

Brief History of Bernard Henry (Heinrich) Mueggenborg

1875—1939

*Prepared on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary
of the arrival of Henry and Dora Mueggenborg
to Okarche, Oklahoma*



*St. Josef Church in Weseke, Germany —
the parish church in which Henry grew up.*

It is essential to preserve some basic information about Henry's (Heinrich) life. He was born as Bernard Heinrich Muggenborg on March 25, 1875 in the small town of Weseke (then Prussia). Weseke is in the region of Westphalia and is close to the town of Borken in northern Germany. He was the son of Wilhelm Josef Muggenborg (b. April 26, 1842 at Weseke, Prussia, d. December 17, 1912) and Maria Christina Hobing (bap. August 16, 1852 at Osterdorf, Prussia, m. May 19, 1874). The Muggenborg family were all farmers.

It seems that Heinrich's interest in coming to America was fostered by several factors including those which repelled him from Germany and those which attracted him to America. Heinrich's dreams were fed by letters received from the John Hoebing family who had recently immigrated to the United States and invited other family members to follow them to the "Land of Opportunity." (John Hoebing was related to Heinrich's mother, Maria, and would later sponsor him for American citizenship.)

Some research suggests that he earned his money by bootlegging coffee from Holland to raise the \$60.00 needed for ship fare. This was a large sum for the time and it may have taken him years to raise it. Other reports indicate that he worked aboard the ship by shoveling coal to assist in paying his fare. These accounts are not mutually exclusive.

At the age of nineteen years, Heinrich Muggenborg left his home in Weseke, Germany and walked to Antwerp (Belgium) where he caught a ship to New York. Heinrich was the oldest of seven children. Most probably, the timing of his departure was motivated by the tense political climate of Prussia, which was on the verge of war. He left for America on May 15, 1894.

Upon arrival at the U.S. port of entry (Judy Grellner's report identifies Henry's point of entry as the immigration center at Ellis Island, New York), Henry's family name was given an additional "e" and changed to the following form: Mueggenborg. This form has remained the most commonly used in the United States. He



The family of Joseph and Marie Muggenborg. The family photo was probably taken in preparation for Henry's emigration to America (c. 1894). Joseph is standing between the parents, Joseph and Maria. The back row is (left to right) Anna, Heinrich, Anton, Gerhard, John and Bernard (Ben).

also began to use the American form of his name (Henry) in place of his German given name (Heinrich). These will be the name forms consistently used in reference to Henry from this point forward.

One last comment regarding Henry's name change seems important to mention and that has to do with the role of his first name. Some records indicate that the Mueggenborg family members in Germany were referred to by their middle names rather than their first names. For example, Henry's father was commonly known as Josef and yet his full name was Wilhelm Josef Mueggenborg. Also, Henry's wife, known as Dora (short for Dorothy), actually had the full name of Maria Doratheia Boes. The reason for this consistent use of middle names is not known.

(Consult the appendix to see an actual copy of a greeting Henry and his brothers prepared for their parents. On this greeting, he personally lists his name as "Heinrich, B." Thus, there is understandable confusion as to which was his first name.)



Mr. and Mrs. John Hoebing visiting the Mueggenborg family in Okarche. Photo taken c. 1915 at the Henry Mueggenborg farm.

What goes on in a person's mind when they are so young and facing such definitive decisions?

When he left, Henry probably thought he would never see his family again. To his surprise, and theirs, he would see them at least once after his arrival in America. Nonetheless, many families considered the moment of departure to be the last time they would see their loved one. To call this experience a moment of detachment would be an understatement.

Coming to America was not an easy task for Henry. His journey to the Midwest required him to continue paying for the expense of his travel. This work definitely involved the railroads and possibly some shepherding as well. (Credible accounts state that Henry was actually recruited from Germany to work with the railroad.) Once in America, he worked his way to the Carroll and Breda areas of Iowa where he began working for the German farming family of John Hoebing. Reports state that John Hoebing sponsored Henry in his application for U.S. citizenship.

Henry communicated the hopeful possibilities of life in America to his family. It was this communication that inspired two of his younger brothers to follow him to America. The first was Gerhard (b. Jan. 30, 1878), who emigrated on April 8, 1897, followed by Anton (b. May 19, 1876), who emigrated on May 12, 1898. Of interesting note, these brothers were living in Iowa with Henry when Josef and Maria were celebrating their 25th Silver Anniversary in Germany. The brothers had a rather large greeting card printed (in German) inscribed with poetic text of their own composition. The brothers retained copies of the greeting for their personal remembrance and at least one of these copies has survived to this day (cf. Paul Mueggenborg). A translated version of this document is attached at the end of this introductory history.

It was not easy to bring over his other family members. Henry apparently provided the funds for Gerhard's trip, who then worked to repay Henry for his patronage. It was with Gerhard's arrival that the Mueggenborg name took another form and became "Mueggenborg". Gerhard married Anna Weber (b. 1887) and lived on a farm near Breda, Iowa. Henry and Gerhard then worked to bring over their other brother, Anton. Anton married his wife, Margaret Nieland, in Iowa. Anton was the only one of Henry's brothers who chose to later accompany Henry when he settled in Okarche.



