

Donovan-Meyer Family History



Donovan-Meyer Family History

Karen Story

karen@nwnative.us
425-941-3737 (cell)

Third Edition
May 2024

Cover photos, clockwise from lower left: Marie Goetze Meyer,
Dr. Joseph Meyer, Ferdinand and Pauline Erschen, Cornelius
Donovan, Mary Hewitt Donovan

This book is available for free download or for purchase (at cost) at
nwnative.us/Karen/Genealogy/Genealogy.html

Changes in Third Edition

This third edition incorporates information and photos from my trip to some of the Donovan ancestral towns in Ireland, Germany, and Slovenia. The changes are a bit too extensive to list here.

Changes in Second Edition

Title page: List cover photos

Page 6: Info about steerage conditions on immigrant ships

Page 13, 70: New photos of Michael Donovan clan

Page 21: Add descendants of Francis X. Donovan.

Page 22: Joe Donovan Jr. death and obituary info

Page 26: New info about Dr. Joseph Meyer

Page 27: Update Theodore Goetz family info.

Page 32: New photo of six Meyer children

Page 34: New info about Martha Meyer and Charles Frederick Wolf Schmid

Page 35: Info from Louise Meyer Erts obituary

Page 36: Louise & Frank's move to CA was for reasons unknown (her sister Martha was not in fact living there)

Page 41: Nancy Laford death date

Page 43: Info about Josephine Meyer and Michael Donovan wedding

Page 44: Info about Reilly's Pub & Ray Donovan

Page 54: Add Julius Gras cemetery info (same as Pauline).

Page 54: Julius had a parakeet he talked to in German.

Page 62: Additional info about life in Gottschee

Page 65: Heddy paid for and encouraged Pauline's trip to Austria to see her mother.

Page 66: Heddy Donovan had malaria as a child.

Page 69, 74: Add pictures of Heddy & Ray.

Page 72: Add Heddy & Ray cemetery info.

Add photos to some trees.

Miscellaneous grammatical and typographic corrections

Lightened dark photos.

Contents

Overview of the Donovans and Meyers	7
Cornelius J. Donovan and Mary E. Hewitt.....	7
O'Donovan name and history	7
Parents of Cornelius Donovan	8
Donovan emigration	10
Parents of Mary Hewitt: Shad Thames and Life on the Docks in London.....	10
Cornelius Donovan and Mary Elizabeth Hewitt	13
Children of Cornelius Donovan and Mary Elizabeth Hewitt.....	15
John Joseph Donovan	17
Mary Frances (Mae) Donovan	20
Michael Cornelius Donovan	21
Helen Theresa Eckhoff	22
Kathryn Agnes Robinson	22
Francis Xavier (France) Donovan	24
Joseph Raymond Donovan.....	25
Ignatius Benedict (Nace) Donovan.....	27
Dr. Joseph Meyer and Marie Goetze.....	29
Joseph Meyer	29
Parents of Marie Goetze	31
Marie Goetze.....	33
Children of Dr. Joseph Meyer and Marie Goetze	35
Albert (Allie) Meyer	37
Josephine Meyer Donovan.....	38
Martha Meyer Schmid Wolf	38
Louise Meyer Erts	39
Clotilde (Tillie) Meyer.....	45
Walter Meyer.....	45
Michael Donovan and Josephine Meyer	47
Raymond Michael Donovan	47
Marion Veronica Cornelia Donovan	49
Charles Joseph Donovan.....	52
Julius Gras and Pauline Erschen (Heddy's parents).....	55
Julius Gras.....	55
Pauline Erschen	59
Pauline's Parents	62
Ferdinand Erschen	62
Magdalena Zwar	63
Ferdinand and Magdalena Erschen.....	64
Gottschee: a German enclave in Slovenia	67
Mozelj, Slovenia.....	72
The Mozelj Church and Cemetery	75
Friedrich Gras.....	80
Hedwig Josephine Gras	81

Raymond Donovan and Heddy Gras.....	85
Children of Ray Donovan and Heddy Gras	89

Donovan-Meyer Family History

This document is primarily for the descendants of Raymond Donovan and Heddy Gras, but will also be of interest to anyone who is related to Cornelius J. Donovan, Mary E. Hewitt, Dr. Joseph Meyer, or Marie Goetze.

This document will be updated as new information comes to light. I've made every effort to fact check all data, and to clearly state what is conjecture or opinion. I apologize for any mistakes or omissions, and I welcome corrections and suggestions. You can reach me at karen@nwnative.us or 425-941-3737 (text or call). I hope this document will spark additional memories and clues for further research.

There is more information about some people than others. I have included what I have been able to collect, which varied from person to person. I have not yet been able to locate all living descendants, so some of the tree diagrams are incomplete.

If you would like to customize this document for your immediate clan, I would be happy to send you the Word version.

For additional information, including sources, specific dates, and more photos, see my genealogy website at <http://nwnative.us/Karen/Genealogy/Genealogy.html>.

Thank you to everyone in the Donovan-Meyer clan, and others who shared stories, research, and photos for this document (please forgive me, and let me know, if I've accidentally forgotten to include you!):

Bridget Bostick
Carol Studer
Donald Reindl
Gottschee Genealogy Facebook group
Helmut Tramposch
James Dillon
Janet Gerlach
Jason Goltz (special thanks for access to his extensive family tree sources!)

Joe Donovan, Jr.

Kathy Von Der Linn
Kerin Siani
Kevin Donovan
Laurie Donovan
Mark Donovan
Marty Laford
Mary Curley
Maureen Curley
Pat Gerlach
Sheila Boyle

A note about names

Name spellings varied widely in old records. Many people were illiterate and only knew how to speak their names. Names in church records were often written in Latin, census takers might write the name phonetically, or names might be modified for various reasons (for example, German names were changed to Slovenian, old world names were simplified during immigration, and the "O" was dropped from Irish names to make them look Protestant for soup handouts during the famine).

A note about the family tree diagrams

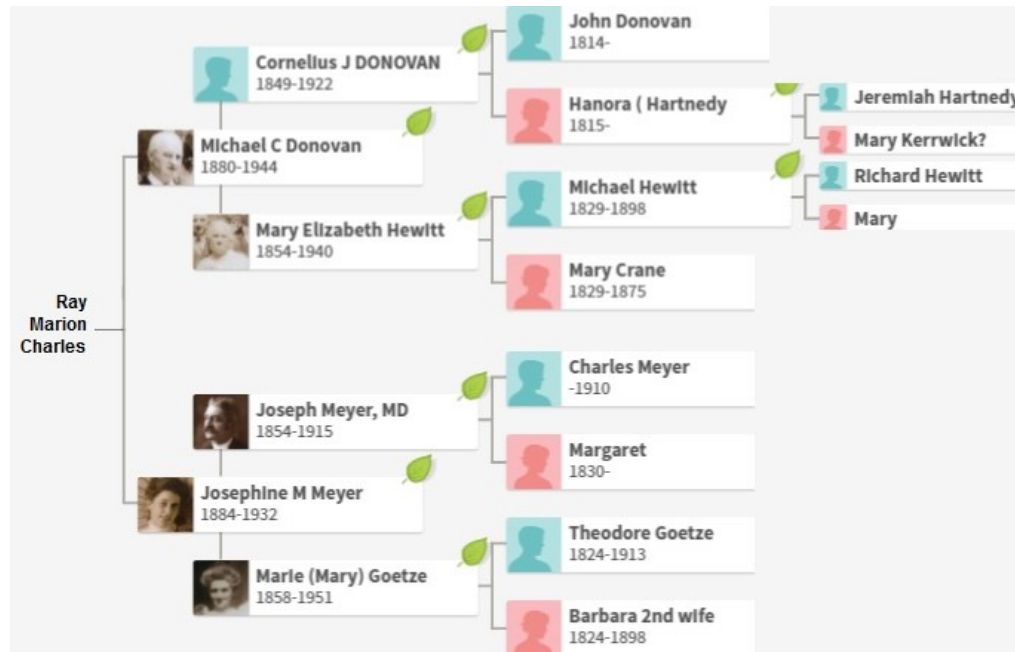
The family tree diagrams in this document contain small green leaf symbols. These represent hints in the Ancestry.com software, and have no relevance for this document. The tree diagrams are small and hard to read; they are intended to show relationships, not details. Contact me for access to the actual tree on Ancestry.com. If I'm not certain about a birth year, it is entered in Ancestry.com as "about" and the year. The "about" does not show in the tree diagrams, so please note that some of the birth years on the diagrams may not be correct.

What was it like to travel steerage?

Most immigrants traveled "steerage," the cheapest tickets, on the lowest deck of a vessel. Although Congress began attempting to regulate steerage conditions in 1820, conditions endured by passengers improved very little. In 1908, special agents of the U.S. Immigration Commission traveled as passengers to observe firsthand the hunger, lack of privacy, and generally uncomfortable, unsanitary, and "disgusting and demoralizing" conditions. In the report, sleeping quarters were described as accommodating 300 or more people. The berths were six feet long and two feet wide. This is where travelers slept and stored all of their luggage. Voyages lasted seven to seventeen days. Most passengers had to provide and wash their own eating utensils. Laws that required clean washrooms were often ignored, and there were far too few washrooms for the number of people. There was only cold saltwater for washing, with maybe one warm water faucet for 300 to share. People were fed from tin trays and the food was "wretched" and insufficient.

Overview of the Donovans and Meyers

Cornelius and Mary Donovan had 12 children. Joseph and Marie Meyer had seven children. We will learn about all of them in this document. This chart shows just Michael Donovan and Josephine Meyer, who were the parents of Ray, Marion, and Charles Donovan.



The Donovan and Meyer ancestors of Ray, Marion, and Charles Donovan

Cornelius J. Donovan and Mary E. Hewitt

O'Donovan name and history

The name O'Donovan has been associated with the western part of County Cork, Ireland, for nearly a thousand years, and is a very common name there, but the O'Donovan place of origin is actually in Limerick, north of Cork.

The name O'Donovan derives from the Gaelic Ó Donnabháin, meaning the grandsons or descendants of Donnubán mac Cathail, the 10th-century ruler of the Uí Fidgenti tuath, or kingdom, an area roughly corresponding to the present diocese of Limerick. The name might have originally meant someone with a very dark complexion or dark hair, or a black-haired nobleman.

The original O'Donovans were descended from one of the Kings of Munster (a province in southern Ireland). The family seat was in Bruree, on the Maigue river, where there are still remains of their earthen forts.

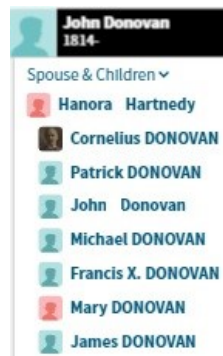
The O'Donovans splintered into clans, and some of them migrated into Cork in the mid-1200s. They built Castle Donovan (Castledonovan) in what was then a remote mountain valley near Drimoleague, about 12 miles north of Skibbereen. This was the seat of the Clann Cathail O'Donovans for a period during the 16th century. When I visited, it was a magical stone ruin on a crag above rolling green hills.

There is a lot more information about the O'Donovan family history on the internet.

Names beginning with O' weren't always inherited by blood. If land passed to the control of a new clan, the local population often adopted the name of the new chief (warlord) out of self preservation. In the 1600s, when English rule intensified, the prefix O' was often dropped because it was difficult to find work if you had an Irish-sounding name. In the 1800s, many families reinstated the prefix.

Parents of Cornelius Donovan

Cornelius Donovan was born in 1849 in what was then the 7th Ward of New York City (encompassing parts of today's Two Bridges and Lower Eastside neighborhoods). There were many Cork immigrants in this ward. Cornelius was the oldest of seven children that we know of. His parents were Irish immigrants John Donovan and Hanora (Nora) Hartnedy.



John Donovan was born in 1814 in Ahiohill (pronounced AH-hee-ohl), a small town in County Cork, Ireland, not far from Skibbereen. There are no records for a John Donovan born anywhere in Cork around this time, however, but so many family sources indicate his place and date of birth, that we can be pretty confident that he was born in or near Ahiohill.

We know that John's wife's name was Hanora Hartnedy, but we aren't certain of her birth location, or her parents' names. There is a baptismal record for a Hanora Hartnedy born in 1815 in Kilbrittain, Cork, to a Jeremiah and Mary. At that time, it was typical for people to name their first son after the paternal grandfather, the first daughter after the paternal grandmother, and the second son and daughter after the maternal grandparents. If a child died, the next-born child of that same gender would be given the same name. We would therefore expect John's parents to be named Cornelius and Mary, and, if Patrick was in fact John and Hanora's second son, we would expect Hanora's father's name to be Patrick. If Jeremiah was in fact Hanora's father, she would have broken with tradition in naming her second son, which was rare among the poorer classes.

We have been unable to find a wedding record for John and Hanora. According to the genealogist I met with in Skibbereen, there are few church records (birth, baptism, or marriage) in this part of Ireland from before about 1818. One reason is that Catholicism was banned, and thus there were no official Catholic church records.

The best source for records of Catholic families are the tithe applotment (land taxation) records of landholders and leasers. All land was owned by English Protestants, but they could lease it to Catholics, who then had to pay tax on it. This was recorded in the applotment books. There are five Cornelius Donovans listed in the books during the early 1800s, but none near Ahiohill. Although Hartnedy is a West Cork name, there are no Hartnedys (including by any variant spelling) listed in the land records in West Cork. So our John and Hanora probably came from families too poor to own or lease land.

Families who couldn't afford to lease their own land would rent a primitive, windowless turf cottage where they could have a small plot to grow potatoes, and hope for work as laborers on large estates or larger neighboring farms. Heat came from smoky peat fires. It was generally a colder climate then as well. Many people lived a subsistence-level existence, which is why they were so vulnerable to disease and starvation when the famine hit.

It was very common for farming families to move around. If the landlord increased the rent they'd move, but not far; they would always stay close to extended family, because family was the only social safety net.

A third of Ireland's population was dependent on potatoes, because that was the only crop they could afford to grow, and they had no money to purchase better food. Plus, most of Ireland's tillage crops were being exported to England. When a blight destroyed the potato harvest beginning in 1845, Ireland suffered a seven-year period of starvation, disease, and emigration that became known as the Great Famine. A million people died, two million emigrated, and Ireland's population was reduced by more than a third. West Cork was one of the areas hardest hit, due to poor soils, smaller estates, and fewer work opportunities.

The Skibbereen genealogist is certain that John and Hanora were "famine emigrants," and that they were Roman Catholic. They would have spoken Gaelic (Irish) and probably not much English. In the 1860 U.S. census they said they could read and write, which seems surprising, as it is unlikely they had an opportunity for education in Ireland.

In 1824, John and Hanora were around 10 years old. If their families were able to send them to school, it would have been to a free outdoor "hedge school," or to an indoor pay school, either of which would have met on an occasional basis, when a teacher was available. In his book "A History of Desertserges Parish," author Con McCarthy quotes several people describing a typical school of the time: "Often we'd be as comfortable outside by the ditch, because the old thatch was bad." We "didn't go to school on wet days or the day after rain because the water would be dripping down. A slate on the ground was used by the master to write on, with the children gathered around him. One book would do two or three children, as some could not afford it. The master wasn't paid [money]. He got bed and meals." Those who

couldn't afford to host the master brought sods of turf for the fire. Often the teacher was a local person who had managed to learn a bit, and passed it along.

Donovan emigration

Every generation raised a child or two or three for emigration. One would go, get established, and then send for the others. Sometimes the whole family would go, pawning their possessions. In most large market towns in Ireland throughout that period there would have been pawn shops everywhere. Some merciful landlords would pay the passage for an entire family or estate during the famine.

We don't know when John and Hanora left Ireland, but we do know they arrived in New York before Cornelius was born in October, 1849. John was about 35 when Cornelius was born, and Hanora was about 34. This was quite old for a firstborn child, so it is very possible that they had lost multiple children, or even that they were widowed. So many people died during the famine, that anything is possible.

We don't know what happened to John and Hanora's families in Ireland, how the couple scraped together the money to go to America, or how they got there. The old succumbed to the famine first, and then the young and weak. Families often sent their healthiest child abroad, hoping they could send money home for others to follow. About half of the Irish famine emigrants went to England on cargo ships (pawning meager possessions for the fare). Hoping to land jobs in England, they often found things to be just as bad there, and continued on to America (somehow scraping together the money for fare, or perhaps becoming indentured). The other half of the famine emigrants sailed directly from Ireland to America on British-owned sailing ships. I have been unable to find any mention of John and Hanora in ship records from this time.

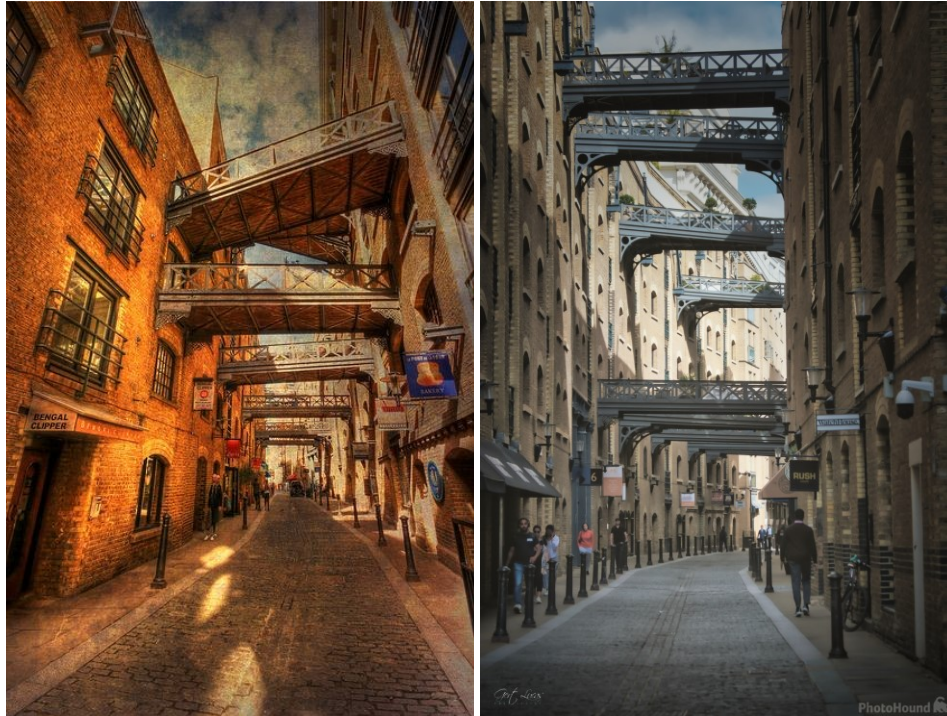
In 1860 the couple lived in the 5th District, 7th Ward, of Manhattan. John was a laborer.

Parents of Mary Hewitt: Shad Thames and Life on the Docks in London

Mary Hewitt was born in 1855 in New York City. She had three siblings plus a younger half brother. Her parents were Irish immigrants Michael Hewitt and Mary Crane.



Michael and Mary were born somewhere in Ireland around 1829. In 1851 they were living in Shad Thames, a neighborhood in London, England, where Michael was a general laborer.



Shad Thames historic district today

Shad Thames was one of London's most important industrial hubs, with wharves, warehouses, mills, and factories on both sides of a narrow, crowded alley. Elevated walkways allowed workers to move goods from warehouse to warehouse without descending to street level. Workers gathered twice a day at the gates, hoping to be hired for half a days' work.



Historic placard in Shad Thames, London

This part of London was a notorious slum, and was the setting for *Oliver Twist*, which was written in 1839. This area is also called the Docklands, and nearby is Poplar (home of the

1950s dock worker families in the book and TV series *Call the Midwife*). Shad Thames is now a preserved historic district with high end shops, restaurants, and condos, and is one of the most photographed places in London. During the time that Michael and Mary lived there, life was undoubtedly extremely difficult. Had they gone to England in the hope of a better life there, or was their plan always to save up money to go to America? Were they escaping the Irish potato famine?

Michael and Mary's son John was born in England in 1852, when they were about 23 years old. In 1853 the family left for America on the ship *Christianna*. They lived in Manhattan and had three more children. In 1855, Michael told the census taker that neither he nor Mary could read or write.

Mary Crane Hewitt died around 1875 when she was about 46 years old. Michael later married Mary Ann Meehan or Meighan and had a son, and possibly a daughter, with her. When Michael died in 1898 he lived at 22 Fillmore Place in Brooklyn. He is buried in Calvary Cemetery, and Mary Crane Hewitt is possibly buried there too.

Cornelius Donovan and Mary Elizabeth Hewitt



Cornelius Donovan

Cornelius and Mary were married in 1872, and initially lived in Manhattan. In the 1900 census, they said they'd had 12 children and four had died (notes from Joe Donovan Jr. list 13 children, five of whom died young). The remaining five boys and three girls lived to adulthood. Of the children they lost, two were little boys who died in the winter of 1882, within a few months of each other. Mary was described as "tyrannical," and perhaps that was her way of coping with the hard work and the losses.

Cornelius has been described as bright, fearless, devil-may-care, and not an easy person to have for a husband. He wasn't mean, but he apparently didn't like rules. Family lore says he wanted to be a drummer boy in the Civil War but was turned away, perhaps because he was too young (the Civil War was from 1861-65, when he was about 12-16). Or perhaps the story was embellished to convey his fearlessness or impulsivity.

Another story illustrates his rebellious spirit and willingness to bend rules. Cornelius liked to play cards with his granddaughter Marion on Sunday afternoons. If Marion said she couldn't play because she had homework, Cornelius would reply, "Don't worry, I'll help you with it afterwards." (Not that Mary needed the help; she was an excellent student.)

Cornelius was a news dealer and a clerk, before becoming a successful real estate broker. He may have transferred his skill to some of his offspring, as it is said that the Donovans liked to buy real estate.

