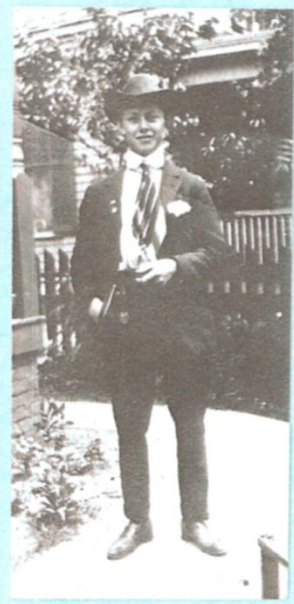


# MY JOURNEY TO AMERICA

I was born on June 17, 1896, the son of Julius & Lola Leucht in the little village of Zaubersdorf, the Province of Saxony, Germany.

I was only 3 or 4 yrs old when my folks bought a house in B... where my dad had... and an Insur... in the City &... Schools,

I went to graduation



JOURNAL 1914-1920  
By Kurt Leucht

25. Juli. Land nach... nach amerik. 6 Uhr... wieder... die See... Fahrt hatten wir zurückgelegt... es war 1 Uhr nach deutscher Zeit...

26. Juli. Es ist... starker Nebel, dann... Ebenfalls vorm... mündeten wir in... wurde sehr warm...

27. Juli. Abends Gewitter...

28. Juli. Schönes Wetter...

29. Juli. Es war nach deutscher Zeit 1/2 12... 6 Uhr als ich aufstand...

## Meine Reise nach Amerika.

Regen... Spiel... 1/2 12

# MY JOURNEY TO AMERICA

## (Meine Reise nach Amerika)

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A Journal written in his own German handwriting by Kurt William Leucht

Translated in 2010 by Christine Strelecky, Illinois Central College German Instructor

Edited in 2011 into book form by William Kurt Leucht, son of Kurt

Published in 2014 on the Internet by Kurt William Leucht, son of William

### Editor's Note

Kurt started to translate the Journal to English around 1970. He only completed one page, though. He began with this short biography:

### Biography

I was born on June 17, 1896, the son of Julius & Ida Leucht in the little Village of Zaulsdorf, a province of Saxony, Germany. I was only three or four years old when my folks bought a house in Plauen where my dad had jobs in the city government and as an insurance salesman. I went thru grade school and high school. After graduating, I obtained a job with Otto-Baum & Son, who manufactured and exported lace. In the meantime, an uncle of mine who lived in our house corresponded with a nephew, Rev G J Degenkolb in America. He wrote that there could be an opportunity for me to come to America; so I got itchy feet.

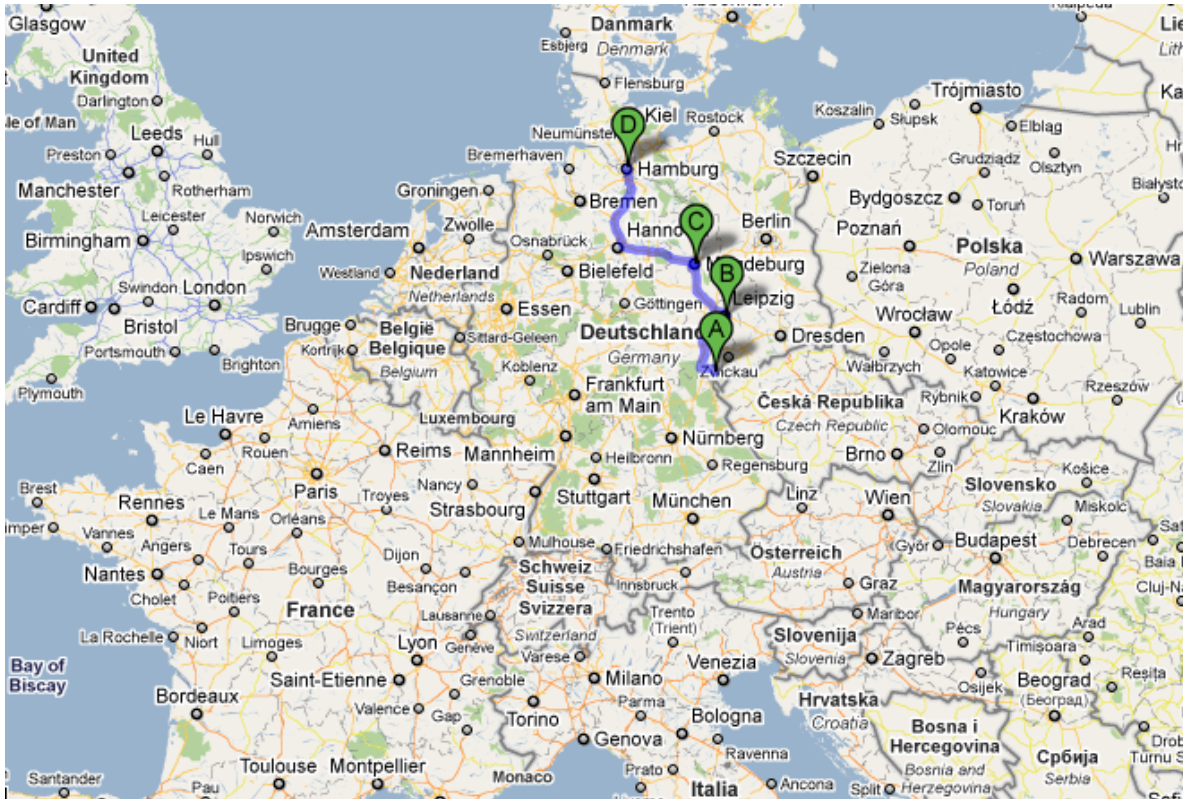


*[Kurt William Leucht, age 17, and his family in 1913]*

# Section 1 - My Journey to America

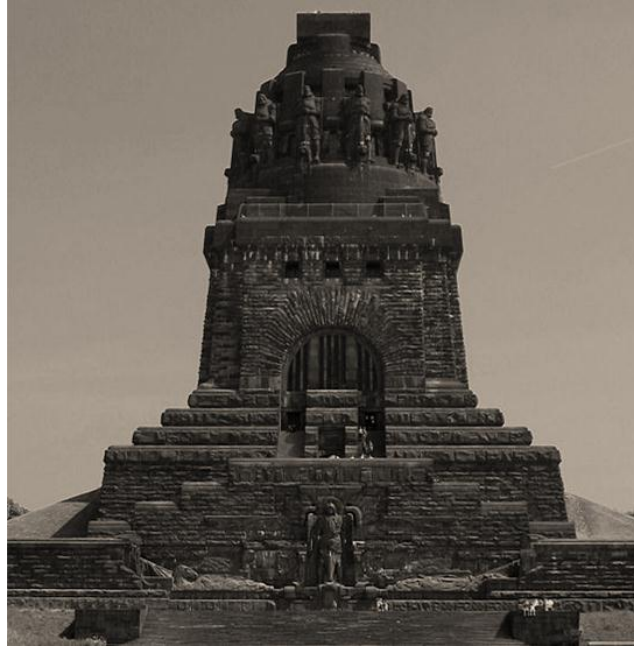
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July 20, 1914



[Trip from Plauen to Hamburg]

[Kurt had recently turned 18 years old when he started this grand adventure.] After obtaining my passport and papers, I was on a train headed for Hamburg. I went per express train from [Plauen](#) [A on map] at 6:02 in the morning to [Leipzig](#) [B]. There was a layover of two hours, so I visited the “[Battle of the Nations](#)” monument. At 10:25am, I left per train thru [Magdeburg](#) [C] to [Hamburg](#) [D] arriving at 4:25pm. I bought a ticket for the ship and after a lengthy search, I found the Hotel Minerva at the corner of Loliestreet and the Repperbahn. The price for overnight was 2,16 Mark per day. [That’s about \$35 in today’s money.] I wandered around the city for awhile. That evening at 8:30, I went to see a musical at the Varsity St. Pauli Singpielhalle until 10:45 and then I let myself be photographed. At midnight, I was in my hotel room and fell asleep.



*[Monument to the Battle of the Nations]*

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### ***Monument to the Battle of the Nations (from Wikipedia)***

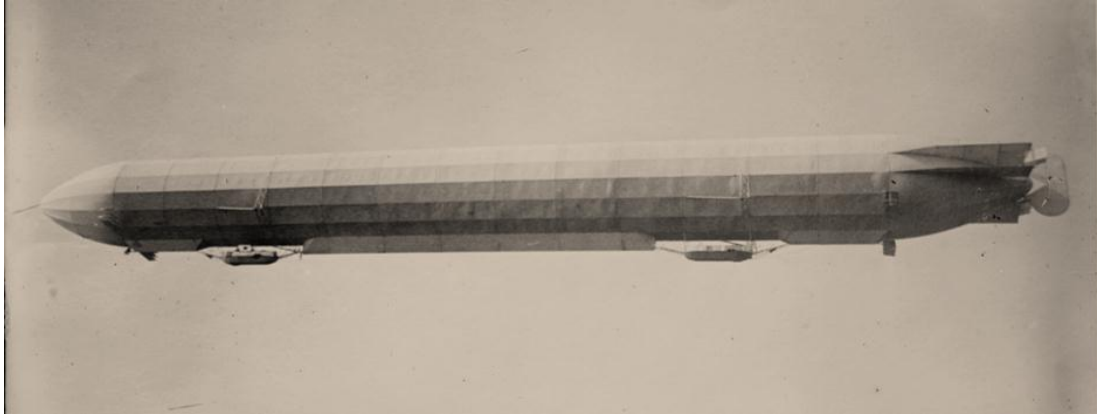
*The Monument to the Battle of the Nations is a 300 foot tall monument in Leipzig, Germany to the 1813 Battle of Leipzig, also known as the Battle of the Nations. Paid for mostly by donations and by the city of Leipzig, it was completed in 1913 for the 100th anniversary of the battle.*

*Between October 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 1813, the Battle of the Nations was fought by the coalition armies of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Sweden against the French army of Napoleon. Napoleon's army was defeated and compelled to return to France while the Allies invaded France early the next year.*

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## **July 21, 1914**

I got up at 8:00am in order to go to the luggage drop-off place. I went to the Hamburg harbor and, just then, a [Z3 \[zeppelin\]](#) was passing by in silence. I continued to view the harbor and later the area of [St. Pauli-Landungsbrücke](#). After a three hour walk, I got to the receiving location and took care of the things I had to do. Next, I went to the train station in order to pick up my dad.



