

Ernst Vornkahl, Grant Township, Clark County, Missouri, U.S.A. a.k.a.

Friedrich Ernst Vornkahl, Hoheneggelsen, Niedersachsen, Germany

Earnest M. (“Mel”) Vornkahl[†] and Roy A. Johnson

Ernst Vornkahl was born 18 Apr 1831 in Hoheneggelsen,^[2306] a village located in the present day state of Niedersachsen, Germany. His parents were Johann Joachim Friedrich Conrad (known as Friedrich) and Johanne Dorothee Elisabeth (Ohlendorf) Vornkahl (known as Dorothee or Dora).^[2949] Before the birth of Ernst, Friedrich and Dorothee had lived in the nearby village of Dingelbe. It appears that they moved to Hoheneggelsen at some time between 1825 and 1831 because the birth of their previous child, Caroline Wilhelmine Elisabeth, is recorded in Dingelbe in 1825.^{[1029][2405]} In the Hoheneggelsen records, Friedrich is described as an Ackermann (husbandman).

Ernst had two brothers who lived to adulthood (he also had three brothers who did not survive childhood – two died in infancy and one as a child, age 4; see Chart 3A for complete family). His oldest brother, Friedrich Adolf was, in fact, a half-brother and was the son of Friedrich and his first wife, Johanne Marie Catharine Elisabeth Hermannes. From later records, we can conclude that Friedrich Adolf (also known as Friedrich) remained in Hoheneggelsen as the heir to the Vornkahl home and farm. This left Ernst, as well as his older full brother Johann Heinrich Christian (known as Henry; see section for him), in need of finding employment or in search of a new profession. Henry emigrated to the United States of America in about 1846 and Ernst followed this path in 1852. For more about Ernst’s family in Germany, see the chapter “Johann Heinrich Christian and Ernst Vornkahl’s Family in Germany.”

In the United States, Ernst settled for several years near the small town of West Point^[2950] in Lee County, Iowa.^[2951] He then moved to land in the extreme northeast corner of Clark County, Missouri, and in 1856 he purchased and moved onto 310 acres of improved farmland in Grant Township, Clark County, Missouri. In 1857, Ernst (Figure 25) married Elizabeth Rikeberg (Figure 26). A photo of the original farm house is shown in Figure 27. The location of the Vornkahl farmstead in Grant Township can be seen in the accompanying plat map from 1930 where the land is identified by the name W.H. Vornkahl, Ernst’s son and heir (see Figure 28).

Elizabeth Rikeberg was born in Germany on 17 Aug 1837,^[2951] the daughter of Anton and Elizabeth Rikeberg. Elizabeth presumably came to America about the same time as her future husband. Before her marriage, she settled in the village of Gorin in Scotland County, Missouri, just to the west of Clark County. To the union of Ernst and Elizabeth Vornkahl were born two children, Amelia (b. 10 Feb 1858)^[2951] and William Herman (b. 8 Sep 1861; known as Herman).^[2951] Ernst was granted U.S. citizenship on 4 Oct 1886.^[2952] The couple operated the farm in Grant Township until about 1888 at which time their son, Herman, took over.

In 1900, Ernst and Elizabeth traveled to Germany to visit Ernst’s relatives and his birthplace. The visit is recorded in several letters sent by Ernst and Elizabeth to their son, Herman, during their travels.^[2953] The first letter, sent from New York on 24 May 1900, described their journey from Iowa via train to New York City. They were impressed when the entire train was taken across the Detroit River on a four hundred thirty foot ferry boat. The route continued through Canada, crossing back into the U.S. at Niagara Falls. In New York, they boarded the steamer *Venetia* for the 13 day trip to Hamburg. In Germany, they first stayed in Hildesheim with Carl Vornkahl, probably Ernst’s cousin. Six days later, they continued on to Hoheneggelsen where they stayed with Ernst’s nephew, Wilhelm Himstedt, probably the son of Ernst’s sister, Catharine Sophie Fredericke and her husband Matthias Heinrich Christian Himstedt.

[†]Deceased 11 May 2014.

