

John A. Vornkahl, Carlinville, Macoupin County, Illinois

In our early searches for Vornkahls in the United States, the name of John A. Vornkahl of Macoupin County, Illinois, was found in several references. The spelling of the name in these references varied greatly but the locations in or near Macoupin County provided strong evidence that they all were about the same person. The earliest reference is to the naturalization of Andreas Vornkahl in 1859; a copy of the original document was obtained from the Macoupin County Circuit Court.^[B138] The document gives very little information about the recipient other than his name, the date of application (14 Dec 1859), and renunciation by the applicant of any allegiance to Ernest Augustus, King of Hanover. The application is signed by “Andras Vornkahl” before A. M. Kim Dubois, Clerk of the Macoupin Circuit Court, State of Illinois.

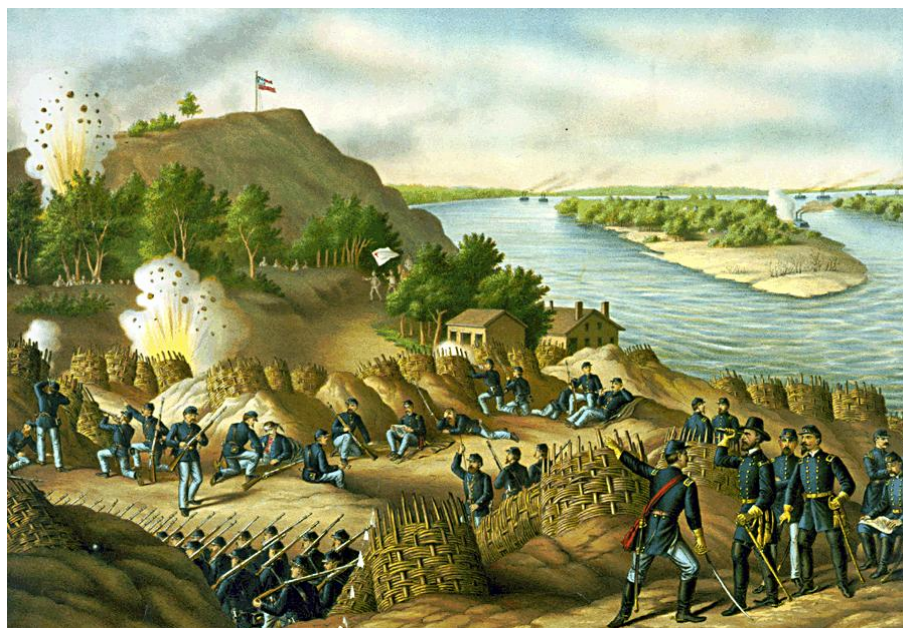


Figure 88. Siege of Vicksburg, 4 Jul 1863. Lithograph by Kurz and Allison in 1888, from Wikipedia. The scene does not represent a specific event.

As the Civil War got underway, John A. Vorkahl volunteered for three months of service and was mustered into Company “K” of the 7th Illinois Infantry on 25 Apr 1861. His place of residence is listed as Springfield. He was mustered out on 25 Jul 1861 and then re-enlisted on 29 Aug 1861 as a veteran in Company “H” of the 30th Illinois Infantry. His residence now is listed as Zanesville, a small village in Montgomery County to the east of Macoupin County. He remained in service with Company “H” until July of 1865. During this time he was promoted to second lieutenant and then to first lieutenant. His residence on these occasions is listed as Nilwood, a small town northeast of Carlinville in Macoupin County. As we will describe later, one of his sisters-in-law moved to Nilwood at about the same time that the Civil War ended in 1865.^[B139]

The 30th Illinois Infantry regiment was organized at Camp Butler, Illinois, and immediately moved on 1 Sep 1861 to Cairo, Illinois, where it was placed under Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the District of Cairo. After Grant was given command of the newly formed District of Tennessee in early 1862, his troops soon became known as the Army of the Tennessee (in reference to the Tennessee River; note that there also was a Confederate army known as the Army of Tennessee). The 30th Illinois Infantry remained within the Army of the Tennessee for the duration of the Civil War and participated in many of the key battles and campaigns of the war. Among these actions were the Battle of Ft. Donelson, the Siege of Corinth, the operations against Vicks-

burg (Figure 88), the Atlanta Campaign, the March to the Sea (also known as Sherman's March to the Sea), and the Campaign of the Carolinas.^[3139,3140] The regiment traveled long distances on foot and suffered heavy losses due both to combat as well as disease. The final tally of losses for the 30th Illinois Infantry regiment is given as: 10 officers and 115 enlisted men killed in action or died of their wounds and 2 officers and 218 enlisted men who died of disease for a total of 345 deaths.^[3140] A regiment at full strength numbered about 1,000 troops.

