

OUR GRAND MOTHERS

Frances Charlotte Von Pein Fienning

2/2/1882- 10/17/1918

Louisa Carolina Stromberg

1858 - 1/25/1945

Frances is remembered as the beloved first wife of George Fienning and the mother of their nine children: Richard, Edith, Ruth, Esther, George, Paul, Martha, Edward, Robert. Her death 10/17/18 of influenza was devastating. Stories of the grieving family are in the family histories gathered from the Original 10 and distributed in the 1990's. (Copies are in the Fienning Family History Box [FFHB].) My mother, Edith, was 12 at the time of her mother's death, and she never fully recovered. The family was able to stay together because of the love and hard work of Ricka, Frances' first cousin, who offered to come and live with the family.

Fances Charlotte was named for her grandmother (Frances Charlotte Springmeyer) who emigrated with her husband Henry William Stromberg from Beilefeld, Germany (not far from Emden where her son-in-law, Frederick Nicholas was born). Her grandparents (the Strombergs) entered the US through New Orleans and moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas to acquire land for a farm in an area where there was a federal military presence to protect the settlers from the Native Americans. Her mother, Louisa Carolena or "Lena", as she was called, was their oldest child.

The Strombergs could not find a Lutheran church in this nearly pioneer territory, so they joined the Presbyterian church. When Lena married Frederick and moved to Richmond, they and their family attended the Presbyterian church. George Fienning "got into trouble" because he did not marry a woman who attended St. John's Lutheran Church. Frances took classes and was confirmed at St. John's Lutheran Church after she married George. (Roger Hunt is taking care of her confirmation certificate.) (Lena remained a Presbyterian throughout her life.)

Lena had been a school teacher in a one room school house in Arkansas. She always loved to read. Edith remembers her taking a correspondence course in Psychology in her 80's because it was a new field, and she was curious about it. Lena was raised on a farm and she loved the out of doors. Her father was a farmer and a horticulturist (liked to experiment in raising plants). Lena knew how to care for trees and bushes. Edith remembers being with Grandma Lena when she grafted new varieties of apple trees to the apple tree in her back yard next door to 1011. Lena also raised chickens.

It is not a surprise that Lena would want a set of encyclopedias in the home

she shared with Frederick and her children. It is more a surprise that she and Frederick had "a beautiful, concert grand piano (Edith)." No doubt the piano was from the Starr Piano Company, a fine piano indeed. This was the piano Frances learned to play on. Frances loved to play the piano at 1011 and have the children march around or sing to the music. She also played sometimes at church.

Lena and Frederick had the only telephone in the neighborhood, and there were other lovely features about their home near the corner of 8th and J. A very dim picture of it remains in the FF History collection. [It needs to be restored.] The home had generous grounds with bushes, trees, and flowers. To the back of the house was a summer house 12-15 feet in diameter with grapevines growing all over it, a popular place for parties. Behind that was at least one barn for the horses and carriages.

Frances' father was Frederick Nicholas Von Pein, the next younger brother of Matthew. Frederick was also born in Emden, Germany, came with his parents and brother to the US, settled in Cincinnati, and moved with his brother to Richmond to work as a master craftsman at what would become the Starr Piano Company. He was sensitive, quiet, and enjoyed reading.

One of Frederick's jobs at the Starr piano company was to select the lumber for the construction of the pianos. One of the places in the country he visited was in Oklahoma, around Paul's Valley near Ardmore. It was on one of these trips that he met John Stromberg, a timber broker, who invited Frederick to come home with him to Fort Smith, Arkansas for the weekend. Frederick discovered John had three marriageable sisters. He and Lena fell in love and they were eventually married in Fort Smith on May 4, 1881 (Stewart).

Both Lena and Frances married German immigrants who came from the Osnabruck area. Lena cared for her father-in-law at her home when he was dying of cancer in 1901. George Fienning worked at the Starr Piano Company as a cabinet maker for 10 years. There he met Matthew and Frederick Von Pein and eventually Frances Von Pein. To see an example of George's fine cabinet making, look in the FFHB for a picture of Ed Fienning playing the restored upright piano George gave Frances for a wedding gift. [Jay-son of Esther-and Mike Youngflesh retored the piano.]

Frances and George Fienning were married at the home of Lena and Frederick Von Pein October 2, 1902. Their wedding was a delightful social occasion.

Herr Richard Werner visiting from Berlin was hired to play Mendelssohn's wedding march and other music. A catered dinner followed while the BonTon chamber group playing a violin, clarinet and harp. After supper, there was dancing and singing. "The festivities were kept up until a late hour, when the guests departed wishing Mr. and Mrs. Fienning a happy and prosperous married life. (Undated newspaper article laminated and in the FF History box.)" The wedding pictures (see the front of the Fienning Family Cookbook II) reveal a beautiful bride and a handsome husband.

The couple lived in three rooms at the back of a house at S. 8th and G Street. Richard was born there September 3, 1903. In 1904 or 1905, they hired Hasecoster [see Royer - Supplement for the story of this Osnabruck immigrant] to build the first part of the house at 1011 S. 8th St.- a parlor, a dining room, a downstairs bedroom, a large kitchen and pantry, a second floor with two bedrooms and an attic in the back.

