

Karl and Sophie Mall Kastner

Karl Kastner was born on Aug 29, 1847 in Königsbach, Baden, Germany. After he came to America he changed his name to Charles Kastner. Sophie Mall Kastner was also born in Königsbach on Jan 17, 1849. They were married in Königsbach on Nov 24, 1874. [Königsbach is now called Königsbach-Stein <http://www.koenigsbach-stein.de/gemeinde/koenigsbach/>]

They and their parents before them belonged to the Evangelische (Lutheran) Church, but at some point after they were married, Sophie converted to the Catholicism. My dad said he and the other grandchildren used to watch her in her rocking chair praying the Rosary, then falling to sleep and snoring, then waking up with a snort and a start and continuing to pray the Rosary without missing a beat. The kids thought this was really funny. She did the same thing while knitting.

Karl came to America in early 1981, several month before Sophie. We don't know what ship he came on and it is said that he was a stowaway on a ship rather than buying a ticket. He may have bribed some of the crew and spent the 3 week trip hiding in the storage below deck. When he arrived in New York he went by train to Hot Springs, Arkansas where Sophie's brother Daniel Mall lived. Daniel was a tin smith. Daniel helped Karl get work in the Ouachita National Forest as a lumberjack (https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALeKk01yVlxpMRhT36GdpuORiLDH_PCruQ:1582423091568&q=ouachita+national+forest&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjfjYeyyebnAhWnna0KHfLsArkQsAR6BAgEEAE&biw=1536&bih=754). Karl had worked as a lumberjack in Germany in the Black Forest (<https://www.tourism-bw.com/destinations/regions/black-forest/>).

Sophie was pregnant with Daniel (Ray Kastner's father) and stayed home to have the baby and sell the house. Daniel Kastner was born on July 6, 1881 and christened in the Evangelische Church in Königsbach on July 17, 1881. Sophie boarded the steamship Frisia in The Port of Hamburg & Havre on October 18, 1881 (http://www.norwayheritage.com/p_ship.asp?sh=frisi) with Karl (Charles) age 5 ½ years, Jakob (Jack) 3 years old and Daniel 3 mos. She purchased zwischendeck (between decks/steerage) tickets for herself and her 3 children. These were the cheapest tickets and the poorest of accommodations. She arrived 13 days later in New York, USA on October 31, 1881 and registered at the Castle Gardens Immigration Center after arriving in New York. (<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/ny-castle-garden-ellis-island/>). Sophie carried her money in her purse and was robbed while onboard the ship, so she arrived in New York penniless. She was befriended by some German people there. An older lady paid her rent and babysat for her while she worked. It may be that she converted to Catholicism during this time. Sophia worked for several months as a seamstress in a clothing factory to earn enough money to support her family and buy train tickets to Hot Springs, Arkansas. Karl and her brother, Daniel may have sent her money to purchase train tickets to Hot Springs. It was probably sometime in early 1882 that she finally joined her husband and the family was reunited. They were hardworking and frugal and soon bought 160 acres of land in the Ouachita National Forest in Garland County, west of Hot Springs in an area called Wiggs, Arkansas. Later it was renamed Hempwallace, Arkansas. Today it is simply part of metropolitan Hot Springs. They partially cleared the land and raised some crops and had cattle, hogs, horses and chickens. Karl continued to work in the forest as a lumberjack cutting the tall straight pine trees to make telephone and electric poles.

After coming to America with 3 sons, Karl and Sophie had another son and 3 daughters:

1. Charles (Karl) Kastner, born in Königsbach, Germany in 1876
2. Jack Kastner (Jakob), born in Königsbach, Germany in 1878
3. Daniel Kastner, born in Königsbach, Germany in 1881 (Your ancestor)
4. Lewis Kastner, born at Hempwallis, Arkansas in 1884

5. Minnie Kastner Hale, born at Hempwallis, Arkansas in 1887
6. Catharine Katner Brock, born at Hempwallis, Arkansas in 1889
7. Sophie Kastner, born at Hempwallis, Arkansas in 1891

Both Karl and Sophie lived in Hempwallis the rest of their lives. Karl died in 1897 at the age of 50. Sophie died May 21, 1922 at the age of 73. They are both buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery about 2 miles from their farm.

Many German people came to America to be free, to own land or for religious reasons. Karl came to America for political and personal reasons. His father, Adam Kastner was a well-to-do farmer who owned 6 or 7 hundred acres of land, sheep, cattle and horses and a nice home in Königsbach. He was well respected, an influential citizen, and a leader in the local church and community. As the eldest son, Karl would have inherited his father's home and land had he stayed in Germany. He chose to leave and go to America and his youngest brother Wilhelm Kastner inherited the estate instead. Wilhelm was a hardworking family man as his father before him and was an influential person in the community. Karl on the other hand was an angry and argumentative man who did not get along well with others. My grandfather, Charles said that his remembered his father, Karl quarreling with his grandfather, