

Finding Family – May 2017

My German Great-grandmother

By Ruth Jenkins-McIntire

My great-grandmother, Christina Wolff, was born in Germany and came to America in 1875 when she was four months old.

For years, I had tried to find the ship that her family traveled on but had not had any luck.

I would have a better chance of finding the location of her family home in Germany if I knew the name of the ship. When tracing ancestors, it is important to know where they lived.

According to census records, her father Johann had listed 1875 as the year of his immigration. "Germans to America," a series of books listing passengers and ships, had shown a Wolff family (Johann and Maria) arriving in New York on the ship, Neckar, on February 15, 1875.

The only problem was that this family was listed as only having a four month old baby boy named Anton. I was looking for a family with two little girls: Christina and her sister Lena, who was about two and a half.

Last year, from another researcher, I found that this was the correct family. I am still thrilled to know this. There were two other families who traveled with the Wolffs: The Heitz family, who turned out to be Maria's parents, Peter and Ernestina, and their two teenage daughters, who were Maria's younger sisters. The researcher I was working with descends from one of the sisters, so we are cousins.

The second family, the Willmers had three young girls with them. Ernestina's maiden name was Willmer, so this other family might have been her brother and his family or a cousin, uncle. We feel they were related but do not yet know how. The youngest girl listed with the Willmer family was Helena Willmer at age two and a half. It could be that she was Lena Wolff and just spending time with her cousins when the passenger list information was being collected. Lena is short for Helena and the age is right.

My researcher cousin suggested that four month old, Anton, was really Christina. Maybe she was fussing when the passenger list was being created and the clerk heard the name incorrectly. The letter M for male written after the name is in a lighter color and looks like it might have been added later. In this case there is enough circumstantial evidence to prove to me that this is my Wolff family traveling with their two little daughters and extended family. I now know which ship they sailed on, the port they left from (Bremen, Germany), families they traveled with, the port they arrived in, and the day they arrived. I would never have been able to figure this out by

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myself as I had no way of knowing that they were traveling with and related to these other families.

I have just listed here some of the evidence we have found to prove this. I am now ready to try and locate the place where they lived and possibly find more ancestors in the records there. I might even find a living descendent in Germany, another cousin!