’Alene, Kootenai County, Idaho, to John E. Stull.^[3127] Later in 1910, at the time of the 1910 U.S. census^[3128] (22 Apr 1910), J.E. and Mollie (misspelling of the name Mattie ?) Stull were living in Spokane, Washington. Living with them was Irving Vornkahl, age 16, born in Missouri and now employed as a clerk. Other information from the census:



Figure 85. L. to r.: Meta (Jacke) Vorn Kahl, Erwin Fred Vorn Kahl, Jr., Lillian (Kallas) Vorn Kahl, Erwin Fred Vornkahl, Sr. Photograph courtesy of Karen Vorn Kahl.

this is the second marriage for Mollie (name is not certain); husband and wife have been married less than one year; and she is the mother of three children all of whom were living at the time of this census.

Additional information about Erwin (Irving, Irwin): (a) he was born 20 Nov 1894 according to his WWI draft registration card;^[3129] (b) Erwin Fred Vornkahl and Neta Jacke Vornkahl of Spokane, Washington, were the parents of a daughter, Virginia Lois Vornkahl, born 25 Nov 1917;^[3130] (c) the 1920 U.S. census lists Irwin F. (age, 26) and Meta H. Vornkahl (age, 24) living with their daughter Virginia L. (age, 2 yr., 1 mo.) in Spokane, Washington;^[3131] and (d) he was the father of Erwin Vorn Kahl, Jr. who according to the U.S. Social Security Death Index was born 1 Apr 1921 and died Jan 1987 in Chicago, Illinois.^[3132] Erwin, Sr., and his wife, Neta Jacke, are shown together with Erwin, Jr., and his bride, Lillian Kallas, in a wedding photograph (Figure 85).

Frederick. The second son of Henry and Marie Vornkahl, Frederick, was born 10 Mar 1867.^[3134] He became a saloon owner in 1904 when together with Joseph Hartinger, he purchased the J.J. Decker saloon in Warsaw.^[3133] He was manager of Leisy's saloon in Warsaw when he died unexpectedly on 31 Mar 1917 at the age of 50 years and 20 days.^[3134,3135] His tombstone is pictured in Figure 86.

Matilda. As noted above, daughter Matilda had the married name Raich. She was living at home in 1900.^[3109] At the time of her father's death in 1922 she was a patient at the Jacksonville, Illinois, state hospital.

John. Henry and Maria's third son, John, married Mary Trautveter on 26 Apr 1897 in Warsaw^[3136] and became the step-father of her daughter Bertha and son Harry.^[3112] John died of typhoid pneumonia 16 Apr 1908 at the age of 38.^[3136] Mary (b. 1864) lived until 1949.^[3116]

George. George was the youngest surviving son of Henry and Marie Vornkahl. While the dates on his tombstone read 1876-1908 (Figure 87), an obituary in the *Quincy Daily Journal* of 21 Feb 1910^[3137] gives the time

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of his death as Sunday morning, presumably 20 Feb 1910 – dateline, Warsaw, Ill., Feb 21. In the obituary, George was said to have been 24 years of age on the previous 21 Jul, *i.e.*, 1909, thereby placing his date of birth as 21 Jul 1885. Note: the age of 24 years almost certainly is a misprint; an age of 34 years would be consistent with other data. Another set of dates is given in a list of burials in the Oakland/Warsaw City Cemetery that includes George Vornkahl, 1876-1909.^[3116]



Figure 86. Grave marker for Frederick Vornkahl, Oakland Cemetery, Warsaw, Illinois.



Figure 87. Grave marker for Henry, Marie, and George Vornkahl, Oakland Cemetery, Warsaw, Illinois.

References and Notes may be found in the Sources section of this book.