*[Zeppelin Z III circa 1914]*

I still had an hour and a half wait, so I went to the café Klosterecke. Traveling on the same train with my dad, were Mrs Traeger, her female sleeping partner and Mr Steinbruder, *[who also had passage to America]*. We all went to [“HAPAG”](#) and then we started to search for a hotel. We spent a considerable time together. We took a streetcar to St. Pauli, where my father stayed behind, and I took them on to the luggage reception area. At 1:20 in the afternoon, we returned. The three of them toured the city, while I stayed to be with my father. Dad and I took a walking tour of the city and arrived at the hotel around 9:00pm. We went to sleep right away.

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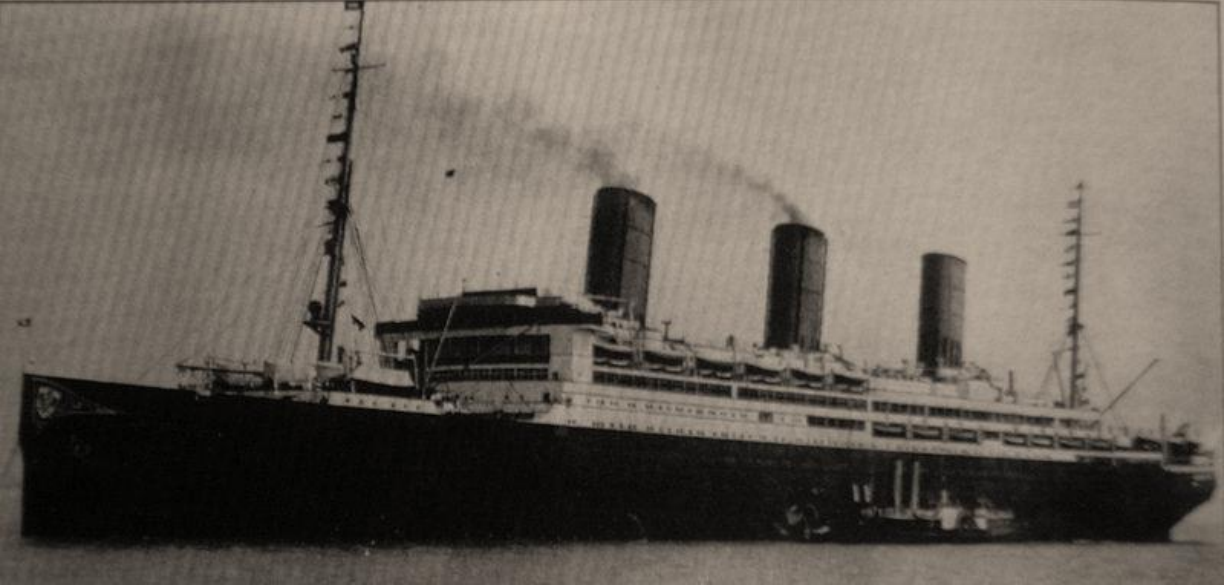
#### ***HAPAG (from Wikipedia)***

*HAPAG stands for Hamburg Amerikanische Paketfahrt Aktien-Gesellschaft (Hamburg American Packet-shipping Joint-stock company) and was commonly called the Hamburg America Line. Albert Ballin, leader of the company, conceived the three largest liners to be built at the time, the Imperator, Vaterland and Bismarck. HAPAG was the largest German shipping company, serving the market created by the German immigration to the United States and later immigration from Eastern Europe.*

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## **July 22, 1914**

We woke up at 5:00am. At 6:00, we all went to the train station *[where his dad took the train back to Plauen]*. The four of us got on the 6:45 train to [Cuxhafen](#) *[60 miles NW of Hamburg]*. We arrived at 9:00. We were invited to board the ship [“Vaterland”](#) which stood ready. We searched for our cabins. There was a big crowd. The band was playing. More and more people gathered on shore. We got off the ship and went to have lunch. When the extra trains had arrived, we quickly went back on board. We noticed that hundreds of people were waving their handkerchiefs and shouting farewell greetings to us. We did the same. The ship left shore exactly at noon.



*[SS Vaterland circa 1914]*

When the ship was brought to the open sea, the ship's propellers were set in motion with increasing speed. The German homeland disappeared in the distance. I looked the ship over a bit. At 3:00 the call to coffee came. After that, there was more activity on deck. Music was made with an accordion, while some Bohemian country people were performing their dances.

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### ***SS Vaterland (from Wikipedia)***

*Steamer Vaterland -- Built in Germany in 1914, this steamer service sailed from Cuxhaven, Germany to New York City and back. It was the largest liner in the world from 1914-1921. It was seized by United States authorities in 1917 and renamed USS Leviathan.*

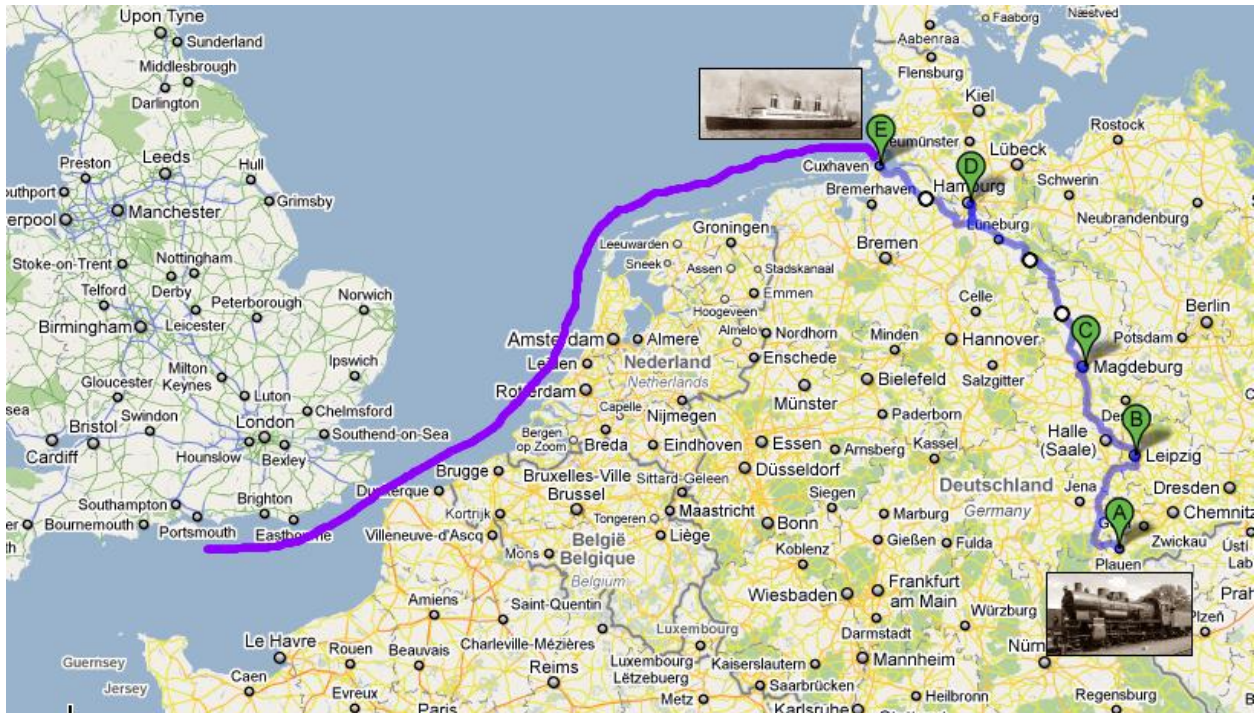
[\*Click here to watch a video about the ship complete with some incredible vintage videos and photographs.\*](#)

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Occasionally, a ship was visible in the distance. The seagulls were following behind the ship. When one looked at the waves created by the ships propellers, it was a wonderful spectacle. It was 6:00 when, suddenly, a heavy rain began and it continued through the night. At 7:00, the bells chimed for the evening meal. It became stormier and the ship swayed a little. Despite the disturbance, there was still dancing on the deck. I added to the concert with my harmonica. I went to bed at 11:00.

## July 23, 1914

I got up at 5:30am. I was on the deck at 6:00 when land came into view. We were getting closer and closer to Great Britain. English warships and sail ships were in sight. At 11:00am, two English steamships came closer to the Vaterland. Our ship traveled slower. The steamships finally connected to our ship. One received the luggage, the other took on the passengers that were going on to [South Hampton](#).



