

The Michael and Catherine Weishan Tragedy

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We all know about the people who came to Town of Franklin, Sauk County and thrived, leaving generations of descendants to carry on their name and legacy. But what about those whose flame died out too soon and have been lost in the rubble of history?¹ In a recent issue of this newsletter, Debbie Blau told the story of John Wachter after whom the main street of Plain -Wachter Avenue – is named. The story gave life to a mystery person in the history of Plain and Town of Franklin.

Michael and John Weishan

Michael Weishan is also an early pioneer of the area. His story had been lost due to an accident of history – his untimely death in the Civil War, which left his family destitute. Michael emigrated from Germany in late 1852, arriving in New York on 10 Jan 1853 from Bremen, Germany. At age 32, he traveled alone on the ship *Johanne*.²

Michael's brother, John, had emigrated in 1847³ and obtained 80 acres under a homestead land grant from the Mineral Point Land Office. In 1855, John sold half of the 80 acres to Michael. The location of their lands are shown on 1859 plat map⁴ below. That same year Michael married Catherine (Eva



Catherina) Reuschlein and began to build their life together on what is now the Allen Kraemer farmer on Butternut Road east of Plain. Catherine was the daughter of Heinrich Joseph Reuschlein and Elizabeth Vath who had emigrated from the state of Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany.⁵

Michael and Catherine Weishan⁶

Over the next ten years Michael and Catherine developed the farm by building a log cabin and barn, clearing land, raising crops and tending farm

animals. The value of real property was reported at \$600 and personal property at \$200 in the 1860 U.S. Census. In 1864, they took out a mortgage for \$320 from Georg Pronold, Jr., to buy another 60 acres (Mortgages, Vol. O, Register of Deeds, Sauk County). By the end of 1864, they had accumulated 140 acres of land, had 15 acres fenced and under cultivation, owned livestock including horses, oxen, calves and sheep and also had a buggy and sleigh, as well as many farm implements and hand tools. The

¹ The "rubble of history" refers to the people, memories, stories and diverse materials which have been forgotten and/or discarded in the official narratives such as county histories and textbooks, which tend to focus mainly on the large events, institutions and people in history.

² Ancestry.com, New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957

³ *A History of Plain, Wisconsin* by Hildegard Thering, page 4

"John Weishan, born February 23, 1823, emigrated from Schonau, Baden, to America on May 23, 1847."

⁴ Michael Weishan homestead on 1859 plat map of Franklin Township

Source: Sauk County Historical Society, Baraboo, WI. Note: The beautiful stone quarry is shown in the wrong location.

⁵ Danielski and Pulvermacher, *The Genealogy and History of the Reuschlein Family*, Vol I & 2, 2006

⁶ Michael and Catherine married on Aug. 19, 1855

Weishans also had four children by this time – Maria, Amelia, Johan and Elizabeth; and Catherine was pregnant with Caroline. Johann died as a child while the girls grew to adulthood.

On November 19, 1864, Michael and his brother, John Weishan, signed up to fight in the Civil War for one year with Company K of the 18th Infantry Regiment of Wisconsin. John came back from the war a year later, but Michael died of chronic diarrhea in Stanton military hospital in Washington DC on May 29, 1865. He is buried in Site 8248 in Arlington Cemetery (Descriptive roll of Company K, 18th Regiment, Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI).

Catherine Weishan was suddenly destitute with five children. Phyllis Dearborn, a former tireless volunteer at the Old Franklin Township Historical Society, found that Catherine had filed for a widow's military pension and obtained the documents, but we have been unable to determine whether Catherine ever received it. Whether she did or not, the pension did not arrive in time to save her and her family from years of separation.

After receiving the news of her husband's death, Catherine requested probate of the estate in August 1865 probably in the hope that the farm assets would be greater than the liabilities. Probate documents from the Sauk County Court show the estate was valued at \$392.70, while debts totaled \$465. In September 1866, the Sauk County Court ordered the real property to be sold at auction in order to pay the debts.

A variety of early settlers around Plain were at the auction in October and bought things – mostly implements and tools but also a wagon, sleigh, and farm animals. The list of items and the buyers are shown in an Appendix available from the author, and include well-known family names such as:⁷

Ignatz Bindl	Joseph Reuschlein	Frank Frank	John B. Hooter
W.G. Alt	Joseph Beck	P. Shriner	Michael Hooter
Berhard Pronold	Jost Volkel	Michael Bindl	A. Beck
Georg Pronold	Ulrich Schoneman	John Weishan	Michael Nachriner
Fred Schonemann	John Cramer	Paul Luther	Henry Bear

Imagine the anguish of Catherine Weishan, who had just lost her husband, as she witnessed each piece of property that had been part of her and her husband's life for the last ten years put on the auction block. Having attended farm auctions as a child in the early 40s, I saw the anguish on the faces of husband and wife who lost their farms, and remember it vividly. The Weishan children most certainly felt it, too.