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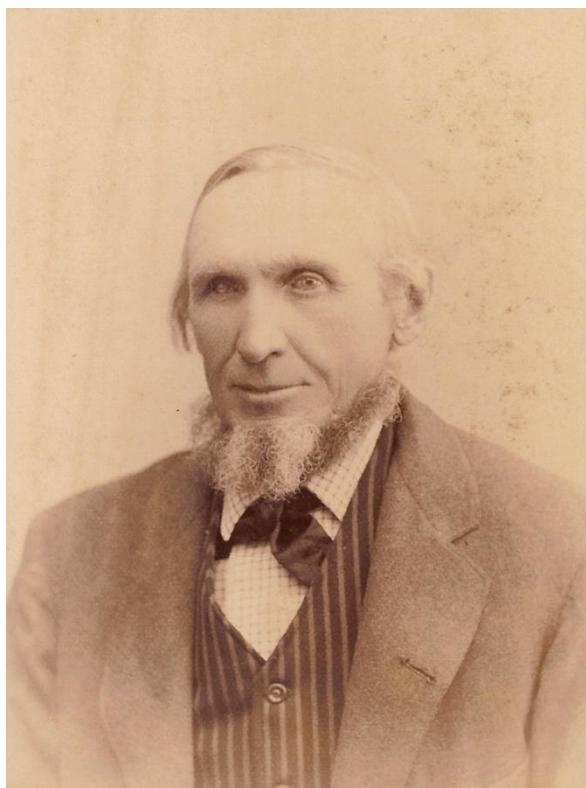


Figure 25. Ernst Vornkahl



Figure 26. Elizabeth (Rikeberg) Vornkahl



Figure 27. Original house on the Ernst Vornkahl farm, Grant Township, Missouri.

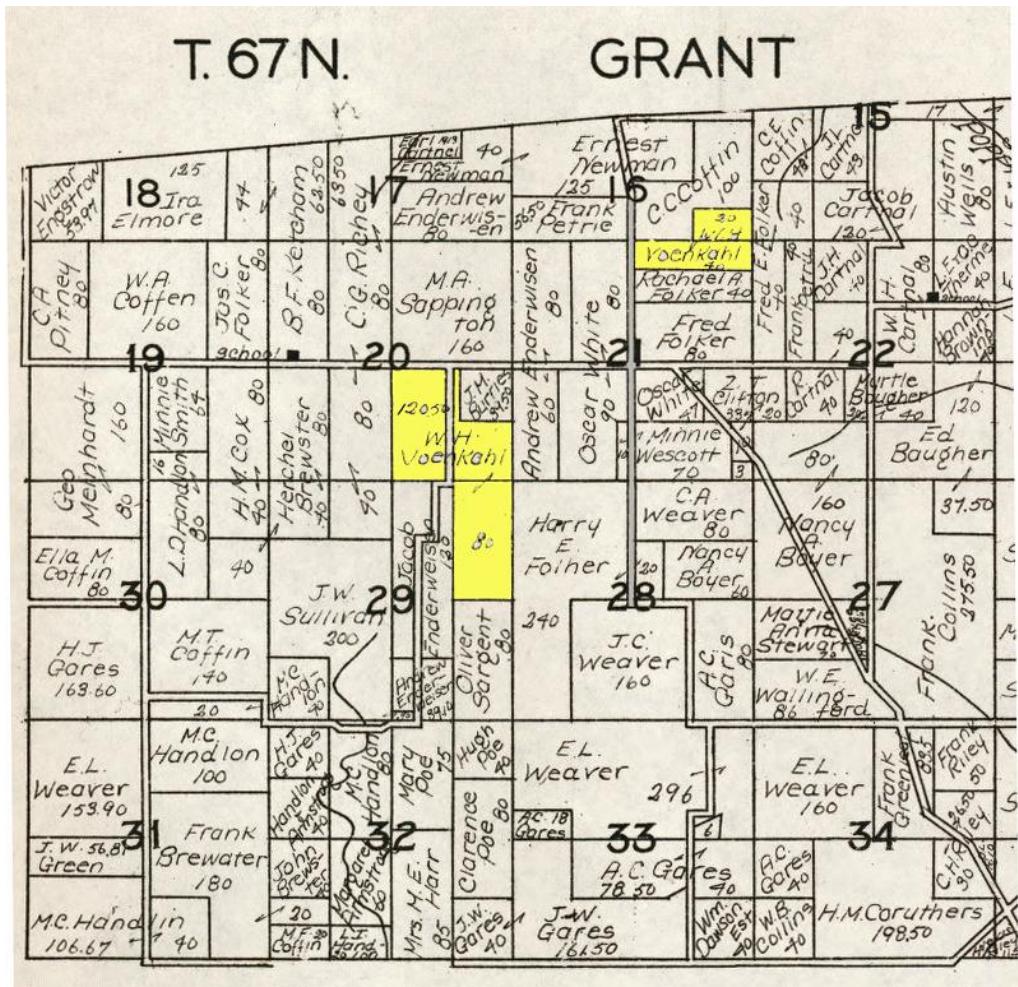


Figure 28. Plat map from 1930 of the western part of Grant Township, Clark County, Missouri, showing the location of Ernst Vornkahl's farm (now labeled W.H. Vornkahl).

