

First published in the OFTHS Newsletter March 2023, - Volume 16, Issue 1, pages 1 to 4.

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The Mysterious Disappearance of Christian Diehl

by Marian Burmester



In our continuing series of local Civil War Veterans, the March issue explores the life of German immigrant, Christian Diehl, who lived in neighboring Troy Township in Sauk County, Wisconsin.

Information on Christian Diehl is very sketchy. Sometime after the Civil War, he seems to have disappeared. The Diehl family donated the tintype (above) of Christian in his uniform to our society. Written on the back in pencil was, "Christian Diehl, Town of Troy, enlisted August 2nd 1862. Became corporal and colour bearer in Company K of Twenty Sixth Wisconsin Infantry Regiment. Was wounded at Chancellorsville, VA. Was transferred to vet. RC Nov. 15, 1863."

Christian Diehl was born on May 26, 1839, at Würgendorf and was baptized on June 2, 1839, at Burbach, Siegen, Westfalen, Germany. The Evangelical church record lists his parents as Johann Philipp Diehl

and Anne Elisabeth Haas.¹ He had four sponsors: Joh. Henrich Diehl and Johann Peter Fries of Würgendorf, and Katharine Haas and Mrs. Peter Haas (Katherine) from Burbach.

At the age of 15, Christian arrived in New York on November 17, 1853, aboard the ship Delaware² from Bremerhaven along with his mother, Anna E. age 56, and siblings Johann Heinrich age 37, Johann Ludwig age 25, Johann Peter age 23, and Elisabeth age 20. The males were listed as farmers and all were from Brunswick [Braunschweig], as was a "Theile" family directly above the Diehls. Brunswick is 200 miles north of Würgendorf, so they may have stayed in Brunswick a while before traveling to the Bremerhaven harbor.

Anna Haas Diehl had at least 9 children; two died young in Würgendorf. Son Johann Gottfried Diehl (born 1820) married in 1851 to Catharine Caroline Thielmann in Neunkirchen, Westfalen, Germany, and raised a family there. Anna's oldest daughter Maria Sophia Diehl (born 1814) immigrated in 1868 per her obituary. Note that Anna's children were known also by their middle names.

Looking at the 1860 US Census,³ two of Christian's brothers, Henry and Ludwig Diehl, lived next door to each other in Troy Township, Sauk County, Wisconsin.

¹ <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QP2G-GZZQ> Christian Diehl baptism

² <https://tinyurl.com/54eykb3f> 1853 ship list

³ <https://tinyurl.com/p35s77cx> 1860 US Census, Troy

One of Henry's household members was his mother Elizabeth Diehl age 66. The baptism record for Anna Elisabeth Haas at Burbach gave her birth date as Feb. 22, 1794, daughter of Johann Philipp Haas and Maria Christina. She married Johann Philipp Diehl on Dec. 26, 1813, at Burbach according to the marriage record. Elizabeth died on Sept. 4, 1873, and was buried at Union Grove Cemetery in Troy Township.⁴ Her husband, Johann Philipp, must have died in Germany.



John "Henry" Diehl purchased a land patent from the state of Wisconsin on October 2, 1854,⁵ with the following description: the southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of section twenty, in township nine north of range five east, in the district of lands subject to the sale at Mineral Point, Wisconsin containing forty acres. The location of this land is indicated by a red circle on the 1859 Troy Township map at left.

At Findagrave,⁶ Christian Diehl's burial was not found, but some of the siblings were found buried at Union Grove Cemetery: Maria Sophia Diehl married to Johann Heinrich Scholl; Johann Henrich (Henry) Diehl married to Julianna Hehenberger; Johan Ludwig Diehl married to Caroline Fey; and Christiane Elisabeth Diehl married to Heinrich Fischer. Christian's brother Peter John Diehl married Elizabeth Christina Rudolph and both were buried in Bethlehem United Methodist Cemetery in Black Hawk, Troy Township.

Christian Diehl enlisted as a private in Company K in the Wisconsin 26th Infantry Regiment on August 13, 1862.⁷ His residence is listed as Troy, Wisconsin. He was wounded at Chancellorsville, Virginia.

The Battle of Chancellorsville resulted in a very surprising Confederate victory, since they were outnumbered 2 to 1. The first engagement of the battle took place just before midday on May 1, 1863, near the Zoan Church three miles east of Chancellorsville in an open field just beyond a forest. Union General Joseph Hooker decided to be conservative by having his men fall back to defensive positions. Confederate General Robert E. Lee split his army, sending his right-hand man Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson to attack the Union's right flank. Jackson's men burst out of the thickets screaming a "Rebel Yell" shattering the Union force and pushed them back more than two miles. The crushing attack snapped the Union army and sent Hooker in retreat to Washington, D.C. As the sun was setting, Jackson led his men scouting the forest. A confederate regiment mistook Jackson and his scouts as the enemy. Jackson was accidently shot. He was recovering after having his left arm amputated, when he developed pneumonia and died on May 10. Historians believe this was Lee's greatest victory, but he lost his most gifted commander. Of 130,000 Union soldiers engaged at Chancellorsville, more than 17,000 were casualties (some 7,500 were killed or reported missing); of 60,000 Confederates, more than 12,000 were casualties (more than 3,500 were killed or reported missing).

Another donation from the Diehl family is a letter that Christian wrote home to his family while he was recovering in a Philadelphia hospital. The letter with envelope was translated by Samantha Litty in 2016. The return address from the envelope was: Mr. Christian Diehl, U.S.A. Hospital, Chestnut Hill Philadelphia, PA, ward 33, bed 53. "Chestnut Hill Philadelphia, PA" would have been *Mower General Hospital*, one of the largest military hospitals operating during the Civil War built in 1862 on a lot of 27 acres. It was located across from the Reading Railroad depot in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia. It operated from

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/2xuxduzi> Anna Elisabeth Haas Diehl

⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/3rjuzzk6> Bureau of Land Management

⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/4uj88ahj> Union Grove Cemetery & <https://tinyurl.com/4da9cshf> Peter John Diehl 1830-1883

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/bsd3hh37> Roster of WI volunteers, Ware of the Rebellion, 1861-1865, Vol. 2



Mower General Hospital

January 1863 through May 1865 and was closed with the cessation of the war.⁸ From here Christian Diehl was transferred to V.R.C. (Veteran Reserve Corps) until he was mustered out on November 15, 1863. The V.R.C. was a military organization within the Union Army that gave light duty to partially disabled or otherwise infirm soldiers.

Following is Christian's letter home:

June the 21st 1863

Dear Mother, Brothers, Sisters Brothers-in-law and Sisters-in-law. I myself have to write you a few lines or you'll still think I am wearing out, how and where I was wounded, you know but that my wound is pretty much healed and I don't have any more pain. Dear Mother, I would have written sooner but through our moving around I could not well. We moved from Brooke Station hospital to Washington⁹ and we were there four days then we had to go to Baltimore. From Baltimore to Philadelphia from there another 10 miles farther in a nice hospital. Dear Mother, you asked if I have clothes and sweets enough to eat I have here more than I can eat and better than I can have at home and beyond that, for each week we receive a rain shirt, four under pants and socks and a coat that is distributed by the hospital and doesn't cost us anything, After the battle we got money for two months. I think if we have to move again then everyone will be sent to his own state then I will probably come to Madison. Writing is going poorly with me and my hands have grown shaky through the long lying in the bed and the bandages in my face, I can't see well. I will tell you the story better next time. I now want to close my letter and I wish that these few lines reach you in good health and greet everyone a thousand times. Write me back soon and send me some post stamps.

Ch. D[iehl]

In Christian's letter home he greets his family as "Dear Mother, Brothers, Sisters, Brothers-in-law and Sisters-in-law." Through research, we find that "home" would be Troy Township Sauk County, Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Historical Society Civil War Roster, Volume II, page 337 also lists his residence as Troy.¹⁰

A story "*Unspeakable Agony*" *The Union Wounded Left Behind at Chancellorsville*¹¹ posted on August 27, 2018, on the National Museum of Civil War History website, may help give the reader a perspective on

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mower_General_Hospital

⁹ Brooks Station (today Brooke, Virginia, in Stafford County), was 9 miles north of Fredericksburg. Soldiers went from Brooks Station to Washington DC, by rail and by boat on the Potomac River, a distance of 62 miles. *Virginia in the Civil War Message Board*. <https://tinyurl.com/mr3be8wb>

¹⁰ <https://tinyurl.com/bsd3hh37>

¹¹ <https://www.civilwarmed.org/chancellorsville>

what Christian may have gone through after being wounded. This is an account from Rice Bull of New York, who had been wounded during the battle. "The problem was the lack of available medical care. Bull claimed that no Federal surgeons had remained on that part of the field, and the Confederates likely had their hands full tending to their own men. John Larmon, a musician from Company I, did stay behind to care for the wounded. Although he had no knowledge of medicine, Larmon did his best to keep the men comfortable. Throughout the afternoon of May 3, the musician tirelessly scrounged food from abandoned haversacks, spread blankets and ponchos over those that could not move themselves, and washed caked blood away from dirty wounds. Despite the courageous work of Larmon, however, Bull called the night of May 3-4 'sorrowful' because it was 'the last night on earth for many who died for the lack of the care they needed.'¹¹ The musician Larmon, now assisted by Chaplain Thomas Ambrose of the 12th New Hampshire (whom Bull regarded as 'one of the heroes of Chancellorsville'), continued to do all they could to make the wounded more comfortable. But without adequate medical care, many of the more severely wounded could not survive. Those that died were laid out, unburied, in the rear of an artillery lunette. An 'awful odor' began to arise from the dead horses and men that lay around the makeshift hospital; 'as time went on,' Bull remembered, 'the stench became unbearable.' Four Union surgeons finally arrived on the morning of May 5 under a flag of truce. They improvised an operating table using a large pantry door (taken from inside the log cabin) propped on two barrels and began their grisly work in view of many of the other wounded. 'As each amputation was completed the man was carried to the old house and laid on the floor,' Bull wrote. 'The arm or leg was thrown on the ground near the table, only a few feet from the wounded who were laying nearby.' Even the passage of fifty years had not softened this horrific scene for the New York soldier."