Even after auctioning off everything she could in the estate, Catherine was in still in debt, had a mortgage on the farm and no means of earning an income. As a result, she was unable to care for her children. One daughter, Elizabeth, was taken in by relatives, Joseph and Sara Reuschlein, in nearby Troy Township. The other daughters, Mary, Caroline and Emelia, became wards of Sauk County for a while, but were later reunited with their mother who remarried to Caspar Briar from Ithaca in Richland County.

Catherine and Casper Briar had several children of their own; Briars live today in the Ithaca area. The 1880 U.S. Census shows the Weishan children were single, Emelia as 21, single and Caroline as 15. Both were living in Ithaca with Caspar and Catherine. We do not know what happened to Mary. The girls do

⁷ Variation of surnames from auction papers: Schonemann/Schoneman (Schoenman), Frank (Franz) Frank, Shriner (Schreiner), Hooter (Hutter), Nachriner (Nachreiner)

not show up in later Richland County census records. The other daughter, Elizabeth, who was raised by Joseph and Sara Reuschlein, married George A. Patterson who lived on a nearby farm in neighboring Troy Township.

Paul and Walburga Kraemer buy the Weishan farm

Paul and Walburga had emigrated from Irlach, Bavaria in May 1866 traveling on ship *Teutonia* with George Pronold, Sr., his son Bernhard Pronold and John Wachter (see December 2014 OFTHS newsletter for his story). Paul and Walburga were living in Fredonia, Ozaukee County near Milwaukee at the time, and probably learned about the farm from the Pronolds. So Paul and Walburga came to Sauk County in May 1867 and bought the farm from the Briars with a mortgage in June 1867. In turn, the Briar’s paid off their mortgage to George Pronold, Jr., who had come to Franklin several years before his father and brother.

Paul Kraemer is the bridge between the old world of Bavaria where the Kraemers originated and the new world of America where the Kraemers of Plain, Town of Franklin have flourished and grown to a large family spread around the United States and the world. The farm that the Kraemers bought was not a 40-acre homestead of wild lands as some have suggested (Clair Geesaman, *A Kraemer Chronicle*, 1985). Over the ten years that the Weishans lived there, they had purchased more land and grown the farm from 40 to 140 acres as shown in the table below.

Inventory of Michael Weishan lands⁸

Acres	Description	Value
40	Forty acres of land known as the homestead farm and being the NW ¼ of NE ¼ of Section 15, town no. 9 North of Range 4 East, fifteen acres fenced and under cultivation.	\$150
40	Forty acres of land known as wild land being the E ¼ of NE ¼ Section No. 15 town 9 North of Range 4 East uncultivated.	\$10
40	Forty acres of land known as wild land and being the NW ¼ of NE ¼ Section 15 Town 9 North of Range 4 East.	\$60
20	Twenty acres of land known as marsh and timber lot being the E ½ of SW ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section No. 10 Town 9 North of Range 4 East.	\$40

And as indicated above, the Weishans had built log structures, cleared land, planted crops and raised livestock. In other words, it had been a working farm although much of it was still wild lands (see descriptions in the table above). The key point is that Paul and Walburga bought a property that was already developed, which they could move into right away, and which they could work during the summer and fall of 1867. They would have to buy some things that had been sold at the Weishan auction and they probably had to repair some parts of the farm right away (e.g., fences, roofs, doors, windows), but they had shelter and could plant summer and fall crops immediately, lay up wood for heating and cooking and mend or make some new clothes.

Over the next thirty five years, Paul Kraemer grew the farm to 280 acres, which he then split between sons Joseph and John. In turn, Joseph sold the farm to Sylvester and today the farm is owned by Sylvester’s youngest son Allen Kraemer. Similarly, John Kraemer sold the farm to Vincent Kraemer whose eldest daughter Evonne lives there today.

⁸ Source: Sauk County Court, In probate In the matter of the estate of Michael Weishan deceased, 8 September 1865. Baraboo: Sauk County Historical Society, Probate Box W, Michael Weishan.

But the Kraemer family history, both in Bavaria and in Wisconsin, is another story. Some of it will appear in future issues of this newsletter. The full story of the Kraemers in Bavaria will appear in a book due out in September 2015 called *Wisconsin Kraemers in the Old World of Bavaria: History and Genealogy of the Kraemers of Tiefenbach, Bavaria who immigrated to Sauk County, Wisconsin*. A second volume, *Wisconsin Kraemers in the New World of America* will be out later.

A related book, called *Kraemer in Amerika*, is already published and can be checked out of the libraries in Plain and Spring Green. This book tells the story of another branch of Kraemers with the same roots, who emigrated from Tiefenbach, Bavaria, to Minnesota and later to California.

Author's request: The Weishan story is not complete and so we would appreciate hearing from anyone who knows what happened to the children of Michael and Catherine Weishan, and whether there are descendants living today. We would also like a picture of Michael and Catherine and/or their children. If you desire a copy of the Appendix mentioned above, or have any information about the Weishan family, please write to Kenneth Kraemer, 12 Harvey Court, Irvine, CA 92617 or email kkraemer@uci.edu. We would greatly appreciate your help. You could also call 949-466-7588.

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