Henry and Dora (Boes) Mueggenborg in preparation for their wedding. Photo taken c. 1899 in Carroll, Iowa.

Henry knew farming (his family had been farmers in Weseke). The area of western Iowa was almost like that of his home in Germany. He soon met Dorothy Boes (b. October 10, 1879, d. August 22, 1950) in Sac City, Iowa and they married on February 5, 1901 in Breda, Iowa. (Note: Dora's name in German has been listed as Maria Dorathea Boes.) Unfortunately, not much is known about Dora. She is remembered as an island of tenderness for her family and as someone who was a faithful wife and good mother. It would be of benefit to collect her stories for posterity's sake and for her honor.

Henry and Dora stayed in Iowa where he worked for the Boes family on their farm. It was a 120 acre farm 3 miles west and 2 miles north of Breda, Iowa. They actually lived in the very house in which Dora was born.

Living in Iowa had its challenges. One family story related by Tony Mueggengborg recounts a blizzard that generated snow drifts so high that it was necessary to tie a rope from the upstairs window to the barn so that family members could find their way. (They would climb out of the upstairs window and follow the rope to take care of the chickens and other livestock.) If Henry was looking for a good reason to move south, this story would surely have been one of his motivations.

The first three of Henry and Dora's children were born in Iowa before they decided to move to the newly opened territories of Oklahoma in 1905. On February 10, 1902 a baby girl was born and they named her Augusta. On February 9, 1903, their first son, Joseph, was born followed by Alphons on April 11, 1904. With three toddlers, Henry and Dora decided to re-settle to a new world.



The 1st three children of Henry and Dora who were born in Iowa: (left to right) Alphons, Augusta, and Joe.

Their interest in Oklahoma was fostered by ads in the local newspapers inviting German Catholics to settle in the small town of Okarche. The ads were placed by the German priest, Zenon Steber, who successfully recruited many immigrants to his parish community in Oklahoma Territory (Oklahoma became a state in 1907).

When they arrived in Oklahoma, they first settled on an eighty-acre parcel of land seven miles east of Okarche. The Kingfisher County records indicate that this land was actually purchased in 1903. The early date of purchase most probably indicates that Henry planned the move to Oklahoma several years earlier and waited until his children were born before undertaking the actual relocation of his family.

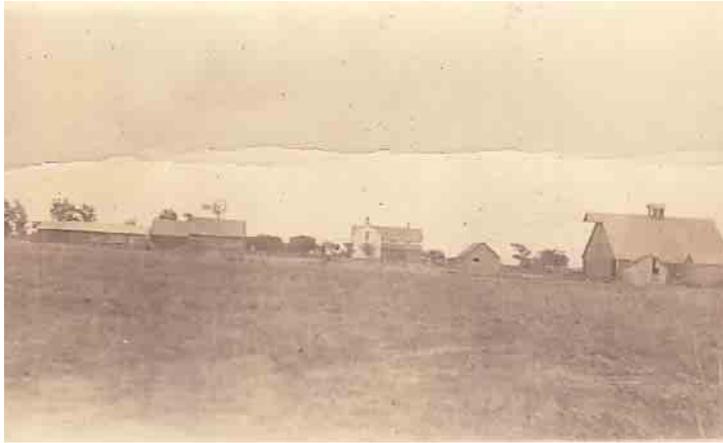


The home occupied by the Henry and Dora Mueggengborg family 7.5 miles east and one mile north of Okarche. The house remained standing until the early 1950's when its later occupant, son Paul, replaced it with a newer structure. It was in this house that the family raised their nine children to adulthood.

The purchase of their first homestead was made possible through the use of Dora's \$1,000 wedding dowry. Although this site had a house, the family lived in a converted chicken coop due to the deteriorated condition of the residence. Their fourth child, Leonard, was born in this chicken coop.

In little more than a year, Henry and Dora purchased a larger 160-acre tract on the northeast corner of the same section. This tract contained a house and additional buildings. They moved there and stayed until Henry's death in 1939.

Henry was a man marked by pronounced character traits as will be shown later in this introduction. When presenting the many stories that exemplify these traits, it is important to remember the context in which he lived. The world of early 20th century rural Oklahoma was not the



The rural Okarche home of the Mueggenborg family. Photo is dated August 15, 1916. The significance of this date is not known but it is presumed to have commemorated some event (perhaps the construction of a new building).

same world we experience today. He should always be remembered and understood as someone who was influenced by the culture in which he lived and by the challenges which he faced. He definitely was a man who was defined by his work ethic, his family commitment, and his religious practice. He had forged his way through formidable obstacles to begin and establish a new life in America. He was determined to be successful in his endeavors.