In 1880, Cornelius and Mary lived in an apartment block at 368 Cherry Street on the Lower East Side. They had four children. Cornelius's brother Francis lived with them, as did Mary's widowed father Michael and her three siblings. (Mary's brother John was a stonecutter, her sisters Ellen and Catherine were dressmakers, and Michael was a laborer. Michael could not read or write.)

In 1900, Cornelius and Mary were renting at 25 Gouverneur St. on the Lower East Side. Cornelius was a real estate agent. They had eight children ranging in age from 6 to 27. (All of them lived to adulthood.) Mary Cleary lived with them and is listed as a servant, but in the 1910 census she is listed as a widowed cousin, German English, whose three children had all died.

In the 1910 census, Cornelius and Mary had moved to 4590 Stewart in Queens and were buying their house. Their oldest son, John, was a customs inspector. He was 37 years old and not yet married. (He paid for his siblings' schooling, and married at age 41.) Mae was a stenographer and Helen was a school teacher. Francis, Joseph, and Ignatius were in school. No profession is listed for Kathryn, who got married the following year.

By 1920 Cornelius and Mary had moved again, to 11412 89th Ave. in Richmond Hill, Queens. According to his obituary, Cornelius, who was a self-employed real estate broker, had "predicted the growth of the town" of Richmond Hill. He was "interested in civic work," and was proud to have been the second subscriber to the local paper after it was founded. Cornelius and Mary owned their home free and clear. Their children Mae, Joseph, Helen, and Ignatius lived with them, along with Helen's husband, Charles Eckhoff. The Donovan clan lived in an Irish neighborhood centered around the Holy Child of Jesus - St. Benedict Joseph Labre church.

Cornelius died in 1922 at age 72, probably of a heart attack. His obituary says his death was "unexpected." He had "apparently been in the best of health, having attended church" that morning. "In the afternoon he took a short walk and after returning home complained of a slight pain in the arm. Shortly after going upstairs to rest he passed away quietly ... it is presumed from heart disease." He is buried in St. John Cemetery, Queens.

As the Donovan children married and moved to homes of their own, Mary expected those who lived nearby (which was most of them) to come for cocktails at the big family house on Sundays—the boys that is, while their wives stayed home to prepare Sunday dinner.



In 1930, Mary was eight years' widowed and lived at 11414 89th Ave. (Either the previous census address is a mistake, or she had moved next door.) Ignatius was the head of the household, which also included Mary, plus Kathryn, who was herself widowed, and her three children. Neither Ignatius nor Mary ever married or had children.

Before she died, Mary Hewitt Donovan lost two more children: John in 1927, and Mae in 1936. As recorded in the 1930 census, the home that she lived in was worth, according to her, \$8000 (\$146,000 in 2020 dollars). Mary died in 1940, at age 86.



The Donovan home at 11414 89th Ave, Richmond Hill, Queens, NY

Children of Cornelius Donovan and Mary Elizabeth Hewitt

-  Anna A DONOVAN *
-  John J DONOVAN
-  Mary F Donovan
-  Cornelius DONOVAN *
-  Honora DONOVAN *
-  Daniel DONOVAN *
-  Michael C Donovan
-  Helen T Donovan
-  Kathryn A Donovan
-  Francis X Donovan
-  Aloysius DONOVAN *
-  Joseph R DONOVAN
-  Ignatius B Donovan

The children with asterisks died young (from notes made by Joe Donovan Jr.)



Mary Donovan with her five sons: France, John, Michael, Nace, and Joe. This was probably taken after Cornelius died in 1922, and before John died in 1927.



Donovan brothers Michael, Nace, France, and Joe. This was probably taken after John died in 1927.



Donovan Clan, circa 1929, celebrating the graduations of Kay and Margaret Donovan. (Left to right) Fifth (top) row: Lillian Goldsmith Donovan, Mary Robinson, Marion Donovan; 4th row: Henry Bush Jr. and Sr. (related to Margaret McCauley Donovan), Raymond Donovan, Catherine Blewett Donovan, Michael Cornelius Donovan, John J. Donovan Jr.; 3rd Row: Josephine Meyer Donovan, Rita Robinson, Ignatius Donovan, Ernest Robinson, Charles Eckhoff, Helen Donovan Eckhoff, Fanny Bush, Frances X. Donovan, Lizzie McCauley; 2nd Row: Mae Donovan, Kathryn Donovan Robinson, Mary Hewitt Donovan, Margaret Donovan, Margaret McCauley Donovan; 1st row (bottom): Daniel Donovan, Mary Donovan, Cornelia Donovan, Rita Donovan, Charles Donovan, Bush child, Helen Donovan

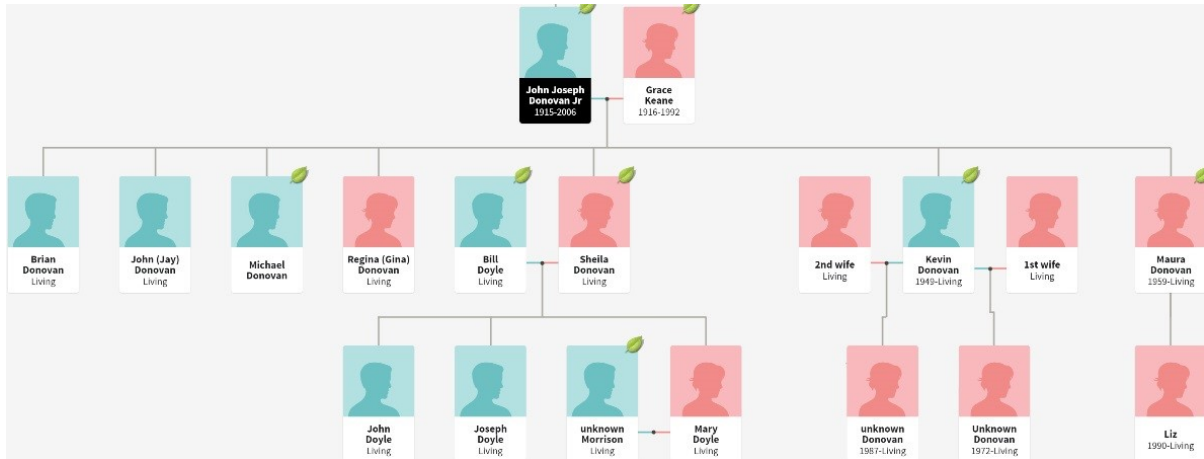
John Joseph Donovan

Cornelius and Mary's son **John Joseph Donovan** was born in 1873. He may have been a twin: one source suggests that an Anna Donovan was born in the same month and year and died in 1880. John was a lawyer, and then a customs inspector. He helped pay for his siblings' educations before marrying Margaret McCauley in 1912 at age 41. John died in 1927 at age 53, and is buried in St. John Cemetery.



John and Margaret had four children: John Jr., Margaret, Rita, and Daniel.

John Donovan, Jr., went to law school. His mother had limited finances after their dad died, but family pitched in to help pay for tuition. After John Jr. graduated from college, around 1936, many job ads (including in the New York Times) said "NINA" (no Irish need apply). John Jr.'s son Kevin has the Donovan family bible. He remembers his father as "a good man, a great father, and an outstanding grandpa."



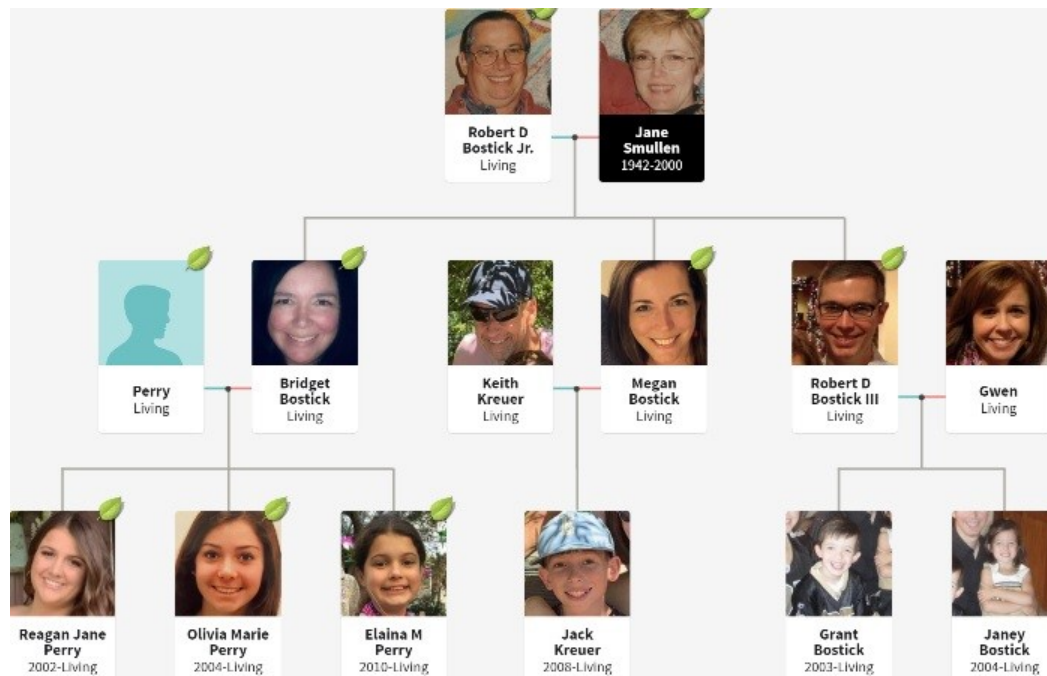
Descendants of John Joseph Donovan, Jr.

John Donovan and Margaret McCauley's daughter, **Margaret N. Donovan**, was called Peggy, or Peg. In the 1930s she worked in a psychiatric hospital in New York. That is where she met her husband, James Smullen, who was an orderly. He had been in the Army, then joined the Navy in WWII. After the war he worked for Eastern Airlines and was transferred to New Orleans in the 1950s. There, Margaret worked as a nursing supervisor in the maternity ward of a hospital. She and James had two children: Jane and Anne. In June, 1984, Margaret, her grandson, Jim Dillon, and her sister Rita went on a trip together. First they went to Cork, Ireland, with an Irish cultural group, and then to Germany. Just after they returned, in July, Margaret had a stroke, they discovered cancer, and she died at age 67.



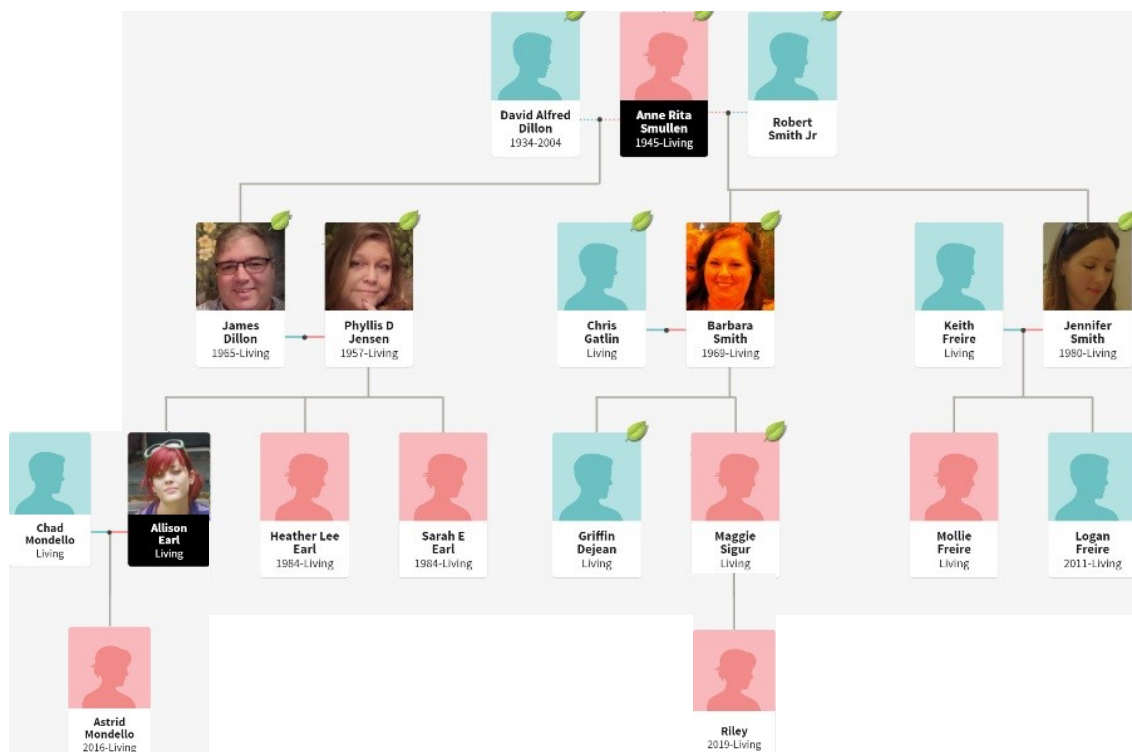
Margaret N. Donovan and James Smullen had two daughters: Jane and Anne Rita. The two sisters were very close, and talked on the phone every day.

Jane Smullen was an ER nurse. She married pediatrician Robert (Doug) Bostick, MD. She loved to dance. She died in 2000 at age 58 of lung cancer. She and Doug had been happily married for 35 years. They had three children: Doug, Bridget, and Megan.



Descendants of Jane Smullen

Margaret N. Donovan and James Smullen's younger daughter, **Anne Rita Smullen**, has three children: James, Barbara, and Jennifer.



Descendants of Anne Rita Smullen

John Donovan and Margaret McCauley's third child, **Rita Donovan**, did not marry or have children. She worked as a secretary in Syracuse, NY, and died in 2012 at age 92. After her sister Margaret died, Rita sent a card and gift to Margaret's grandchildren every birthday and special event, signed from their grandmother and Rita. Rita's grandniece Bridget remembers, "That was so special. Rita was very friendly, laughed a lot and had many friends. She visited New Orleans a few times too. Very kind hearted."



Rita Donovan (left), Margaret Donovan Smullen, and baby Jane Smullen, circa 1942

John and Margaret's son **Daniel Cornelius Donovan** served as a corporal in World War II, in what was then called the US Army Air Forces. He may have later worked for the US Postal Service. He died in 2003 at age 81. I have been unable to find any records for marriage or children. An Elinore B. Donovan of his same age is buried in the same plot in St. Mary's Cemetery in Syracuse, NY.

Mary Frances (Mae) Donovan

Cornelius and Mary's daughter **Mary Donovan** was born in 1874. She was called Mae. She never married or had children. She was a stenographer for the board of education. She died in 1939 at age 64, and is buried in St. John Cemetery.



Mae Donovan

Michael Cornelius Donovan

Cornelius and Mary's son **Michael Donovan** was born in 1880 in New York. In 1906 he married Josephine Meyer. They had three children: Ray, Marion, and Charles.

Family stories suggest that Michael was a fighter, a "firecracker," hyperactive, and once punched a priest (no one remembers why).

In the 1900 census Michael was a highway clerk. In 1930 he was a clerk for Con Edison, the electric company. One family story says that he worked in some capacity managing the New York City budget, and did not go to college.

In 1915, when Michael was 35, he saved the life of a 16-year-old girl whose dress had ignited at a bonfire. He heard her screams, wrapped a rug around her, and beat out the flames, burning his hands. A newspaper article about the incident said the girl would "probably recover."

After Josephine died in 1932, Michael married Ann Savage, who was called Annie. A family friend had suggested that Annie would be a good "housekeeper." Apparently she wasn't very domestic, however. One story says that she would put the dirty dishes from Sunday dinner in the oven so she could go out for a walk and the kitchen would look clean. She was also said to be shrewish and not very bright. Ray and Marion did not like her. Marion felt that she had taken advantage of Michael, and had conned him into marrying her for Charles's sake (Charles was only 12 when Josephine died). Annie may have had some connection with Mary Hewitt's family. Ray thought the marriage was a setup and didn't trust Annie's family.

Michael died in 1944 at age 63 of heart failure from "acute pulmonary edema and hypertensive heart disease." Apparently Michael changed his will on his deathbed, and left everything to Annie, including a log cabin on Shady Lake in New Jersey. Ray insisted that Annie's inheritance be put in trust so her family couldn't take it, and this was done. Ray and Marion believed that Michael intended the cabin as a place for his grandkids to spend time, but after it went to Annie, Ray and Marion never went there again. (The cabin was set back from the lake. It was called "Rock Rim" because it was built on a large rock.)

He is buried in St. John Cemetery. His death record says he was retired from the "N.Y.C. Dept. Gas Electric."



Michael Cornelius Donovan (Ray, Marion, and Charles's father)

Helen Theresa Eckhoff

Cornelius and Mary's daughter **Helen Donovan** was born in 1884. She was a teacher, and wrote religious poetry for Vanity Press. She married Charles Louis Eckhoff Jr. in 1915. They had one child, Charlotte, who died in the same year she was born. Helen was widowed at age 55, and died in 1953 at age 69.

Kathryn Agnes Robinson

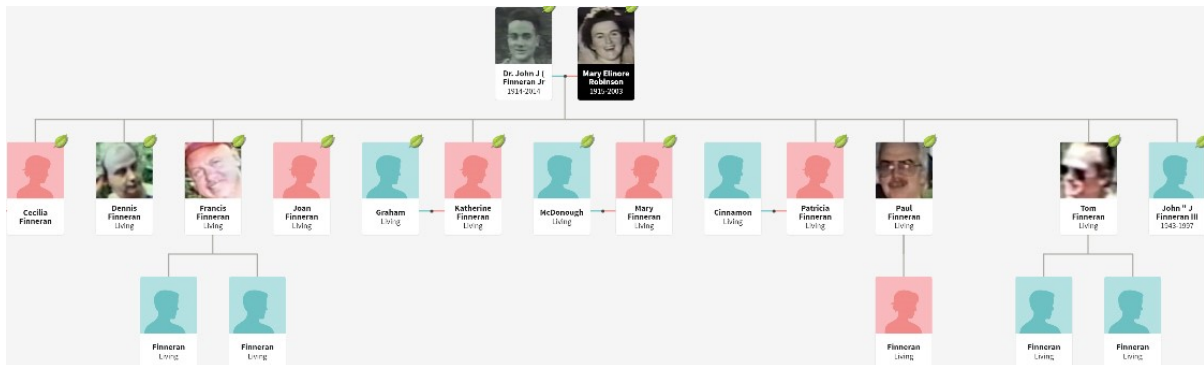
Cornelius and Mary's daughter **Kathryn Donovan** was born in 1886. She married Ernie Robinson in 1911. In 1915, at age 29, she was living in Manila, Philippines, with her three-year-old daughter, and there she applied for a passport. In her application she wrote, "I expect to visit China, Japan, Hong Kong, British and Dutch India, in the company of my husband, whose purpose is commercial business." Her second child, Mary, was born in Shanghai. Her husband died in 1920, leaving Kathryn with three young children. In 1930, she and her kids were living with her mom, her sister Mae, and her brother Ignatius. She was a public school teacher. In the 1940 census she said she earned \$3800 a year (that's \$69,000 in 2020 dollars). She died in 1963 at age 76.



Ernie Robinson and Kathryn Donovan

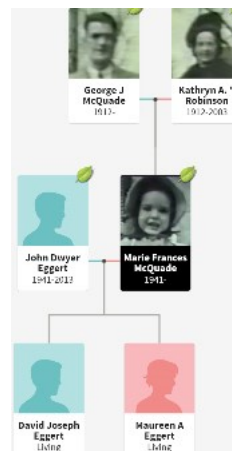
Ernie Robinson and Kathryn Donovan had three children: Mary, Kay, and Ernie Jr.

Mary Robinson married Jack Finneran, who became an Ob-Gyn. They had ten children. Jack was well liked by everyone. He delivered all seven of John Joseph Donovan Jr.'s children. His practice was in his home in Jamaica, New York. He liked to tell a story that illustrated the perils of life with ten children: One day he was surprised to find one of his daughters sitting in his waiting room. When he asked what she was doing there, she said, "I'm sick, and you never have time to look at me." The Finnerans had a summer place in Port Jefferson, Long Island, as did many of the Donovans.



Descendants of Mary Robinson

Ernie Robinson and Kathryn Donovan's daughter **Kay Robinson** married George McQuade and had one child that I know of.



Descendants of Kay Robinson

Ernie Robinson and Kathryn Donovan's son **Ernie Robinson Jr.** married Ruth Rhatigan and they had nine children. Their son Ernie III became a priest.

