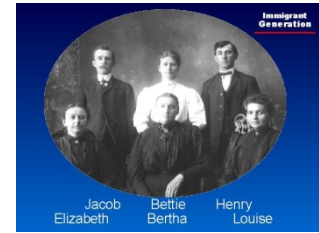


Henry and Perseda Zeisset

By Paul Zeisset, July 30, 2016

My grandfather Henry was the youngest of the 6 siblings. Their mother died in childbirth when Henry was just 3 and his father died when he was 6.



When they became orphans, their Uncle Johannes and Aunt Elisabetha took in Henry and his sister Bettie. They lived at Niedersteinach, the farm displayed in this painting.



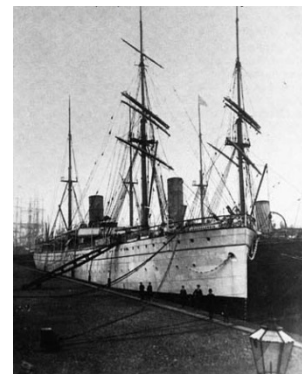
Within a few years, all of the older siblings had resettled to Kansas, and plans were made for Henry to join them after he finished school at fourteen years of age and after his confirmation at the church in Orlach. This photo of Henry's confirmation class is the only picture we have of him in Germany. (Henry is the one standing to the right of the teacher.)



Henry's departure for America was delayed an extra year by a cholera outbreak. That may have been a particular concern because, at age 15 and an orphan, he could have been conscripted into the army.

By the time he left, Henry's older sisters Louise, Bertha and Lizzie were all married, with families of their own. It was agreed that Bertha and her husband Juergen Nanninga would pay Henry's \$88 passage fare and that he, in payment, would work for Juergen for a year. Using the Consumer Price Index to compare the value of the dollar in 1893 to the value of the dollar in 2016, the \$88 fare would be over \$2200 now! Henry said goodbye to his Uncle Johannes and Aunt Elisabetha and his cousins on the 22nd of March, 1893, leaving on the train for Bremen.

Two days later, Henry boarded the ship Braunschweig for departure from Bremen to New York City on the 28th of March. Unlike his brother and sisters, Henry traveled in the cabin section of the ship, rather than in steerage, thanks to the \$88 the Nanningas had provided. He was able to take three pieces of luggage with him, whereas his siblings had, at best, only one piece of luggage each. Henry arrived in New York City two weeks later. He was the only one of the Zeisset brothers and sisters to enter America through Ellis Island, as it had opened to immigrants only in 1892. The earlier ones had also come through NYC, but through the earlier port of entry, Castle Garden. As a cabin passenger, Henry was able to forego the inspection process at Ellis Island after a brief onboard inspection.



From New York City, Henry took a train to Chicago, then to Kansas and Riley (which Henry thought was pronounced “Ree-lye”). At long last Henry was reunited with his brother and four sisters.

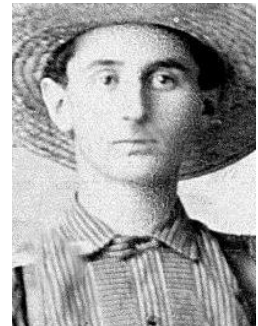
Coming to Leonardville

Upon arrival, Henry made his home with his sister Bertha's family, though, fortunately, only oldest 4 of the children had been born by the time Henry arrived. The Juergen and Bertha Nanninga family lived on the place we now associate with Merlin and Marlaine Potts. That house was extended over the years, but when Henry arrived, it was still just two rooms and loft overhead, housing 7 people. The roof of the house was not fully weather-tight, so when it snowed with wind, snow might come in to cover sleeping children.



Schooling

Henry was 15 when he arrived and had completed the eighth grade. He attended Fairview School here for three months the first winter, especially to learn English, but the time was not especially fruitful because it was a one-room school with all eight grades, and Henry felt the teacher treated him like a first grader, given his limited English.