The Mueggenborg family lived eight miles east of Okarche on dirt roads. Rains would render the roads impassable. When this occurred on Sunday and the family was unable to attend Mass, Henry and Dora would gather the children together and conduct their own home ser-

vice. Dora would lead the Rosary and Henry would recite the *Litany of Blessed Virgin Mary* from memory – an act that impressed the children because of their father’s ability to remember such a long prayer. Henry’s life required him to trust in Divine Providence; he probably relied on these memorized prayers to sustain him during challenging moments.

Henry had a strong desire for success that was persistent throughout his life. It was probably this very desire that inspired him to travel to America as a young man. Who knows for what life he hoped? What would motivate a person to leave behind family, friends, country, language, and culture? What is known is that he considered it very important to accomplish and communicate his success – especially to his family who remained in Germany. In preparation for Henry’s return to Germany in 1911 (one year before his father’s death), he purchased several sets of white shirts and had various teeth capped with gold. These were two contemporary symbols of wealth. Henry’s brother, Ben, recalled these moments. Children have a natural desire for their parents to exhibit pride and approval of their accomplishments. Josef and Maria must have seen in their son the verification and realization of the American Dream.



Anton and Margaret (Maggie) Mueggenborg. Anton most likely cared for Henry’s family and farming interests during his (Henry’s) two year return trip to Germany.

A special note regarding Henry’s return to Germany should be stated since the actual date of his departure from America is not historically known. Travel during this period of national and international history was dangerous. According to one story (as told by Paul), Henry repeatedly recounted the reality of travel dangers evidenced by a train wreck at the Dover bridge in 1906 (the bridge crossed the Cimarron River and was weakened by heavy rains and subsequent increased river flow). The disaster killed several passengers. Other reasons for Henry’s concerns probably had to do with the difficult state of pre-World War I political tensions in Germany.

Judy Grellner’s research indicates that Henry’s return trip occurred in 1911. Although the dating of the trip is uncertain, it is certain that Henry returned to the U.S. on January 27, 1914 (cf. appendix). If the 1911 date of departure is accurate, then Henry spent nearly two years in Germany before returning to the United States. This was an eventful period for Dora and the rest of the family because Henry’s second daughter and fifth child, Angeline, was born on January 30, 1912. It is not known whether Henry even knew that Dora was expecting their fifth child when and if his departure was in 1911. Although little is known about the circumstances of Henry’s wife and children at this time, it is most probable that Anton assisted in caring for them as well as Henry’s farming industry during his absence (as has already been noted, Anton lived in Okarche). One can only imagine the task Dora faced in caring for her family during Henry’s absence.



Ben Mueggenborg dressed in his Prussian military uniform. Photo c. 1914.

Henry was the oldest of ten children, of whom seven survived to adulthood. When Henry returned to Germany, it was during the difficult and ominous years of pre World War I Germany (the war was brewing for nearly a decade and actually began only a few months after Henry's return to the United States). It would seem unusual that Henry would spend two years away from his wife and children except for a serious reason. Several possible motives for Henry's return are proposed. First, it may be that Henry simply wanted to see his aging father before his death (Josef [b. April 16, 1842; d. December 17, 1914] actually died during Henry's visit). Note that Henry's mother, Maria, had already died nearly six years before Henry's return (d. Apr. 17, 1905). Second, Henry may have wanted to assist his family who remained in Germany (this assistance may have been both financially and physically). Third, Henry may have wanted to strongly encourage his remaining family members to emigrate to America as he and his other two brothers had already done. Fourth, he may have known of his father's pending death and came to help his remaining siblings. These reasons are not mutually exclusive. What is known is that Henry's visit did bear practical results.

Henry persuaded a fourth brother to emigrate: Bernard (aka "Ben", b. February 20, 1891), who had been serving in the German (Prussian) army. Ben worked for Henry in Oklahoma before joining Gerhard in the area around Breda, Iowa. Ben married Kathryn Hatting and they bought a farm near Sac City, Iowa. It seems that Ben's entry into America was distinct from the others. Ben had to flee the German (Prussian) Army and feared for his life should he ever return (the penalty was believed to be death). His concern for his safety was so strong that he refused to accept the gift of a return trip to Germany on the occasion of his 40th Wedding Anniversary (given by his family). It is reported by his descendants that Ben took such precautions as to enter the United States from the West Coast (records indicate that San Francisco, California was the actual port of entry). Research has not yet determined the specific date of Ben's arrival but it can be reasonably assumed that a pre-war date would be more likely than a post-war date. Thus, Ben most probably arrived in America in mid 1914. Ben was by most accounts a gentle soul who was particularly loved by Henry's children, with whom Ben spent his first years in America while learning English.

The last brother to be brought over was John (b. April 7, 1893, immigrated October 4, 1922), who was also an officer in the German Army. John suffered a war injury which gave him a permanent limp. Shortly after his arrival, John met another Hatting sister, Anna, and they married. (Note the appendices for information about the arrival of each brother.)

