Johann, Henry, and Otto: All Names For One and One For All? Finding the True Identity of Otto Krieger

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According to family legend, Otto Krieger, former Bürgermeister (mayor), and a classmate of the Kaiser, smuggled his sons one by one out of Germany. He then followed them with his wife and daughter to Hamilton, Butler County, Ohio, before traveling on to Kansas. A family record chart provided extensive details with birth and marriage dates, wives, children, and grandchildren. The family charts even identified the former residence in Germany as Bad Wildungen. The Kriegers were identified as Lutheran.¹ There was one big problem: No Otto Krieger lived in Butler County, Ohio, from 1850 to 1870.

Henry Krieger in Butler County, Ohio

No Otto Krieger appeared in the 1850, 1860, or 1870 censuses. The researcher could not find reference to him in land and probate records, Lutheran Church records, city directories, county histories, cemetery records, or death records for Butler County during the same time period. The search for Otto expanded to include any Kriegers living in the Hamilton area of Butler County, with special emphasis on those with the given names of Otto’s known sons: Conrad, Henry, Carl, Adam, Lewis, and Andrew. A Henry Krieger (spelled various ways) emerged as a probable match for Otto. Could he indeed have been the same person as Otto Krieger?

- Henry, 59; his wife, A. Mary, 40; a son Andrew, 13; and a future daughter-in-law Anna Maria Stein (also Otto Krieger’s daughter-in-law) all emigrated together from Darmstadt (Hesse, also known as Hessen-Darmstadt), and arrived at New York on 12 June 1857. Their recorded ages agreed with birth records from the

family and 1860 census information, but not with immigration information from family charts.  

- A Henry Krieger, 63, appeared in the 1860 census of Hamilton with Mary, 42, and Andrew, 17. All three were born in Germany. These names and ages matched information about Otto and his family gleaned from family records.

- Further searching for Otto under the name of Henry and for his children unearthed various land records in the same area of Butler County for the correct time period for him and for his wife, Mary, and for Otto’s son, Henry.

- There were entries in the Williams’ Hamilton Directory, City Guide and Business Mirror, 1858, that showed Henry Krieger and men with the names of two of Otto’s sons, Henry and Carl. All lived in close proximity and worked as coopers.

- The married children of Otto, Karl Krieger and Mary Feyh appeared in census records in 1860 in the same area of the county as Henry.

- In the probate of the estate of Henry Krieger, Mary (name of Otto’s wife) appeared paying taxes on their property. Carl (name of Otto’s son) appeared as administrator. George Feyh (name of Otto’s son-in-law) appeared on receipts. No relationships were stated.

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9 Henry Krieger Estate Packet, Butler County estate file # 02838, Butler County Records Office, Hamilton, Ohio.
These records all show a probable connection of Henry to the known sons, daughter, and wife of Otto Krieger. The researcher found no contradictions to the family records except on the dates and order of immigration. The preponderance of records suggesting a connection, and the lack of documented contradictions showed that Henry and Otto were probably the same person.

**Johann Krieger in Butler County, Ohio**

The extracted church records for the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hamilton, Ohio, gave the most useful clue, but added a further complication.

- Church records showed a Johann Krieger born 19 December 1797 in Heimbach, Hesse-Darmstadt, and dying 7 December 1864. The exact birth date given for Otto Krieger in the family records was 19 December 1797.\(^\text{10}\)

- Germans often use Johann as a baptismal name. But now Otto had an additional name.

- None of Otto’s children received the name of Johann, which was inconsistent with naming patterns for Hessen. However, Otto named one of his sons Henry.

- Further perusal of the church records revealed births and deaths of what appeared to be Otto’s grandchildren because Otto’s children were listed as their parents.\(^\text{11}\)

- Family information identified the Kriegers as Lutherans, and their appearance in the Zion Church records supported that fact.

  Birth date, religion, and names of wives, children, and grandchildren of Johann Krieger and Henry Krieger all matched those of Otto Krieger. Naming customs and patterns might explain the use of multiple names.

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\(^{10}\) Hazel Stroup, comp., *Butler County Cemetery and Church Records* (Cincinnati: R.D. Craig, 1980).

\(^{11}\) Ibid. 10, 34.
Henry Krieger in Cemetery Records in Butler County, Ohio

The cemetery records in Hamilton, Ohio, for Greenwood Cemetery documented the death of Henry Krieger, 68, buried 9 December 1864.12

- The church death record for Johann Krieger stated that he died two days before this burial.13

- The probate for the estate of Henry Krieger was dated 2 January 1864, but, since the dates for funeral and medical expenses postdated that event by several months, the researcher assumed that the recorder made an error in writing the year when switching to the new year and meant 2 January 1865.14

- The cemetery record lists Henry Krieger as the owner of the plot in which he and Ann Maria, the name of his wife and of the wife of Otto Krieger were buried.15,16

- The birth date calculated from the age at burial for Henry Krieger matched the birth date of Otto Krieger.17

This chain of interrelated evidence and abundance of supporting documents provided evidence that Johann, Henry, and Otto were the same person. The definitive answer would lie in Germany.

Searching for Otto, Henry, and Johann Krieger in Germany

A search of possible birth places for Otto Krieger in Germany led to Hainbach, Alsfeld, Oberhessen, Hessen, Germany, because its spelling resembles Heimbach, the place of birth listed in the Zions Lutheran Church records for Johann Krieger, and because it was located in Hessen.