Work as a farm laborer

I clipped that image from a larger photo of Henry with Lou Hoerman. Just what the occasion was, or why they were posing in work duds, we don't know.

Henry worked for the Juergen Nanningas a year to repay the \$88 and then, over the next 12 years, he worked for several other farmers. He enjoyed most of the people he worked for, but his first employer, a family named Russell, didn't provide him enough food. Henry was expected to work hard and he likely had a good appetite. Henry told the story of being so hungry he began to eat raw eggs that he found in the manger in the barn. Imagine being that hungry! One day he ate seven raw eggs and gagged, and that was the end of swiping eggs. He stayed at that farm only one year.



Henry with Lou Hoerman

Later, when Henry was working for Dick Meyer he was given more responsibility and eventually managed 100 head of cattle on his own at another farm. He told my father that that experience contributed a lot to his sense of responsibility and trust.

As a farm laborer, Henry got Sunday's off. Henry rode a horse to the Evangelical Church in Leonardville. He usually spent the day with the Nanningas, the Wellers, or the Hoermans, returning to his employer's place after the evening service.



During the years of working for these farmers, Henry had no permanent place to keep his things, such as winter clothes in the summer. He had things at each of several homes, especially Wellers; though it probably depended on where he worked. Lillian Carlson, one of the Weller children, said she and her sister Minnie liked to play with her Uncle Henry's neckties when he wasn't around.

Farming for himself

After 13 years as a farm laborer, at the age of 28, Henry decided he could begin to farm for himself, so he rented a farm in 1906. By the next year, he figured that he was \$900 ahead of where he'd been if he had continued to work for another farmer. Perhaps that made him think that if he could have another year like that, he could afford to marry.

Marriage to Perseda Schreiber



Henry and Perseda, 1908

We don't know exactly when Henry began taking an interest in Perseda Schreiber. Starting in 1905, Perseda was employed as a clerk in the Sikes store, in a frame building on the corner where the s/stone building now stands. There were many German people in the community and Perseda was the only clerk fluent in German, so she was the favorite of many patrons on that account.

Perseda's father, the Rev. Johann Friedrich Schreiber, had been a preacher in the German-speaking Evangelical Church. He had immigrated from Germany with his parents and had grown up in Illinois. We know of no special education that he had in preparation for the ministry—probably just the eight grades. Iowa was new territory for the Evangelical Association, and he was sent to serve a circuit in a big territory. He had a horse and maybe a buggy but no parsonage. He stayed with people of the churches he served. One of the families he stayed with was that of Benjamin



Fisher in Lisbon, Iowa, and in time the young preacher returned to marry Maria Fisher, one of Benjamin's daughters. Across the next 35 years, my great-grandfather served pastorates in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas.

In 1881, while serving as a pastor at Swede Creek, my great-grandfather bought a farm near Leonardville, the same farm where my father grew up. There was no house on the land when it was purchased, so my great-grandfather had a small 16' x 24' house built. That would have been only the right end of the house shown here, and before the second story was added. While my great-grandfather continued preaching elsewhere, his eldest son and his family lived in the house. Then, in 1895, Great-Grandpa Schreiber retired and moved his family, including 17-year-old Perseda and the other two children still at home, from Cosby, Missouri, to Leonardville. He lived in that house less than a year before he died. Perseda, her mother and two of her brothers continued to live on the farm until 1905, when they rented out the farm and moved into Leonardville, to a house directly across the road south of what is now the Leonardville United Methodist Church.



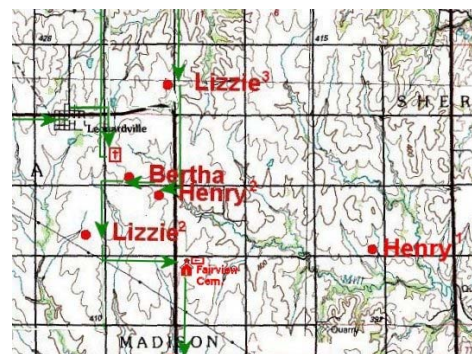
Marriage

Perseda and Henry would have met at church already in 1895, but they didn't keep company very long before their marriage on February 20, 1908. Their marriage took place in Perseda's mother's Leonardville home.