Of historical note, two children (Henry's siblings) remained in Germany – daughter Anna and son Josef. Anna's married name was "Meking" and she had a son who was captured during World War II and became a prisoner in the American camp for Germans at Georgia (U.S.A.). It is known that he (or his family in Germany) communicated with at least two of the American relatives during his imprisonment (Henry's son, Leonard, and Henry's brother, Ben -- Note that by the time of this occurrence Henry had already died.). The other son, Josef, remained in Weseke and lived in the family home with his four children. One of his sons, Gerhard, inherited the family home upon Josef's death. Gerhard's son, Josef, now lives in the same family home with his wife, Rita, and their children.

Oklahoma was a very different world for Henry and Anton. The early days of statehood were a time of transition when the untamed wilderness began to emerge into a civilized society. The Mueggenborg children recall some of the peculiar realities of this transitional era. For instance, American Indians used to travel the creek next to the Mueggenborg homestead during their migration to and from various camps. It was common place to see camps, complete with teepees, in the area east of Okarche. It may not have been the wild west but it was certainly wilder than it is now.

Henry provided the best for his family. It seems that they enjoyed the just rewards of their labors for the first twenty-four years in Oklahoma (1905-1929). Henry provided music lessons for all of his children—a luxury for the period. Many family photos show the children well-dressed for the era and location.



The Mueggenborg children dressed as American Indians.

One of Henry's children, Alphons, was particularly talented. In addition to playing the trombone (see photo) and violin, Alphons became an avid keyboardist and eventually purchased the family piano from his mother, Dora. Alphons enjoyed entertaining audiences throughout his life. He was mostly known for the various electronic organs he kept in his home in Okarche and on which he enjoyed playing songs.



Joe (left) and Alphons (right) with their musical instruments.

There is an abundance of family photos from this period which document the



Brothers Joe and Alphons proudly displaying their animal hides (mostly skunks). The Mueggenborg learned simple economics by practices such as trapping and selling.

many farming and other family industries. The children were blessed with toys ranging from bicycles to rifles. These were among the most care-free times of the Mueggenborg family.

Henry taught his children to be outgoing and adventurous and to take advantage of the opportunities of their time. Several of the Mueggenborg brothers began a small fur-trading business in which they trapped skunks and other animals for their marketable pelts. The brothers learned to turn their hobby into profit rather quickly.



Joe with sits in his first car. The 1920's were filled with seemingly endless opportunities for the Mueggenborg family.

Other family “trophy’s” stem from this same period as well. Henry’s son, Joe, once shot a Bald Eagle — a feat that delighted the family and community. It should be clearly noted that Bald Eagles were plentiful at this time and were not listed on the endangered species list; their hunting was legal and common. Several photos document this adventure and the pride Joe demonstrated in showing his prize.



Joe proudly displaying the Bald Eagle he had shot.



The Mueggenborg children (absent Tony). Photo taken c. 1922.

Still, forging a civilized existence came slowly. The Mueggenborg’s received their first telephone in the early 1920’s. It was on this telephone, purchased from Montgomery Ward, that Henry conducted his business. The wood box telephone is still in the possession of the Mueggenborg family (cf. Daniel Mueggenborg).

The life of a homemaker had added challenges since fresh produce was only seasonally available. Dora was an avid canner who pickled her own sauerkraut and other items from her garden. Dora’s original cabbage slicer and butter churn continue

to be in the possession of the Mueggenborg family (cf. Daniel Mueggenborg).

It was during the age of prohibition that Henry began the practice of operating a seasonal still in his granary (e.g., each winter). This was a common practice in the area of rural Okarche. Nonetheless, it was something that always required discretion. Henry's interests in operating a still were purely social. However, others operated commercial stills nearby which drew the attention of the local Sheriff. On one occasion, the "Carey Boys" were operating a still on the creek just north of Henry's home when they were raided. The police also searched Henry's home and held Dora at gunpoint until they were finished with their investigatory efforts. Fortunately, it wasn't the winter season!

The Carey Boys distillation process was not a minor operation. Paul relates that it regularly produced nearly fifty barrels of moonshine. Old photos of the operation show the simplicity of the process and the abundance of the product. It was understandable that such an endeavor would attract



The Carey Boys stored their barrels of moonshine in ravines north of the Mueggenborg farm. Henry's interest led him to document the process and the product.



The Carey Boys operate their still with a crude but effective setup.

the attention of law enforcement. Paul also relates the story that he and his brothers used to re-start the still when the Carey Boys were gone for the day!

The 1920's were a time of personal hardship for Henry and the entire Mueggenborg family at the beginning of the decade. Henry and Dora buried their then youngest son (Raymond) who was only one year old (the cause of his death is not known). While infant deaths were more common in the early 20th century, such experiences are never easy. The death of the young son left a lasting impression on the entire family. The decade would begin and end with misfortune.

This left Henry isolated from his other siblings who now lived in Iowa (it is not known if John ever stayed in Oklahoma or went straight to Iowa to be with his other brothers in a more established part of the country). Henry and his remaining brothers gathered for the funeral of their brother and commemorated the reunion with a photograph. The cause of Anton's death is not known but a heart attack is most commonly suggested (he was known as a very hard worker who rarely rested).