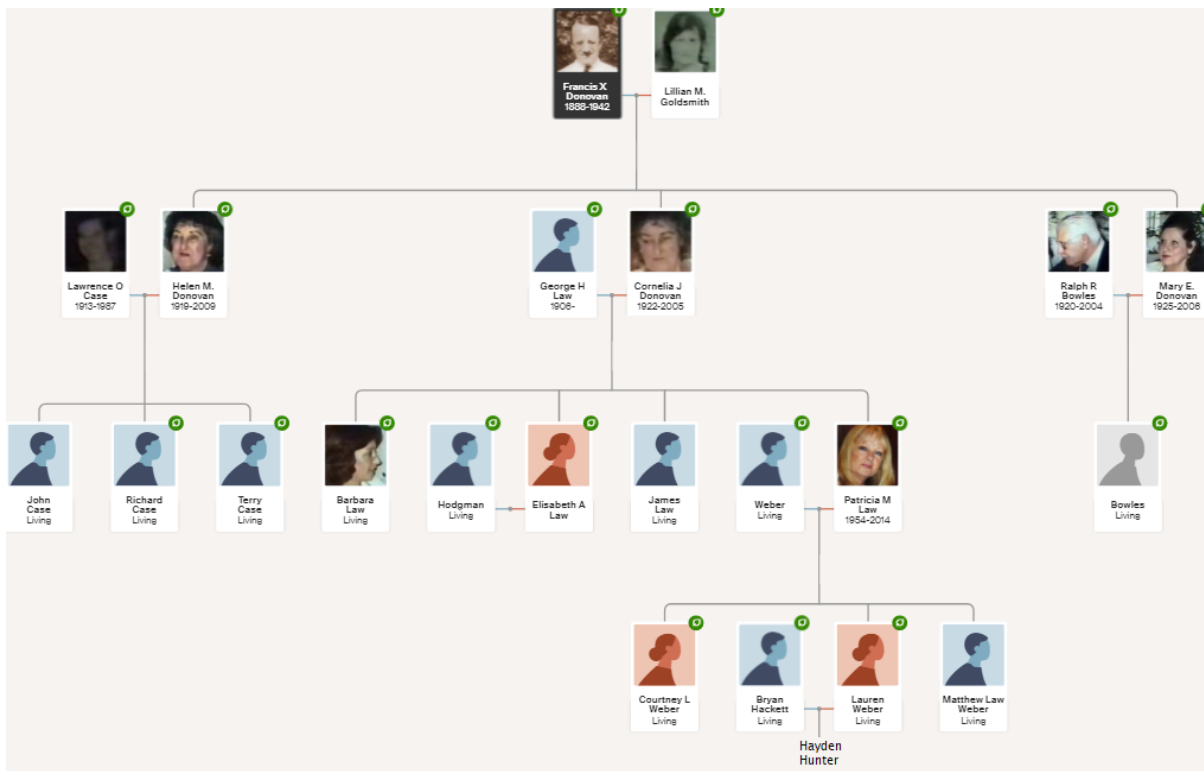


Descendants of Ernie Robinson, Jr.

Francis Xavier (France) Donovan

Cornelius and Mary's son **Francis Donovan** was a "noted" semi pro baseball player before getting married in 1917 to Lillian Goldsmith. He suffered a stroke in 1942 and died two weeks later. He had just taken his wife to their summer home in Port Jefferson so she could convalesce from an operation. He was 53 years old.

Francis and Lillian had three girls: Helen, Cornelia (Connie), and Mary.



Descendants of Francis Donovan

Joseph Raymond Donovan

Cornelius and Mary's son **Joe Donovan** was born in 1891. He graduated from Cornell University in 1915 with an Arts degree. He was captain of the baseball team his senior year, and he was invited to join Quill and Dagger, a senior honor society that recognizes exemplary Cornell undergraduates who show leadership, character, and dedication to service.

Joe served on the front lines in WWI. At one point he was sent to the hospital with rheumatism, a common problem in the trenches, caused by prolonged squatting and stooping to avoid enemy fire, and the heavy equipment soldiers had to carry.

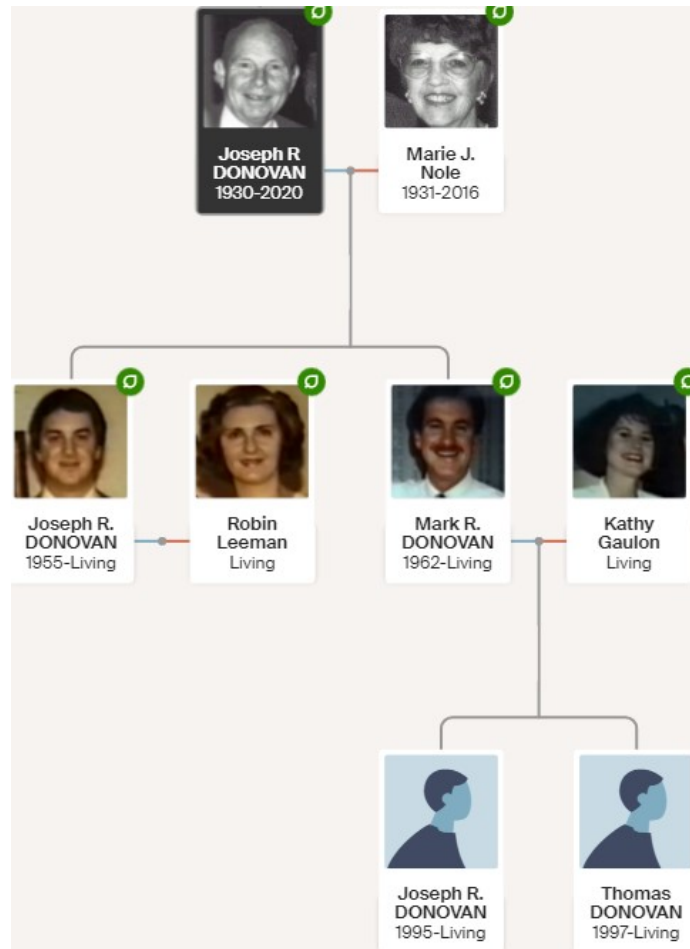
After the war, Joe attended the University of London. Back home in New York, he worked as a clerk for a title company and a law office. He married Catherine Blewett in 1928 at age 37. They had three children. Around 1946 they moved to Albany, New York. Joe died in 1970 at age 78.



Joseph Donovan and Catherine Blewett

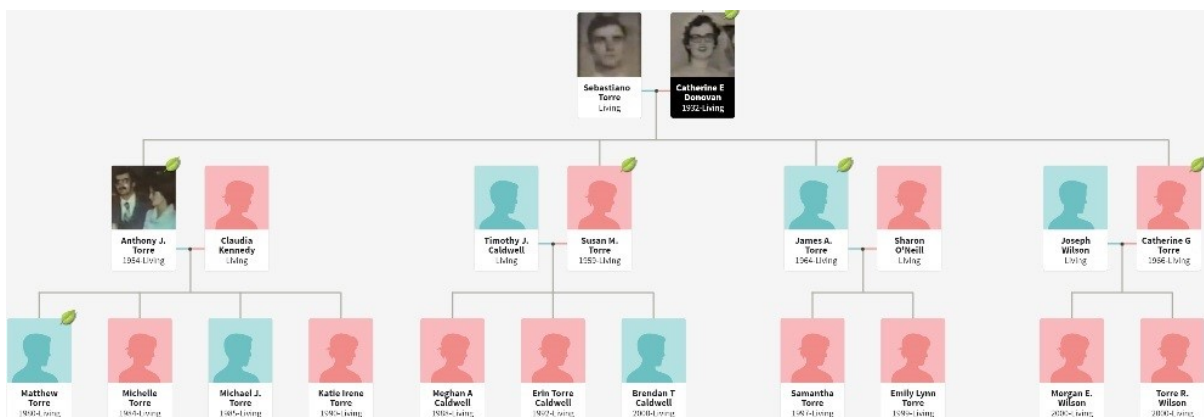
Joseph Donovan and Catherine Blewett had three children: Joseph Jr., Catherine, and Maureen.

Joseph Donovan Jr. went to Cornell, like his father, and then attended Albany Law School. He worked for the NY State Department of Motor Vehicles for forty years, and retired as First Assistant Counsel working closely with the NY State Legislature. He was made an honorary lifetime member of the NY State Magistrates Association. He loved to play the organ and sing. He made narrated home movies of old family photos, which were a great source for this document. He had two children: Joseph III and Mark.



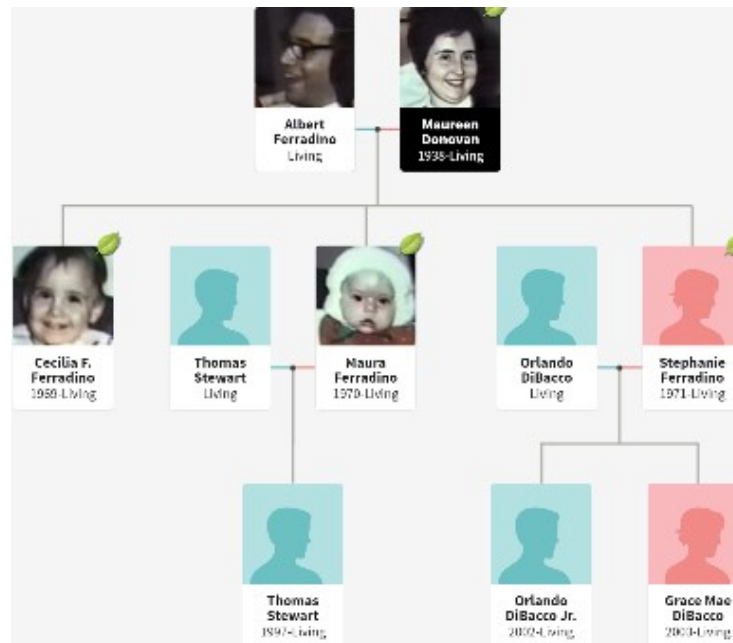
Descendants of Joseph Donovan Jr.

Joseph Donovan and Catherine Blewett's daughter **Catherine Donovan** married Sebastiano (Sam) Torre and had four children: Anthony, Susan, James, and Catherine.



Descendants of Catherine Donovan

Joseph Donovan and Catherine Blewett's daughter **Maureen Donovan** married Albert Ferradino and had three children: Cecilia, Maura, and Stephanie.



Descendants of Maureen Donovan

Ignatius Benedict (Nace) Donovan

Cornelius and Mary's son **Ignatius Donovan** was called Nace. He was born with a club foot and a hip problem. He wore a shoe lift and walked with a limp. His WWI draft card said he was exempt from service because he had "hip disease," and "walks lame." He was said to be movie star handsome. He supposedly wanted to be a priest, but at that time, priests had to be physically "perfect." In 1940 he was a teacher earning \$3800 a year, and living with his mother and his widowed sister Kathryn and her three children. He never married or had children. He loved to swim. Joe Donovan Jr. said that when the clan would go to Port Jefferson on Long Island Sound, "Nace would swim for hours and hours and hours." Nace visited Ray and Heddy Donovan every Christmas, "representing" the Donovan clan. He may have had a master's degree, and he taught at a high school or college. He was clearly passionate about education: for their wedding he gave Jim and Kathy Von Der Linn a high quality Parker pen and pencil set. Nace died in 1971 at age 77.

Family Vacations: Port Jefferson

Many of the Donovans owned cabins in Port Jefferson, a vacation enclave on the north shore of Long Island: the Finnerans, McQuades, and Laws, the Joe Donovan Jr. family, and probably others as well. In the narrated DVD he made in 1999, Joe Donovan Jr. shows photos from a trip in 1956 and says, "There were always lots of kids on the beach. There were kids galore! All the kids ended up like fishes down there. They swam like crazy and had a lot of fun."

Dr. Joseph Meyer and Marie Goetze



Joseph and Marie Meyer

Joseph Meyer

We know very little about Joseph's parents, Charles and Margaret. Records indicate that Margaret was married before she married Charles, and had two children with her first husband. I believe that Charles and Margaret had six children, and that Joseph was their eldest.



Joseph Meyer was born in New York in 1854. He attended St. Francis Xavier College, then graduated from the New York College of Pharmacy in 1872 (at age 18). There he won the prize for materia medica and botany. (Materia medica refers to the body of collected knowledge about the therapeutic properties of medicines.)

In 1872, when Joseph attended medical school, there were no requirements for admission and no grades. (This was true at all medical schools.) Faculty salaries came directly from student fees, so faculty wanted to maximize the number of students.

Instruction was almost entirely lectures. There was no laboratory work of any kind. In no American school did students use a microscope. But unlike in many medical schools in America, students at Joseph's school could examine cadavers. The single requirement for an MD was to pass a final examination. One student said it was the easiest exam he had ever taken.

Not a single physician in the US made a living doing research. If students wanted a good medical education they had to go to Europe. Germany is where the best science was being done. It's estimated that between 1870 and 1914, fifteen thousand American doctors studied in Germany or Austria. Here they could learn both clinical medicine (treating patients) and laboratory science.

Joseph graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York City in 1877, interned for eighteen months in the Charity Hospital of New York, and then went to Europe and studied in Munich (under a famous laryngologist) and Strasburg.

After returning home in 1880, Joseph married Marie Goetze. He was 26 years old.

He had a general practice in Brooklyn for fifteen years before deciding to specialize in diseases of the eye, ear, nose, and throat. An article about him written by his alma mater states: "The professional career of Dr. Meyer has been marked by his learning and skill, his proficiency in medical practice, his honorable adherence to medical ethics, his personal integrity and prudent benevolence."

His obituary states that "He was one of the most prominent physicians in Brooklyn," and "was widely known for his charity in treating patients who had not the means of paying for his expert services." His office was at 216 Van Buren St., where he "built up an extensive practice and made thousands of friends."

He practiced medicine for 40 years. He was on the staff at St. Catherine's Hospital for 37 years and was one of the organizers of its dispensary. In 1902 he was second in rank on the medical staff, and was a visiting and consulting laryngologist at several other hospitals. He wrote a number of medical papers, and was the inventor of a post-nasal forceps. A plaque once hung on the wall at St. Catherine's, possibly an award for the forceps.

Dr. Meyer died in 1915 at age 60, after a long illness.



Dr. Joseph Meyer

Parents of Marie Goetze



Marie Goetze's parents were Theodore Goetze and Barbara Messerschmidt, who was his second wife. Theodore is remembered as easygoing, quiet, and well-liked. He was born in Fritzlar, Germany (then Prussia), in 1824, when his mother was 17. He immigrated to America in 1849, at age 25, with his first wife, Elizabeth, and infant son, Theodore. Records suggest that a son named Otto died young. Elizabeth died in 1852.

In 1853 Theodore married Barbara Messerschmidt. They had five children, and she died in 1882 at age 58. In 1885 Theodore married Bessie Debold. She died 10 years later. Theodore married once more: his son Theodore Jr. died in 1901, and Theodore Sr. married his son's widow in 1909. He outlived her as well. Theodore Sr. died in 1913 at age 88.

In the 1870 census, Theodore's occupation is listed as "R fancy store." Marty Erts Laford remembers that Theodore and Barbara started and ran a mercantile store. She said it wasn't in the city, but was in a more country setting. Maybe it was actually called "R Fancy."

In the 1880 census, Theodore and Barbara lived at 110 Second St. in Manhattan. His occupation was listed as "Gents furnishings goods." Furnishings meant textiles, clothing, and related merchandise.

In the 1900 census Theodore lived at 412 West 146th Street in Manhattan. The elegant three-story stone house was brand new when he moved in (real estate records say it was built in 1901), and Theodore lived there until his death. In the 1900 census he was 76 years old and

said he had no wife. (His third wife had died in 1895.) He was a naturalized citizen, and owned his home free and clear. He listed his occupation as landlord. Perhaps he had sold his business, or maybe his sons were running it. He lived with his children Charles, Gustav, and Martha, and Martha's 21-year-old son, Ernst Reccius. Martha was widowed.

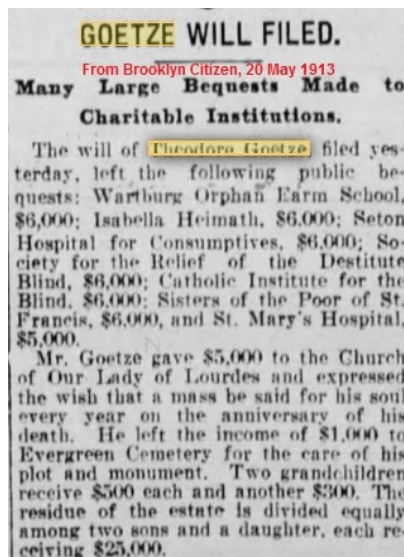
When Theodore died in 1913, his estate was worth \$137,000, equivalent to over \$3.5 million in 2020. In his will he gave a total of \$54,000 to charity, the equivalent of \$1.4 million today. Several newspapers reported on his bequests. Each of his surviving three children (Marie, Herman, and Gustav) received \$25,600 (\$663,000 today).

One of the charities listed in his will was the Wartburg Orphan's Farm School in Mt. Vernon, Westchester County, sixteen miles north of the city. It provided a home for orphans, but also for children whose parents couldn't care for them. Did he perhaps place his son Theodore Jr. there after his first wife died, and before he married Barbara?

Theodore Sr. also gave money to the Isabella Helmuth hospital for chronic invalids. Did one of his wives or children spend time there?

Another bequest was to the Seton Hospital for Consumptives. This hospital was only for men. Did one of Theodore's sons receive care there?

Two other organizations that received money were The Society for the Relief of the Destitute Blind and the Catholic Institute for the Blind. Was one of his children or relations blind?



One of the newspaper articles about Theodore's charitable bequests (this clipping says each of his children received \$25,000, but another, less legible, clipping says they each received \$25,600)

Theodore gave a thousand dollars (\$26,000 today) to The Evergreens Cemetery in New York City for the perpetual care of his grave. Five thousand dollars (\$130,000 today) went to the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Brooklyn, with a request that a mass be read each year on

the anniversary of his death (May 9), for the repose of his soul and the souls of deceased members of his family.

He gave \$300 (\$7800 today) to grandson Ernie Reccius, and \$500 each (\$13,000 today) to grandsons Theodore and Frederick Goetze. Ernie and Frederick filed objections to the will, and according to the terms of the will, this meant they risked forfeiting their inheritances.

Grandsons Frederick and Theodore were appointed two of the executors of his will, but they were removed just before Theodore died.

Marie Goetze



Marie Goetze Meyer

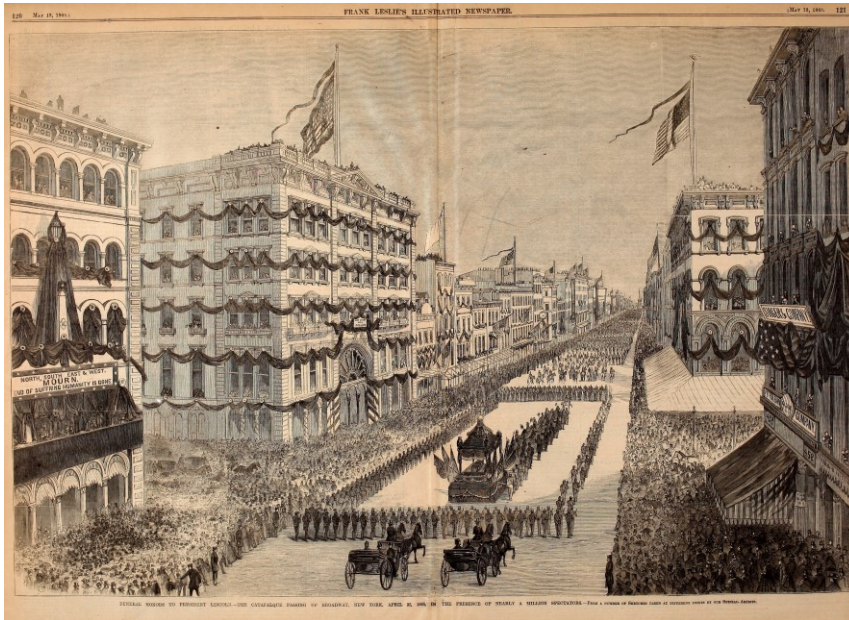
Theodore and Barbara's daughter **Marie Goetze** was born in New York in 1858. In 1865, when she was six years old, she was one of "a million people" who came to watch President Lincoln's casket travel up Broadway in New York City.

Marie and her sister Martha both studied abroad at a convent school. Martha married Adolphus Reccius, who died before their only child, Ernst (called Ernie), was born. Martha never remarried, and died in 1905 at age 50.

Marie married Dr. Joseph Meyer in 1880, when she was 22 years old.

No one knows what happened to the money Marie inherited from her father. Presumably her estate was divided among her six children. It's possible that she distributed some of the money to them during her lifetime to help with things like starting businesses or purchasing homes. When her brother Gustav died, she received "income for life[*she lived another eight years*] from a sixth of the estate." His estate was worth \$356k (\$5.5 million in 2023).

Gustav's assets were mostly tied up in real estate, and we don't know what happened to those properties.



Sketch of Lincoln's casket passing up Broadway in 1865;
6-year-old Marie was somewhere in the crowd

In the 1930 census, Marie, who had been widowed for 15 years, lived at 9022 193rd St., Hollis, Long Island, with Allie, Walter, Tillie, and Martha. They were purchasing the house.

Marie developed dementia in old age and moved to Kingston to live with her daughter Louise. Marie had to be sent to a nursing home in 1951 when Louise had a heart attack and couldn't care for her. Marie died shortly after that at age 93.

Children of Dr. Joseph Meyer and Marie Goetze

Joseph and Marie were married in New York City in 1880 and had seven children: Albert (Allie), Josephine (Josie, Jo), Martha, Louise (Lulu, Lou), Clotilde (Tillie), Walter, and Charles (who died in infancy). Only Josephine and Louise had children of their own.

	Albert (Allie) E. Meyer Son	BIRTH July 1881 in NYC, NY	DEATH
	Josephine M Meyer Daughter	BIRTH Sep 1884 in NYC, NY	DEATH 11 Dec 1932 in Bellaire Queens New York
	Martha Meyer Daughter	BIRTH Sep 1886 in NYC, NY	DEATH 18 Feb 1960 in Kingston, New York
	Louise "Lou, Lulu" Meyer Daughter	BIRTH Aug 1888 in NYC, NY	DEATH 15 Nov 1968 in Kingston, New York
	Clotilde "Tillie" Meyer Daughter	BIRTH Nov 1889 in NYC, NY	DEATH 1949 in Kingston, New York
	Walter J. Meyer Son	BIRTH 7 Jun 1892 in NYC, NY	DEATH 2 May 1963 in Phoenix AZ
	Charles Meyer Son	BIRTH abt 1894 in NYC, NY	DEATH abt 1895 in NYC, NY

Children of Joseph and Marie Meyer



Top: Josie & Martha; Bottom: Allie, Tillie, Walter, & Lou



The four Meyer sisters: Louise, Martha, Jo, & Tillie



Brothers Walter and Allie Meyer

Albert (Allie) Meyer

Joseph and Marie Meyer's son **Albert Meyer** was born in 1881 in New York. The 1900 census says he was a clerk in the county clerk's office. In 1910 he was 28, single, living with his parents, and managed an ice cream shop. The shop was popular with local kids, who stopped in after school. Allie's sister Louise also worked there.

