

John Henry Weigel 1858-1924

A biography by his son Rothe Weigel written and dictated during July 1977 in Chicago, Illinois. Transcribed by his great grandson James E. Granger on October 15, 1977 in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

John Henry Weigel was born on Jan 22, 1858 in Wartburg, Morgan-Roan Co., Tennessee..the seventh and last child of Carl Augustus Weigel and Johanna Christiana Hirsch (Weigel). He was a rather small man, about 5 ft. 6 in. tall weighing anout 140 pounds. He was wiry and active and had a red beard and mustache until he shaved them off at about 50 years old. He was rather quiet but had a great sense of humor and was industrious, intelligent and ambitious; and had his family and church always in mind. He had a good ear for music and was a tenor in the church choir. He believed in boys working and was honest almost to a fault.

Some years ago I, Rothe, was with a group of men and was asked to tell something about theman, of all the men I had known, that I admired the most. I told them that it was my father and then told them why.

He was one of a large family having one sister (Ernestina) and five brothers (Fred, Charles, Dave and John (both deaf mutes), and Frank). They spoke German at home since father, mother, Frederick, and Ernestina were German born. He learned sign language in order to talk to his brothers; thus becoming fluent in German, English, and sign language. So I say he was trilingual. The family lived on a farm in Knox County near the forks of the Holsten and French Broad Rivers. John Henry went to the German Lutheran school in Knoxville and got there by walking the seven miles on Monday morning carrying enough food for the week, then he walked back to the farm on Friday. His father died (I was told) when he (my father) was about 13 years old and it was necessary for him to quit school in the six grade and go to work on the farm. That was the extent of his formal education. Incidentally I, Rothe, do not know much about his father and mother nor do I remember seeing them.

As a young man, when the farm was divided, he sold his share and moved to Knoxville, Tenn. and learned the carpenters trade. He specialized in building those free standing spiral staircases. It was in Knoxville that he met and married my mother, Mary Rothe. He was an extremely honest young man and a member of a German Lutheran church where he sang in the choir. After some time he built the first home that I remember on a tract of land he bought in the suburb of North Knoxville. After building this home, he found the Lutheran church too far away to attend and joined the Fourth Presbyterian Church two blocks from home. He later became a Deacon and then an Elder in that church. All of us children attended Sunday School and Church every Sunday sitting together in one pew.

After moving to North Knoxville, John Henry decided to go into the Dairy business. He built a large dairy barn and bought several cows. He and my oldest borhter Albert would get up at four o'clock in the morning, milk the cows and then my father would deliver the milk in a horse drwan milk wagon. Of course there was care of the cows and evening milking required also.

John Henry Weigel (cont)

He operated the Dairy for only a few years before deciding to become a building contractor. He began by designing and building homes for friends who, because of his honesty and the quality of his work, would recommend him to others; until eventually he became a builder of factories. Many times people would come to him and say "Henry, I want you to build me a home", telling him how many rooms, bathrooms, etc. He would design the house, supply the specifications, and give them his estimate. No other questions would be asked and no other bids requested. They would simply say "Go ahead, Henry, and build it for me."

At times, when work was slack, he would build additional homes on his own tract and rent them to others.

He also built concrete block manufacturing equipment for Carl and I; and the two of us spent many hours after school and on Saturdays making concrete blocks to augment the family income. Before that time we had worked with him on construction, as did all my other brothers. As a result, by the time we were out of high school, we knew how to work and how to build.

Nothing was said in particular about it, but it was understood that we would go to college; and all six (four boys and two girls) graduated from the University, working summers to help pay expenses.

My father's health was good, never having lost even one day of work on account of his own sickness. He had all his own teeth and only one filling in his mouth and the time of his death from a heart attack at age 66

John Henry Weigel died on March 1, 1924 in Knoxville, Knox Co., Tennessee preceeding his wife, Mary Aug. Rothe, by 17 years. They had been married in the Knoxville German Lutheran church on July 13, 1886.