Henry pursued his dream for ever-greater success and continued to take the risks of which he had become accustomed. This practice bore tragic results in the Stock Market crash of 1929. Henry's dream evaporated before him as he lost more than \$40,000 in a single day. This moment fundamentally changed his life, and his personality, in a dramatic way. He died less than ten years later. (It should be remembered that \$40,000 in 1929 would be a huge sum in today's standards.) It is not known if Henry lost only that amount or if that amount represents the debt beyond that which his liquid assets could cover.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929 was a disaster of national and international proportions. Its effect on Henry's life cannot be underestimated. It could be observed that this event became one of the most defining moments of Mueggenborg family history. Thus, Henry's life could be divided into three basic periods: Growing up in Germany, Establishing a family and farm, and re-building his life in the context of the Great Depression.



The Mueggenborg brothers: Bottom (left to right) — Henry and Gerhard; top (left to right) — Ben and John. Photo taken c. 1922 on the occasion of Anton's death.

Henry participated in something called the Board of Trade, which was a commodities-based stock exchange. The city of Enid had such an exchange; it was an opportunity to invest with a margin. Henry's investments were usually made only for one day at a time and it was a risky business. Many of his trips to Enid may have been to engage in this style of trade. It is interesting this misfortune left a life-long impression on many of Henry's children understandably causing them to refrain from stock market investments.

On some occasions, Henry took his children to join him in the business of trade. This trip was sometimes combined with the annual three-day tractor shows which were hosted in Enid as well. There were times of success to encourage the continued investment practice. When Henry did have a successful time at the market, he would purchase something to bring home. On one such occasion, both Peter and Paul received shot guns as gifts. On another occasion, Henry brought home a Seth Thomas mantle clock. These items were reminders of his success and a means by which he shared his good fortune with those closest to him — his family. Of interesting note, the mantle clock continues to be in the possession of the Mueggenborg family (cf. Barbara Mueggenborg Toelkes).

No one really knows the extent of Henry's involvement in commerce. He was a definite leader in the community and chose to be a part of major developments. During his early days in Oklahoma, it appears that he traveled to Oklahoma City for the dedication of a new railway line. The date of this dedication is not known but a photo commemorating the moment is still in the possession of the Mueggenborg family (cf. Paul Mueggenborg). Henry can be clearly seen standing on the front row. This photo attests to Henry's involvement in commerce and civic development.

His financial misfortune initiated the most burdensome time of Henry's life – his final ten years. He was fifty-four years old in 1929 and he had just lost his life savings. He was only able to retain his land holdings by placing his family in massive debt. His dream of success was shattered in an instant. He was the oldest son who had shown incredible strength to overcome so many obstacles; but now, to become weakened as he was beginning his elderly years was a fate he had not anticipated. He had worked tirelessly for so much and it was virtually gone in an instant.



One of the Mueggenborg children displays his prey. The shotgun may have been given by Henry following a successful day at the Enid Board of Trade.



The Mueggenborg brothers working on the family farm. Paul is seated on the white horse in the center of the photo. Picture taken c. 1925.

One can only have compassion for any human being who endures such a terrible experience. One can have compassion for the family members as well. Henry was a strong and determined man. However, in his mid-fifty's, it was not his natural desire to re-start his life with his youngest sons still at home (Vince, Peter, Paul, and Tony). Accomplishing this feat would require the untiring efforts of everyone – especially the children. It does not take much imagination to see how this kind of stress began to strain Henry and those around him.

Henry's financial distress had ramifications throughout his personal life and that of his family. He did not eat or sleep for nearly a week following the disaster. When the time came to settle his debts, Henry had no choice but to mortgage his farms with the Federal Land Bank. Henry sent his son to accompany the Land Bank agent as he

carefully measured each of Henry's lands and noted their location. Henry would need to secure the best value on these mortgages in order to settle his debt; he did. After mortgaging all seven of his farms (160 acres each), he had enough funds to cover his losses. Now he had to do the seemingly impossible: buy back his land for the second



The Mueggenborg sons (Joe, Alphons, and Leonard) saw lumber with a crude but effective set-up. The entire family would need the skills of self-sufficiency to survive the trials of the Great Depression

time. This would have been a daunting task in any economy but in the 1930's it was unthinkable.

Paying the mortgage in the Great Depression was difficult. Paul decided to quit school after the 7th grade and work at home to provide an extra hand (Paul seems to have made this decision of his own volition since he was tired of studies and enjoyed spending time on the farm). Henry's older children (Augusta, Joseph, Leonard, Angeline, and Alphons) had already left home; legitimately, they were concerned for their own emerging families. Only Vince, Peter, Paul and Anthony remained. The family was still paying

off the last vestiges of the mortgage nearly ten years later when Henry died. Nonetheless, Henry retained all his land holdings and survived the catastrophic disaster.