In 1920, Allie was renting at 38 Dennington Ave, and married to Bertha, a designer. In 1930 he was a "comparer" in the county clerk's office, and lived with his mom and siblings. That census said he was single, and Bertha is not listed. Was this a census mistake, or had Albert and Bertha separated? Because in the 1940 census Albert was again listed as married to Bertha.

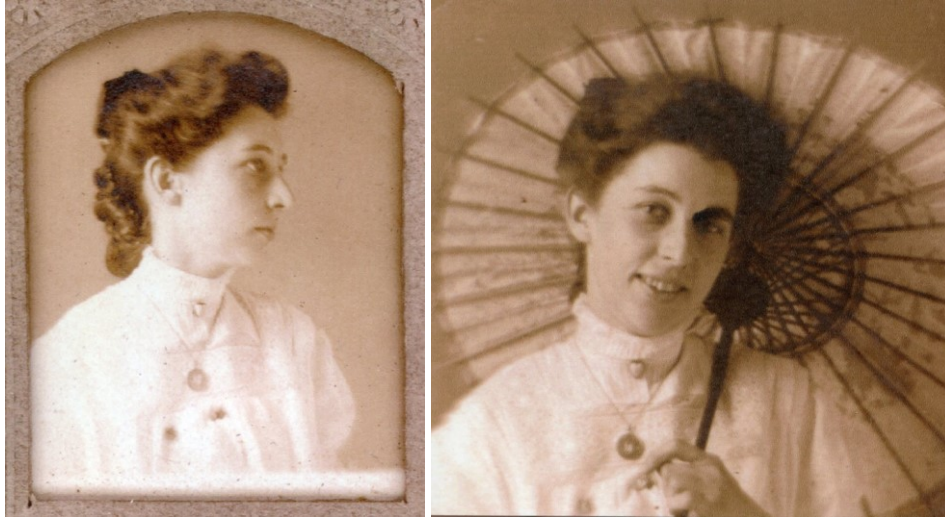
In 1940, Albert was listed as head of household, and said he had an eighth grade education. Marie, Martha, and Tillie also lived with him and Bertha, and said they were "unable to work." Albert was a law clerk in a county office earning \$2600 a year, and said he also had other sources of income. He was apparently good at the stock market. Perhaps he helped his mother invest her inheritance. In 1946, he told his sister Louise to buy stock in a company that was just going public and would be a great investment: Avon. We don't know if she followed his advice, but we do know that Avon did well and is still around today. Louise and Martha both owned stocks that were passed on to their heirs.

Albert and Bertha did not have children. In 1963 Albert was 82 and lived in Miami, Florida.

Josephine Meyer Donovan

Joseph and Marie Meyer's daughter **Josephine Marie Meyer** was born in New York in 1884. She was called Josie, or Jo. She is remembered as beautiful, smart, and organized.

In 1906 she married Michael Cornelius Donovan. They had three children (Ray, Marion, and Charles). She grew and canned vegetables, perhaps due to the WWI food shortage. She died in 1932, at age 48, of heart disease.



Josephine (Josie, Jo) Meyer, born 1884, was Ray, Marion, and Charles's mother.

Martha Meyer Schmid Wolf

Joseph and Marie Meyer's daughter **Martha Barbara Meyer** was born in 1886. Her nieces and nephews called her Aunt Mar.

Martha's husband, Fred Schmid, was born Charles Frederick Wolf in Germany in 1883, and was called Fred. His mother, who was most likely widowed, immigrated to the US with Fred and his younger brother in 1892.

A few years later, Fred's mother married Karl Julius Schmid (a very wealthy German immigrant known as the "Condom King"). Eventually Fred and his brother changed their last names to Schmid. In 1909, Martha married Fred Schmid. Their wedding announcement says they honeymooned in Palm Beach, and would be living at 216 Van Buren St. in Brooklyn, her family home.

Fred worked for his stepdad's rubber goods company. In 1911, Fred was arrested for making "unlawful and licentious articles" (condoms). His stepfather had been arrested for the same offense in 1890. In 1915, the rubber factory and adjacent family house and employee dwelling on 16th Ave in Long Island City, NY, were destroyed in a "spectacular" blaze of "mysterious origin." One suspects arson...

In June, 1924, Fred applied for a passport for himself and Martha. On the application it says they live in Orange, New Jersey, and are going abroad on business for 6-8 months. They're leaving from New York on the ship *America* on July 12, 1924, going to England, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Belgium. For some reason they returned in November, 1924, after only four months abroad. Fred died in Los Angeles one year later, at age 42. Perhaps he was there on a business trip. Martha never remarried and she and Fred did not have children.

In the 1930 census Martha lived in Hollis, NY, with her mom and three of her siblings, and is listed as Martha Schmidt (a census misspelling of Schmid), widowed. In the 1940 census she is listed as Martha Wolf, widowed. Perhaps she decided to use Fred's original last name because it sounded less German during WWII.

Sometime in the late 1940s, Martha and her sister Tillie moved to Kingston to be near their sister Louise. 1949 is the first time that Martha appears in the Kingston city directory. She bought a duplex at 35/37 Warren St. She and Tillie lived in one half and rented out the other half.

Martha had a bull dog and a cute little fluffy white dog. She is remembered as being good at investing. Her grandniece, Kathy Von Der Linn, says, "I remember Aunt Martha so vividly. She sounded very cultured and intelligent and was a good listener." Martha died in 1960 at age 73 in Kingston. She is buried in Maple Grove Cemetery in Queens, with Fred (he is listed as Carl Schmid on the headstone). Her obituary says there was a "Christian Science" service. Kathy Von Der Linn says that Martha being a Christian Scientist never caused any kind of rift in the otherwise Catholic family.

Martha's niece Marty and her husband, Louis Laford, had been living in the other half of Martha's duplex, at 37 Warren St., and after Martha died, they acquired the home. Marty still lives there.

Louise Meyer Erts

Joseph and Marie Meyer's daughter **Louise Meyer** was born in 1888. She was called Lulu as a child, and Lou as an adult. In the 1910 census, her occupation is listed as "none." She was in fact working with her brother Allie at the ice cream shop he managed. One day Louise was working there alone and felt sick. She locked the shop door while she was in the bathroom, and could hear kids banging on the door and windows, wondering why the store was closed. We can only guess whether the kids waited, or gave up and left!

Louise did not graduate from high school, but she did graduate from St. Catherine's School of Nursing in Brooklyn. She worked as a stateside US Navy nurse during WWI (to the best of our knowledge, she did not serve overseas). The war lasted from 1914 to 1918, when she was 26 to 30 years old. When she died, Louise received a veteran's burial flag.

After the war, sometime in the early 1920s, Louise got very sick with TB and went Upstate to convalesce. That's where she met her husband, Frank Erts, who was from Woodbourne.

There were two TB sanitariums in Upstate New York at that time. The one closest to Woodbourne was the Homestead Sanitarium, in Providence, about two and a half hours north of Woodbourne. Frank had served as a cook in WWI, and was never wounded. We can only guess at how they met. Perhaps he was a cook at the sanitarium.

Frank was five years younger than Louise, and apparently had to be persistent to win her over. They were married in Rockville Centre in 1923, when Louise was 34. They weren't able to have a wedding reception for some reason, so on their 40th anniversary they had a big party. Since it was their ruby anniversary, people gave them red things, including a set of dessert glasses that Louise's granddaughter Carol still has.



Louise Meyer (right: in her nursing uniform)

Louise is remembered as tough and independent, an authority with a deep voice who could be a little scary (at least to a young child). Pat and Kathy Donovan also remember her as warm inside and a caring, great, fun person. She and Frank were both strict, with old-fashioned, "Victorian," values, but also quite funny. They loved to play cards, especially pinochle, and hosted card parties in their yard.

Louise and Frank had two children: **Frances-Louise Erts** (Louise wanted everyone to call her Francie-Lou, but she was called Fran, or Franny) and **Martha Erts** (Marty).

In about 1925, Louise, Frank, and baby Fran moved to Los Angeles for reasons unknown. Marty was born in California in 1926.

There were large earthquakes in California in 1925 and 1927. Thirteen people died in the 1927 Santa Barbara quake. Louise found the quakes terrifying. This might have been why

they moved back to New York. The Great Depression may also have been a factor. Whatever the reasons, Louise and Frank were back in New York before the 1930 census.

Louise's reputation as a nurse during WWI earned her respect. However, Pat Gerlach remembers Louise saying that she did not consider nursing a good profession for young ladies. Louise continued to work, possibly as a nurse, after having children, and when her daughters were old enough, they were latchkey kids. (Once, they were playing on top of the large dining room table and tipped it over. They got in a lot of trouble for that and many other things that happened when they were home alone.)

In 1932, Louise's adored older sister, Josie, died of heart disease at age 48. Louise had a strong bond with Josie's son, Ray Donovan (and probably with all three of Josie's kids). When Ray's daughter Pat was born in 1935, Ray's wife, Heddy, was quite ill for several months (possibly with "childbed fever"). Ray and Heddy's mothers had both died, and Louise stepped in to take care of Pat. She was always good to Pat and her little sister Kathy, and glad to see them on Sunday afternoon visits at Louise's home in Bellaire, on Long Island.

Kathy Donovan remembers going to the Bellaire house to make a recording to send to Charles Donovan, who was serving overseas during WWII. By the 1940s, self-recording had become hugely popular. Acetate discs were a relatively inexpensive and easy way to record before magnetic tape was invented, and they allowed people to send "audio letters" to troops stationed overseas.

The Bellaire house is also where Marty Erts taught Pat and Kathy Donovan to do the Lindy Hop when they were young.

Frank and Louise lived in Bellaire until about 1947, and Frank worked as a butcher. But Frank had grown up on a farm and was a farmer at heart; he did not like living in the city. When Marty and Fran were about 19 and 21, Frank and Louise bought a boarding house on a farm in High Falls, near Kingston, about two hours north of Bellaire. Louise considered turning the guest house into a convalescent home. Instead, she and Fran and Marty worked very hard taking care of vacationers who came up to escape the city. Fran was the cook, Marty was the waitress, and Louise ordered the supplies. They must have all helped with laundry and cleaning the rooms.

The guesthouse had been in operation for a while, and had a good reputation. Some of their guests were waiters from the city. One day, when things got very busy, Marty told one of the waiter guests to "Hold your horses!" Marty said the waiter didn't mind at all—he understood what it was like when things got busy—but her mother sure did yell at her.

Pat and Kathy Donovan, and John Drum, all remember spending one or two idyllic summers in High Falls, and helping out around the farm.

Frank and Fran loved the farm, but Louise and Marty did not. After two years, in about 1948, Frank and Louise sold the place and they all moved to Kingston. Kathy Donovan remembers

a bedroom upstairs in the Kingston house that had lovely yellow-brown walls. She and Pat called it “the butternut room.”

Not long after Frank and Louise moved to Kingston, Louise’s widowed sister Martha moved to Kingston with their sister Tillie.

Frank and Louise's daughter Fran wanted to be an actress. Her Aunt Mar encouraged her, but her dad said, “If you become an actress, you can’t come back home.” He did not consider that acting was a dignified profession for a young woman. So Fran worked for Sperry. She joined an acting club, but didn’t pursue it as a profession. Fran was bright and enterprising. She had gone to work young, at a dry cleaners, before her friends were working.

Fran, her sister Marty, and their future husbands, Harold (Harry) Studer and Louis (Lou or Louie) Laford, were all part of a big circle of kids that grew up together in the same neighborhood in Queens. Harry’s dad owned a garage and body shop where Harry and Lou worked. Both boys were sweet on Marty. Harry’s dad said, “Doesn’t she have a sister? Why don’t you date her?” And that’s how Fran and Harry started dating.

Harry and Lou both served in WWII. Lou was an Army tank driver. He received a silver star for retrieving two tanks from behind enemy lines, before being hit in the third tank. He had a plate in his head from an operation to remove shrapnel. Harry was an airplane mechanic in the Army Air Corps in Italy.

After the boys came home, Harry’s dad encouraged them to travel, and get the war out of their systems. So they spent some time drifting around the West, working off and on to pay their way (Harry for one year, Lou for a year and a half).

When Fran and Marty moved to High Falls, they were already dating Harry and Lou. The boys drove up every weekend to visit their sweethearts (and no doubt help on the farm).

Louise was old school, and expected the older daughter to marry first, so Marty and Lou had to wait their turn. Fran and Harry got married in 1948. Since Harold was not Catholic at that time, they were not allowed to get married in the church, and the ceremony took place in the Rectory.

Harry and Fran lived in Queens Village, where Harry continued working at his dad’s shop. Harry later took over the station when his dad retired.

In 1949, eight months after Fran and Harry’s wedding, it was Marty and Lou’s turn to get married. Marty had been Fran’s maid of honor, and Fran wanted to be Marty’s. But Fran was pregnant, and Louise said it wasn’t proper for a pregnant woman to be in the wedding party. Fran was very upset about this. She said she wasn’t even showing. Lou Laford said, just let her hold some flowers in front. But Louise wouldn’t agree. So Pat Donovan was asked to be the maid of honor at age 14.



Fran and Harry's wedding in 1948: Louis Laford, Harold Studer, Fran Erts, & Marty Erts

To add insult to injury, Fran got stranded at the church after the wedding (everyone thought she was riding with someone else). Luckily a neighbor came to check and see if anyone needed a ride. So it was a tough day for Fran!

Lou and Marty stayed in Kingston after they got married. Around 1954, Lou became a press operator. Later he became a mechanic with the Trailways, NY, bus company for many years. Then he went to work for the Hudson Cement plant and was the mechanic for their big cement trucks until the plant closed. After that he worked at another cement plant. Lou died in 1993. Kathy Donovan remembers that he was "such a nice guy."

In about 1951, Louise had a heart attack. In those days, they put you on bed rest for six weeks. Louise's mother, Marie, had been living with Frank and Louise, but Marie had dementia and needed a lot of care, so she had to be sent to a nursing home.

In 1960, after Martha Wolf Schmid died, Fran and Harry and their kids went up to help Marty clean out Martha's apartment. Fran was pregnant with her fourth child. She was lifting heavy things and ended up losing the baby early in the pregnancy.

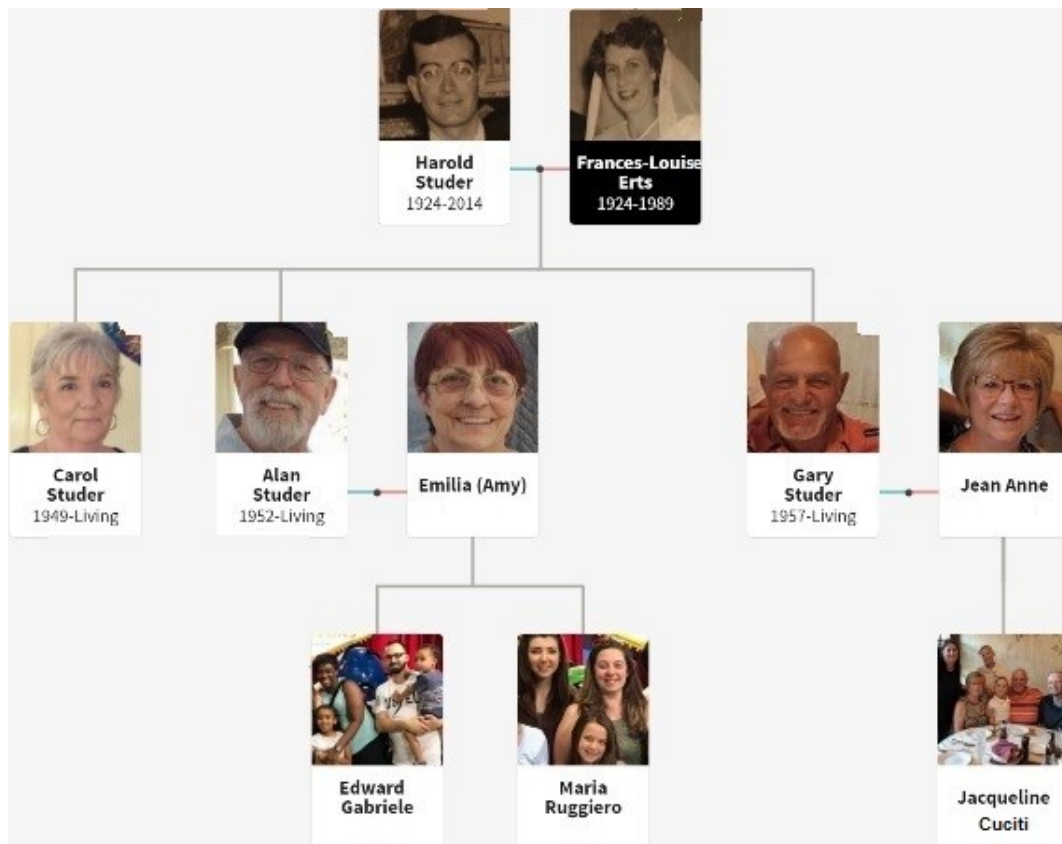
Fran's daughter Carol lived with her grandparents, Frank and Louise, for two years when she was going to Ulster County Community College. She was living there when Louise died in 1968, and when Frank died in 1970 (just before Carol graduated).

Marty Laford threw an 80th birthday party for her mother, Louise, in 1968. Fran drove up from the city as a surprise. Three months after that Louise had a stroke and died a week later. Eighteen months after Louise's death, Fran surprised her widowed father, Frank, with a visit, and shortly after that he died unexpectedly in his sleep. Fran always felt these pre-death visits were a strange coincidence.

Frances Erts died of complications from type 2 diabetes in 1989, at age 64. It was fairly sudden. She and Harry were on vacation in Florida when she collapsed. She died in the hospital while on life support. Harry remarried within the year, and lost his second wife ten years later.

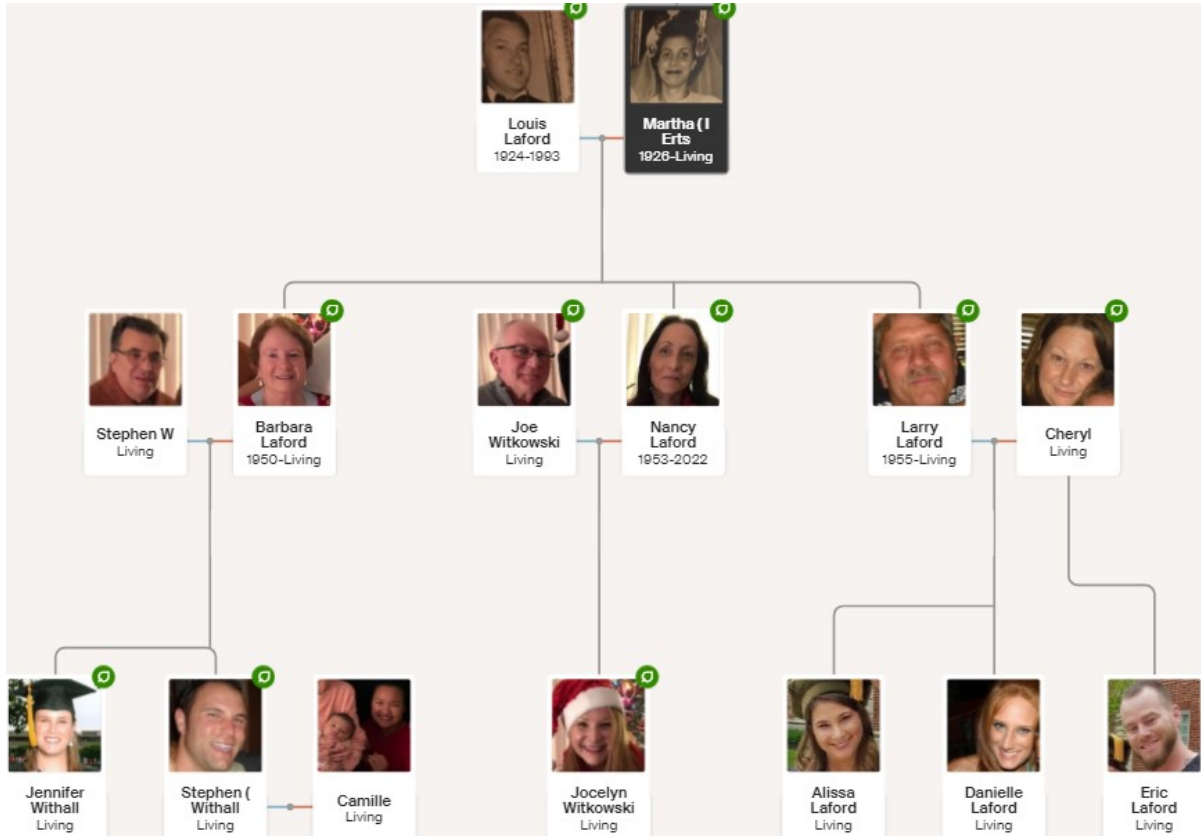
Marty Laford continues to live in Kingston.

Fran and Harold Studer had three children: Carol, Alan, and Gary.



Descendants of Fran and Harry Studer

Marty and Lou Laford had three children: Barbara, Nancy, and Larry.



Descendants of Marty and Lou Laford

Clotilde (Tillie) Meyer

Joseph and Marie's daughter **Tillie Meyer** was born in 1889. She was described as "slow," and was probably developmentally disabled. She never married. Before she moved to Kingston, Tillie lived with her mother, Marie, on Long Island. Marty Laford remembers a visit to Marie's house when Tillie ate in the kitchen instead of with the family. This infuriated Fran. There was a sense that Tillie was treated a bit like Cinderella, and was expected to do a lot of chores. Marie may have been embarrassed to have a disabled child.