*[Passengers disembark for England]*

Our ship stayed in place until 2:00pm, then continued on with full steam. Around 5:30, France came into view. I could see the fortifications on the land. Again two ships came. At 7:30, we went on our way. When it became dark, there was hearty dancing again on deck. I went to bed at 11:00.

## July 24, 1914

When I got up at 6:30am according to German time, it was 12:30am New York time. On these days, not much happened that is noteworthy. The sea became more turbulent, the ship swayed and many become seasick. I myself had to vomit. I went to sleep for six hours. I couldn't eat anything. I finally ate the evening meal and went to bed at 8:00pm *[Germany time]*.

## July 25, 1914

I got up according to German time at 8:30am. The food tasted good again. It was the most beautiful weather the whole day and the sea was quiet. In the evening, there was hearty dancing. We had gone half way [*across the ocean*]. I went to bed at 1:00am [*Germany time*].

## July 26, 1914

Nice weather today. Rain began to fall in the evening.

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### *Ellis Island (from Wikipedia)*

*Ellis Island, in Upper New York Bay, was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States as the nation's busiest immigrant inspection station from 1892 until 1954.*

*The island was greatly expanded with land reclamation between 1892 and 1934. Before that, the much smaller original island was the site of Fort Gibson and later a naval magazine. The island was made part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965, and has hosted a museum of immigration since 1990.*

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## July 29, 1914

It was 11:30am [*Germany time*] when I got up; 5:30am New York time. [*Kurt now switched to New York City time in his journal.*] At 9:00, we saw land far on the horizon. At 10:30, we could recognize the buildings of [New York City](#) fairly well. At noon, we rode past the skyscrapers and the [Statue of Liberty](#).



[*New York City skyline circa 1913*]





*[Statue of Liberty circa early 1900s]*

We docked at 8:00pm *[in Hoboken, NJ which is a couple miles from Ellis Island]*. From a distance, one could see the thousands of people at the arrival hall, who were expecting us and shouting well wishes. It was a great joy. Shortly before docking, a heavy rain came down, but it soon stopped. First and Second Class disembarked, while we had to remain in the lower decks overnight. There was much to see on the docks from the ship.



*[Ellis Island dock circa early 1900s]*

## July 30, 1914

I got up at 5:00am. At 7:00, we had to go to the luggage hall where the suitcases were managed. From there, we were quickly transported to [Ellis Island](#) [via ferry] where we were examined. We came into a large hall where everyone was shown to a specific location.



*[Ellis Island main hall circa early 1900s]*

Since I had given the address of my uncle, I was directed to go to an area for [Peoria, Illinois](#) [Peoria is 170 miles SW of Chicago]. Then I came to the luggage room, where I had to find my things. I got my ticket to Peoria, which cost \$18, and that was that. We had to wait until 3:00pm to get on a ship which left at 5:00 for the train station. [This was likely a ferry from Ellis Island to the mainland.] Everyone was decorated with a large piece of paper. We didn't have to ask, every employee knew where we belonged.



*[Ellis Island circa early 1900s]*

We stayed in the train station until 7:00, then we were led to the ready trains. Shortly before 7:30, the train began to move. There were twelve Germans in my section of the train and we made ourselves comfortable. There was no difference between First and Fourth Class. Every section of the train was the same and was furnished something like our Second Class. Now the train was moving thru New York City, beyond and to the West *[towards the city of Chicago]*. Night came and we laid down to sleep as good as possible.

## **July 31, 1914**

At 5:00am, the train stopped in [Hornell, NY](#), where we had a twenty minute layover. We had breakfast. We continued on the whole day and night. During daylight hours, I was able to enjoy the wonderful landscape. Occasionally there was a village or small city where the train stopped.

## **August 1, 1914**

At 1:45am, we finally arrived in [Chicago](#). Those of us who were to continue on received a piece of paper, which was pinned on. At the train station, buses were waiting. Everyone was placed on the appropriate bus. Now, I was all alone. The bus I was on went to another train station. I had a four and a half hour layover before my train left for Peoria. While waiting, I ventured out to look at the city of Chicago for a little bit.



*[Chicago skyline circa 1910]*

At 9:00am, the train left. I arrived in Peoria just before 2:00pm.



*[Peoria panoramas circa early 1900s]*

I took a taxi to my Uncle Gustav [*Degenkolb's*] home, according to the address on my paper [822 *Griswold Street near Humboldt*]. When I got there, I rang the doorbell; but no one was home. It wasn't long before my Aunt [*Alice*] came. My uncle was out of town and was to be back home on Tuesday. My aunt and I spoke German with each other. She could not speak much, but it was sufficient. I washed myself thoroughly and laid down for awhile, since I was quite tired from the trip.

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### ***"Uncle" Gustav***

*"Uncle" Gustav is not an uncle, nephew, nor cousin to Kurt even though he referred to him as Uncle Gustav throughout his journal. According to genealogical research Kurt's father, Julius, had a sister named Alma who married a Degenkolb. This Degenkolb, Julius' brother-in-law, had a brother named Gustav who came to America. So "Uncle" Gustav is related only by marriage to Kurt's Aunt Alma.*

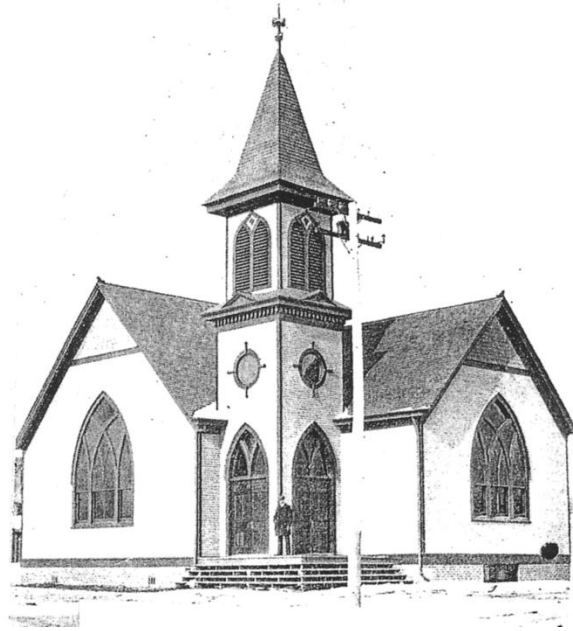
*Reverend Gustav J Degenkolb was born in the province of Saxony, Germany in 1876. He was twenty years older than Kurt. He came to the United States in 1896. He married his wife, Alice, in America. He was the first minister, from 1911-1915, of Grace Evangelical Church, located on the NW corner of 605 Stanley Street at Humboldt in Peoria.*

*Kurt and Verna were married in this church in 1920. The church built a new building diagonally across the street in 1925 which still stands there today. Kurt's third son, Bill, married Gail in the 1925 building in 1966. It became Grace Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946, then Grace United Methodist Church in 1968 ending its affiliation in 2002 and was sold.*

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## August 2, 1914

Today is Sunday. At 9:30am, I went with my aunt to the church for Sunday school [see Sidebar on Uncle Gustav for details about the church]. This was very similar with our children's Sunday service in Germany. The rest of the day was uneventful. I spent the time reading and playing the piano.



*[Grace Evangelical Church, circa 1910]*



*[Grace United Methodist Church in 2011, diagonally across street from original church; image copyright Google Street View]*

## August 4, 1914

In the afternoon, a lot of girls came over to my aunt's house in order to help her prepare sugar cookies that were needed for the following day. At 6:00pm, my Uncle Gustav came home. How surprised he was to find me there already. He wanted to meet me in Chicago. The happiness was great. I had to tell him how everyone *[back in Germany]* was doing. When he heard that my uncle in Germany had died, he was very sad. A letter came that same day telling him all about it. *[This uncle was most likely Kurt's Uncle Louis, who would have only been 51 years old.]*

## August 5, 1914

Today was a big day. The "picnic" festival was celebrated by the Sunday school once a year. It is a children's festival, however older people also attend. We got up in good time, for at 8:00am, there was a gathering at the church. At 9:00, we went to the South Park *[now Trewyn Park at the corner of Montana & Idaho streets]*, where the festival took place.



*[South Park circa 1919]*

I went on the wagon which contained the salable goods and other apparatus. When we got to the park, we unpacked our things. I had to help sell ice cream, soda and lemonade. I was able to learn a lot today. Uncle Gustav introduced me to several girls who could speak a little German. So, I had to teach them German and they would help me with my English. It went very well. The festival and sales also went well. By evening we had made about \$30.

## August 6, 1914

Today we took a ride in a big boat on the Illinois River which lasted from 9:00am until 6:00pm.

## August 7, 1914

In the afternoon, I went with my uncle into the city [*downtown Peoria*]. We rode on the streetcar for a half hour before we got to the right part of downtown. We did some shopping and I got some postcards and stamps. Once we were back home, I wrote twenty-one cards, which were picked up by the mailman the next morning.

## August 10, 1914

I realized that I was on the last ship to come over to America from Germany, for on August 1st World War I broke out in Europe. I still had good fortune. I didn't know that there was a war going on, since I couldn't read or understand English yet.