Henry not only survived this time of misfortune, he also saw it for the economic opportunity it was. For example, it was in the context of paying off his debt that he purchased nearly 1,400 acres of ranch land in northwestern Oklahoma. He recognized that the hardships of the present were temporary and the possibilities for the future were enormous. He continued to think and act with an astute mind for business.

Henry's tragedy in the Great Depression was not a unique experience. Most American families will relate similar difficulties from their own ancestors who lived through this period. What is unique, however, is how Henry faced it. He demonstrated the same determination to beat all odds that he had demonstrated when he left Germany for America in 1894. He had done it before and he would do it again. That is what was unique about Henry – he could accomplish by sheer determination. Many who suffered his same fate simply gave up and moved on. Such a departure was not an option for Henry; he had overcome tremendous obstacles before and he would do it again.



Henry and Dorothy on their 1,400 acre ranch near Enid (Phroso). Photo taken c. 1936.

It is not known how the family's financial distress affected Dora. It is known that she expressed great concern for the security of her children who were still at home. A great many families had been forced to leave their homes and property due to similar tragedies. Dora asked that Henry provide assurance that the family would not suffer the terrible fate of destitution and so Henry returned to her the dowry used to purchase their original farm in Okarche. Dora kept this reimbursement as a personal guarantee that the family would be safe. Such a guarantee gave her peace of mind.



Marriage photo of Henry and Dora Mueggenborg. Photo taken c. 1925.

Henry and Dora's relationship undoubtedly experienced stress through these difficult times. However, they worked together to ensure that their marriage and their family remained intact. Henry was not an unreasonable man – he knew that Dora and he had built a good life in Oklahoma and he was grateful for the blessings they had together received even in midst of a stressful time. On one occasion, a traveling craftsman passed through the Okarche area offering to make high quality custom picture frames (the Great Depression generated many such free-lance industries). Henry decided to gift Dora with such an item and had one of their marriage portraits placed in an oval frame. The marriage portrait was taken in El Reno in 1925 along with their

first all-family photo. This marriage portrait remains in the possession of the Mueggenborg family (cf. Kathy Landoll).



Henry working with his sons to bring in the harvest. Henry is seen standing near the front of the tractor; Leonard is sitting on the tractor seat (Leonard never liked having his picture taken); Alphons is standing on the combine behind the tractor; Paul is standing in front of Alphons; and Peter is standing in the grain wagon. Photo taken c. 1927.

Henry continued his involvement in civic and business interests and made regular trips to Enid as well as other locations in the Midwest. The stated reasons had to do with his position on the Board of Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association (Henry was County Chairman of the Agricultural Conservation Program and served as the first President of the board which organized Kingfisher's cooperative). When he would leave for one of these meetings (which occurred about four times per year), he would prepare a long list of tasks that would take his children weeks to complete. Although his absence would only last a few days, he seemed to expect that the tasks would be completed upon his return. Such a practice may have been a futile effort to keep the children out of trouble.

roof vent and feel the updrafts of air rushing around them. It was an ordinary venture until one day Vince fell off the hay and landed on the ground. In doing so he stepped on a pitchfork and it pierced completely through his foot. Peter and Paul had to join efforts pulling on the pitchfork to remove it. None of the three boys said anything to their father about the event lest a lengthier list of tasks be prepared! Dora, undoubtedly, tended to the wound.

The children knew to keep their mischievous misfortunes to themselves. One trio especially adept at errant adventure was Vince, Peter and Paul (they related well together due to their closeness in age). An incident worth relating concerns the three young boys playing in the barn and climbing to the top of the hay so they could be near the

Further attention should be given to Henry's aggressive involvement in the life of commerce. Henry lived during a time when farmers' cooperatives had only recently been legalized. He saw the potential these cooperatives could have for rural industries and personally led the organizational efforts to start one such cooperative in Kingfisher. After the Kingfisher cooperative was fully functioning, Henry then turned his attention toward Okarche and led efforts to start a similar cooperative there. These involvements show that Henry was a gifted leader and person of economic and community vision. It is easy for us to take such institutions for granted but it is difficult to imagine creating them from nothing except an idea and a possibility. To have such a vision is to be blessed; to be able share that vision with others and inspire them to support it is to be a blessing to others.