Tillie moved to Kingston with her sister Martha in about 1949. Martha bought a duplex, and she and Tillie lived in one half. The other half was rented out. Tillie died in 1949, not long after moving to Kingston. She was 60 years old.

Walter Meyer

Joseph and Marie's son **Walter Meyer** was born in 1892. In 1910 he was an engraver at a department store. In 1917 he lived in Woodhaven on Long Island, was married, and worked as a chauffeur in Long Branch, NJ. He requested a WWI draft exemption, saying he was the sole source of support for his wife. They must not have granted his exemption, because in the

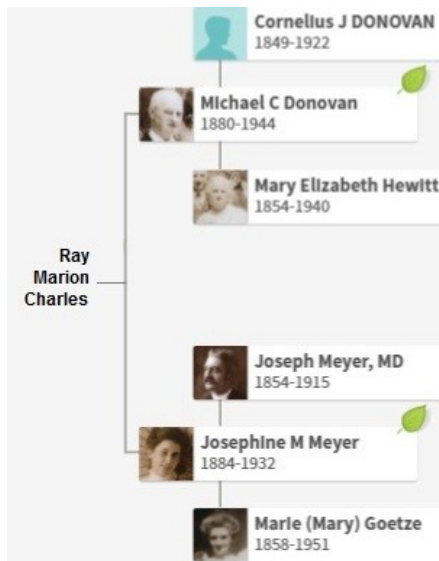
1930 census he is listed as a WWI veteran. In 1930 he was an auto salesman and lived with his mom, brother Albert, and sisters Martha and Tillie. He was listed as single (not widowed).

In 1937, at age 45, he married Ebba Lindahl in Manhattan. In 1942 they lived in Forest Hills, Queens. His WWII draft registration described him as five foot seven and a half and 131 pounds, with blue eyes and gray hair.

In 1937 he owned a jewelry store at 30 West 47th St. in Manhattan. Marty Laford remembers going there as a child with her mom, Louise (Walter's sister). Harold Studer bought Fran Erts' engagement ring from Walter in about 1947.

In 1960 Walter moved to Phoenix, Arizona. He died there in 1963 at age 70. His obituary says he was a retired watchmaker and engraver, and mentions his widow, Theresia. Unless Theresia and Ebba are the same person, either Walter and Ebba divorced, or Ebba died. Walter had no children.

Michael Donovan and Josephine Meyer



Cornelius and Mary Donovan's son **Michael** married Joseph and Marie Meyer's daughter **Josephine** in 1906. Their wedding in St. Benedict Joseph Catholic church in Morris Park was reported as being "one of the prettiest" of the season. Josie wore a wreath of lilies-of-the-valley on her head. Her sister Martha was maid of honor, and her sister Lulu was one of two bridesmaids. Michael's brother John was best man and the ushers were Francis Donovan and Albert Meyer. Forty guests came to the reception at the Meyer home after the ceremony for an "elaborate wedding supper." The bride and groom left at 12:30 am for the St. George Hotel, and then took a 10-day honeymoon trip to New England. They had plans to visit Josie's brother Walter, who was studying at St. Anselm College in NH. Upon their return, they were planning to reside in Morris Park (Richmond Hill).

In 1907 they lived at 309 Carter Ave., Morris Park, (Richmond Hill) and at 448 Madison St. in Brooklyn. In 1915 they lived at 115 Williams Ave., Brooklyn. Other families lived at this address, so Michael and Josephine were probably renting. In 1932 they lived at 208-10 104 Ave. in Bellaire, Queens.

Michael and Josie had three children: Ray, Marion, and Charles. It is said that Michael wasn't too good with money. Marion and Ray had to work to help support the family, and weren't able to go to college.

Raymond Michael Donovan

Michael and Josephine's oldest child, **Ray Donovan**, was born in 1907. He had a close call at the age of three months when a gas (kerosene?) heater next to his crib caught fire. A newspaper article says Josephine "heard the cry of her baby, and hastening to it, found the bed on which it lay all ablaze. She snatched the imperilled[sic] baby from the burning bed and ran with it to the house of a neighbor." Then she ran to the police station to report the fire. "There she collapsed and became so hysterical that the police had difficulty in learning

the location of the fire." Luckily the blaze was extinguished by neighbors. Raymond's daughter Kathy says he did have some lung damage from the smoke.

Ray started working for Con Edison when he was 16, after early graduation from Richmond Hill High School. He wanted to go to college, but his father wanted him to contribute to the family expenses. Ray started as a meter reader, became a collector by 1930, and continued to work his way up. He stayed with Con Edison his whole life.

In 1928, he enlisted in the New York National Guard and was assigned to Company L of the 107th Infantry Regiment (previously the 7th Regiment New York State Militia, or 7th infantry). It was known as the "Silk Stocking Regiment" for the many members of New York City's social elite among its ranks, and the armory's location on Park Avenue in the Silk Stocking District of the Upper East Side. Members had to be nominated by another member, much like joining a fraternity. Ray re-enlisted in 1931.

Ray got along well with his dad, and adored his mom. In 1932, his mother, Josephine, died at age 48. Ray was 25 years old. Eighteen months later, in June, 1934, Ray married Heddy Gras. (Read on to learn more about Heddy, and their descendants.)

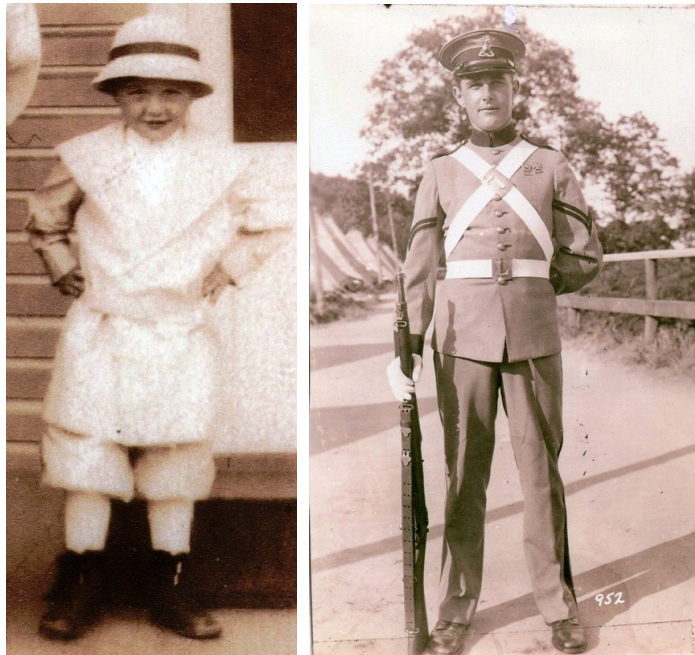
Ray liked to hang out at Reilly's Pub (Peter Reilly Restaurant and Bar) in St. Albans. He usually met his friends there about once a week, and after church on Sunday. It was men only in the bar. There was a separate entrance to the dining room for a rare family dinner with Heddy and their girls.



Ray had a history of varicose veins and was hospitalized several times with clots in his legs. In 1968, at age 60, he died suddenly of thrombosis. A clot probably traveled to his heart or lungs. He is buried in St Charles Cemetery, Farmingdale, NY (Section 24, range JJ, #127).



Left: Josie, Michael, and Raymond Donovan around 1907; Right: Raymond



Raymond Donovan

Marion Veronica Cornelia Donovan

Ray's sister **Marion Donovan** was born in 1912. When she was about six she contracted a life-threatening illness—it may have been scarlet fever. One of John Donovan Jr.'s earliest memories is of being told to pray for his cousin.

Marion was very smart and good with numbers. She wanted to go to college, but, like her older brother, she had to go to work after high school to help support the family. In 1930, she was a clerk for Con Edison, the electric company.

When her mother died in 1932, Marion was 20 years old. She quit working to keep house for Charles, who was only 12, and their father, Michael.

In 1935 Michael remarried. Marion did not like her stepmother, Annie, so she went to live with her Aunt Louise, Uncle Frank, and cousins Fran and Marty.

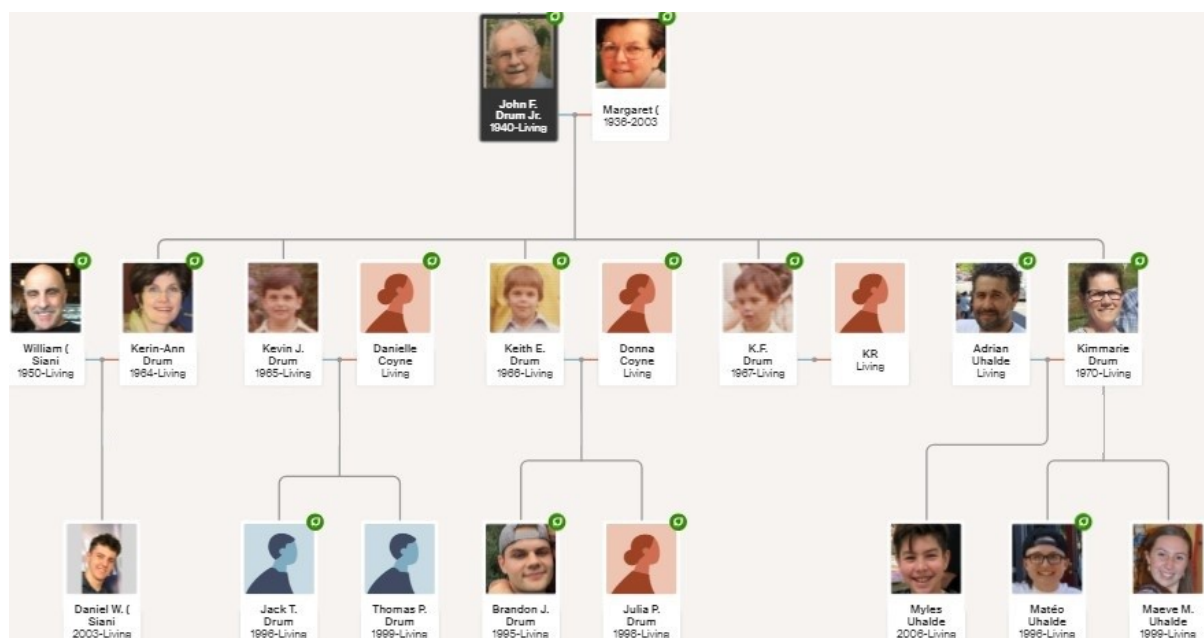
Ten months later, in 1936, Marion married John Drum, who was called Jack. She was 24 years old.

For many years Marion worked in the Macy's children's department. Her Seattle great nieces and nephews remember her sending them comfy pajamas for Christmas every year.

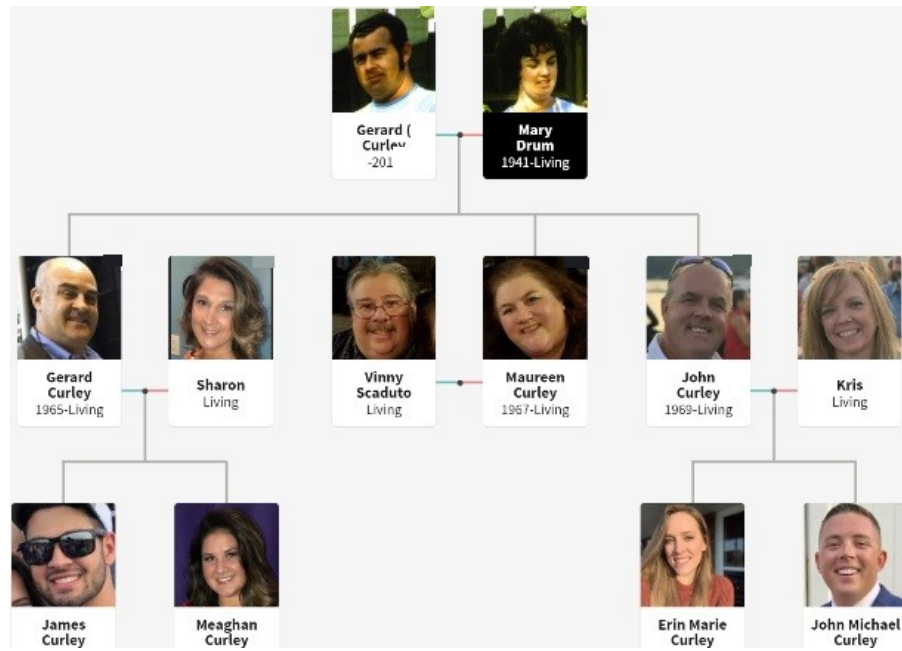
Jack died in 1986, when Marion was 73. A few years later she developed macular degeneration. Although she became legally blind, she still had some peripheral vision. She went to a school to learn how to navigate with a cane and manage daily life. She died in 1999 at age 86. Marion and Jack are remembered as "the nicest people you could ever meet."



Jack and Marion Drum had two children: John and Mary



John Drum had five children: Kerin, Kevin, Keith, K., and Kim



Mary Drum had three children: Gerard, Maureen, and John



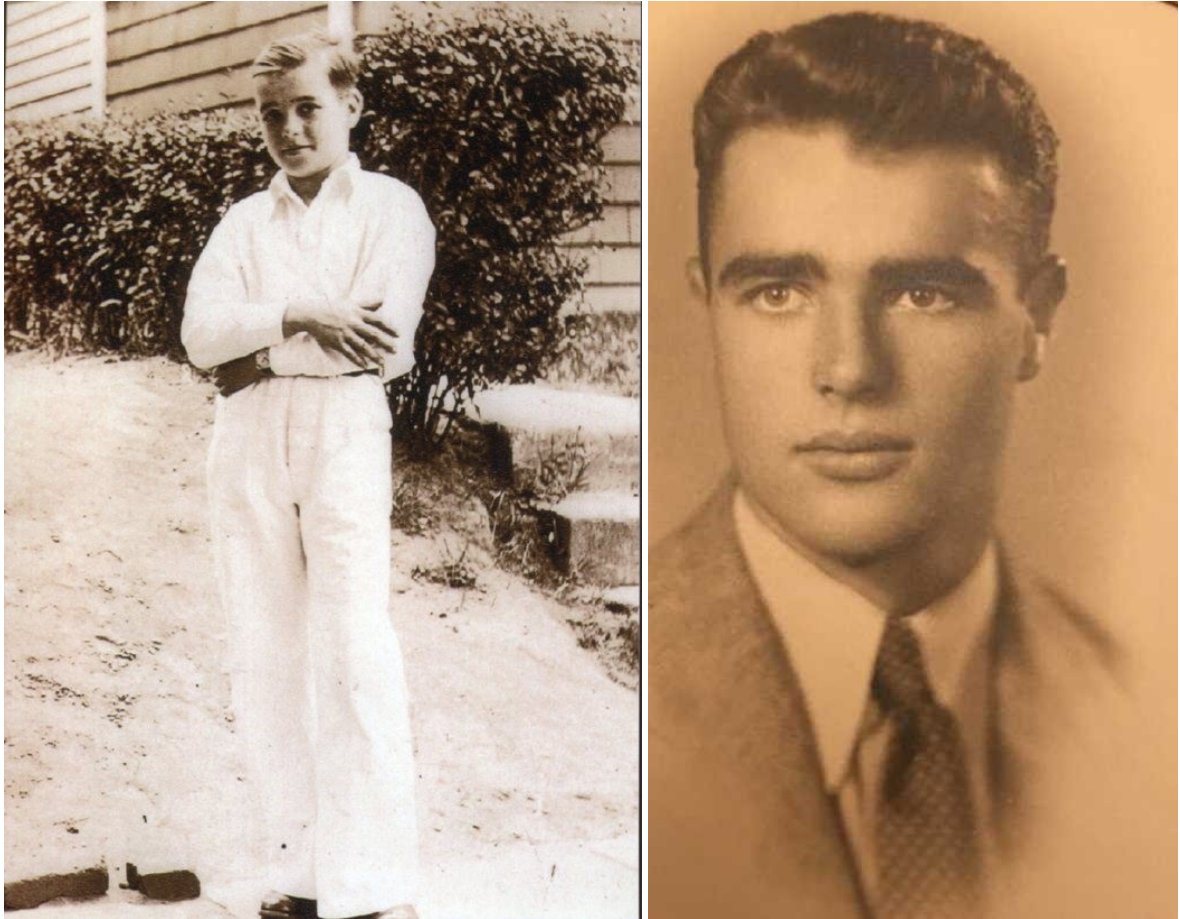
Grandma Marie Meyer with Ray and Marion Donovan



Ray & Marion Donovan

Charles Joseph Donovan

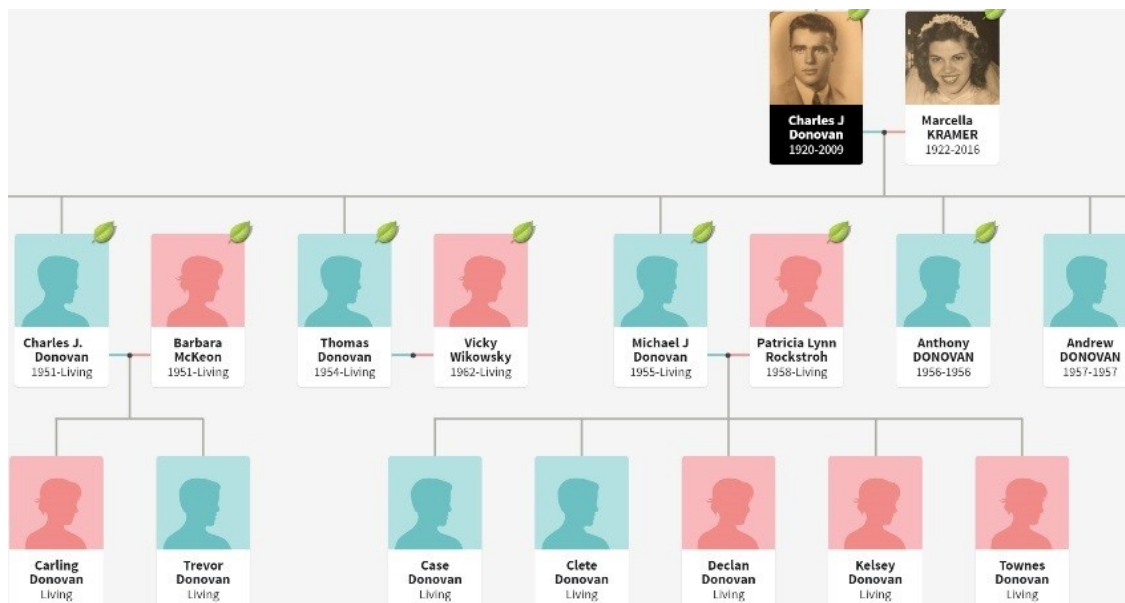
Ray and Marian's brother **Charles Donovan** was born in 1920, when Ray was 13 and Marion was 8. He had one blue eye and one brown eye. He was very handsome.



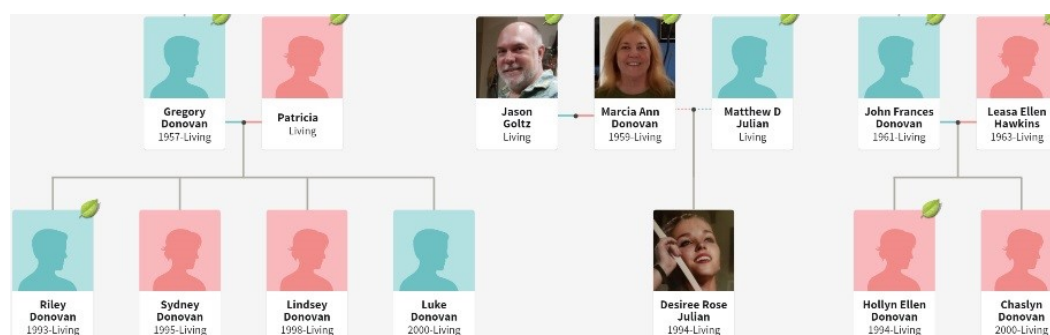
Charles Donovan

He was just 12 years old when his mom died, and 14 when his dad remarried. Charles went to live with Marion and Jack when he was 15 or 16. (He also lived with them after he came home from the war, and for a while after he got out of law school.) Charles spoke charitably about his stepmother, Annie, later in life. He said he appreciated that she had taken such good care of his father when he was dying. He even asked his siblings for money to help support Annie when she was older and her finances were depleted. We know that Marion said no.

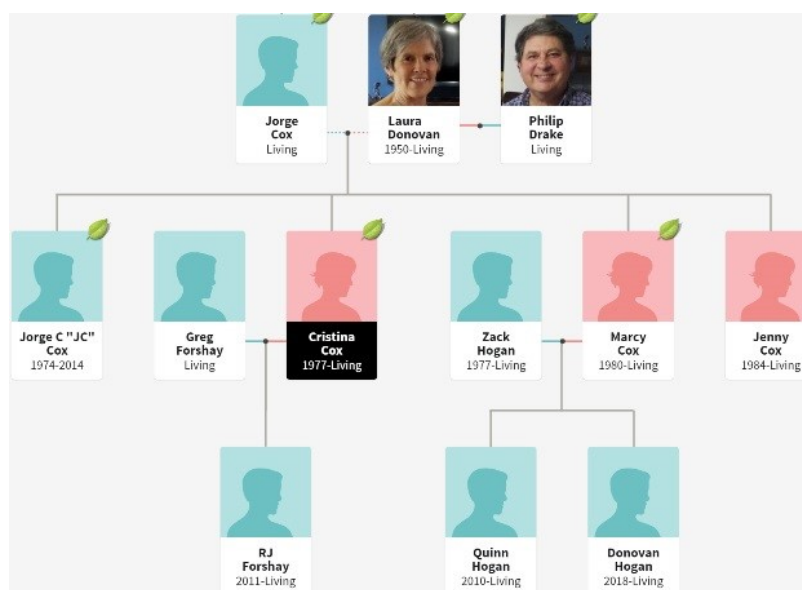
Charles completed Army Officer Candidate School as a Lieutenant. One of his assignments in WWII was in a Recon Unit in Belgium. After the war he went to law school on the GI bill. He married Marcella (Marsha) Kramer in 1948, at age 28, after finishing law school. He was a corporate lawyer in Houston, Texas. Charles and Marsha moved to Austin after he retired. They had seven children: Laurie, Charles (Casey), Thomas, Michael, Greg, Marcie, and John.