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### *Last Ship to America*

*According to Wikipedia, the SS Vaterland had made only a few trips when she arrived at New York City in late July 1914 just as World War I broke out. A safe return to Germany was rendered virtually impossible by British dominance of the seas, so the ship was laid up at her Hoboken, NJ, terminal and remained immobile for nearly three years. She was seized by the United States Shipping Board in April 1917 and turned over to the custody of the U.S. Navy in June 1917.*

*As a direct descendant of Kurt, I can't help but imagine how different my life would be if his trip to America had not occurred exactly when it did.*

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## Section 2 – Living and Working in Peoria

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### August, 1914

I spent the next few weeks riding the streetcar to familiarize myself to the area and downtown.

### September, 1914

I got my first mail from Germany, plus some newspapers. I couldn't even describe my joy.

### October 24, 1914

I got my first job for \$2 per week delivering coal--two cents a bushel.

### October 31, 1914

I started a new job in the warehouse of Jos Szold & Son [at 2201 South Adams Street at Garden] working from 5:00pm to 9:00pm at 75 cents per day. I worked only on Saturdays for awhile.

### December 15, 1914

I became a full time employee at Szold's Department Store. I received \$5 per week. Since it was close to Christmas, I had to put wagons, bicycles and such together in the basement.



*[Szold's Department Store circa 1914]*



## December 27, 1914

Time went by. Christmas came and went. It wasn't near what a German Christmas was.

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### *German Christmas*

*Christmas, or [Weihnachten](#), is considered by Germans to be the most important of the major holidays. The German holiday season is a time for introspection, celebration, and family and friends. It is less consumption-oriented than in the United States. Not only the holiday itself, but also the weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas involve many traditions and customs of diverse origins.*

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## January, 1915

In the new year, I was employed as the assistant to the window decorator. I was able to learn a lot. I also learned to make posters and sale signs earning \$9 per week.

## Spring, 1915

At the end of March, my uncle was transferred to a church in Chicago, so I had to look for new lodgings. I moved to an apartment at 405 Maple Street [*the 400 block of Maple no longer exists, but it was near the modern day baseball field in downtown Peoria*] and paid \$2.50 a week. The house belonged to the mother of the window decorator. By this time, I was able to speak English very well. I made friends with many of those where I went to church.

## Summer, 1915

Summer is coming. It is much warmer here than in Germany and one can have a very nice time. Often we went rowing, boating and much more. Summer is the nicest time one can have here. Letter exchanges between me and the old homeland were quite regular. The war went on.

## November, 1915

I changed my apartment again to 211 Butler Street [*near McArthur*]. I paid \$5 a week for room and board. The landlord, a co-worker, was very good to me. His family treats me like their own.

## December, 1915

A second Christmas came and passed in my new homeland. I went to visit my uncle in Chicago. He and his wife had a second baby boy. The language was by now mere child's play. I learned quickly because, at church, they only spoke and sang in English. I also became a good tenor.

## December 31, 1915

A few friends organized a little New Year's Eve party. We got on the streetcar and took a night stroll downtown. At midnight, there was a great deal of shooting with guns and revolvers to celebrate the new year. It was pouring rain after midnight.

## Spring, 1916

At the end of March, I stopped working for Jos Szold & Son. I got a job at the Wallace Theatre as a scenery painter. I enjoy myself there. We did not work at all on Mondays which was nice, because it was payday. I worked six to seven hours per day the rest of the week. I received \$8 per week since I was still learning.

*[The Wallace Theatre opened in 1909 and moved to the Hippodrome Building at 213 SW Jefferson Street downtown near Fulton. It closed in 1926 and later became the Rialto Theater showing movies. Today the Civic Center is at this location.]*



*[Hippodrome Building circa 1913]*

Our young men and boys at church had a great interest for gymnastics. The church bought a hall downtown. They fixed it up, as well as the land next to it for tennis and baseball. A nice gym hall was soon in place where we could play basketball in the winter and do gymnastics in the summer. The YMCA provided gym equipment for us--horizontal bars, springboards, etc. On Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays we had a great time. The younger boys would use it from 7-8:00pm; the bigger ones would come in from 8-9:00. In a very short time we had a hundred members.

## May 30, 1916

A race was organized. On the same day, we painted the outside of the church.

## Summer, 1916

The theater had stopped in the middle of June for the season. The scenery painter and I got a job on July 4th for the Neptuna Carnival in Peoria. I was paid \$10 for the job. I worked for them during the day for a few weeks until the Wallace Theatre opened again on August 20th.

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### ***Neptuna Carnival (from The Peoria Transcript, Sunday July 2, 1916)***

#### ***Neptuna Carnival Begins Tonight***

*The Neptuna Carnival will open tonight with a concert program given by the famous Liberati band of fifty musicians and company of opera singers. This concert will be given from the Island Beautiful in the river directly in front of the grandstand. There are over 10,000 seats in the grandstand. at 25 cents each. The concert will begin at 8:00 and according to the advanced sale of seats will have a really remarkable attendance. The ballet, which is to present a marvelous spectacular ballet on the Island Beautiful on the night of the Fourth in honor of the coming of Neptuna.*

*The entrance of the Court of Honor, which has been erected on lower Main Street near Adams and on the parking lots of the river front, is a sight of majestic splendor and pure architecture, with its columns gleaming white. It frames a vista with the sparkling blue of the river and the green hills as a background. When the thousands of incandescent monster lights, which have been placed for the illumination, are at last alight, the Court will present a vision of beauty not soon to be forgotten. The river front will present a decidedly festive and carnivalesque appearance with many booths and tents having sprung up during the day.*

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## September 22, 1916

I received terrible news that the Wallace Theatre had caught on fire. Where there was once a large stage on Thursday evening, now, was a heap of rubble the next morning. Everything on the stage was burned, the inside was lightly damaged. It was lucky that the wardrobe of the players, which was in the basement, was not burned. We, the painters lost everything--brushes, patterns and models. The only thing on the whole stage that we were able to save were a few postcards, pictures and patterns which had fallen in a pile out of the suitcase.

## September 23, 1916

At noon, we did not know what to do yet; but at 3:00pm, the curtain would go up in the hall for an afternoon performance. We also did an evening performance. The performers managed to get their water- and smoke-damaged clothing cleaned and returned by afternoon, while the property men and I were borrowing furniture and props.

## September 24, 1916

Our director declared that on Tuesday, the 26<sup>th</sup>, we were to have our new home in Sioux City; where we had planned to go in a few weeks anyway.

## September 26, 1916

I packed my suitcase on Monday. On Tuesday morning around 5:00am, the scenery artist, his wife and I drove to Sioux City, Iowa [*340 miles NW of Peoria*].

## September 27, 1916

We arrived around 7:00am. The others from the troupe planned to get here tomorrow. It was cold. We had breakfast in a restaurant. Since we were very tired from driving all night, I got myself a place to stay, while my companions got a room in a hotel. Later in the day, we went to the new theater, the Grand Opera House, and started to make publicity for the next day. We had a week and a half to prepare everything before the opening performance

## September 28, 1916

I found an apartment in a private house for \$1 a week.

## October 6, 1916

I found somewhere better to stay--the YMCA for \$1.75 per week plus membership.

## October 8, 1916

We opened with Sherlock Holmes. The director gave me my first opportunity to be an actor as a "John, one from the underworld." I still feel my knees shaking today, as I went on stage with my English. I will never forget this performance. I had never seen so many people as there were in this first performance on Sunday evening. After the third act the curtain went up and down for ten minutes. The ladies of the company received many wonderful bouquets; one contained \$60. *[Wow, that's about \$1,200 today.]*

## October 12, 1916

Every day I got to play a role that I loved and I received \$5 extra for doing it. The first few weeks, we had a lot to do.

## November 14, 1916

Our next performance was "Polly of the Circus." We had a street parade that was two blocks long and I played a clown.



## December, 1916

On December 12th the daily newspaper was filled with news that there were peace declarations from Germany. It did not come to pass. Germany is in the third and perhaps worst year of the war so far and 1917 is about ready to begin.

## January, 1917

On New Year's Day, we received the news that the theater would be closed in two weeks. I left Sioux City on January 15th and went to Chicago to visit with Uncle Gustav and his family. I was hoping to get work there. After a week in Chicago, I went back to Peoria. Within two hours of my arrival, I was asked to work at the Garden Theater. The employees welcomed me with joy. I started at \$10 a week, after the third week it was \$12 and by the eighth week I was getting \$14.

*[The Garden Theater opened in 1913 and was located at 2137 SW Adams Street, near Szold's and near Garden Street. It closed in 1942.]*

## March, 1917

I moved in March to 916 Warner Avenue *[near MacArthur]*. I feel quite at home here in Peoria. I have a roommate now. He works with me in the theater. We paid \$1.50 a week for the room, including laundry service. On March 12th the United States declared war on Germany. How will this all end? Letter exchanges between the old homeland and Peoria stopped. The last news I received was in January.

## Summer, 1917

I am now making \$16.50 per week, plus I'm working in two theaters--the Garden and the Palace. In spite of that, I could not put a lot *[of money]* aside. I needed a suit, shoes and other things.

*[The Palace Theater opened in 1912 at 1201 SW Adams Street at Spencer. It later became known as the "Little" Palace Theater when a new Palace movie theater opened downtown on Main Street in 1922. The Little Palace Theater closed and became the Grand Theater and later, the Warner Theater.]*



*[Warner Theater, formerly the Little Palace Theater circa 1942]*

It was summer again. I didn't work Tuesday and Friday evenings, and sometimes I took Sundays off in order to go to the park or the river with friends. I took a lot of pictures. I had the best time. My twenty-first birthday was June 17th. My roommate had a birth-day on the same day, but he is one year younger. We had a little party.



