

Biography of Henry Gruesen and Barbara Alt

The Gruesen family comes from the Mosel River area around Eller/Ediger and Senheim, known for its vineyards. The earliest written record of the Gruesen family is contained in a membership list of the "Rosenkranz Bruderschaft" of the Catholic Church in Ediger/Eller on the Mosel on November 22, 1620. It lists:

*Franciscus Grössen et uxor Catharina Gerlachs.
Margareta Grössen et Joannes Grössen p(ro)les*

Franciscus Grössen et uxor (wife) Catherine Gerlachs
Margareta Grössen et Joannes Grössen p(ro)les (children)

Franz Grüssen was a long time counselor in Ediger and represented the district of Zell at the Parliament in Trier in 1623 and 1625.

The next record is in Senheim of the marriage on February 11, 1631 of "Joannes Grüssen of Edinger, Franciscus Grüssen's son and Nicolas Hirschen's daughter Margretha". The Hirschen's house still stands in Senheim.

After many generations in the Senheim area, Henry's grandfather Nicholas relocated to Koblenz, possibly as a result of the wars with France around 1800. He later married Maria Höhnen who had been born near Senheim in Lutzerath. It is unknown how she got to Koblenz, and may have been married earlier, since she was 27 at her marriage to Nicholas in Koblenz.

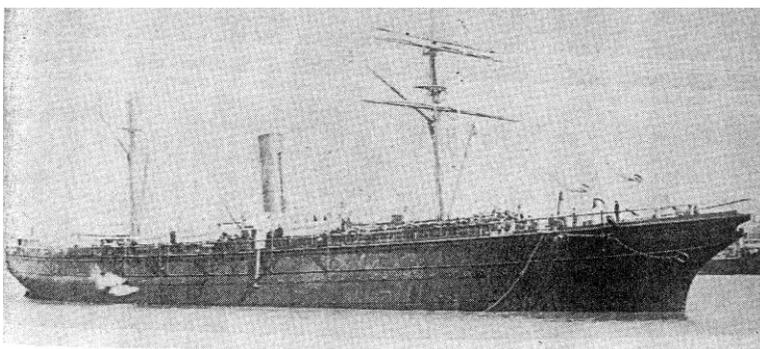
Nicholas's son Carl, baptized February 2, 1809, married on February 10, 1852 to Elizabeth Cappellen of Osterspai.

10. *Decima Febr. 52 praevis & proclamata Car. Fried. Grüssen dotarius
parochus ad D. Elis. Cappellen ex Osterspai parochus ad S. Cap. coram facelle
Schauffler matrum. uisere prof. testibus Joh. Bergers & Edu. Bentzsch* | Grüssen
8
Cappellen

Henry Gruesen, was born in Koblenz to Carl and Elizabeth on April 6, 1858 as the fourth child, but he was the first to survive past childhood

13. *Quinta Aprilis 58 natus et antea ex eo unatus est Henricus, Caroli
Fruementi Grüssen et Elisabeth Cappellen coniugum filius, exente Henrico
Cappellen, solato ex Osterspai.*

He immigrated to the US in 1881 on the "Main" arriving in New York on October 22, probably following the example of his father's cousins the Hennens (Höhnen), who had come to



S.S. MAIN, 1868 North German Lloyd
Courtesy The Peabody Museum of Salem

Wisconsin in the 1850's. He apparently carried a letter written by Joseph Hennen in March 1853 to his uncle, Henry's grandfather, in Germany telling how good things were in Wisconsin, which obviously influenced Henry's

decision to immigrate (as maybe did the impending war with France). The letter began:

"Dear uncle, cousin Karl and sweetheart,

I must write to you how things have turned out with us. We come luckily to New York the 17th of July [1851]. We stayed there only two days, because there is nothing but thieves there."

It then described how they got to Wisconsin and their life there and how it was better than in Germany, writing:

"Here, I can already see that a free America does not cost as much as in Germany, where so many thousand salaried people are. The tax collector here doesn't need so many dogs as in Germany."

Karl and his "sweetheart" (Henry's parents) were married February 10, 1852, before this letter was written, but the writer would not have known that.

According to a note Henry's son Anthony wrote many years later:

"Henry went to Mt. Calvary, Wis (near Fondulac, Wis) & stayed with his uncle John Hennen until fall of 1882. Took old Wis Central R.R. (wood burner) to go to Ashland but got off at Phillips, Wis & worked for farmer until spring of 1883 when he went on to Ashland & from there a boat to Duluth, where he arrived May 19, 1883."

(Records of Wisconsin in 1874 show that John Hennen owned land 1 mile east of Mt Calvary.)

Henry's wife-to-be, Barbara Alt, was born in Rhens on the Rhine and near Osterspai where Henry's mother was born. Barbara immigrated in 1885, arriving in New York on July 1 aboard the "Westernland" accompanied by Henry's 21-year old sister Mary. Prior to this, Barbara had been working, apparently as the children's tutor, for a professor at the Louvain University in Belgium named F. Roderburg. She appeared first in the Duluth directory in the 1886-1887 edition as a "domestic" at 1325 E Superior, while Mary Gruesen was the same nearby at 1432 E Superior. The next year, Mary Gruesen was at 1325 E Superior, and about 1888, she married John Helmer who was later the president of the Cuyuna-Duluth Iron Company. (In 1887, there are 4 other Alt's in Duluth, but no relationship is known.)