Ernst liked what he saw in Germany, writing on 30 Jun 1900 that "the whole country is prospering. The land in Germany is very high (in price) and the rent of it is from 52 to 60 marks an acre of 120 rods; that means from 13 to 15 dollars. Cows with calves will bring 350 to 400 marks." In a final letter to Herman on 4 Aug 1900 from Bremen, he writes that he and Elizabeth are on their way home, Elizabeth having become tired of traveling and homesick.^[2953] Ernst laments, "I wanted to see something else besides what I did while we were here, because it is a Paradise on Earth, but I had to give up."^[2953]

We may ask if both Ernst and Elizabeth collected inheritances while in Germany because in his last letter, Ernst gave instructions to Herman how to claim money that they had deposited in the National City Bank in New York in case "...the Steamer should go under and we with it..."^[2953] The couple returned aboard the steamer, *Marie Theresa*, departing from Bremen on August 7, 1900.

Ernst died near Acasto, Missouri, on 5 Jan 1910.^[2954] Elizabeth died 24 Feb 1914 in St. Joseph, Missouri, where she had been a patient in the state hospital.^[2955,2956] Both are buried in the Acasto cemetery in Clark County, Missouri. A photo of the gravestone for Ernst and Elizabeth is shown in Figure 36 (in the Appendix).

Ernst and Elizabeth's daughter Amelia married David Sullivan in Dec 1880 (see Figure 31).^[2951,2957] They were the parents of Walter O. Sullivan (b. Nov 1886)^[2958] and also of two children who died in infancy.^[2951,2957]

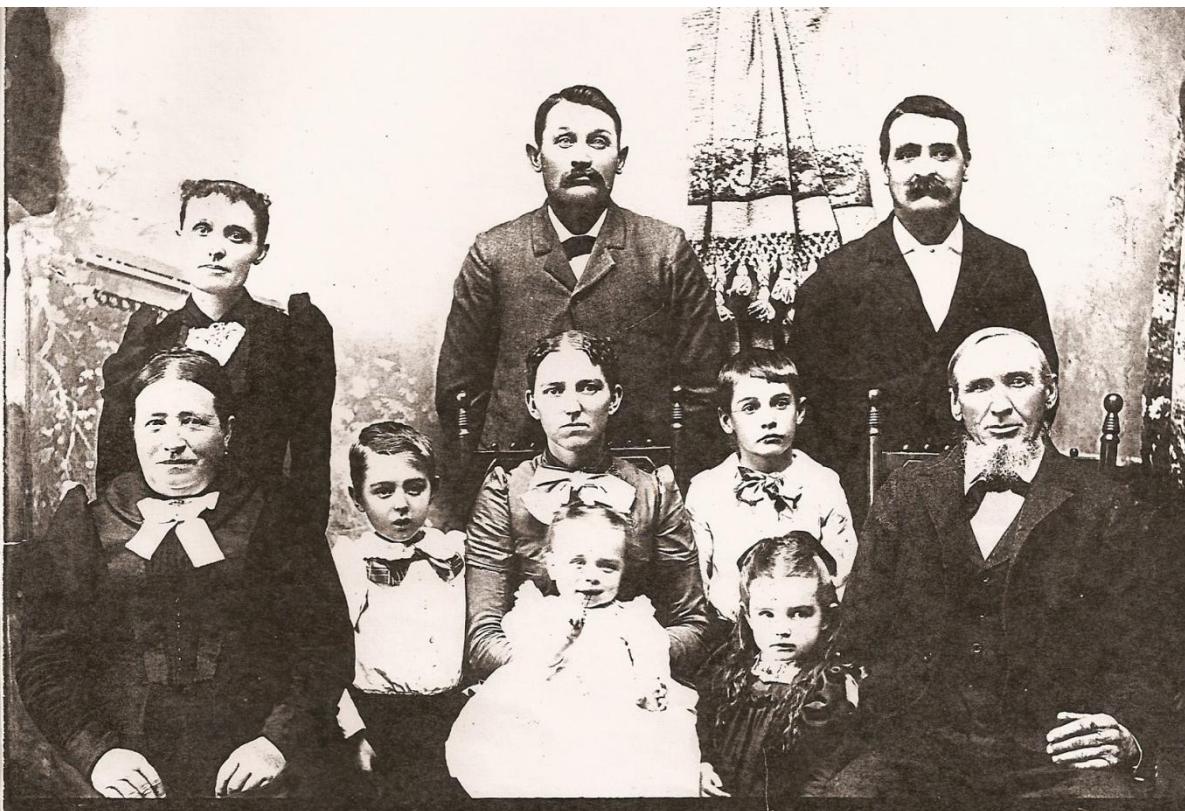
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Figure 29. William Herman Vornkahl



Figure 30. Sadie Brewster Vornkahl



Back row: Amelia (Vornkahl) Sullivan, Harmon Vornkahl, David or Daniel (?) Sullivan
Front row: Elizabeth Vornkahl, Elmer Vornkahl, Sadie Vornkahl, Sullivan's son-Walter, Ernest Vornkahl, Ada Vornkahl (sitting on Sadie's lap), Mary (Vornkahl) Von Seggen next to her.