13 Stroup, Butler County Cemetery and Church Records, 10.
14 Henry Krieger Estate Packet # 02838, Butler County Record Office.
15 Henry Krieger Cemetery Record #2421, Greenwood Cemetery, Hamilton, Butler, Ohio.
17 Henry Krieger Cemetery Record #2421, Greenwood Cemetery, Hamilton, Butler, Ohio.
• Hainbach, located in Hessen in the area of Bad Wildungen, was named as the hometown for the Kriegers in the family records. Previous correspondence showed that no Kriegers had ever lived in Bad Wildungen.

• The parish for Hainbach was Nieder Gemunden.

• Nieder Gemunden, Alsfeld, Oberhessen, Hessen, Germany, church records contained many Kriegers in the indexes. Some nearly matched data for Johann, Henry, or Otto Krieger. The ones with closest birthdates were eliminated through death records.

• An exact birth date search revealed the birth of a son to Catharina Musch on 19 December 1797. The witness was Johann Heinrich Musch. Alexander Krieger claimed parentage. No first name was given for the child.18

• In this area of Hessen, parents name the child after the witness. Therefore, this was the birth record for Johann Heinrich Krieger born the exact date stated in family records and in the Lutheran Church records in Hamilton, Ohio.

• The marriage records of Johann Heinrich Krieger, son of Alexander Krieger and Catharina Musch; and Johann Heinrich Krieger, son of Alexander Krieger and Anna Maria Musch, second wife, were found in Ermenrod, a small village close to Hainbach with records in the same parish of Nieder Gemunden. Johann Heinrich Krieger’s age at marriage gave him a calculated birth date of 1797.1920

• Further research showed the children of Johann Heinrich Krieger being born in Ermenrod, Hessen, Germany. They were the same children as those attributed to Otto

18 Johann Heinrich Krieger’s Baptismal Record, Evangelische Kirche Nieder Gemunden, Kirchenbuch, 1619–1908, Baptisms 1660–1807, 6, FHL# 1195773.
20 Johann Heinrich Krieger-Anna Maria Musch Marriage Record, 14 May 1843, Evangelische Kirche Nieder Gemunden, Kirchenbuch 1619–1908, Marriages, 1660–1807, FHL# 1195714, 133.
Krieger with two additions and the exception of the second child, Conrad. Some of the
dates of birth were not exact, but close. Johann Heinrich Krieger and either Catharina
Musch or Anna Maria Musch were named as the parents of all of the children. Otto’s
(Johann Heinrich’s) son, Henry Krieger, was born Johann Heinrich Krieger.\textsuperscript{21}

- Johann Heinrich Krieger’s brother, born 7 September 1799 in Hainbach, was also named
  Johann Heinrich Krieger. This information came from the marriage records of Johann
  Heinrich Krieger (b.1797), which identified his brother, Johann Heinrich Krieger
  (b.1799), as a witness and stated that he was his brother.\textsuperscript{22,23}

- In Hessen, families sometimes gave children the same given name, especially if the first
  child died or was illegitimate.

Conclusions

The preponderance of interrelated data collected from various records while following
Otto Krieger from Ohio to Germany and through three given names, proved that he was the same
person as Johann Heinrich Krieger in Germany and Johann Krieger and Henry Krieger in Ohio.
He was the husband of Catharina Musch and Anna Maria Musch, who usually appeared as Mary,
A. Mary, or Ann Maria in the Ohio records. He was the father of eight children, six from his
first marriage and two from his second marriage. Two children died in Germany and six
emigrated to Ohio. Family records named and documented all six children. There were no
conflicts except with family tradition, clerical errors, and inexact birthdates.

Here are some probable explanations to some of the remaining puzzles. Johann Heinrich
Krieger was called Otto in family records, but on no official documents. Johann Heinrich Krieger
probably used the nickname, Otto, to distinguish himself from his brother of the same name. Otto
was a \textit{Bürger} (citizen), not a \textit{Bürgermeister} (mayor) and probably had never met the Kaiser, but

\textsuperscript{22} Johann Heinrich Krieger-Catharina Musch Marriage Record, 4 Mar 1828.
\textsuperscript{23} Johann Heinrich Krieger-Anna Maria Musch Marriage Record, 14 May 1843.
was nicknamed after him. The Kriegers likely named Bad Wildungen as their home because it was the closest town of any size to Hainbach and Ermenrod.

Family records, although incomplete and exaggerated, provide the researcher with needed information to begin the quest for the identity of Otto Krieger. The problem was resolved by evaluating the information collected along the way in light of the family records and coming to a well-documented conclusion.

**Continuing Research**

The ancestors of the Kriegers and Musches should be easy to locate because of the abundance of available microfilmed parish records for the area of Ermenrod and Hainbach. Future research goals include finding the baptismal records for and relationship between Johann Heinrich Krieger’s wives, Anna Maria and Catharina Musch. The baptismal record for his son Conrad must be found. The search for the birth date and birthplace of Anna Maria Stein, daughter-in-law of Johann Heinrich Krieger, will begin in Ermenrod and the neighboring villages. An understanding of the culture and history of the Ermenrod region will broaden the understanding of the Krieger family’s German roots. The study and documentation of the entire Krieger line should be fruitful, but will require extensive research.