The war ended with the Confederate surrender at Appomattox on 9 Apr 1865. The soldiers of the 30th Illinois Infantry were mustered out of service on 17 Jul 1865; they received final payment and discharge on 27 Jul 1865.^[3139] On 29 Dec 1865 John A. Vornkahl was married to Miss Diene Opperman in Macoupin County, Illinois.^[3141] From her obituary (1918),^[3142] we learn that Conradine Oppermann (Diene Opperman) was born 24 Oct 1845 in Bettmar (Bettmar), Germany. Further, "At the age of 13 she with her parents came to this country locating on a farm near Chesterfield, Illinois, where she resided until the failing health of her mother caused them to leave the farm and take up residence in Carlinville."^[3142] Other members of her family are listed in a record of emigrants from Bettmar.^[3143]

Diene's father and mother were Johann Heinrich Oppermann and Marie Elisabeth Henriette Siedentop (b. 13 Aug 1808) of Bettmar. In Bettmar, Johann Heinrich was classified as a Brinksitzer.^[3143] The family emigrated in 1858 bringing with them the following children: Johann Heinrich Christian Theodor (b. 5 Mar 1827), Ilse Dorothe Konradine (b. 27 Dec 1828), Johann Heinrich Friedrich Christian (b. 4 Feb 1835), Johanne Dorothee Henriette (b. 3 Jun 1838), Christiane Friederike Elisabeth (b. 4 Aug 1841), Johanne Conradine Christiane (b. 24 Nov 1844), and Auguste Christiane Eleonore (b. 2 Aug 1850).^[3143] (Note the discrepancy in birthdates for Conradine between her obituary and the emigration listing. The year of birth inscribed on her tombstone is 1845; see Figure 89).

In the 1870 U.S. census,^[3144] John Vancroft, age 35 and described as a wagon maker, is enumerated in Township 10, Range 7, of Macoupin County. This is the township in which the city of Carlinville is located but the 1870 census did not identify locations by place names. Enumerated with John Vancroft were his wife, Dena, age 25, and two children, Henry, age 3, and Mary, age 1. Also reported in the following two entries on the same page of the census are, first, Henry Opperman, retired farmer, age 69, born in Brunswick, Germany, and, second, the family of Bornhart Durve (almost certainly Bernhardt Duwe), cooper. Duwe's wife is Augusta (born in Brunswick), age 19; they have one child, Bettie who was 5/12 of a year of age. Augusta almost certainly was Dena's (Conradine's) youngest sister. Except for the spelling of names, this census data fits well as a description of John A. Vornkahl and his immediate family, his father-in-law, and his brother-in-law and sister-in-law.^[3144]

On 7 Jan 1879, John A. Vornkahl was killed in a mining accident when a lump of coal fell and struck him on the head.^[3145] Surviving were "Conradina Vornkahl, his widow, and Henry, Mary, John, Augusta, and William."^[3146] Another child, Bernhard, was born after his death. The 1880 U.S. census^[3147] lists Dinah Vankol in Carlinville with four children: John, age 9; Augusta, age 8; William, age 5; and Bernhard, age 1. Also entered next on the same page of the census is Bernhard Duwe and his family including his wife Augusta and children Elisabeth, Henry, Augusta, Charlotte, Bernhard, and an "unbaptised" infant. It is puzzling that Conradine's two older children, Henry and Mary, are not included in the census listing.

Several key pieces of information about John Vornkahl have eluded our searches. We do not know his exact date of birth nor with certainty where he was born in Germany. The inscription on his tombstone (Figure 89) in the Carlinville City Cemetery gives the years of his birth and death as 1833 and 1879, respectively. Census and other records clearly show that he was born in Germany. The birth records of the Nettlingen parish church contain one entry that could be for John Vornkahl if some inconsistencies are overlooked. On 24 Feb 1833, Andreas Heinrich Vornkahl was born to Matthias Vornkahl and Marie Catharine Meier.^[1085] The year correlates correctly but the name Johann is not in the birth record. There is no additional information in the Nettlingen records that either eliminates or confirms that this is the person who emigrated to the U.S. and took up the name John A. Vornkahl.



Figure 89. Grave marker for John A. and Conradine Vornkahl, Carlinville City Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Kay Stein.

Following the death of her husband in Jan 1879, Conradine gave birth to their seventh child, Bernhardt Emil, in March of the same year. She lived in Carlinville until her death at the age of 72 on 10 Mar 1918.^[3142] Her obituary noted that she was survived by five children and two sisters, Mrs. Fredericka Schleicht (almost certainly Friederika Schlicht) of Nilwood and Mrs. Augusta Duwe of Superior, Nebraska. Friederika Opperman “came to the U.S. when about 13 years of age and settled with her parents on Spanish Needle Prairie near Chesterfield, Illinois.” She later moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where she was married to August Schlicht on 13 Oct 1861. She moved to Nilwood after the Civil War in about 1865 and resided there until her death 28 Mar 1921.^[3148] Bernhard Duwe, husband of Augusta Opperman, was an executor of the Vornkahl estate after the death of John. The Duwe family in the 1900 U.S. census is living in Superior, Nebraska, and working as hotel operators.^[3149]

Children of John A. and Conradine (Oppermann) Vornkahl.