In August, it was the beginning of the fourth war year and still no closer to peace. I thought it looked as if my Germany would give up. I was viewed as an enemy, however, I had nothing to fear as I had many friends. My friends and I were at the river a lot. We rented a house for a week. Every evening after work, I would go out there. We had the best time. The cashier girl at the theater had a girl friend from Indiana visit her for the summer. I will never forget this summer and the good times that I had experienced.



## **Fall, 1917**

The theater season started again. Sometimes I would have a date or go out with my friends to the theater or to an amusement. On September 16th I sent for my first citizenship papers. During the first week of October, a few friends and I planned a pleasure trip. We were off early that morning and returned home by 6:00pm -- another time I will not forget. Many American soldiers went over to France. I don't know if they can do something. My only hope is that the war will be over soon.

## **December, 1917**

The Germans declared a ceasefire with the Russians. A friend of mine, Adelaide, had a birthday. We had a little party. It was a lot of fun. About a week before Christmas, I was sick with a headache and a cold. I went to work anyway to get the theater ready for the new year. Christmas came again, my third one in America. This time I received a lot of gifts. Miss Zitron gave me \$3. I got handkerchiefs, socks, ties and candy from the employees. Uncle Gustav sent me a box full of cake and candy. I had given everyone a homemade calendar. I was invited to a neighbor's house for dinner and really ate a lot.

## **December 27, 1917**

I had a date with a neighborhood girl. I ate at her house for dinner and later we went out with a few friends to the theater -- another good time.

## **December 30, 1917**

I asked another friend, Lena McMurray, to go out with me on New Year's Eve.

## **December 31, 1917**

Seventeen of us went to the opera house for a performance at midnight. Afterwards we strolled around downtown, ate something and watched people celebrating the new year. We missed the streetcar and had to walk home. On the way, we decided to walk to the Palace Theater, since I had the keys, in order to get warm. We played the piano, danced and sang. I took Lena home and went to bed around 4:00am.

## **January 1, 1918**

I got up around 1:30pm and went to work. We were all busy doing things in the theater, but I was not tired.

## **January 2, 1918**

In the evening, a friend of mine and Lena came over to my place. I showed them some of my pictures and paintings.

## **January 3, 1918**

The day was quiet. That evening, Lena and I went to the Majestic Theater and saw a comedy.

## **January 5, 1918**

It got very cold late in the evening and we had a lot of snow on the ground.

## **January 6, 1918**

The snow in the morning was one to two feet high. It was very windy. In a few places, the snow had drifted to a man's height. All trains were late or not running. The streetcars did not run from time to time. We had the most snow in many years. Business was, therefore, very bad.

## **January 8, 1918**

The day went by quietly. In the evening, I went to a Bible class meeting.

## **January 9, 1918**

Every day the newspapers were full of stories saying that Germany wanted peace, but couldn't get a compromise with Wilson's Plan. The Americans want to fight to the end. They will have no peace until they have the Emperor.

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### ***Wilson's Plan (from Wikipedia)***

*The "Fourteen Points" was a statement given on the 8th of January, 1918 by United States President Woodrow Wilson declaring that World War I was being fought for a moral cause and calling for postwar peace in Europe.*

*The U.S. had joined the Allies in fighting the Central Powers on April 6, 1917. Its entry into the war had in part been due to Germany's resumption of submarine warfare against merchant ships trading with France and Britain. However, Wilson had not entered into the war with any affinity with the long-festering almost tribal disputes between the Allies and Germany; if America was going to fight, he would try to unlink the war to nationalistic disputes or ambitions.*

*The speech made by Wilson on January 8, 1918 laid out a policy (free trade, open agreements, democracy and self-determination). The Fourteen Points speech was the only explicit statement of war aims by any of the nations fighting in World War I. Some belligerents gave general indications of their aims, but most kept their post-war goals private.*

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## **January 10, 1918**

This evening I went with Lena to my friend's place, Paul Wendland [*who would be the best man at Kurt's wedding in a couple years*], and had a party. We played games and sang. Some of the guests played mandolin and guitar. I had a fine time. At 11:00 we went home. It was snowing again.

## **January 11, 1918**

It snowed and the wind blew snow around the whole day. The weatherman said that a new and bigger storm was coming. It became much colder. Traffic had stopped. I stayed in the Garden Theater overnight. It was too bad to go home. [*It was 19 degrees below zero, a record still today.*]

## **January 12, 1918**

It was the coldest day in years with 21 degrees below zero [*a record that still stands today*]. Business was very bad. Trains were not coming in or leaving Peoria at all. My theaters weren't able to get any new films. We had to show the same pictures for two days.

## **January 13, 1918**

There still were no trains running. Business was better.

## January 14, 1918

In the afternoon we were closed, since we did not have new shows. We were able to trade films with another theater in the evening and would probably show those pictures the next two days.

## January 16, 1918

The trains were back in service and all films came by train/mail. Our theaters were the only ones who received their films for Wednesday and Thursday. Coal was scarce.

## January 17, 1918

In the evening, I went out with Lena and two friends to a theatre. All the electric streetlamp signs had been turned off. It was very dark out.

## January 18, 1918

An order came from the government saying, from this day on, all factories had to be closed for five days, plus every Monday for ten weeks due to the coal shortage. [[Here is a nice article about the coal shortage.](#)] It became almost unbearable with the dark nights, plus days without coal to heat our homes and cook our meals.

## January 20, 1918

Today, it was decided that all the theaters would be closed every Tuesday for ten weeks. All stores, shops, warehouses, factories and such would be closed every Monday.

## January 21, 1918

It was strange today. Everything was closed except for restaurants and theaters. I couldn't buy anything, not even cigars.

## January 22, 1918

Today we had to close. I slept until 10:00am. Later, I worked a bit at one of the theaters. I went home and painted.

## **January 24, 1918**

The painters started to decorate the Palace Theater.

## **January 26, 1918**

It was still very cold and windy with snow.

## **January 31, 1918**

Since it was getting warmer, the government opened all the stores and theaters on Mondays and Tuesdays.

## **February 17, 1918**

A few weeks ago, I stopped working at the Garden and Palace theaters. I started to work the next day as a painter at a sign shop called Keys & Keys *[415 Fulton Street near Jefferson]*. I was to receive \$2.50 a day at the beginning. I only had to paint the signs for the theater. Now my pay is up to \$21.50 per week.

## **February 19, 1918**

About two weeks ago, all German non-citizens had to register by filling out forms and had their fingerprints taken. I received my registration card today. I loved my new job and learned a lot. I'm only working eight hours a day and on Saturdays, until noon.

## **February 24, 1918**

This evening, I had a date with Laura. We went downtown and saw a show. After that, I worked on some drawings.

## **February 25, 1918**

Today, there was a dance and I had a great time. I got home at 2:00am.

## May, 1918

During this period a lot has happened. I had little time to write down all that is new. The Emperor's days are numbered. Almost every day here, boys are leaving to get soldier training. I went to many farewell parties for my friends. In March, I bought a war bond for \$100 which I can redeem in 1928 for an additional four and a quarter percent interest. Big Freedom, Red Cross and many other parades are being held from time to time. After July 1st all men in store positions, waiters, theater employees and so on must look for a spot in factories and women are taking their places. Five million men were sent to France in order to beat the Emperor. I hope the war will find an end soon.

I believe you feel sorry for me, but do not fear, all Americans treat me well. All German language was exterminated in the schools and even in the churches. The high schools have burned all German books. You can't believe how everyone hates the Emperor, even I. If what all the papers write is true, it must be horrible. Prisoners are being treated badly. Arms, ears and noses are cut off and they are being hanged. Belgian and French girls, women and children are murdered, burned alive and buried. The hospitals are bombed. In an American theater, a picture was shown entitled "The Emperor, Beast of Berlin" and a man in the audience was so angry that he shot at the screen in his rage. He made a big hole in the white curtain and said, "If I can't get him there, I will get him here." I could relate a thousand things of how hated the Emperor is, but soon they will get him and then it will be the end of the war.

Uncle Gustav got a new baby boy at the beginning of May. Now he has three children.

I have taken a step up with my work. The business director of Jos Szold & Sons has learned how good I can draw and gave me work for a newspaper that they publish. I make all the drawings there, in the evenings, then I go to the printer and earn extra money. For a single drawing, I get from \$1 to \$10. I can learn a lot with this work. I don't have much time to go out and, therefore, I save money.

[\[Here is a nice article about some of Peoria's most famous and influential immigrants, including the Szold family.\]](#)

## Summer, 1918

I was drafted on June 5th but up until now I have not been told to get a physical exam. My number was fifty-one. A week later, I received a card and was placed in Class 5, which means I would not be taken.

In July, I spent a lot of time with my friends at the river for summer freshness. I had a very good time.

On July 5th the excursion steamer "Columbia" sank off the shore of North Pekin. Ninety people had drowned. It was a disaster.

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### ***Excursion Steamer Columbia***

*The Excursion Steamer Columbia overturned in the Illinois River five miles south of downtown Peoria on the evening of July 5, 1918. The boat jammed against the Peoria side of the river in a fog and tore a huge hole in the bow of the boat. It sank almost immediately. Ninety people drowned resulting largely from the panic that followed on the boat as it began to sink. [Here is a short article with photos.](#) [Here is another short article.](#)*

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Later that month, I went to the house we rented for four weeks. I was the cook.