Grandview home

Henry and Perseda's first home was in the Grandview neighborhood 3 miles east of Fairview Church, where Henry had begun farming for himself in March of 1906. The home was in the same section with the Grandview Methodist Church and only two miles from the Mill Creek Evangelical Church, but they did not consider any place other than the Leonardville church where other family members worshiped. They were regularly in the Schreiber home for Sunday dinner and maybe stopped at Nanninga's on the way home.



The farm Perseda's father had bought, and where Perseda lived 1895 to 1905, opened to new renters in 1909, and Henry and Perseda moved there in March of

1909. My father was born there the following November, and my Aunt Carol was born there two years later.

Perseda's operation

Perseda was not fully well all through my dad's childhood. In 1918, a Dr. Carlson came to Leonardville briefly, and while their regular doctor had never found what was wrong, Dr. Carlson quickly concluded that Perseda had chronic appendicitis. He scheduled the appendectomy surgery to be performed in their home in March of 1918.



Henry, Merton, Carol, and Perseda, 1920

Dr. Carlson made all the arrangements. He hired a nurse who was with the family two weeks at \$28 a week. He told Henry and Perseda just how to prepare. Sheets were torn into strips and boiled in a copper boiler on the kitchen range for sterilizing, then made into pads as the doctor prescribed. The surgery was performed in the living room. Perseda did require another surgery 6 years later, perhaps a hysterectomy. Perseda continued to have a few health problems, but after the surgeries she was much improved. She gained some weight. She had never weighed as much as 100 pounds before. And then she lived to be 90 years old.

Farming

Kansas Agricultural Census Data—Henry Zeisset Farm

	1915	1925
Acres cultivated	160	160
Corn, acres	70	65
Oats, acres		13
Potatoes, acres	1/4	1/4
Wheat, acres	20	14
Prairie hay, acres		10
Bushels of corn on hand		900
Tons of hay cut	16	
Pounds of butter churned	100	
Dollars of dairy product sold		129
Dollars of poultry/eggs sold	230	300
Horses	8	6
Milk cows	4	2
Other cattle	7	19
swine		8
dogs	1	1
hens		120

Loretta compiled these figures about the farm from the state agricultural censuses of 1915 and 1925. Henry and Perseda were renters on the farm until they were able to buy it, with a loan, from the other heirs in September, 1916. But it was 1943 before the farm was fully paid for. They made reasonable progress from 1916 to 1930, but then the low farm prices and the dry years of the early 1930s brought real hard times to the farm. Better crops in the late '30's and higher prices in World War II helped them pay off the loan.

Modernizing the house

In 1927, Henry and Perseda decided to modernize their house. From my dad's notes, one could tell that this was a project of endless fascination for him. He had just finished high school and probably contributed significant labor to the project.



The modernization started with building a new cistern to store rainwater—soft water. The brick for the new cistern came to Leonardville by train, and my dad hauled it on a wagon with a team of leftover horses--left after Grandpa took the best 4 for field work.

They drilled a new well and installed two pumps--one for cistern water and one for well water—to be powered by a new Aermoter windmill.



They installed water tanks in the attic and another tank in the kitchen that had a metal box built into it, which kept food cool when the water ran past it. This was 1927 and rural electrification did not come until 1943.

They dug a new cesspool. The back porch was enlarged and a room was added to accommodate a washing machine and cream separator, as well as coats and overshoes.

Water in the house meant easier baths. Some of the Nanninga girls regularly walked the quarter-mile to their Uncle Henry's house to enjoy the bathtub.

My dad thought the expenditure for this modernization was surprisingly much for a farm still \$6000 in debt. Henry and Perseda were always very saving. They put off having an automobile until 1920, long after many of their neighbors had cars. But they saw the importance of having the improvements Perseda needed because of her frail health. Henry had bought a Maytag washing machine with a gasoline engine in 1918 when Perseda was particularly frail, and in 1927 they

installed indoor plumbing. My father said they were the first in the community not to have to use an outdoor toilet.