Descendants of Casey, Thomas, and Michael Donovan



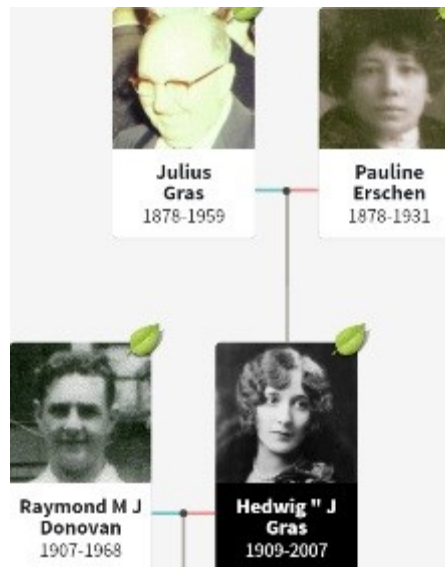
Descendants of Greg, Marcie, and John Donovan



Descendants of Laurie Donovan

Julius Gras and Pauline Erschen (Heddy's parents)

The parents of Hedwig Josephine Gras (called Heddy) were Julius Gras and Pauline Erschen. They had a son out of wedlock, Frederick, who was probably raised by Julius's family in Prussia, and died in New York at age 28. Heddy never knew about him, and always believed she was an only child.



Julius Gras

Heddy's father, **Julius Gras**, was born in 1878. He lived in Rammelsbach, near Kusel, in the German Rhineland, but he may have been born in Frankfurt, as is listed on his WWII draft registration card.

In 2023 I worked with an archivist in Kusel. He looked at the birth, baptism, death, and marriage records and couldn't find our Julius Gras born in Rammelsbach or Kusel in 1878 (the one he did find, died in Germany). I have several official records that give Julius' birth date, so I feel confident about that information, but unfortunately we may never be certain of his birthplace, or know who his parents were.

France annexed the Rhineland from 1795 to 1814, and it became part of the Kingdom of Bavaria in 1818. In 1870 it joined forces with Prussia, eight years before Julius was born.

Rammelsbach had about 800 people when Julius lived there. Students attended either a Catholic or an Evangelical school. There was a thriving limestone industry, alongside traditional farming. The town became an industrial village after 1886, when large-scale quarrying of basalt began. The population tripled during the 1800s. Hard work characterized village life for both men and women.

In 1868, ten years before Julius was born, a railway opened, linking Rammelsbach to the larger town of Kusel, just a mile away. Kusel, with about 3000 people, had cloth factories, quarries, breweries, brickyards, printing shops, smithies, and livestock markets. Apparently these job opportunities weren't enough to keep Julius from leaving at age 21.



Rammelsbach in 2023. It probably looked a lot like this when Julius lived there, minus the wind turbines.

Heddy said that Julius had four brothers who all died in WWI. She also said that Julius had a sister who came to the US with her husband and children, but returned to Germany after her husband died. I have not found records for any of these siblings.

In December, 1899, Julius immigrated to New York on the ship Southwark from Antwerp. Why did he leave? I talked to a historian in Kusel who said it was probably due to poverty. The area was struggling with overpopulation, famine, bad harvests, and poor soil.

When he left Germany, Julius was 21, single, and a laborer. On his immigration papers he said he was coming to visit his cousin, Anna Gras. In the 1900 census he was a boarder in Brooklyn and worked as an iron smelter. His granddaughter, Kathy Donovan, thinks he abandoned that profession after being burned on the job. He then turned to restaurant work and owned a saloon.

Julius married Pauline Erschen in 1903, when they were both 25. (In 1901 they'd had an illegitimate son named Friedrich; see page 80.) Heddy was born in 1909, when Julius and Pauline were 30.



Julius was a big man who always dressed in a suit and tie to go for walks around the neighborhood

In the 1910 census Julius says he is an unemployed "iron moulder" in the foundry industry, an "alien" (not naturalized), and a renter.

In his WWI draft registration in 1918 Julius was listed as 40 years old, a bartender, tall and stout, with brown eyes and black hair. His address was 575 Onderdonk Avenue, Queens.

In the 1920 census, when Heddy was 10, the family lived at 682 Seneca Avenue, Ridgewood, and were renting. Julius said his naturalization papers had been submitted, and he owned his own "liquor business." This address is possibly where their saloon was located. Heddy said the business did very well. Her mom was the "brains" (finances and paperwork), and Julius was the "people person." However, prohibition ran from 1920 to 1933, so how were they able to sell liquor? Heddy said her father was a "rum runner," perhaps meaning that he knew where to acquire illegal alcohol and drive it back to their saloon. It's interesting that he told the 1920 census taker he was in the liquor business, since it was illegal at the time.

In the 1930 census, the Gras family had moved to 190-22 118th Avenue, Queens. They owned their home, valued by them at \$8500, as well as a radio set. Julius said he was able to read and write, and to speak English. He once again said he was an unemployed "iron moulder."



682 Seneca Avenue, Ridgewood (on the left), was possibly the location of Julius and Pauline's saloon

Pauline died in 1931, at age 53. Julius drowned his sorrows in drink. Heddy, who was 22, had her hands full working, keeping house, and getting her father, Julius, out of frequent drinking episodes. This lasted several years, but after a serious car accident, Julius mended his ways.

In the 1940 census, Julius was 62. He lived with Heddy and Ray and their two daughters. He was naturalized (i.e., a citizen), and worked as a bartender at a grill. He said he had completed 8th grade or less.

On his WWII registration card in 1942, Julius was 64 years old. He was five foot seven, 240 pounds, and his hair was still black.

His granddaughter, Kathy Von Der Linn, remembers that Julius had a parakeet named Tweety that he talked to in German. She also has these memories of him:

Grandpa Julius Gras lived with us in the house in St. Albans, which was originally his. Except for his frequent fishing excursions further east on Long Island he was always there. He worked part time as a bartender in a neighborhood tavern, having previously had his own pub in Brooklyn. A friend and I knocked on the back door once or twice and he handed us pretzels from the bar. It was summer, and I recall the dark coolness and pleasant smells from inside, and that he was glad to see us.

At home he was a man of few words, since his English wasn't fluent. He grew wonderful tomatoes and roses in our small backyard and dressed in a

shirt, jacket, and tie to go for walks around the neighborhood. He was an excellent cook, but mostly left the kitchen to my mother. His crocks of sauerkraut and herring marinating in the basement were legendary. In later years his space was the front room (a closed-in porch) on a comfortable chair with his parakeet in a cage next to him. The bird sang but I don't think it ever learned to talk.

Julius liked a good cigar, and he loved wrestling. He used to get so excited. I wonder if he wrestled as a young man, because he was very into it. He would sit in his big chair, and when there was somebody down on the mat, he would be pounding on the arms of the chair.

One summer he took Pat and me to Coney Island for a full day. Riding the subway, walking the boardwalk, treating us to hot dogs and ice cream and watching us on the rides.

Julius died of stomach cancer in 1959 at age 81. He still lived with Heddy and Ray, who took care of him for more than a year while he was dying. He is buried with Pauline in Saint John Cemetery and Mausoleum, Middle Village, Queens, NY.

Pauline Erschen

Heddy Donovan's mother, **Pauline Erschen**, was born in 1878, in Grafenfeld, Gottschee, Krain, Austria (now Dolga Vas, Slovenia). Later in this document we will learn more about Gottschee, a German linguistic and cultural "island" that has a fascinating history. Pauline was the oldest of 11 children.



Grafenfeld in about 1924; the church was destroyed by the Yugoslav regime in 1956

Pauline's daughter, Heddy, always said that her mother grew up near the Alps, and in fact she grew up in the Dinaric Alps, an extension of the main Alps.

When Pauline was about 14, her family moved five miles away, to Niedermösel (now Kočarji, Slovenia). This small village of about 40 homes was the site of a grist mill that processed grain for surrounding villages. Niedermösel was burned to the ground by the Italians during WWII.



Niedermösel in about 1935

In about 1895, when Pauline was 17, she went to New York to work as a housekeeper for a wealthy family. In the 1900 census she is listed as the servant for the Ferdinand Sloat family at 149 Van Buren St. The family comprised Ferdinand, his wife, an adult son, and an adult daughter with her husband and their young daughter. Pauline was 20 years old.

In 1903, Pauline married Julius Gras. Their daughter, Heddy, was born in 1909. (See page 80 for information about their illegitimate son, Friedrich.)

Thirty-four years after leaving Gottschee, Pauline went to visit her ailing mother, Magdalena. Heddy encouraged the visit, and paid for the trip. Heddy said that Magdalena died the day after Pauline arrived. A ship manifest lists Pauline as a passenger returning to New York via Antwerp on August 30, 1929, about three weeks after her mother died.

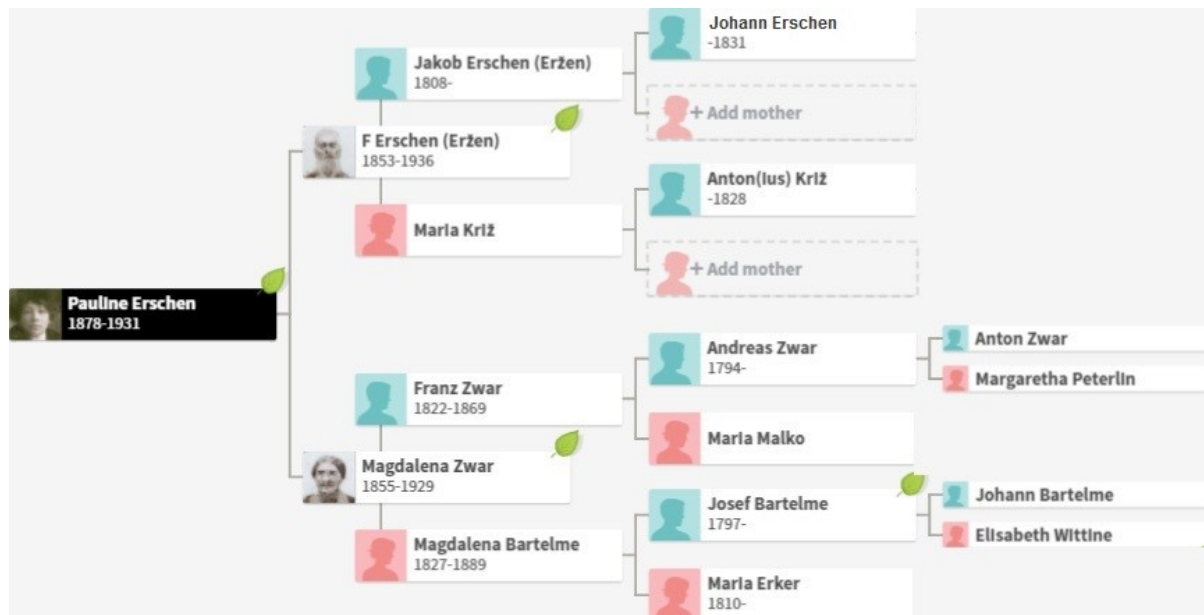
Pauline herself died less than two years later, in 1931, at age 53, of brain cancer (“carcinoma of cerebro” is listed on her death certificate). She is buried with Julius in Saint John Cemetery and Mausoleum, Middle Village, Queens, New York.



Pauline and Heddy Gras, circa 1913

Pauline's Parents

Pauline's parents were Ferdinand Erschen from Croatia and Magdalena Zwar from Gottschee (now Slovenia). Eržen and Cvar are the respective Croatian and Slovene spellings of these names, found in some records.



Pauline Erschen's ancestors

Bear with me here. The next few paragraphs are going to read like the book of Genesis, with all the begats. The above chart of Pauline's ancestors above will make this easier to follow.

Ferdinand Erschen

Pauline Erschen's father, **Ferdinand Erschen**, was born in 1853 in Gorači, Croatia (then Hungary), in the parish of Čabar, just a few kilometers from the Gottschee border. His parents were Jakob Eržen and Maria Križ. The Eržen family lived in house #5.

Jakob Eržen is the son of Joannes (Ivan) Eržen, who died in 1831. Maria is the daughter of Antonius Križ from Tropeti, near Gorači, in Croatia.

Jakob and Maria were married in 1828. Both of their fathers attended the wedding, but neither mother, so the mothers had probably both died. Jakob and Maria had about a dozen children. Ferdinand was the youngest, and was born almost 25 years after his parents' wedding.

Pauline's daughter Heddy was told that Ferdinand was a French architect and bridge builder, and that a small town in France was named for him. I have not been able to find any information that corroborates this. However, it was common for Gottschee men to travel

outside of the region for several months each year, seeking additional income as peddlers or factory workers.

Ferdinand died in 1936 at age 83. His death record says he was a "gostač" which means wage laborer in Slovene. He did own land (5/8 of a hube, which is just over 31 acres), but it may not have been enough to support his family, so he may have worked as a hired hand. He died of "old age and weakness." He is buried in the Mozelj cemetery.

Magdalena Zwar

Pauline Erschen's mother, **Magdalena Zwar**, was born in 1855 in Grafenfeld, Krain, Austria (now Dolga Vas, Slovenia). Her family lived in house #36.

Magdalena Zwar's parents were Magdalena Bartelme and Franz Zwar. They also had a son named Franz.

Magdalena Bartelme's parents were Joseph Bartelme and Maria Erker (possibly Schuster). Joseph and Maria had two daughters, but Magdalena's sister died at age 30. After Joseph died, Magdalena Bartelme and her husband, Franz Zwar, inherited the Bartelme house.

Magdalena Zwar's father, Franz Zwar, was originally from Seele (now Željne, Slovenia), house #45. He was the son of Andreas Zwar and Maria Matko, who were both born in Zadolje and moved to Seele sometime around 1830. Andreas Zwar was born in 1794 to Anton Zwar and Margaritha Peterlin, who lived at house #1 in Zadolje. The 1824 roster of household heads lists 29-year-old Andreas as the "paterfamilias," which likely means that Anton had died.

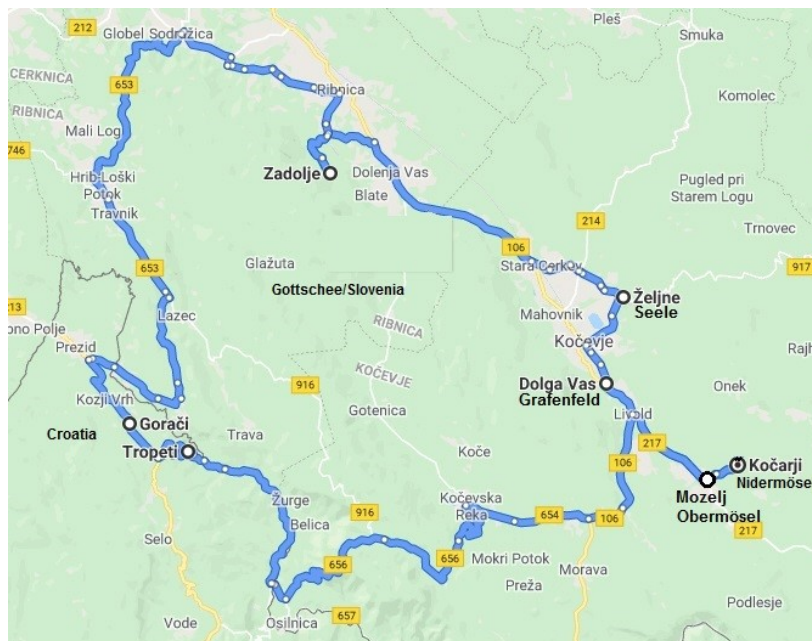
When Franz Zwar married Magdalena Bartelme in 1854, he moved to her family home at #36 in Grafenfeld, not far from Seele. As mentioned above, he and Magdalena inherited the Bartelme house after Magdalena's father died. Magdalena Bartelme died in 1889, and her husband Franz predeceased her.

Magdalena Zwar Erschen died in 1929 at age 74. She is buried in the Mozelj cemetery.

Ferdinand and Magdalena Erschen



A ceramic photo of Pauline's parents, Ferdinand Erschen and Magdalena Zwar, from their headstone in the Mozelj cemetery



The villages of Ferdinand and Pauline's ancestors; no two are more than 25 miles apart. The towns in Gottschee had German names, which were changed to Slovenian names after WWII.

Ferdinand and Magdalena were married in 1877 in Grafenfeld. Their marriage may have been arranged, as was common at the time. This way the parents of the bride could be a little

more certain of the groom's abilities to care for their daughter financially, since land and livestock were passed on to sons.

For the first 15 years of their marriage, Ferdinand and Magdalena Erschen lived at #36 in Grafenfeld with Magdalena's widowed mother, Magdalena Bartelme, who was listed as the head of household. Magdalena Erschen's younger brother Franz lived there as well. Ferdinand and Magdalena Erschen's first six children (including Pauline) were born in Grafenfeld.

In about 1892, Ferdinand and Magdalena moved to Niedermösel (now Kočarji, Slovenia). Presumably Magdalena's brother Franz inherited the Grafenfeld property. In 1920 (28 years later) Ferdinand and Magdalena are listed in the record of Mozelj residents in house #11, so they may have moved from Niedermösel to Mozelj. When Ferdinand died in 1936, he lived at Mozelj #46.

Ferdinand and Magdalena had 11 children. One of their sons died in infancy, and is not listed in this table. Another son died at age 20, and the remaining nine children emigrated to America.

Erschen Children	Birth-Death	Immigration year	Immigration to	Death location if different
Pauline Erschen Gras	1878–1931	1895	Brooklyn	
Ferdinand Erschen	1880–1918	1905	Brooklyn	PA
Josefa Erschen Heller	1883–1927	1898	Brooklyn	
Maria (Mitzie) Erschen Schoenig	1886–1958	Before 1911	US	St Louis, MO
Franz Erschen	1888–1909	Probably didn't go to US	—	Died at age 20, no death record
Johann (John) Erschen	1893–1955	1910	New York	
Rudolf Erschen	1895–1931	1921	Brooklyn (lived with Pauline in 1925 state census)	
Julie Erschen Christos	1897–1975	1920	St. Louis	Queens
Magdalena (Lena) Erschen Jesche	1900–1975	1922	Queens	

In addition to birth, communion, and wedding dates, the Niedermösel parish priest duly noted when and where each member of the family died. These parish records are called “Status Animarum,” or State of Souls.

Nomen loci, seu Vicinitatis					Nomen vulgare: <i>Erschen</i> <i>5/8 p.m.</i>						
Singulorum habitantium					Numerus Domus <i>11</i>						
NOMEN & Cognomen		Conditio	locus	dies mensis	Annus	vacuatus confirmatus primo confensus primo commun. matrimon. iunc.	Mortuus	1 An communicaverit in Pascha?	2 An sciatur rudimenta fidei?	3 Mores	ADNOTATIO
						Anno millesimo octingentesimo			Anno millesimo octingentesimo		
+ Ferdinand Erschen	($\frac{1}{2}$ f.) $\frac{5}{8}$ f.	mf.	Cabar	30 April	1853		$\frac{22}{5}$ $\frac{36}{17}$	1			f. in Cabar 1856 f. in Cabar 1857 f. in Cabar 1858
+ Magdalena Lwar	mf.	Grafenfeld	14 Juni	1855			$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{29}{17}$	1			
+ Paulina	fic.	Grafenfeld	23 Juni	1878			$\frac{30}{6}$ $\frac{31}{17}$	1	gestorben in Bismarck 1874		
Ferdinand	fil.		27 Nov.	1880				1			
+ Josefa	fil.		23. Sept.	1883		99 01	$\frac{28}{2}$ $\frac{27}{17}$	1	gestorben in Bismarck 1884		gestorben in Bismarck 1884
Maria	fic.		27 Mai	1886		94		1			
+ Franz	fil.	Grafenfeld	1. Juni	1888		00	$\frac{28}{4}$ $\frac{09}{17}$	1			
+ Johann	fil.		7 Mai	1891			$\frac{4}{6}$ $\frac{93}{17}$	1			
Johann	fic.	Nieder- mösel 11	19 Juni	1893			$\frac{12}{7}$ $\frac{23}{17}$	1			
+ Rudolf	fic.		10 April	1895		gestorben in Bismarck 1894	$\frac{27}{11}$ $\frac{9}{17}$	1	gestorben in Bismarck 1894		gestorben in Bismarck 1894
Juliana	fil.		2 Juni	1897			$\frac{23}{7}$ $\frac{07}{17}$	1			
+ Magdalena	fic.		18 Juli	1900			$\frac{12}{4}$ $\frac{20}{17}$	1	gestorben in Bismarck 1900		gestorben in Bismarck 1900

Erschen family page from the Niedermösel parish record, or Status Animarum

An average life span was 55 to 65 years. Cholera, typhoid, and tuberculosis killed many people. Childbirth was the main killer of women under 40. Ferdinand and Magdalena beat the odds, living to be 83 and 74, respectively.

Gottschee: a German enclave in Slovenia

Pauline grew up in Gottschee (GO chay), a German-speaking linguistic and cultural “island” established in the early 1300s by settlers from various parts of Germany. It was located in southern Slovenia and was one of the oldest German settlements outside of Germany and Austria. By the 1860s the Gottschee population reached 18,000. Today there are fewer than 1,000 descendants still living in Slovenia due to the two world wars, immigration to the U.S. and Canada, and expulsion to Germany after WWII. Any Gottscheers who remained integrated into the Slovenian community. Many Croats and Slovenians with German surnames have Gottschee ancestry.