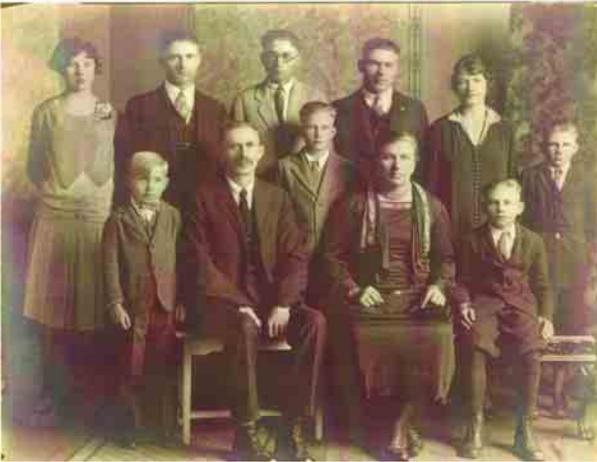


Henry was a hard-working businessman who managed well the various affairs entrusted to him. His involvement in the civic business arena has already been discussed. It should be noted that Henry's office chair remains in the possession of the Mueggenborg family (cf. Raymond Mueggenborg). The safe Henry used to store his valuables is also in the possession of the Mueggen-

The family works to store newly harvested grain in the barn with an auger. Note the horse-drawn wagon. Photo probably taken c. 1920. This photo demonstrates the hard working character of the family. Henry learned how to do things creatively better way. It was this innovative spirit that inspired him to start the Kingfisher and Okarche cooperatives so that farmers like himself could benefit from improved technologies and shared efforts.

borg family (cf. Elenora Mueggenborg).

Despite the economic hardships of the Great Depression and Henry's losses in the stock market, he did travel with Dora to Havana, Cuba in March of 1936. Not much is known about this trip except that it was an exceptional experience given the economic hardships of family and nation. The motivation for this excursion is not known. Henry made a few other travels during this period as well. On a practical level, these travels probably served as a reward for having survived the previous seven years of financial hardship.



The family of Henry and Dora Mueggenborg: Bottom Row (left to right) — Anthony, Henry, Dora and Peter. Back Row (left to right) — Angeline, Joe, Leonard, Alphons, Augusta, and Paul. Vince is seen standing in the middle between Henry and Dora. Photo taken c. 1925

was a person who had left home when he was nineteen years old and set out to start a new life. He did it with little resource and much perseverance. To Henry, it may have seemed normal that his own children would leave home in the same way. It is certainly safe to say that Henry's son's needed their father's skills in order to launch their lives in such abrupt ways — and they did possess those skills. Their stories are worthy of recalling because they demonstrate something about the character and personality of each son.

The first to be disciplined in such a way was Vince. Henry ordered Vince to leave home when he was a young man. However, what was meant as a punishment became a blessing. The circumstances of his departure were as follows: Vince had insisted on attending the funeral of Rose Wittrock, who was a distant cousin (through the Nieland family – Dora's genealogy). When Vince returned from the funeral, Henry informed him he was to leave immediately. Vince did. He worked for I.G. Gilles in the construction business and within a few weeks was introduced to Mr. Gilles' daughter, Alta. Vince and Alta were soon married and began their own family.

The second was Leonard. Apparently Henry, and Leonard, became accustomed to the scenario of his leaving and returning. On one occasion, Henry ordered Leonard away only to comment, "Don't worry, he'll be back". And so he was. This was a cycle that repeated itself at least three times. (Leonard took night refuge in the hay loft until Henry calmed the next day!)

The third and fourth were Paul and Anthony (Tony). They were jointly ordered away during a memorable event in which one intervened to help the other. This was a particularly difficult time for Henry as he desperately needed help on the farm to pay off the mortgages. He invited Paul to return the next day but would not yet invite Tony to return; such a scenario was not acceptable to Paul and he chose to remain away unless his younger brother was also welcomed home. Paul worked in Okarche rebuilding Model A engines until he earned enough money to take Tony and him to Iowa where they



Leonard driving a Fordson tractor. Photo taken c. 1925. Leonard was known for his love of farming. He would even help his neighbors milk cows early in the morning when he had finished his own.

worked the corn harvest. Sadly, Henry died of a heart attack one month later – the date was November 24, 1939. His strength of will had met its match in the sons he raised.

It should be noted that these encounters between Henry and his sons were probably more of a momentary reaction than a permanent decision. It seems that Henry was repeatedly open to retracting his disciplinary decisions if such a retraction, and return to previous relationship, were acceptable to his sons. It was Henry's strong will and determination that had brought him to America and had empowered him to form a family and industry for himself. It was that same strength of will that he sought to foster in the lives of his children. He had. Henry's sons all did very well for themselves despite the difficult circumstances of their parting. They relied on the skills their father had taught them and they, too, forged lives for themselves and their families.

Despite his differences of opinions with his sons, Henry maintained a loyalty to them. To each of his children he left a sizeable bequest of land. These gifts of land would become more valuable to Henry's descendants over time when petroleum would be discovered in the area of Kingfisher County. Many of Henry's descendants today continue to receive the benefits of his generosity. Henry and Dora were both very attentive to the importance of treating their children fairly and equitably.

There can be no doubt that Henry was a determined man – a demanding father, husband, and businessman with a rigorous work ethic. Perhaps it is because of these traits that his children forged a deep bond with one another and with their mother, Dora, who remained an island of gentleness in the midst of a rather difficult era. The Mueggenborg family has been noted as continuing to possess this sense of dedication to one another. Those who saw Henry's children grow old together were witnesses to the tight bond that united them throughout their lives. Family gatherings abounded with the telling of childhood stories.