Henry C. Vornkahl. John and Conradine’s first child, Henry, was listed as being of age 3 years in the 1870 U.S. census,^[3147] placing his birth either in late 1866 or in 1867. Curiously, neither Henry nor his sister Mary (or Marie) is listed in the residence of their mother in the 1880 census. (Perhaps because of the death of the father in January and the birth of Bernhard in March of 1879, these children were being cared for by someone else.) The next data we have that is consistent with the date of Henry’s birth is in the 1900 U.S. census. There, Henry Vornkahl is listed living in a boarding house at 980 Millard Ave., Chicago, Illinois. The census gives the following information about Henry: his birthplace was Illinois, both of his parents were born in Germany, his age was 33, his date of birth was Dec 1866, and his occupation was a motorman for the St. (?) R.R.^[3150] Therefore we conclude that as an adult John and Conradine’s son Henry lived, worked, and raised a family in Chicago.

As a motorman for the Chicago Union Traction Company, Henry Vornkahl was involved on 15 Jul 1900 in an accident in which the motor car struck and overturned a horse drawn wagon, injuring the driver of the wagon. The initial trial resulted in a verdict in favor of the wagon driver, the decision was upheld by the court of appeals

but was overturned by the Supreme Court of the state of Illinois. A summary of the case as argued before the Supreme Court has been published.^[3151]

By 1910, Henry had been married to Mary (or May) David for two years and their first child, Evelyn, had been born in 1909.^[3152] His occupation still was as a streetcar motorman. A second child, Mary Bernadine, born 1 Oct 1910^[3153] died in infancy on 4 Oct 1910.^[3154] Additional children were: Harold (b. 1911);^[3155] Marian (b. 1913);^[3155] Edward (b. 30 Dec 1915; d. 2 Apr 1919);^[3156] John Raymond (b. 10 July 1917; d. 6 May 1918).^[3157] Entries in the Social Security Death Index^[3158] give dates of birth and death for each of the three surviving children: Evelyn, b. 18 Sep 1909 and d. 11 May 1994; Harold Vornkahl, b. 3 Oct 1911 and d. Jan 1971; and Marian, b. 26 June 1913 and d. Aug 1968.

Marie Vornkahl. After being recorded in the 1870 U.S. census as Mary, age 1 year,^[3144] she is not listed with the family in the 1880 census. In the probate records following her father's death in 1879, she is named among the survivors.^[3146] After her mother's death in 1918, she is included in the obituary and in the probate records as Marie Johnson. Her residence is given in the obituary as California, Missouri, located in Moniteau County. The 1920 census for this county records a John B.S. and Marie A.B. Johnson living in rural Walker township with their two children, Roy E. and Ida May.^[3159] The earlier 1900 census gives her date of birth as Aug 1869 and that of her husband as Mar 1872.^[3160] In 1900, they were living in Webster Groves, Missouri, near St. Louis and had two children, Roy Edgar (b. Jan 1896) and Ida May (b. Jul 1898).^[3160]

John H.C. Vornkahl. Born 26 Jun 1870 in Carlinville.^[3161] In 1900 he was working on the farm of his cousin, Henry Schlicht.^[3162] A Kansas State census taken in 1915 lists John and Emma Vornkahl living in Goodland, Kansas,^[3163] however their ages (50 and 43, respectively) do not correlate well with their birthdates. Emma's full name and date of birth are revealed in the California Death Index, 1940-1997, to be Mary Emma Fiechter (b. 27 Feb 1873; d. 13 Aug 1954).^[3164] In 1930, the couple was living in Santa Paula (Ventura County), California, where John's occupation was listed as "box-man, citrus warehouse."^[3165] His death on 8 Dec 1943 is recorded in the State of California Death Index.^[3161]

Augusta Vornkahl. Born Aug 1872 in Carlinville.^[3147] In several documents,^[3142,3166,3167] she is found with the name Augusta Acton. She was married to E.D. Acton in Pueblo, Colorado, on 17 Oct 1901.^[3168] In 1920, she lived in Springfield, Illinois, with husband Ernest L. Acton, a carpenter, and son Harold B. Acton, age 19.^[3169]

William F. Vornkahl. 1875 – 1900.^[3170]

Julius C. Vornkahl. 1877 – 1878.^[3170]

Bernhard Emil Vornkahl. Born 14 Mar 1879^[3167] after the death of his father in a coal mining accident. He remained in Carlinville while his mother was living. He registered in September, 1918, for the World War I draft.^[3167] By 1920, he was living in Gardena, Los Angeles County, California, was single and worked in a greenhouse.^[3171] On 24 Dec 1924 in Los Angeles, California, he married Sarah Keller Winchel. He was forty-five years old and his new wife, from Denver, Colorado, was thirty-eight years old.^[3172]

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