I think the war is coming to an end, since the Americans are fighting. On July 18th the "extra" news sheets declared that the American advances were victorious in ten cities and they took many prisoners. From August on, the Germans were being pushed back. We saw war pictures of how things were going. The atrocities of the Germans were shown in the theaters everywhere. One example was the American Ambassador, James W Gerard's movie "My Four Years in Germany." When I saw the picture, I didn't want to believe it. However, when a Canadian soldier, who had lost an arm in the war, talked, I hated the Germans myself and was ashamed.

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### ***My Four Years in Germany***

*The book "My Four Years in Germany" was written in 1917 by United States Ambassador James W Gerard and it was made into a movie in 1918.*

*"I want to tell the American people the gravity of the situation in Germany. They do not grasp either the magnitude or the importance of this war. We are en-gaged in a war against the greatest military power the world has ever seen; against a people whose country was, for so many centuries, a theatre of devastating wars, that fear is bred in the very marrow of their souls. Their leaders have promised them, as a result of the war, not only security, but riches untold and the domination of the world. We are in this war because we were forced into it; because Germany murdered our citizens on the high seas. Unless Germany is beaten, the whole world will be compelled to turn itself into an armed camp. The German autocracy will either bring every nation under its dominion or it will forever be wiped out as a form of government."*

*The full text is found here: <http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/memoir/Gerard/4yrsTC.htm>*

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## September 12, 1918

This was a big day. All men from eighteen to forty-five have to register. In Peoria alone, 14,000 men had to go. When they are all deployed, it's good night Germany. I wished I could go too.

I am safe and sound despite the fact that, now, I don't have much money. All my savings are being used up. Food and clothing are very expensive. I hope the war will be over soon.

## Fall, 1918

It's been five weeks since I last wrote anything. There have been great changes in Peoria and the world. Since the beginning of October, in almost all the states of America, a terrible epidemic has broken out, called the "Spanish Influenza." It was most notable in the barracks among the soldiers. It begins with a cold, then a fever and so on until pneumonia sets in, and most die. I was sick with it. I immediately went to the doctor and spent three days in bed. Since I did not have any real care at home, I suggested that I go to the hospital. After two days in the hospital, I felt much better. I was there for a week. All I needed was a good rest, which I received. I did not go back to work right away and the expenses cost me a lot of money. I had used up all my savings.

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### ***1918 flu pandemic (from Wikipedia)***

*The 1918 flu pandemic (January 1918 – December 1920) was an unusually deadly influenza pandemic, the first of the two pandemics involving H1N1 influenza virus. It infected 500 million people across the world, including remote Pacific islands and the Arctic, and killed 50 to 100 million of them—three to five percent of the world's population —making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history.*

*Most influenza outbreaks disproportionately kill juvenile, elderly, or already weakened patients; in contrast the 1918 pandemic killed predominantly previously healthy young adults. Modern research, using virus taken from the bodies of frozen victims, has concluded that the virus kills through a cytokine storm (overreaction of the body's immune system). The strong immune reactions of young adults ravaged the body, whereas the weaker immune systems of children and middle-aged adults resulted in fewer deaths among those groups.*

*To maintain morale, wartime censors minimized early reports of illness and mortality in Germany, Britain, France, and the United States; but papers were free to report the epidemic's effects in neutral Spain (such as the grave illness of King Alfonso XIII), creating a false impression of Spain as especially hard hit— thus the pandemic's nickname Spanish flu.*

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In November, I went back to my former job at the Garden Theater. Mr Zitron now owns three theaters in Peoria. He had been after me to come and paint signs. I earned \$25 to \$30 per week at the beginning. I also needed a new suit, hat and shoes.

Now, more about the war. Finally, the German people are getting a bit smarter. For four years they were fed lies from the Emperor and his generals. Bulgaria had stopped fighting, Turkey followed, and Austro-Hungary laid down their arms. Only Germany stands alone, and if it weren't for the socialists, the German people would sit in the dark. The people realized that they can't win. I knew that, ever since the Americans got into the war. If things go as they have for the past four weeks, everything will be over.

I hope that Christmas 1918 will be one with peace and joy.

## November 11, 1918

I knew the war would not last much longer. [Today was the day of armistice](#). It is one day that I will never forget.

From early in the morning, 6:00 to 8:00, whistles on all the trains, and all the factories that had them, were blowing. Many people didn't go to work. It brought me out of bed. I went to work and did what I could, but around 9:00, I put my work down. No one cared about working. The streets were full of people. Parades had been formed and everyone went downtown. Everything was closed. All streetcar service had stopped. The streets downtown were white with confetti and scraps of paper. I saw liveliness there that I cannot describe, and it went on into the night.

## Winter, 1918-19

Everything went on pretty quietly during the winter months. I worked every day at the theater.

## Summer, 1919

Peace was declared on June 28th. Great parades took place when the soldiers came home. The United States went through a lot of suffering during the past two years. One strike after another was declared. Food and everything else became more expensive. It was terrible. On July 1st I left the Garden Theater. I started working as a decorator and artist at the warehouse of Jos Szold & Son earning \$35 per week [*nearly \$440*]. The work was much better and I only had to work eight hours a day.

## Section 3 – My Romance with Verna

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### Summer, 1919

Since May, I have been seeing a girl, Verna Bishop, who had worked as a cashier at the Garden Theater. She fell in love with me in a short time and I fell for her. She was twenty years old but, nevertheless, had been previously married. She had a little boy named Fritz. Her husband was worthless and had lived with her only a short time. He separated himself from her shortly before the boy was born. *[Verna filed abandonment charges.]* She was granted a divorce on May 16th.

I could not help myself to direct my love and trust for her. I couldn't find a better and amiable girl as she, so soon. She is so good to me and I would give up everything for her.



*[Kurt and Verna, already married in this photo from probably the summer of 1920]*

## December 25, 1919

Another Christmas came, the sixth and perhaps the best that I have experienced. I made it a real German Christmas and thought of Germany. I slept at Verna's house Christmas Eve. She lived with her mom. Early on Christmas morning, we exchanged gifts. Little Fritz was overjoyed like the rest of the family. I had bought him a train set. He was occupied with it the whole day. We all received a lot of gifts.

I decorated the tree last night and Verna, her mother and two brothers looked on. It was the most beautiful tree that they had ever seen. On the gramophone, I had a record playing "Silent Night" sung in German, which I bought. We had a real German Christmas fest.



Fritz Bishop

## Winter, 1920

A branch store of Szold's was built in Lewistown, Illinois [35 miles southwest of Peoria]. On January 16th I was transferred. I found a beautiful room right away and brought my things there. I really liked this town a lot and want to build my home here. From time to time, I would go to Peoria in order to visit Verna.

## Spring, 1920

Since I was in Lewistown, Verna became quite lonely. I felt so at home here and I wanted to get married. I bought a nice house. [He also asked Verna to marry him.]

## Summer, 1920

I painted everything in the house and made it ready to move in. Then, I was given the news that I would be relocated back to the Peoria store. I was not pleased with that at all. Even Verna was quite disheartened. Everything was almost ready for the wedding. The furniture was on the way and it had to be returned. I had to sell the house. So in July, I went to work again in Peoria. Mr Roth, the decorator, became the business manager in Lewistown. I had to take his place. The place that I used to live in Peoria was available, so I rented it right away.

*[Szold's Department Store opened in 1880 and was owned by Jos Szold & Son. It was re-located around 1900 from the original store on Tyng Street to 2201-2209 South Adams Street at Garden. It closed in 1986. Verna worked there as a sales clerk for a number of years.]*

## July 5, 1920

This was my wedding day. Weddings are not so highly celebrated here as in Germany. We had a few relatives present. At 2:00, we were at the church *[Grace Evangelical]* where Uncle Gustav had preached when he lived in Peoria. After the wedding, we drove downtown to take pictures. We had to go to Lewistown today. To our surprise, just before 4:00 at the train station, everyone that had accompanied us downtown threw rice at us. We got on the train to Lewistown just in time. We stayed there overnight.



*[Kurt Leucht and Verna Bishop wedding day, July 5, 1920]*

**July 6, 1920**

We finished what we had to do in Lewistown, then we came back to Peoria. We are both very happy. We will live happily together with Fritz. I am very content with Verna. She makes a good housewife.

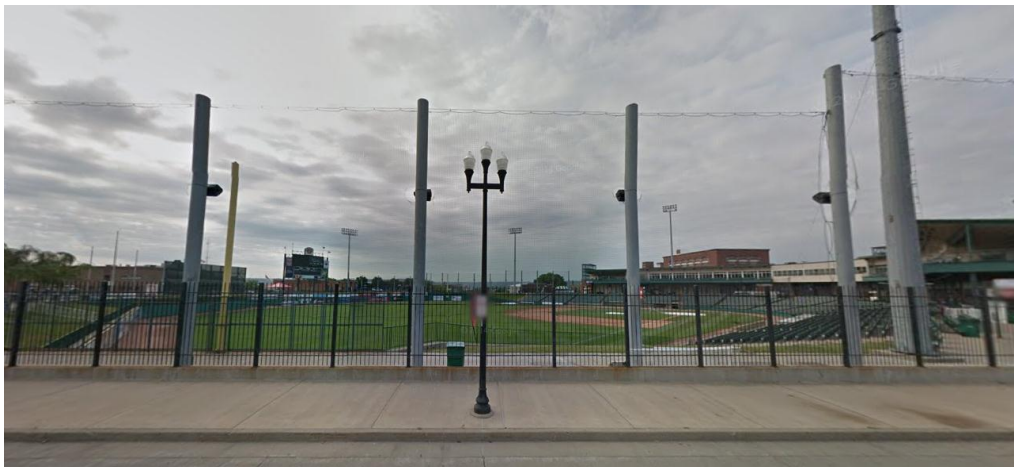
*[That is the last entry in the journal.]*

## Section 4 – Epilogue

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Just four months after Kurt and Verna's marriage, Fritz died of diphtheria in the winter of 1920. He was only 4 and a half years old. According to Wikipedia, diphtheria killed 13,000 to 15,000 children per year in the early 1920s. One year later Kurt and Verna had their first child together, a girl they named Betty Joyce. Two and a half years later they had their first boy, Jack Dean. Then a full 7 and a half years later they had their second boy, Thomas Otto.