Christian Diehl mentions in his letter, "my hands have grown shaky through the long lying in the bed and the bandages in my face, I can't see well." At the time of the letter, it had been over a month and Christian still had bandages on his face. His injury must have been very serious. We do know that he was mustered out on November 15, 1863. The last finding of Christian is in the 1870 US Census¹² when he was age 31 was again living with his brother Henry's family as a farm laborer. His mother Anna was still alive at the age of 76. Henry Diehl and wife Julia now had four children. After this date, there is no trace of Christian to be found.

Christian's Civil War experiences may have caused what now days is called "PTSD" and could be the reason why he just disappeared. In his letter home he addressed his mother three times, answering her concerns about his welfare. Since he was the youngest, his mother's passing in 1873 may have caused intense sadness. He might have felt that he was a burden to his brother's family and decided to strike out on his own.

Extra Information on the Diehl family

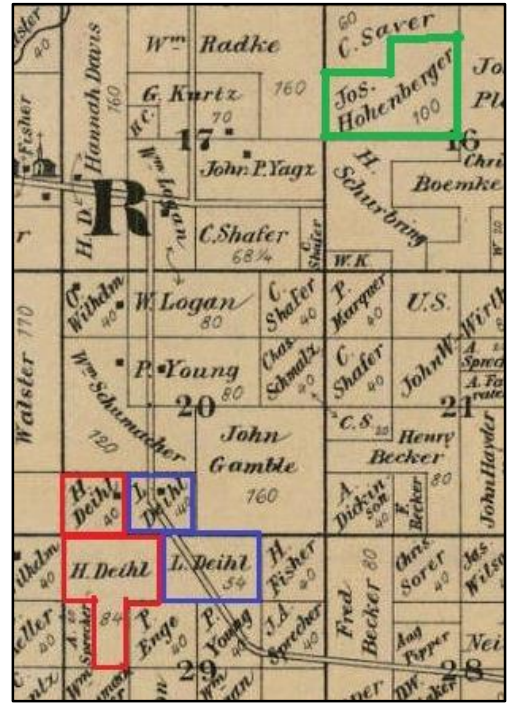
German documents¹³ translated by Samantha Litty in 2016 states that Christian's oldest brother, Johann Henrich "Henry" Diehl served for 3 years as a musketeer in the 8th Company of the Royal Prussian 35th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Reserve from Würgendorf in Siegen County of the administrative 5 district Arnsberg. His description was as follows: "5 foot 6 inches tall, with slim physique and brown hair, who was born on the 18th of May 1817 and who arrived for active military service on December 1st 1839."

Henry married Julianna Hehenberger on May 24, 1858, in Sauk County, Wisconsin, after he purchased a land patent for forty acres from the state of Wisconsin in the Harrisburg area of Troy Township. *See map and info on page two.* In the 1877 Troy Township plat map, Henry was living next to his brother Ludwig (see map on the next page). By 1893, Henry was somehow the owner of Ludwig's land for a total of 220 acres of land.

¹² <https://tinyurl.com/3bxp866w> 1870 US Census, Troy

¹³ Documents at the OFTHS museum.

Christian Diehl's married siblings all seemed to prosper in America. According to the book, *A Standard History of Sauk County Vol. II*, 1918, pages 929 and 930 there is a description of Henry and Julianna: "He was a very industrious, careful man and was more enterprising than many of the other early settlers. He carried on his farming operations with success and profit and also engaged in hop growing and raised cane and manufactured syrup. He owned nine threshing machines. Mrs. Diehl was born in Austria, in 1837. Her parents were Joseph and Elizabeth Hehenberger and with them she came to the United States in 1852. For one year the family lived at Buffalo, New York, and then came to Sauk County and in the same year took up land and located permanently in Troy Township. Joseph Hehenberger had 100 acres and cleared his land and did all his early farming with oxen." (Note on the 1877 map at the right, the Hehenberger farm is outlined in green not far from the Diehl farms outlined in red and blue.) Henry died in 1891. Henry and Julianna's son-in-law, Aksel Bruhn studied under Adolph Schoenman, another son-in law of Henry and Julianna, in butter and cheese making and later



worked in Adolph's cheese factory. Aksel decided to build a cheese factory on the Diehl farm and started operating the Oak Leaf Cheese Factory on April 1, 1904.



Julianna's birth certificate mentions that her father, Joseph Hehenberger, was a tailor and jeweler from house no. 4 in Kronberg.

The OFTHS museum has a beautiful bonnet made by Julia on display. See photo at left. She must have picked up the tailor talent from her father. She worked as a seamstress in Buffalo, New York, before she moved to Sauk County. The photo doesn't really bring out the beautiful detail. Come and visit the museum this summer when we again resume the open house events to view the bonnet for yourself along with nine old German documents and certificates from the interesting Diehl family along with the translation by Samantha Litty.