The nest empties



Since my dad stayed at home for three years after he finished high school, they began renting and farming additional land. Unfortunately, it was in times of poor crops and low prices.

In 1930, when my dad decided to leave home and study for the ministry, the rentals were cut back.

The nest emptied completely when my Aunt Carol married Raymond Benninga in June of 1938. While Henry no longer had a son to help with the farm work, he had a son-in-law. That is how he got along without ever buying a tractor or the equipment that would have been needed with it. Raymond had a tractor, while Henry had farmed only with horses and never had to make the switch to a tractor for himself.



In the aftermath of the dust bowl, the government offered good payments for terracing and contour farming. Henry hired Raymond to do some of the work. Later he rented part of the land to Raymond; finally all of it. While still farming, he was easing himself out of a job.



Henry and Perseda, 1955

Old Age

Social Security was coming in, and Henry and Perseda saw its importance to them. The minimum requirement was to farm six quarters of a year and pay a Social Security tax on the income. The minimum Social Security payment that this brought was small by today's standards, and then after Henry's death, Perseda received only two-thirds. Still, from 1958 to 1969 there was never less than \$52 in the monthly check. It helped; and the plan was opened to farmers only in the "nick of time" as far as my grandparents were concerned.

Henry had been very ill in the spring of 1957, and had a high fever. Perseda did not think he'd come back from the hospital alive. Modern medicines brought him through physically, but it was soon evident that he was not his full self any more mentally.



The following year they marked their 50th wedding anniversary in February.

Then they decided to move to town. They didn't consult their children or a realtor, thinking they could save a realtor's fee. They sold the farm to Donald Lund for \$24,000, a nice profit, they thought. True, but a realtor would have realized better how property values were rising. They sold livestock, grain, and a few implements without a big auction, and then gave away small items to a variety of friends. Raymond and Merton each took a few tools; some items were just left for the new buyer to use or throw away.

Henry's Decline

Henry and Perseda paid \$9,000 for a little house at 303 E. Chase in Leonardville, a house my dad said was made from the old Monitor school building. The house was just across the street from the church. But it didn't work out; Henry was too ill. We don't know that he suffered from Alzheimers', but he had several of those characteristics.



Life in town was not pleasant. Henry was too confused to ever recognize the new place as home and he had to be restrained. Perseda had been the submissive one through the years, the one in poorer health; now she had to become the assertive one, taking over business management as well as managing her husband. Her granddaughter Norma Benninga provided some help, and my Aunt Carol lived only three miles away; otherwise my grandmother could not have managed.



Henry and Perseda, 1958, 50th anniversary

Henry's decline was fairly rapid. In October of 1960, Merton and Carol took him to the Jolly Nursing Home in Manhattan, but he couldn't stay there because he'd walk away. Then they located a nursing home in Junction City that had a fence around it. He lived there until his death, January 23, 1961, at the age of 83.

Perseda Alone

Perseda had very little will to live after Henry was gone. My dad hoped that with the relief of responsibility for Henry, she'd "bounce back", but she never did. She very much wanted to die right away. Starting in 1961, while we lived at Jewell, my grandmother lived with us during the school year, and with Carol in the summers, and that arrangement continued for the next 5 years.



Starting in 1966, Perseda lived a year and a half in Goldie Martin's rest home in Concordia. When the Leonardville Nursing Home opened up, she was the first patient to move in, and was happy to be there for the next year and a half.

My father's last visit with her was up to 5 pm on the day she died. She was able to visit freely, but it was apparent she was declining fast, and she was gone within a few hours. She had reached the age of 90, and when she died, in 1969, making it to 90 was less common than it is today.

Tribute

My father wrote that he felt he had very good parents. He felt loved and supported, and thought he received a lot of important values. And they were faithful supporters of the church, in attendance, in finances, and in their prayers.