In 1926, Kurt started working for H E Hobbs Company, a sign shop located at 702 SW Jefferson Ave at State Street. In 1958 he bought the company from Mrs. Hobbs after her husband died. He sold the shop to a larger company, Leo Donovan Co Outdoor Advertising in 1968 and worked for them three more years before retiring in 1971 at the age of 74.



*[the former H E Hobbs sign shop location is now roughly third base in the downtown Peoria ballpark, image copyright Google Street View]*

Twelve years after Tom was born, Verna and Kurt had their third son, William Kurt. Sadly, at only 44 years of age Verna died due to complications during childbirth. Betty was now 21 years old and had just married a month prior but was able to help raise William, or Billy as the family called him. Some neighbor ladies also stepped up to help take care of Billy.

Nearly 8 years after he lost Verna, Kurt married Alberta Stone on June 16, 1951. They were active in Peoria Cinema Club, Manual High School Band Boosters, Senior Summer Band Boosters, plus they collected and sold antique glassware in their home. Kurt and Alberta were also members of Grace EUB/United Methodist Church which was the same church where Kurt and Verna were married in 1920 and where Kurt's youngest son, Bill, was married in 1966. Kurt and Alberta were married just shy of 25 years when Kurt passed away in 1976 at age 79. Alberta died six years later.



*[Kurt and Alberta, 1975]*

Kurt was a very accomplished sign painter and artist. He was self-taught and had extreme natural talent along with a strong work ethic. In addition to painting, he also enjoyed filming and editing home movies. See section 7 below for many examples of Kurt's artistry.

Kurt's youngest son, Bill, named his own son Kurt William Leucht. There is a bit of resemblance, as you can see below:

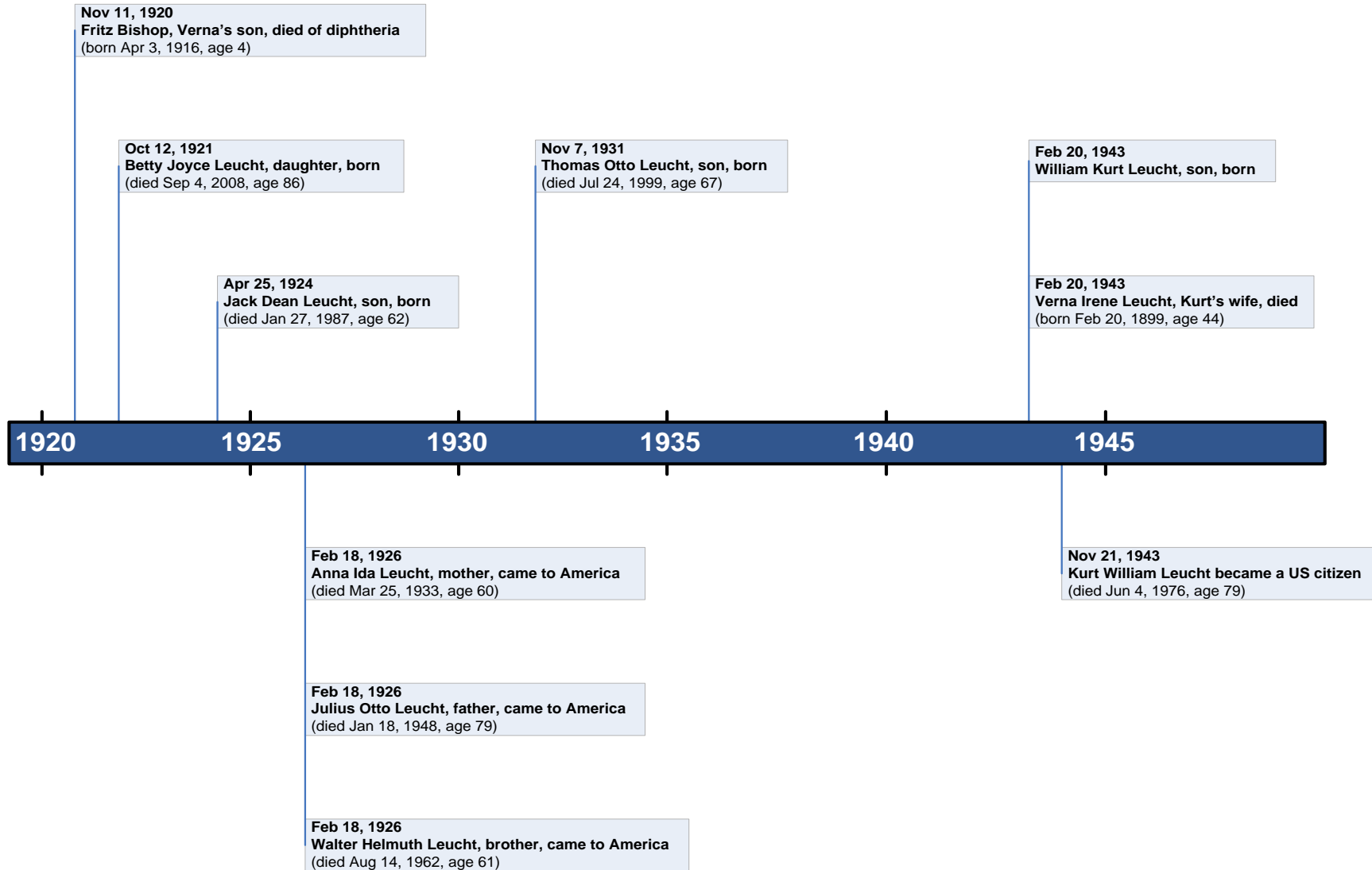


**Kurt William Leucht, born 1896  
(age 17)**

**Kurt William Leucht, born 1970  
(age 17)**

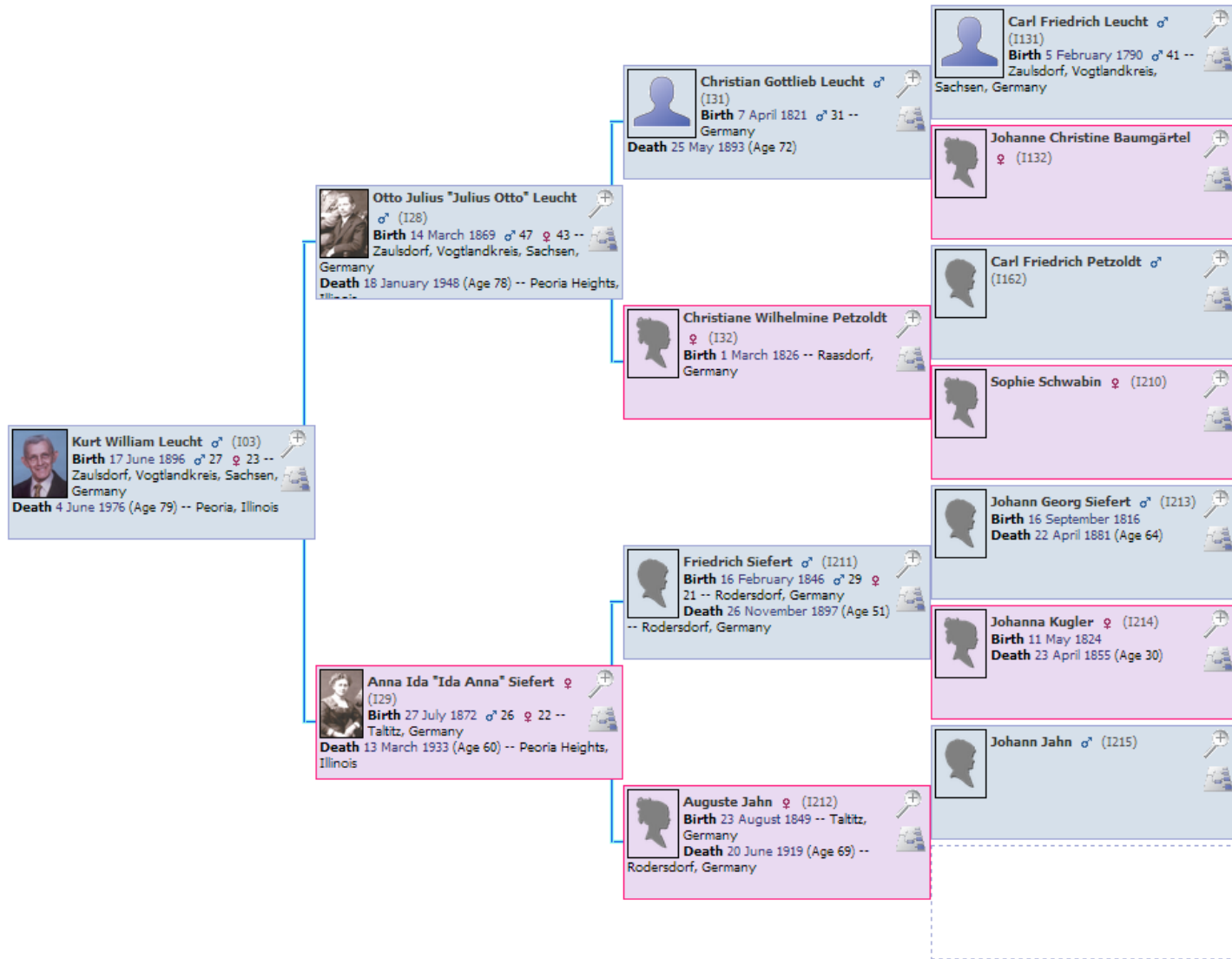
# Section 5 – Kurt and Verna’s Family Timeline