Later additions included a second floor bathroom, a hallway, a closet, a stairway to the third floor attic, a bedroom and a walk in closet, and three gables (rainwater was stored in a big tank in one of the gables). The ceilings were plastered throughout, and a hot air furnace was added under the dining room to provide heat to all of the bedrooms. The second child, Edith Louise, arrived April 6, 1906.

On April 4, 1907, Frederick, 52, walked over to 1011, hugged baby Edith playing in a buggy at the back of the house, then walked into the barn and shot himself. He died instantly.

It is unclear why he committed suicide. One possibility is that a close friend had done something that caused him to lose his job at the Starr piano company. He became so upset about this he developed stomach problems. (Edith)

The newspaper accounts stress despondency and stomach problems.

... he was a trusted and valued employee of the Starr Piano Company. . . He held one of the most responsible places in the manufacture of pianos. . . Only last year did he sever his connection with the local factory. After a brief sojourn in Buffalo, NY, he returned to Richmond and had been unable to work since, on account of his health. (Palladium, 4/4/1907, p.1, col.4)

An undated newspaper account reports Frederick had been in a state of nervous unrest, complained of stomach distress, and "the last two days had been very melancholy." "He did not intimate he contemplated death, except on one occasion when he informed his son-in-law of his affairs."

The article went on to praise Frederick as a leading member of the South Side Improvement Organization which did so much to improve the material welfare of the community.

At his own heavy expense, he laid out the addition opposite his home, constructing cement curbs, gutters and walks and otherwise offering inducements for the settlement of this locality. In many ways he contributed to the advancement of Richmond and his loss will be keenly felt

His death was a great shock to his family and all who knew him. Now Lena would need to take care of her four children and herself. In order to manage financially, she sold land she and Frederick had owned. Frances would have a third child, Ruth Marie, November 7, 1907.

George Fienning left the Starr Piano Company in 1905. He, too, had stomach problems and Frances often reminded him to eat slowly and to chew his food. He began selling groceries for the A & P Tea Company. He would take a horse and buggy from the headquarters of the company, load it with tea, coffee, and nonperishable items and go from place to place selling groceries. He dreamed of owning his own grocery.

He realized this dream when he opened his own grocery, Fienning's Fine Food, on June 28, 1909 with his partner Oscar Nolte. [Several of you have the calendar that commemorates the opening. Julie and Rusty Presley purchased the restored one at the FF Auction last year. Having done more research for these essays, it becomes clearer why that calendar has a picture of a place that looks like Osnabruck.] The store was at 11 and South D streets. George had worked with Nolte at the A & P Tea Company, and also he knew him from St. John's Church. As well, Nolte was married to the sister of George's older brother's (Charles Fienning's) wife. This must have been a very satisfying moment for all.

When the USA entered WWI in 1917, George was reviewed by the Draft Board of Wayne County. It was discovered he had been born in Germany and was an alien; he had never gone through the process of becoming a US citizen. He was taken to jail (Edith). It is hard to believe that he spent much time there, but it did motivate him to do what was necessary to become a US citizen. (Examples of naturalization papers for immigrants like George are in the back of Royer's Supplement.)

With the exception of the incident mentioned in the previous paragraph, the years from 1909-1918 were very busy but happy ones for Frances and George. The

domestic chores and entertainment are described in detail in the 1991 Fienning Family History. More children arrived: Esther Charlotte 10/01/09, George William (1/07/1911), Paul Frederick (7/12/12), Martha Jane 3/27/1914, Edward Henry 5/26/1916, Robert Louis 12/25,1917.

Then the 1918 influenza claimed Frances's life on October 17.

No account of the 1011 would be complete without mentioning the regular help of Grandma Lena who sold her larger home at the corner of 8th and J and built a smaller home next to 1011. She lived there after all of her children were out of the house except Edna. The 1990 Fienning Family Histories include mention of her role at the noon meal, the main meal, when 10-12 people would be sitting around the dining room table, a younger child next to an older one. If anyone misbehaved or violated what the children had been taught as good manners, Grandma's switch would flick on their arm to bring them quickly back in line.

Grandma Lena did more than this, however. She had lived through the sudden death of her husband and the death of her oldest daughter. She knew how important it was for her to help the 1011 family in any way she could. She moved next door as much to help them as to help herself. As an example of how else she helped was an interaction she had with teenage Edith. After George and Ricka were married, Edith's father asked all of the children to call Ricka, "Mother." Edith had a very hard time bringing herself to do that. She went to Grandma Lena and complained. Grandma told her: "She's your mother now and you need to call her Mother."

When Lena grew infirm, she went to live with Edna and Windsor Harris. She died at their home in 1945.

Aunt Mattie had these kind words to say about George, Frances, and Ricka in a 1/11/1966 letter to Robert Fienning:

Your father lived to a good ripe old age and I think he had a very good life. I'm sure he did an excellent job of raising his family, and I often think of how your mother always enjoyed each and every one of her children. You were all certainly blessed. And Ricka always carried on so well too. She was always fond of Frances and I'm sure enjoyed raising her family.