Marian Statue of Our Lady of Fatima in Holy Trinity Church.

Dora is the one figure about whom few stories are told. Perhaps this history will serve to surface her stories for future preservation as well. There is one legacy left by Dora that is worth noting. She was so grateful when her two twin sons, Peter and Paul, returned safely from World War II that she donated the Mary statue which currently adorns the south side altar of Holy Trinity Church in Okarche. Dora was obviously a woman of faith and gratitude. (Of worthy note: Peter was decorated with the Purple Heart for an injury he received during a military campaign in Sicily and Paul received the Bronze Star for his service as an Army Ranger in the Philippines.)

All of Henry's children developed their strong family values and work ethic while members of the Mueggenborg home in Okarche.

Henry was a man respected by his children.

They looked up to him and chose to honor him by giving the name "Henry" to many of their own children (either as a first or middle name). This action is an enduring legacy of a definitive man.



Following Henry's death in 1939, Dora moved to Okarche and lived in this home until her own passing in 1950.

Another way in which Henry's children have shown their enduring appreciation of their father is by treasuring the simple relics he left from his life and work — the memorabilia mentioned in this document, as well as much more displayed at the reunion, are physical contacts with the man who made our lives possible. These items are treasured not for their monetary worth but for their sentimental value. Such enduring appreciation is a statement of the strong appreciation felt for Henry and Dora.

Even in their adult years, Henry's children held him in respect. They told the stories of their childhood throughout their lives. These stories are worthy of preservation because they speak of Henry's influence and of the character he forged in his children and their children. It is also interesting that Henry's children continued to interact with one another in the language of their childhood: German. It was common for them to repeat phrases to one another which they had heard their parents speak. This alternate language ability also gave them the opportunity to dialogue with one another when they wished confidentiality in their comments. They chose to continue living this world of their childhood because it was the solid foundation of their personal character as individuals and as adult siblings.

Another legacy of Henry and Dora, and witness to the strong family values they passed on, is the fact that most of their descendants continue to live within fifty miles of Okarche. These descendants, and their spouses, represent nearly eight hundred people! The desire to remain in physical proximity can be legitimately interpreted as a desire to maintain close bonds with others in the family. There is an enduring sense of sharing the same "blood" among all members of the extended Mueggenborg family. This sense is not present by accident but by heritage and much of that heritage was given to us by Henry and Dora. It has been more than sixty years since Henry's death and fifty years since Dora's death yet their legacy continues to live in their children, grand children, and even great-great-great-grand children.

To be a homesteader did not only refer to someone who staked his claim during a Land Run. It also referred to the personality of someone who tamed the wilderness and created a productive life. This was not a task for the faint of heart or weak of spirit – it took a fortitude and perseverance that we can barely imagine today. Henry and Dora Mueggenborg were homesteaders. The events of their lives represent greater challenges than many of us will face. We honor and respect their memory and their work as we preserve their story for future generations.

We share a common bond that transcends the many branches of our family tree. Our lives and our worlds are very different from that of our ancestors yet we, too, are responsible for the decisions we make in this place and time. By reflecting on the past, it is hoped that we can better understand the present and choose to pass on a future full of hope. Henry came to America so that he and his family could have a future – we are that future. His sacrifice and his work were not in vain and we are living witnesses of gratitude to him and Dora.



The adult children of Henry and Dora Mueggenborg (c. 1963). Left to Right: Augusta, Vince, Alphons, Leonard, Angeline, Joe, Paul, Peter, and Tony. Photo taken in front of Leonard's home.

Henry can be proudly remembered for his merit and accomplishments. He lived during a very challenging and difficult time. He established a new family in a new world in a new way in a new era. He did not have the luxury of following another's lead; he had to be his own leader.

May every family gathering be an opportunity to recall our ancestors with gratitude and be an occasion to remember with pride the courage, determination, faith, and loyalty of Benard Henry and Maria Doratheia Boes Mueggenborg.

July 2, 2005
Mueggenborg Centennial Family Reunion
Okarche, Oklahoma

Prepared by Daniel Henry Mueggenborg, grandson of Henry and Dora Mueggenborg

Information Sources:

There is only one surviving child of Henry and Dora who was able to provide first-hand insight into their life and character: Paul Mueggenborg. However, Paul did not know Henry for most of his (Henry's) life. Paul was born in 1917 when Heinrich was already forty-three years old. Heinrich died twenty-two years later at the age of sixty-five.

There is also one written record which offered important historical information for this study. In 1993, Judy (Mueggenborg) Grellner (daughter of Vince, granddaughter of Heinrich) compiled a brief summary of known historical data regarding Heinrich and his early life. This publication, entitled, "Our Family History: 1842-1993," is an invaluable source of family data. Judy's research can be trusted due to her historical access to multiple eye-witnesses who were living at the time of publication and could authenticate the text's content.

In addition to Judy's research, further information was gathered from Dick Feuerborn (husband of Peggy Mueggenborg Feuerborn) who has been an avid genealogist for years.