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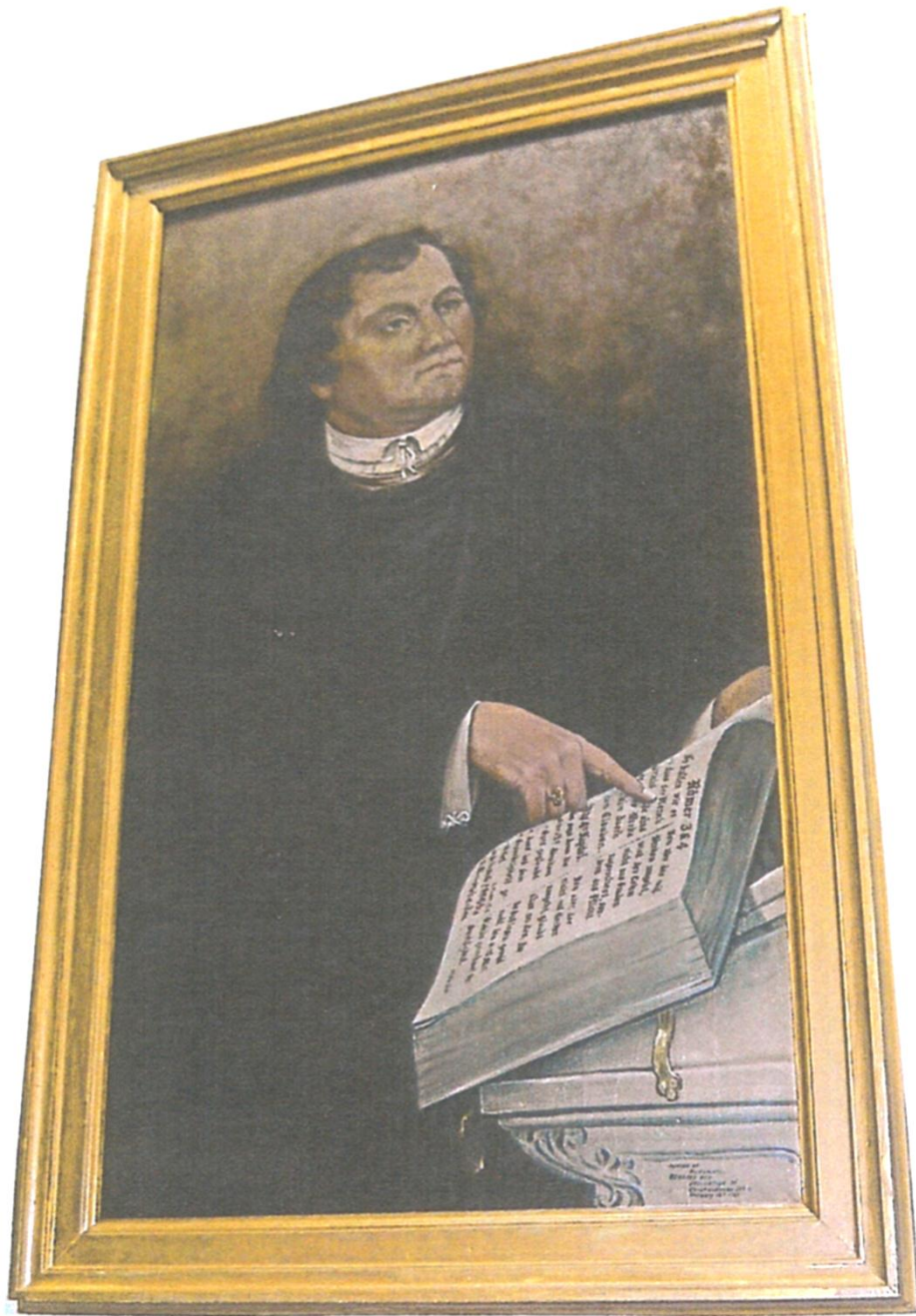


# Section 6 – Kurt William Leucht's Ancestry



## Section 7 – Artistic Works of Kurt Leucht

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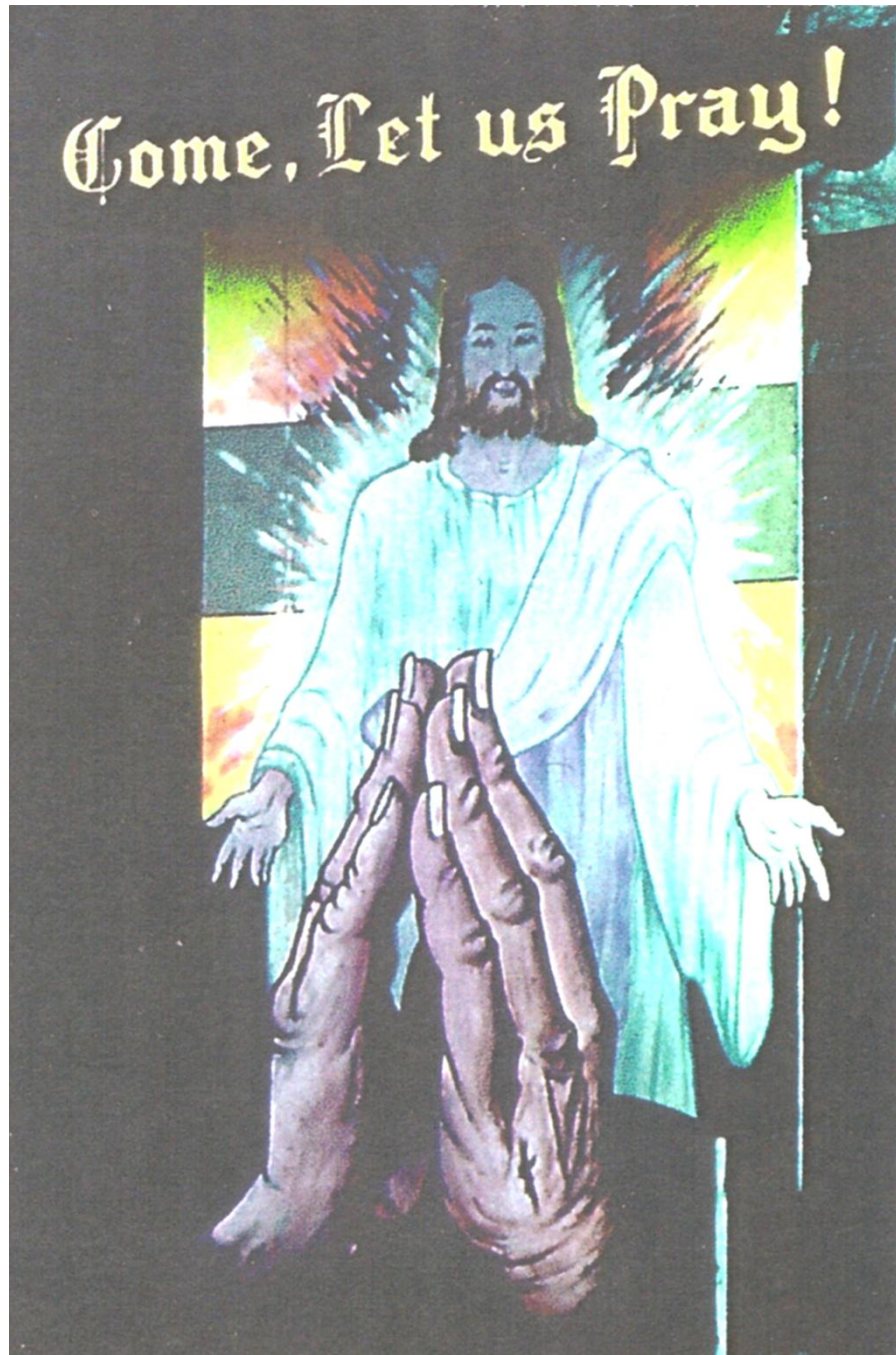
*["Martin Luther c. 1540", Oil Painting, 62" x 35", 1927, restored in 2010]*



[Landscape, Watercolor, 15" x 10", 1934]



*[Landscape, Wall Painting, 6' x 10', 1957]*



*["Come, Let Us Pray", 3D Outdoor Painting, 8' x 4', 1968]*



*["Blue Boy", Oil Painting, 23" x 19", 1973]*



[Landscape, Oil Painting, 18" x 12", 1974]

# 1950's Peoria Cinema Club Films



(distributed from [www.leucht.com](http://www.leucht.com))



[1950's Peoria Cinema Club Films, available for purchase at the [Leucht Online Store](http://www.leucht.com)]