Figure 31. Ernst and Elizabeth Vornkahl and family.



Figure 32. Elmer Ernest and Bertie Ann (Clifton) Vornkahl and son Marvin Eston.



Figure 33. Shucking fodder on Vornkahl farm.

Herman worked with his father on the family farm and took over operation of the farm in about 1888, building a home on the northeast part of the property. He operated the farm until his retirement in 1936 at which time he purchased a home in Farmington, Iowa. Herman (Figure 29) married Sadie E. Brewster (Figure 30) on 19 Oct 1888.^[2959] To this union four children were born: Elmer Ernst (b. 14 Aug 1889), Mary Ethel (b. 18 Jan 1892), Ada (b. 17 Oct 1893), and Effie (b. 30 May 1900). Operating the family farm in that period and especially during the Great Depression was a struggle. One of the writers of this account, being the grandson of Herman, spent some time listening to stories Herman told about life in those days. "He seemed to take it all in stride and was proud of what he had accomplished in life. His religious beliefs were strong as were his father's before him and I'm sure that carried them through the difficult times." Herman and Sadie are pictured with other members of the Vornkahl family in Figure 31. Following retirement, the farm was turned over to his grandson, Marvin Vornkahl. Herman suffered a stroke in late 1942 and died on 17 Apr 1943.^[2960] Sadie Brewster (b. 27 Feb 1868) was the daughter of George and Malinda Neff Brewster. She became a devoted farm wife and, after retiring in 1936, moved to Farmington with her husband. After his death, she lived with her two daughters, Ada and Effie, until her death on 20 Oct 1946.^[2951]

Elmer Ernest Vornkahl, son of Herman and Sadie, married Bertie Ann Clifton on 25 Feb 1915^[2961] (Figure 32). They purchased and moved onto what was known as the Sappington farm on 20 Mar 1915.^[2951] The Sappington farm, still shown as such on the 1930 Grant Township plat map (Figure 28), is located just across the road from the original Ernst Vornkahl farm. To Elmer and Bertie three sons were born: Marvin Eston (b. 15 Feb 1916), Merrill Dean, and the co-writer of this account, Earnest Melburn (b. 13 Jul 1932).^[2951] Elmer and Bertie continued farming and prospering until the fall of 1950 when Elmer was diagnosed with lung cancer.

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Figure 34. Ada and Effie Vornkahl. Photograph courtesy of Deanna Gray.

He died on 27 May 1951.^[2962] Bertie Ann Clifton was born 19 Oct 1892, the daughter of Zachariah and Clarinda Alice (Gammon) Clifton.^[2951] The Clifton land is also shown on the Grant Township plat map and is located on the border of Sections 21 and 22. After the death of her husband in the spring of 1951, she purchased a home in



Figure 35. Aerial view of Vornkahl farm.

Farmington, Iowa, and sold the farm in the fall of 1951. She lived first in her home and then in the Clark County Nursing Home until her death on 21 Nov 1990.^[2951]

Mary Ethel Vornkahl, oldest daughter of Herman and Sadie, married Lloyd Von Seggen (b. 10 Nov 1887) on 7 Apr 1914.^[2951] To this union two children were born: Milo (b. 25 Sep 1922) and Wilma (b. 26 May 1928).^[2951] Lloyd died of diphtheria at an early age on 2 Sep 1937.^[2963] Mary Ethel died in Farmington, Iowa, on 2 Nov 1982.^[2951] Of Herman and Sadie's two younger daughters, Ada remained single throughout her life and lived at home until her death on 19 Aug 1953.^[2951] Effie also lived at home for many years, working at many jobs with her sister, Ada. Then on 25 Nov 1959 she was united in marriage with Darrell Wolfe (b. 24 Mar 1901).^[2951] They farmed together near Donnellson and had a happy marriage until Darrell's passing on 13 Oct 1970.^[2963] Effie moved back to the Farmington area and lived there until her death on 30 Mar 1996.^[2951] A photograph of Ada and Effie Vornkahl is shown in Figure 34.

The original farm purchased by Ernst Vornkahl in 1856 was in the family for 148 years. The farm was designated a century farm in 1981.^[2963] A picture of the original farmhouse is shown in Figure 27. A scene showing harvesting of the corn crop in the 1800s is shown in Figure 33. William Herman Vornkahl built a new house in about 1888-92, which is included in the aerial photograph of the farm shown in Figure 35.

Appendix. Photograph of grave marker for Ernst and Elisabeth Vornkahl.



Figure 36.

References and Notes are found in the Sources section of this book.