

The Schwindinger Family

John Conrad's father died on the boat on the way to America. When they arrived in New York, John's mother (according to Mom):

said she would marry the first man who asked her - even if he had an oxenkauf - ah, an ox's head - oxen head, see - a cow's head or an ox's head, see - so, I don't know where she met this man that she married, but she married - oh dear - a man from Rahway.

So Great Grandfather John Conrad

grew up in Rahway and I know the next [third, actually] child that was born was also a boy and his father wanted him called John too, so they called him John and they always knew one as Little John and the other as Big - ya know John and Little John - they were half brothers. I remember the name of my Grandfather's stepfather - it was Schwindinger. - My mother's father's stepfather was Schwindinger. Got that? And there was quite a family of them - and that's the one that had the Little John. I don't know whether my Grandfather was called Little John or the other John - I would imagine that the baby - the youngest - would be called Little John.

I have pictures labled George and Adam - but no John - so the pictures are mislabeled or I am missing a picture of John Schwindinger.

They had a nice family and I remember when I was little - I was old enough to remember - my Mother and I went to Rahway - just the two of us - I don't remember whether it was by trolley or by train - but we got to Rahway, we visited an aunt - one of my mother's aunts - who must have been a half sister to my grandfather [actually, the aunt's husband was the relative] - and I remember they had a boardwalk to their house and I found a penny on the boardwalk - and I was so thrilled and somebody told me that pennies grew on the boardwalk - I always remembered that, ya know - Rahway, and I remember that they had just harvested a lot of peaches and they were peeling peaches that day and making peach preserves and they had made apple butter and of course we had samples of both to take home. I don't know whether we stayed overnight or not - it's so far back - but I do remember the boardwalk.

When Mom said boardwalk, I immediately thought she meant on the ocean, but she said:

No, no no no. People didn't have sidewalks. I can remember my own Grandmother's [Mary Anna Werkheiser] house when she lived on 18th Avenue in Newark and they had from the sidewalk back into their backyard was a wooden walk - and this was in Newark when I was little - but I remember lots of people had these wood walks - they just built these wood walks - now they have - lotsa places used stone or even gravel, but they carried dirt into the house so they built those wood - and the walks could be swept off ya know - the wood could be swept off

But I remember even after I was grown up - well grown up - I think I was married and had children - going into the post office in Newark and seeing one of the clerks - the sign on his window said Schwindinger - and I can't remember what the first name was, but I asked him if he happened to be from the Rahway Schwindingers - and he was - so he was related somehow to us - course I didn't get all the details.

Update: June 27, 2004

Thanks to Ron Wolff (my half third cousin once removed!), who found my web site via the Internet, the following information can be added to my Great Grandfather John's story:

The most compelling relationship connection is the photographs. Ron and I both have the same photographs of Adam, George, and Mary Schwindinger.

Thanks to Ron and the Internet, it can now be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mary Miller (born 1816 in Germany), was our Great Grandfather John Conrad's mother. Although Mary Miller in all probability did not meet her "oxenkof" the moment she stepped off the boat, she probably did soon thereafter. His name was Conrad Schwindinger and she in all likelihood met him in the Bronx in 1837. Conrad Schwindinger was a farmer and tinsmith by trade. Conrad brought two children (Caroline and Elizabeth) from a previous marriage to their union and Mary brought one (Great Grandpa [Big] John). Together, Mary and Conrad had ten children (George, 1840; Catherine, 1841; John [Little], 1842; Tommy, 1844; Dennis, 1846; Mary, 1849; Adam, 1851; Eliza, 1853; Margaret, 1854; and Michael, 1855;). No record, to date, has been found to identify Great Grandpa John's biological father.



*Kate and Michael Schwindinger
On that Boardwalk!*

(Picture compliments of Ron Wolff)

Why did Great Grandpa John (Big John) use the last name of Conrad? Again we can only speculate. Ron thinks (and I agree) that perhaps he took his Stepfather's first name as his last name to differentiate himself from his step brother John Schwindinger (Little John). Why he did not use his biological father's last name is anybody's guess.

My Great Great Great Grandmother Mary Miller lived eighty years. Seventeen of those years were child-bearing years. In true pioneer fashion, she had 11 children over those years, or, 1.5 children per year. Of those 11 children, seven (including Great Grandpa John Conrad) were men and four were women - a very good team to work the farm. I am almost certain that John Conrad did not stay on the farm and perhaps others also left.

Mary's (second) husband died in 1865 - 31 years before Mary. I wonder what she did during all those years. Eventually she lived with her youngest son Michael and his wife Kate Cahill.

Mom never met her Great Grandmother, Mary Miller Schwindinger, because she died in 1896 - seven years before Mom was born, but Grandma Loeffler had probably visited her Grandmother Mary in Rahway many times. However, it was after Mary Miller died that Mom and her Mom (Mary Conrad Loeffler) visited Michael and Kate (her half Uncle and Ron Wolff's Great Great Grand Parents) in Rahway - that wonderful day when Mom found the penny on the boardwalk (see picture) - which was probably some time between 1908-1913 (Mom would have been between five and ten years old).

Mary Miller Schwindinger, George Schwindinger (her grandson via Michael), and Agnes Ritter-Schwindinger (George's wife) are all buried in the same plot in St. Mary's Cemetary in Clark, New Jersey (formerly a part of Rahway, New Jersey) along with Mary Cahill (a half-Aunt to John Conrad) who died in 1896 as well.

As per usual, the more you know, the more you want to know, such as: What motivated John and Mary Schwindinger to locate in Rahway, New Jersey? Why didn't Great Grandpa John stay in Rahway and help with the farming? He married Mary Anna Werkeiser in 1863 at age 25. It is my understanding that prior to that he was a ship's carpenter so I speculate that he left the homestead at about age 22 or so, which is strange because it is usually the oldest son that inherits the farm and the work. His stepfather obviously taught him how to use tools however, because like him, Great Grandpa John was very good carpenter.