The location of Gottschee in today's Slovenia. Between 1804 and the present, this region belonged to six different countries: Austria; Austrian Empire; Austria-Hungary; Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; Yugoslavia; and Slovenia.

In 1247, a prince of the Holy Roman Empire gave a large estate to the Counts of Ortenburg. The fief included a primeval, densely-forested highland bordered by rivers. Settlers began arriving in 1330, making their way up to 500 miles from various parts of Germany to the new colony. They were lured by the promise of land and freedom from servitude. The original settlers and their descendants are called Gottschee Germans, or Gottscheers.

In his 2010 memoir¹, Prof. John Tschinkel writes that the settlers were offered “personal freedom and ownership of parcels of land in return for an annual tithe. The promise to become free men, free of the bonds of serfdom, was a powerful attraction. Settlers made their way in oxen-drawn wagon columns. The journey was long and arduous.”

¹ Tschinkel, John, *The Bells Ring No More*, 2010, CreateSpace Publishing

The trip could take as long as a month. Gottschee-born historian Helmut Trampusch writes that the settlers traveled:

by foot, oxen, mule, donkey or cow-drawn carts over partially mountainous trails. Peasants typically did not have access to horses, [which were] available only to the ruling class and their armies. I assume that travels used the old Roman road system that peppered that part of the world and thus made travel a little bit easier and faster. Travelers most likely moved from sunrise to sunset and rested at the numerous waystations along the route.

The settlers found rocky land that was difficult to farm. Generations of Gottscheers wrested a living from the infertile soil for over six centuries. Each spring they had to file the plow blades, repair the harrows, grease the wagon axles and hubs, whet the spokes, re-shoe the horses, and oil and repair the harnesses. The animal manure that had been collecting all year was spread onto the fields before the snow had melted. Soon it was time to plow, sow, and plant. Next came weeding, mowing, and hay making. In between they had to cut, split, and stack enough firewood to get through the long, cold winter. Extra firewood and lumber could also be sold for cash.

The season was too short for wheat, so they grew rye, oats, barley, millet, buckwheat, and corn. The grain harvest began in mid-July and the corn ripened in September. Cow's milk, chicken, eggs, pork, and mice² provided protein and fat, along with chestnuts and walnuts. Staple vegetables were cabbage, potatoes, turnips, carrots, kohlrabi, onions, beans, and garlic. These, along with apples and pears, were stored in cool cellars. Most of the cabbage was made into sauerkraut. Plum, cherry, raspberry, blueberry, and wild strawberry preserves were stored in earthen jars sealed with a layer of wax. The most fertile soil was found at the bottom of the limestone sinkholes that dot this area. These depressions were mostly used for growing herbs and vegetables. Suitable areas for wine growing were discovered in the 16th century. Chamomile flower tea was the standard cure for most ailments.

Challenges included a short growing season, poor soil, severe weather, floods, forest fires, wild boar, and cattle plagues. Hail the size of small potatoes could destroy an entire crop in a few minutes. These were all part of God's wrath, and the result of sins, as the villagers were reminded constantly by the priest in his sermons. To help make ends meet, many men went to Austria and Germany as chestnut sellers in the winter months or as peddlers in the summer.

Gottscheers helped each other, working from one farm to the next until all the crops were in. One ritual was the annual pig slaughter at the end of November. After the produce was harvested and stored, and enough firewood was cut and stacked to last the winter, families helped each other butcher a pig and convert it to smoked or pickled hams, sides of bacon, long links of sausage, and wooden vats of lard. Not a scrap was wasted. A common meal was sausage with polenta and sauerkraut, covered in pork drippings. Bread and strudel were baked in wood-fired ovens.

² The European edible dormouse is still consumed in Slovenia and Croatia. They are considered a delicacy and dormouse trapping is a tradition.

A typical farmhouse parlor in Gottschee had a heavy oak table in the corner where families ate together. It had a tiled wood-burning stove with recesses where you could sit. A step allowed children to climb to the upper recess, where they could hide or play games. A bench around the stove was where the grandparents sat in the winter. Here they could watch the children play, tell them stories, join in the conversations, or take a nap (“nopfatsn”). Sometimes neighbors would stop by in the evening to play cards, chat, or spin wool. Stories were told and embellished until legends arose. Sometimes they sang old traditional songs in Gottscheer. These folk songs are among the oldest in the German-speaking world.

Most Gottscheer families were quite large. All hands helped with the work. The men and children left home by lantern light and worked all day in the fields. Many children were working paid jobs for other, better-off, families by age nine. Most Gottscheers had a kitchen garden, some pasturage, and a crop for animal feed in the winter. Their plots were usually less than 50 acres. In addition to the house, barn, garden, pasture, and crops, there were fruit trees, plus other trees for firewood, tools, structures, and furniture.

People lived in relative poverty as farmers and carpenters. A man who grew up in Gottschee in the early 1900s said they had only one or two cows and a pig, "and that's what you lived on."

In the isolation of their highland, the people of Gottschee maintained much of the heritage of the early settlers. The area remained a linguistic island until 1942. Gottscheerisch is one of the oldest German dialects alive, and has very little in common with present day German—a modern German would not understand it.

For the Gottscheer, home was limited to the small Gottscheer region where their language was spoken, an area of about 331 square miles. By the late 1800s, when Pauline left, there were 176 villages and 123 churches and chapels.

Sundays were days of rest: church in the morning, perhaps lunch at a Gasthaus, followed by an afternoon of socializing, singing, and dancing; almost every village had at least one accordionist. Gottscheers were Roman Catholic and very religious, observing all holy days and fasts. Sunday worship was obligatory. Each village had one family that was responsible for church maintenance and access. They rang the church bell during the week to announce the start of work in the fields, lunchtime, and the time to stop work. On Sundays, the bell rang the call to worship.

The son who took over his parents' homestead was expected to provide for his siblings, so the more he could get out of his future in-laws, the easier it was for him later on. An old Gottscheer proverb says: *Bues mon shi d'rhairotn khonn, prach mon shi et tse d'rurbaitn.* (What you can gain through marriage, you don't have to work for.)

Weddings usually took place in the bride's village. Villagers made wreaths and banners to put up at the bride and groom's houses, and to carry in a procession to the church. The banners were made of spruce or birch saplings, and held signs that said "Long live the bride," or

"Long live the groom." The wreath-making party was called a *Krantslaischpintn*, and it culminated in dancing to an accordion.

On the wedding day, the groom was presented with various obstacles on his way to the church. A barricade was set across the road, and he had to negotiate a fee to pass by. The crowd enjoyed the entertainment as he haggled with the village elders.

Professor Tschinkel, who grew up in Gottschee in the 1930s, remembers "the heavy fragrance of the pines in the vast forest in springtime, when the sap began to flow." In the spring there are also incredible displays of flowers that change by the week.

Historian Donald Reindl was bicycling through Mozelj in late May of 2020 and described the area, noting that some things have probably not changed since the Erschen family lived there:

I chatted with some women cutting hay. One refilled my water for me, and added some elderberry flower syrup. It was delicious, and I enjoyed it while hiking down to Kočarji Spring [in Niedermösel, where Pauline's family lived]. The catchment there was built by Gottschee Germans in 1849. There were three mills operating on the creek. It was a bustling place. The local tourism board has set up a trail connecting the springs in the area.



Kočarji Spring in Niedermösel was built by Gottschee Germans in 1849. The shelves were for holding buckets of water. The recently added metal doors prevent animals from falling into the basin.

For 650 years the Gottscheers endured Turkish invasions, cholera, statutory labor, oppressive taxation, occupation by Napoleon's army, multiple wars, annexation by Yugoslavia and Italy, and eventual expulsion after WWII. Not surprisingly, many Gottscheers emigrated. Thousands left for New York and Cleveland beginning in the late 1800s (railway service

reached the region in 1893). Pauline Erschen was one of them; she left in 1895, just two years after railroad service began.

Helmut Trampusch writes:

Immigration was typically by individuals rather than whole families. Those that departed were usually the young men and women. Their parents generally remained behind to take care of the farmland and the grandparents. The normal mode of travel to “the new world” was via third class or tourist tickets on one of the many trans-Atlantic ships. The third-class passage was not elegant, but it was relatively inexpensive.

From <https://www.gottscheerland.at>:

The first Gottscheers entered the new world after a three-month journey on an old sailing ship. During the First World War, traveling back and forth was prohibited, but from the mid-1920s to the 1930s, emigration reached such an extent that almost every house [in Gottschee] had a family member who had emigrated to America. In the 1930s there were 6,000 Gottscheers living in New York alone. The "Americans" had already surpassed the population living in Gottschee.

The economic, political and cultural center of Gottschee was the city of Gottschee, now Kočevje, about six miles from Niedermösel. Pauline may have visited on occasion, and it is probably where she started her journey to America.

At the end of WWI, in 1918, Gottschee was incorporated into Yugoslavia. Until then the Slovenes and Gottscheers had lived peacefully side by side. The Gottscheer priests saw the coming unrest and sent a letter to the bishop in Ljubljana denouncing the plan to annex Gottschee, to no avail.

That same year a proposal was made for Gottschee to become an independent republic under American protection, based on the large Gottschee German population in the United States. A demonstration demanding autonomy was held in New York in January 1919, when Pauline was 40 and Heddy was 10. It seems likely that Pauline knew about the demonstration, and I wonder if she attended.

Pauline's mother, Magdalena, died in 1929 and her father died in 1936. By the end of Magdalena's life, political and assimilatory pressure had caused many Gottschee Germans to emigrate. German-language high schools were closed in 1918. In 1925, German was eliminated as an elective subject in schools, and the singing of the Gottscheer anthem was banned. During this time, German business, cultural, and athletic societies were dissolved, and there was forced Slovenization of the names of villages and people.

Pauline's parents died before the worst of the changes. In 1938, the name of the place Obermösel was changed to Mozelj, and after WWII there was a concerted effort by the

Yugoslav regime to obliterate all traces of German (Gottscheer) heritage, including villages, churches, and gravestones. During the Second World War the remaining German population was expelled. Today Mozelj has a population of 184, but these are Slovenians.

According to a 2015 Smithsonian article, “a proud and thriving community of Gottscheers still exists in Queens, New York. Gottscheer Hall hosts traditional Austrian meals and choir performances in the Gottscheerish dialect. Every year, in a tradition that dates to 1947, over a thousand Gottscheers gather at a *Volksfest* on Long Island. A Gottscheer cookbook frequently sells out.”

Slovenia gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. During that long regime, people were not allowed to talk about Gottschee, its German heritage, or the atrocities that were committed after WWII. Now, museums and organizations are preserving photos, films, and stories about Gottschee. The Kočevje Regional Museum has a permanent exhibition called “The Former German Language Island in the Kočevje Region.”

For those who are interested, there is a wealth of information about Gottschee online.

Mozelj, Slovenia

Niedermösel (lower Mösel), where Pauline lived from age 14 to 17, is about one mile from the village of Obermösel (upper Mösel, or Mösel), now Mozelj, Slovenia. This is where Pauline went to school, and her family went to church.

Mozelj (MO zul) was one of the larger towns in Gottschee, and one of the oldest settlements. It was settled first because it sits on a hill above the surrounding area, and was protected from floods. The elevation of the town is about 1500 feet. It’s surrounded by fields and forests. Colorful blossoms cover the native linden and chestnut trees in the spring.

The first arrivals cleared forests and cultivated the land. They made and transported shingles throughout the region. Slovenia today still ships forest products all over the EU. The land still isn’t great for agriculture.

The primary trade route north into the city of Gottschee went through Mozelj, helping it to grow into one of the largest villages in the region. A part-time school was established in a private house in 1811, and the first school building was completed in 1844. Children from Niedermösel and other surrounding villages attended the school. Thus Pauline, born in 1878, was able to receive a good education, including two years of high school (according to her daughter Heddy). She would have learned to speak standard German, and this would have helped her when she immigrated to America—although there were many Gottscheerisch speakers in New York, her future husband was not one of them.

Like most everyone in Gottschee, the people of Mozelj made a difficult living from agriculture, animal husbandry, fruit growing, and forest products. They also made bricks from the local dolomite sand. They held a livestock fair three times a year. When Pauline lived there, the village had a school, two churches, a parsonage, a municipal office, a post

office, a gendarmerie, three inns, two shops, two blacksmiths, a butcher's shop, a brickyard, and several kinds of craftsmen. Below the village, on the road to Kočevje, stood a mill. They had their own fire brigade (founded in 1898), a brass band, four choirs, and various educational and political societies. Pauline would have walked into Mozelj to go to school and church, and probably also for shopping and socializing.

For many years the people obtained water from two wells, which dried up during the dry months. In 1905, a water line was laid from a nearby spring.

In 1880 there were 372 people and 71 houses. Eventually, the poor soils and other factors forced many inhabitants to move to the USA and Canada.

Ferdinand and Magdalena saw big changes to their world as their children all left for America, and anti-German sentiment grew. Between the two world wars, the number of Slovene speakers in the village increased to almost 25% of the residents, and there were increasing efforts to assimilate or oust the German Gottscheers.



Mozelj in about 1934



Mozelj in the 1920s or 30s. Pauline had left, but her parents still lived there.



Mozelj village center, 2009

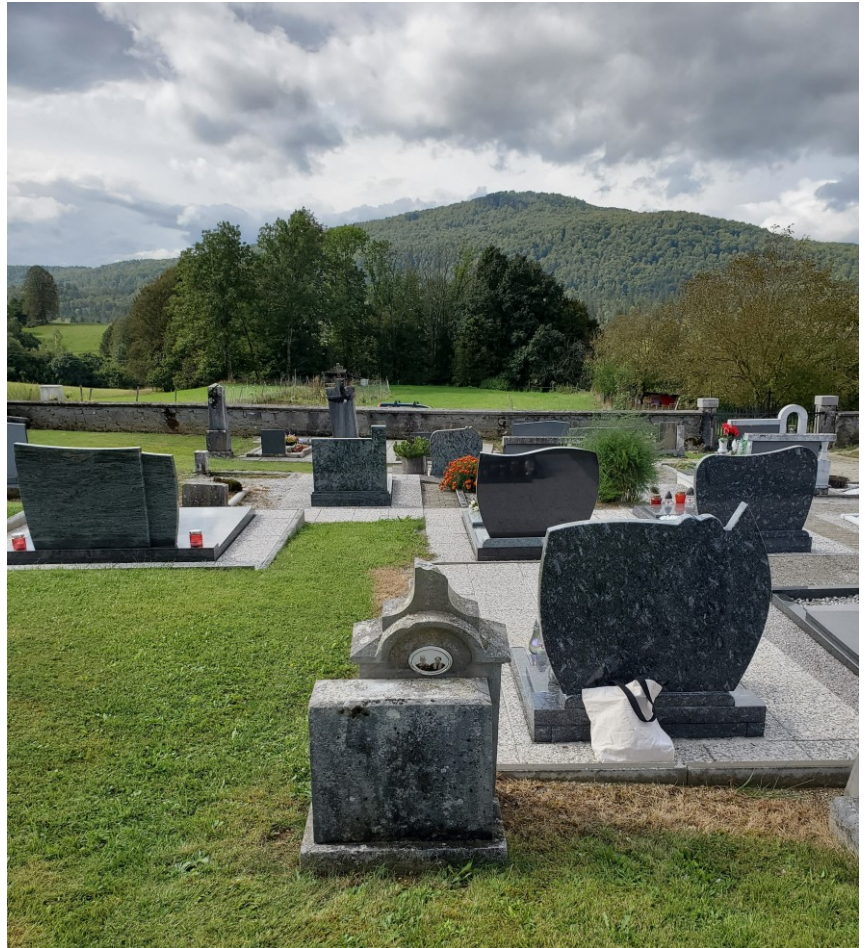


Aerial view of Mozelj, 2006. The church is visible on the right. The cemetery is just off the right edge of the picture.

The Mozelj Church and Cemetery

Many Gottscheer villages and cemeteries were destroyed during and after WWII, when Yugoslavia systematically eradicated as much German (Gottschee) heritage as they could, tearing down German churches, houses, and tombstones. Of 176 settlements, 112 were razed. The ones farthest from main roads, and least “visible,” fared the worst. Mozelj and its church and cemetery survived partly because the town was on a main road, and partly due to Slovenian heroes who protected it.

We are lucky that Ferdinand and Magdalena’s headstone survived the war. It was the key to unlocking Pauline’s family history. The Mozelj cemetery is one of only a handful with German headstones still standing. Ferdinand and Magdalena are the only Erschens buried in the Mozelj cemetery.



The Erschen grave in the Mozelj cemetery is surrounded by newer, Slovenian graves. The headstone fell (or was deliberately knocked?) off the plinth years ago, but it is turned around so the face has been protected from the elements. In the photo on the right, you can see the cameo photo peeking over the top of the plinth.

The headstone reads:

*Hier ruhen
Ferd. Erschen
(dates)
Magd. Erschen
(dates)
Ruhen sanft*

*Here rest
Ferd. Erschen
(dates)
Magd. Erschen
(dates)
Rest gently*

It seems likely that the headstone was made after both Ferdinand and Pauline had died. When Ferdinand died, only four of his children were still living, and presumably they paid for the memorial. No expense seems to have been spared.

The verse inscribed on the plinth is in German, and as best we can tell it is original, perhaps written by the kids. Here is the text, with the English translation:

*Vereint im Tod wie einst im Leben
Hat euch die treue Gotteshand
Wo sel'ge Geister euch umschweben.
Weilt ihr im ew'gen Heimatland.
Der Kinderdank beweint das Scheiden
Die Liebe blickt zu Sternenhöh'n
Und glaubt und hoft Nach Trennungsleiden
Entzückt ein frohes Wiederseh'n!*

*United in death as you once were in life
The faithful hand of God holds you
Where blessed spirits float around you.
You reside in the eternal homeland.
Your grateful children weep at this parting
Their love looks to the starry heights
And believes and hopes
After the sorrow of separation
With joy in a happy reunion!*

Yugoslavia razed 95 out of 123 churches, and most chapels. One of those destroyed was the chapel of St. Florian in the center of Mozelj. Some years before its destruction, Pauline's sister Juliana, who was by then living in the US, had had the chapel beautifully renovated inside and out using her own funds.

On my visit to Mozelj in 2023, I learned that the town church, called St. Lenart's, was one of the few churches in Gottschee that survived. It was protected by brave Slovenian villagers. (The German inhabitants of Mozelj had been evicted in 1941, and the homes taken over by Slovenes.) A current inhabitant of Mozelj told me that the Slovenian villagers did not want to see a historic church destroyed. A booklet about the church, published in Slovenian in 2009, tells the amazing story:

The fate of the churches and chapels in the Mosel parish is shocking. All signs illustrating the Christian faith had to disappear from our area. That is why churches, chapels, signs, crucifixes fell. The "liberators" thoroughly "cleansed" the Mozelj parish.

Members of the Mozelj municipal committee ... decided to remove the church of St. Lenart. Since the local communist authorities carried out the actions at night, four villagers of Mozelj lit a bonfire at the church every night for almost a month. High flames illuminated the church and no one could approach it unnoticed. A home-made tool was prepared for defense against the destroyers of historical assets, but it was not used.

Other believers from the village were also involved in protecting the church in their own way: they brought food and drink to the defenders of the church, but above all they encouraged the four heroes and gave them confidence that they were not alone, that a large part of the village was with them. With the action described, the determined villagers of Mozelj prevented the demolition and removal of the church and thus with the greatest measure of courage contributed to the preservation of this historic building.

During the protection of the church, [the villagers wrote a] letter to the office of Marshal Tito [Yugoslav dictator]. Although [they] did not believe in the success of the letter, an answer from Belgrade came to the Mozelj Municipal Committee. The content of the reply was not known to the rebellious villagers, but the [subsequent] actions of the committee showed that the Marshal supported [the villagers]. The chairman of the municipal committee informed the defenders of the church that they could get the keys to the church from the innkeeper in Mozelj.

The Church of St. Lenart thus did not join the sad number of demolished sacred buildings in [Gottschee].

The simple plastered exterior of the Mozelj church belies the treasures that lie within. The church was built in the early 1500s and has been remodeled and restored various times over the years. In 1720, the interior of the church was redecorated in Baroque style. The main altar is a high-Baroque wooden confection created in 1764. One fairly recent restoration uncovered medieval wall frescoes. The townspeople treasure the church and care for it. I had the good fortune to visit Mozelj with a friend who speaks Slovene. He found a local woman with a key who gave us a tour.



The deceptively plain exterior of the Mozej church



The high-Baroque main altar of St. Lenart's church in Mozelj. (courtesy Wikipedia)



Medieval frescoes uncovered during renovation of the church

Friedrich Gras

In 1901, two years before she and Julius were married, Pauline gave birth to a boy named **Friedrich**. The birth is listed as illegitimate in the parish record in Niedermösel. The name is recorded as Friederich Erschen (Gras). For some reason Pauline and Julius were not able to get married or keep the child. Perhaps they couldn't yet afford to live on their own. There is a military record for Friedrich Gras in the Bavarian army in 1918 in Julius's hometown of Rammelsbach, so perhaps Fred was sent to live with Julius's family. He's listed as Fred W. Gras on his marriage license, and as Frederick on his death certificate. Pauline and Julius are listed as his parents on both records.

We do know that Fred returned to New York sometime before marrying Anna Schetzer in 1927 in Manhattan. He died in 1930 at age 28 of carbon monoxide poisoning from the illuminating gas that was used to light homes (a common tragedy at this time in history). He was cremated and interred at Fresh Pond Crematory and Columbarium, Middle Village, Queens County, New York. I did not find any record of Fred and Anna having children.