Another of Henry's sisters, Margaret, first appeared in the Duluth city directory in 1888 as Miss Maggie, a laundress who lived at the rear of 120 3rd Street with Henry. She married Gustav Collatz in August 1893, had a child in July 1894, and died in childbirth of her second child in August 1895. One item that is hard to explain is that she was recorded as having purchased 160 acres from the US government on March 19, 1894 under the name Maggie Gruesen. (That land is in the middle of what is now the Mesabi Iron Range mines.)

Two of Henry's brothers, Jacob and Karl, also came to Duluth. Jacob immigrated in 1885 and became a successful watchmaker and jeweler. Karl, after being released from the Prussian army and his citizenship in 1887, immigrated in 1888, and first worked for and lived with his brother Henry. He was not listed in the city directory for 1890-1891, leading to the speculation that he was also at the homestead with Henry and Barbara. Carl was committed to the State mental hospital in St Peter in early 1892 where he died in 1936. It seems that his grandnieces knew nothing of his existence.

Henry and his two sisters and two brothers who immigrated to Duluth had three older siblings who all died in Koblenz very young and their mother and father died in Koblenz in July 1884 and January 1886, respectively.

Henry first appeared in the Duluth City Directory in the 1883-1884 edition as a laborer for Willis Peck, a lumber manufacturer, then a porter at the Merchants Hotel, and a bartender at Michael Finks saloon where he also lived. He wasn't listed in 1886 but reappeared in 1887 as a newsdealer and the following two years was listed with a large entry:

Gruesen, Henry: Stamp Clerk P.O., P.O. Newsstand, subscription agency and free delivery of Chicago, St Paul and Minneapolis Papers, Orders taken for all kinds of rubber stamps, etc. res rear 120 W 3d (see ad opposite)

Henry and Barbara were married July 10, 1886 and Anthony was born April 11, 1887. An interesting fact is that, on March 18 and May 20, 1887, Henry agreed to purchase, and then did purchase, his first parcel of property in Duluth, Lots 178 & 180 in Block 98, from Remi and Louisa Belleperche, whose daughter Jennie was born a few weeks after Anthony on April 24. Twenty-six years later, Anthony and Jennie would marry.



Henry and Barbara were not listed in the 1890-1891 edition of the Duluth city directory, apparently being the time in which they homesteaded and the family lived in a log cabin (when Anthony was about 3 years old). There are two records of land being granted to Henry as follows. The timing makes it seem more likely that the homestead was at the first of these two.

- 19 September 1889, NE 1/4 of SE 1/4 of Section 33 and NW 1/4 of SE 1/4 and W half of NW 1/4 of Section 34 in Township 63 N, Range 19 West in 4th Principle Meridian containing 160 acres (This is a half mile off Highway 53, 30 miles NW of Virginia, MN.)
- 9 November 1891, N half of NW 1/4 of Section 11 in Township 62 North of Range 14 West of the 4th Principle Meridian containing 80 acres

They returned to Duluth after this attempt at homesteading and Henry was again listed in the 1891-1892 directory as a carpenter living at 415 6th Ave W, the same as in 1889-1890. In succeeding years he was a conductor on the railway, porter at the Wells Stone Mercantile, and finally in 1895, again a clerk at the post office, where he would remain. In 1892-93 he resided at 823 W Superior and in 1893-1896 he was at 1112 W 3rd. The family eventually lived in a large house at 1325 London Rd., one block downhill from where Barbara had been a domestic in

1886. When Henry and Barbara died in 1928 and 1933, the house passed to his son Joseph and then to his grandson Thomas and was eventually torn down to build a Perkins.

Henry and Barbara had six children. One, Agnes, died before her 1st birthday. The others all lived into their late 60's, 70's and 80's, each raising a family, except for Mary Margaret who became a nun.

Some of the family made trips back to visit in Germany. On one such trip, Barbara Gruesen returned to New York on September 12, 1908 after a visit to her brother Anton Alt in Rhens. She was accompanied on the return by her niece Catherine Kadenbach age 20.

Henry's obituary reported that he was a stamp clerk from 1886 until his retirement on April 3, 1923 and a Duluth resident since 1882. He was chief stamp clerk at the time of his retirement and an authority on stamps. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Order of Foresters.

Another line of the Gruesen family came to America and settled in Texas. It began with Peter J. Gruesen, a fourth cousin of Henry Gruesen, who arrived in New York on April 19, 1873, listing his occupation as carpenter, the same as Henry did 8 years later. Peter settled in Texas. His descendents today include Nathaniel Gruesen of Seabrook, Texas, born in 1962. This family pronounces the name as Grēsen with a long "e". In the 1960's, Anthony traveled from Minnesota to Texas to visit his 5th cousin, so there must have been some contact between the families for many years.



1911, Back row: Mary, Henry Jr, Joseph, Anthony
Front row: Barbara, Frank, Henry

Sources:

Records of Ediger-Eller Church

Records of Senheim Church

Land records of St Louis County

Minnesota Census 1885-1930

Duluth and Minnesota Marriage, Birth, and Death records

Duluth City Directory

Land Grants

Peabody Salem Museum (now Peabody Essex Museum)

Ellis Island Immigration Records

Letter written March 1853 Joseph Hennen to Carl Gruesen

Recollections of Anthony Gruesen

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