Pauline and Julius married about two years after Fred's birth. Their daughter, Heddy, born in 1909, never knew about Fred.

Fred's death is not recorded in the Niedermösel parish register. Perhaps Pauline didn't know about his death, which would suggest that she had not kept in touch with him. Pauline herself died just 14 months after Fred.

In the 1910 census, Pauline said she had only given birth to one child, Heddy. This shows that people don't always tell the truth on censuses, and that census data isn't 100% accurate.

Hedwig Josephine Gras

Julius Gras and Pauline Erschen's daughter, **Hedwig Josephine Gras**, was born in 1909 in Brooklyn, New York. She didn't like the name Hedwig, and was called Heddy.

Heddy remembered her childhood as very lonely. Her parents worked long hours in their saloon while she spent most of her time in the family apartment above. For company she had a piano and a Great Dane named Babe. Her parents were strict. Friends were not allowed up to visit, and she was not allowed to play on the street with the neighborhood kids. She loved school because she could be with other children. Her happiest summers were the ones when she was sent to Upstate New York to board with a farm family that had a lot of kids. She contracted malaria when she was a child.



Heddy Gras, probably with her Great Dane, Babe. Perhaps this was the day she chose Babe from a litter of pups? (circa 1926)

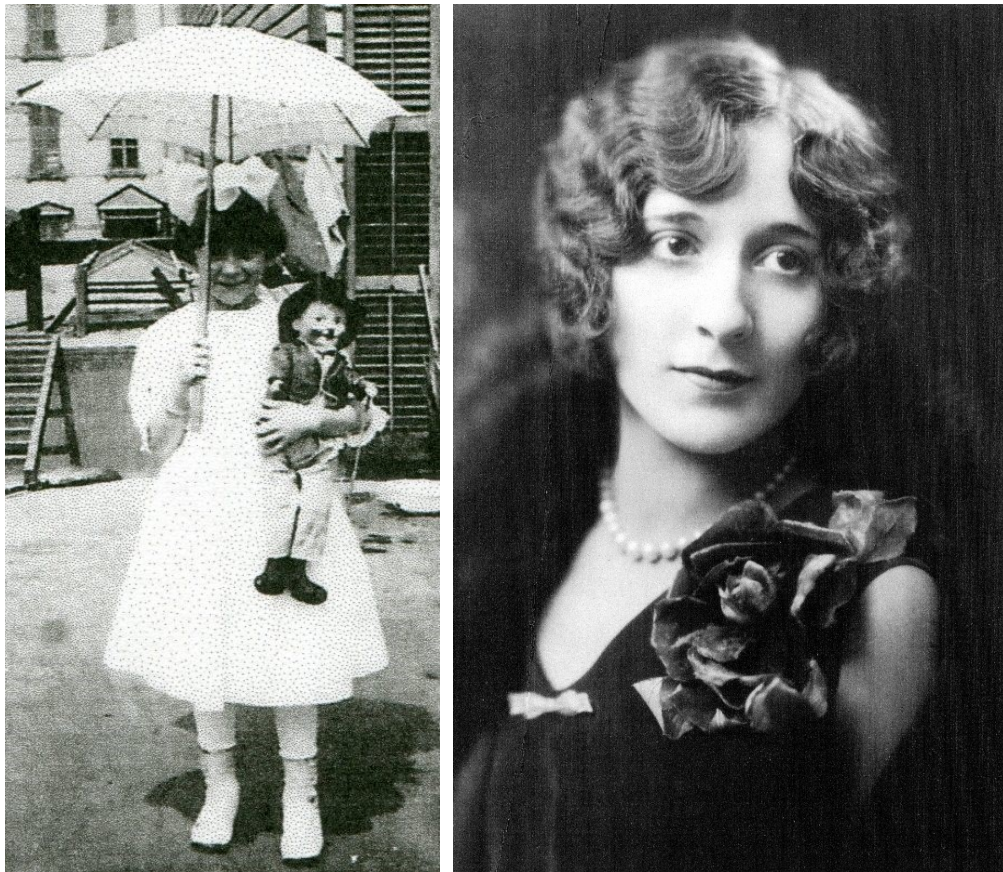
To the best of our knowledge, Heddy never knew she had a half brother. Seven of Pauline's brothers and sisters lived nearby, and some of them had children, but there are no family stories suggesting that Heddy spent time with these cousins. Kathy Donovan does remember meeting "Tantas" (Aunts) Mitzie and Julie, Pauline's sisters, but Kathy always thought they were Julius's family. Pauline died seven years before Kathy was born, so Mitzie and Julie's visits suggest that the sisters kept in touch with Pauline's husband and children long after Pauline had died.

Heddy liked sports and wanted to become a PE teacher. But her father wouldn't let her go to college, so she switched to commercial studies in high school, taking a secretarial course and graduating early from high school. She got a job in the mail room of the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) while still in high school, later became a stenographer (shorthand transcriptionist), and eventually rose to be the director of personnel. She was a crackerjack typist. She started smoking at about 16 because she had to go to work and she wanted to look older. Her daughter Kathy says, "The roaring 20s had changed young women into the

possibility and sometimes necessity of becoming career women, and smoking was a part of all that."

In 1928, Heddy won a car in the LIRR "Most Popular Employee" contest. She had just put a down payment on another car, so she sold her prize for \$800 (almost \$12,000 in 2020 dollars).

LIRR had a competitive track team, which gave Heddy a chance to use her sports talent. She won many medals in the 440 and shorter races. The team traveled up and down the East Coast and to Canada in a special train car, and Heddy met famous athletes such as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and heavyweight boxing champion Gene Tunney.



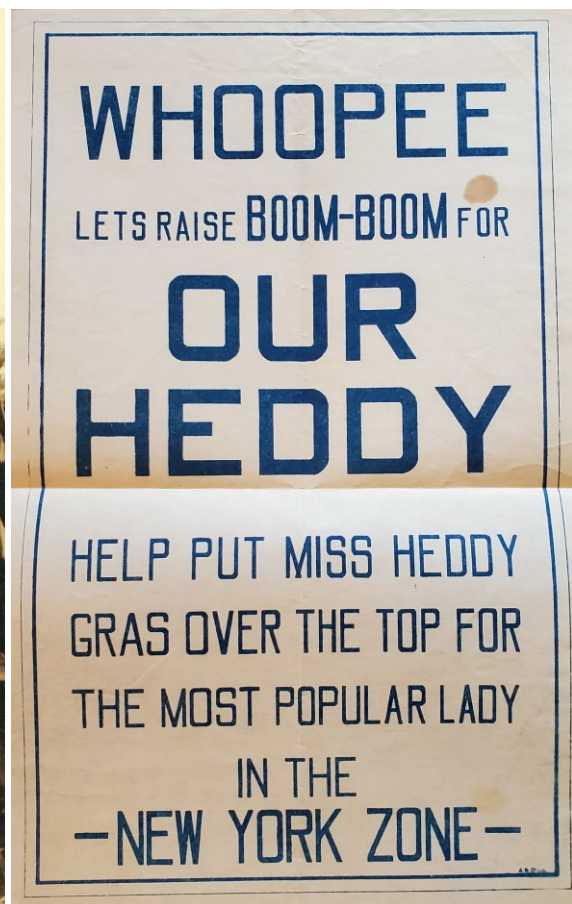
Left, Heddy with a Charlie Chaplin doll; right, Heddy at age 18

In 1929, Heddy paid for her mom, Pauline, to return to Germany for the first time in 34 years. Heddy said that Pauline's mother, Magdalena, died the day after Pauline returned.

Pauline died in 1931, when Heddy was 22. Heddy continued working, but also took on running the household and caring for her father, who drowned his sorrows in drink for a while after Pauline died. In 1934, Heddy married Ray Donovan. Julius lived with them until he died in 1959.



I'm not sure if this is the car Heddy won, or the one she purchased.



Left, Heddy in her track suit; right, Heddy was voted Most Popular Employee

Raymond Donovan and Heddy Gras

Ray and Heddy met on a blind date in 1932 at one of the formal dances held by the 107th Regiment at their famous Armory on Park Avenue in Manhattan. A mutual friend set things up. Ray would have been in uniform the first time they met.

After that, Ray and Heddy often double dated with Ray's sister Marion and her boyfriend, Jack Drum. Marion and Heddy became good friends.

Ray's mother died not long after Ray and Heddy started dating. Ray, Heddy, Marion, and Jack were very protective of Charles, who was only 12.

Ray and Heddy married in 1934, and Jack was best man. Marion and Jack got married two years later.

When Heddy and Ray married they lived with Heddy's father in his house in St. Albans. Julius didn't want to live alone, and it would have been difficult for Ray and Heddy to afford their own house.

Heddy and Ray had two daughters, Pat and Kathy. The girls grew up in a multi-generational household with their grandfather. They celebrated all their holidays with Jack and Marion, who also had two children, John and Mary.

Pat was born in 1935. Heddy was very sick after the birth, possibly with what they called "childbed fever" (puerperal fever), a bacterial vaginal infection. It was a devastating disease that affected women within the first three days after childbirth. It progressed rapidly, causing acute symptoms of severe abdominal pain, fever, and debility. Women often died. In 1935 they were just beginning to use sulphonamides to treat it. Ray's Aunt Louise stepped in to care for Pat while Heddy was convalescing.

After Pat was born, Ray worked a second job on the docks. The 1940 census says he was a collector for Con Edison making \$1500 a year. (The median income for a man in 1940 was \$956.)

Heddy always worked at something. Her best friend was Muriel (Nissen) Agnelli. Muriel wrote the Dorothy Dix advice column after the original Dorothy died, and hired Heddy as her part-time assistant to help answer the mountain of letters "Dorothy" received. Kathy and Pat helped stuff and seal envelopes, which Heddy would bring home and pile on the dining room table.

Kathy Donovan remembers that her parents were not racist. As more black people were able to afford to move out of the city and into neighborhoods like St. Albans, many white people were upset. When Kathy was a teenager, someone chalked a line down the middle of their street and wrote "Mason Dixon Line." Ray and Heddy were furious, and helped remove the chalk. To their neighbors who said, "Black people are lowering our property values," Ray

and Heddy replied, “Then don’t sell your house.” They were one of the last two white homes to sell in the St. Albans neighborhood.



This photo circa 1940 shows Ray (bottom center), Heddy (seated second from right) with Kathy on her lap, and Pat next to Kathy on someone's lap). Ray's father, Michael, is standing on the left, and Michael's second wife, Annie, is seated in the center, in black, with glasses.

Kathy recalls other examples of Ray and Heddy’s values. The first black man Kathy ever saw in her neighborhood was Jackie Robinson. He was walking down Linden Blvd., and Ray said, “There goes one hell of a ball player.” There was no mention at all of his skin color.

Ray and Heddy were friends with black TV personality Al Roker’s parents. Both couples volunteered at Bingo nights to raise money for St. Catherine’s church. Ray and Heddy admired Al’s parents because they sacrificed a lot to send their kids to private school. (When Al interviewed his parents years later, his father (who was called Big Al) said, “Sometimes we had to rob Peter to pay Paul. You didn’t know Peter, and you didn’t know Paul, you just knew there was food on the table.”)

In 1959, when Kathy was pregnant with her first child, she lived with her mom, dad, and grandfather for six months while her husband, Jim Von Der Linn, was serving his ROTC active duty in Virginia and New Jersey. Kathy says that Heddy and Ray were a great example to her of patience and caring. After Karen was born, Kathy got very sick with the Hong Kong flu, and Heddy took care of Kathy and Karen, as well as her dying father.

Muriel Agnelli died on the same day as Julius. Just a few weeks later, Kathy, Jim, and baby Karen went back to Seattle. This must have been a very hard time for Heddy.

The following year, Ray and Heddy sold the house in St. Albans and bought a newer house in Cambria Heights, just a few blocks from Marion and Jack. The next eight years had to have been a happy time for them. This was really their first house, which they got to decorate and enjoy, and it was in a safer, prettier neighborhood. They were especially proud of the party room in the basement, where they entertained often. They loved the black family that lived on their street, especially the son, who they hired to mow their lawn. (Just like in St. Albans, they weren't so fond of some of the white neighbors.)

In the summers Heddy, Ray, Marion, Jack, and other friends went to a resort called Breezy Knoll, about 130 miles north of the city, in Greene County. Every other year Heddy and Ray went to Seattle to spend a few weeks with Kathy and Jim and their five kids.



Pat's First Communion: Ray, Heddy, Pat, & Kathy, 1942

Ray was beginning to plan an early retirement from Con Edison when he died suddenly of thrombosis at age 60. Heddy was devastated. She was already working part time at St. Catherine's Catholic church and school, and they offered her a full time position. She said the job saved her sanity. The priests and staff there were like a second family to her. She

worked at St. Catherine's and lived in the Cambria Heights house until she retired at age 76. She then moved to Northport, where her daughter Pat and son-in-law Ed agreed to let Heddy build an apartment in the basement of their home. She loved it there, and was surrounded by family for the remainder of her life.

Heddy spent summers on the West Coast until she was 95. She died in July, 2007, at age 98, and is buried in St Charles Cemetery, Farmingdale, NY (Section 24, range JJ, #127).

Many things in Heddy's life had not been easy, and she didn't like to talk about the sad memories. She said that she preferred to put the past behind her and focus on the good things.



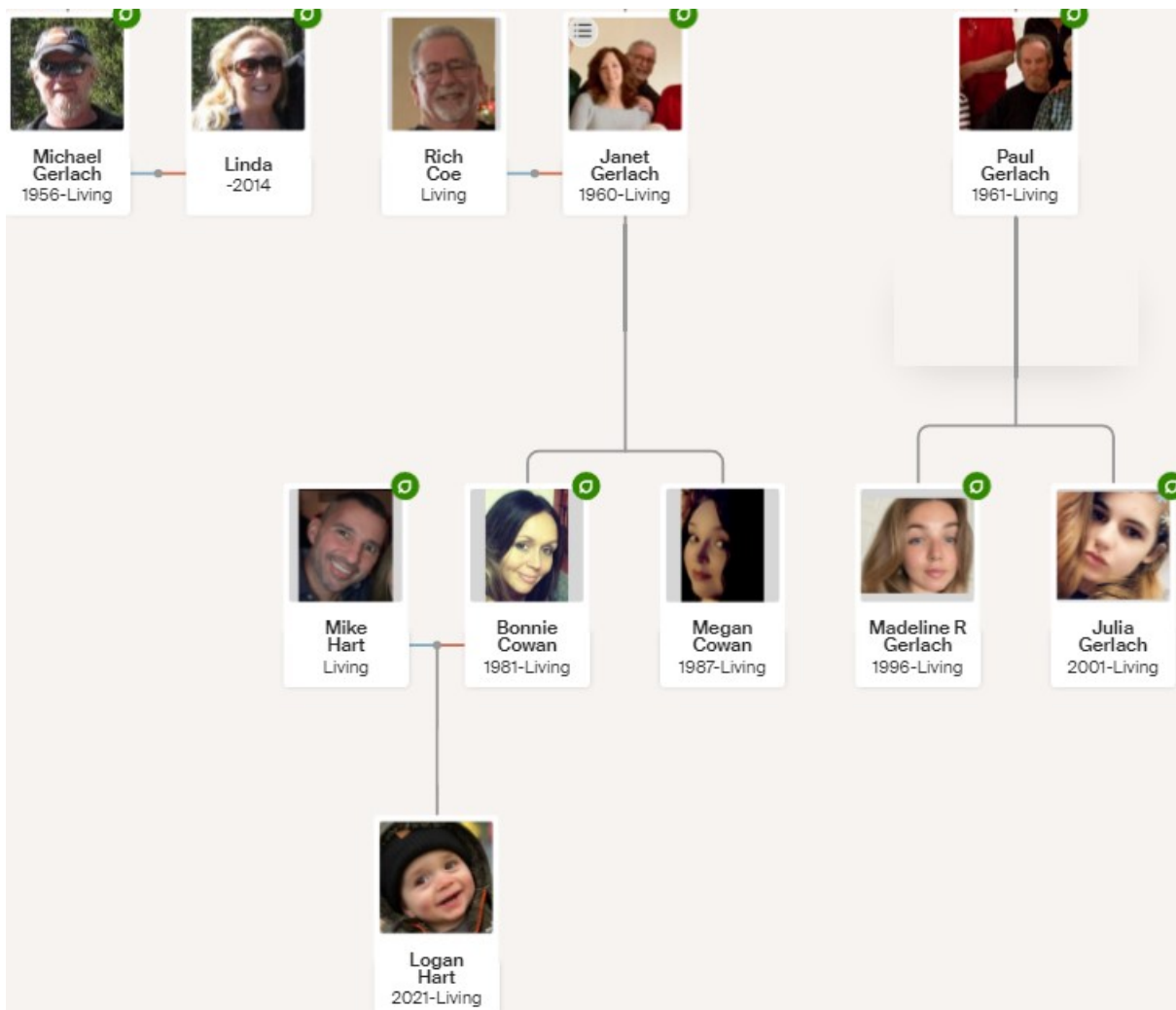
Left: Heddy, Pat, and Kathy about 1942 (photo taken to give Ray in case he had to go to war);
Right: Heddy & Ray in the 1960s

Children of Ray Donovan and Heddy Gras

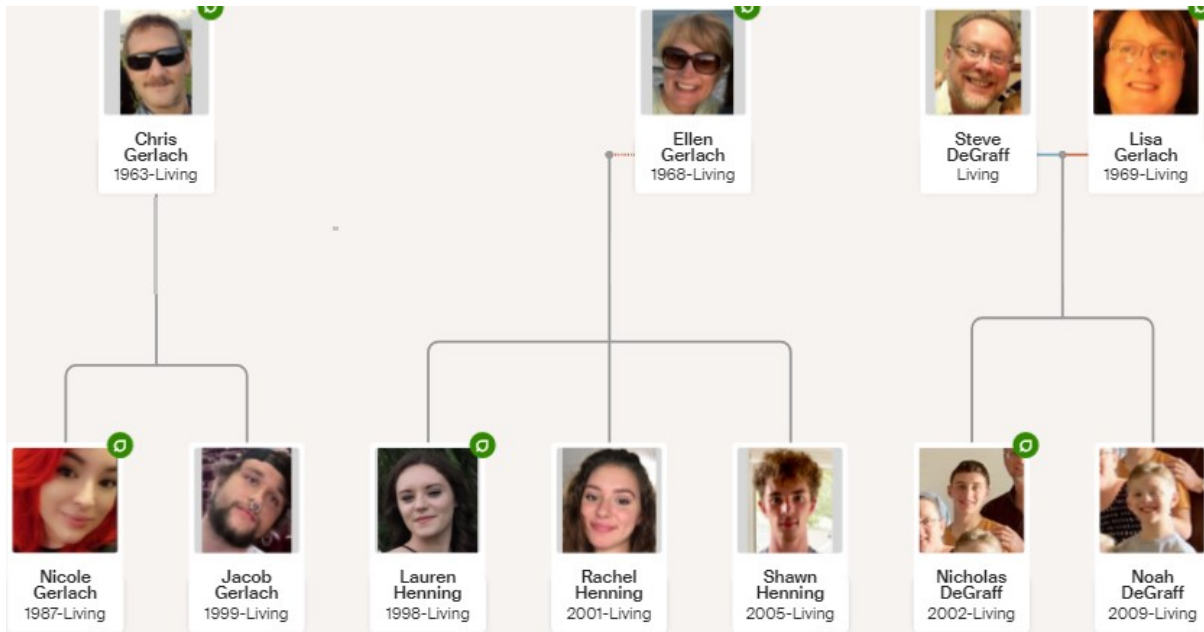
Ray and Heddy had two girls: Pat, born in 1935, and Kathy, born in 1938.



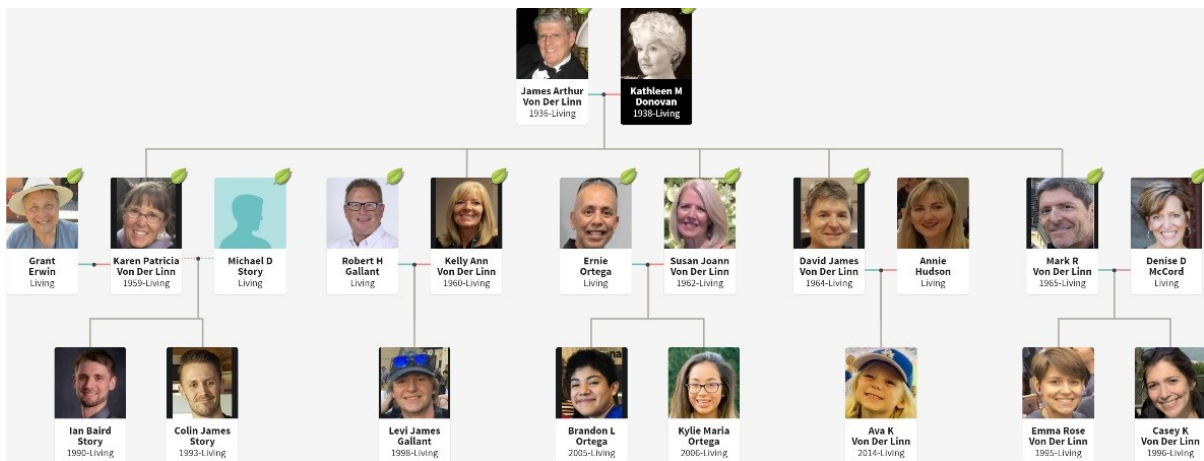
Pat and Ed Gerlach live in Northport, NY, and have six children, 11 grandchildren, and a great grandson.



Descendants of Michael, Janet, and Paul Gerlach



Descendants of Chris, Ellen, and Lisa Gerlach



Kathy and Jim Von Der Linn of Seattle, WA, have five children and eight grandchildren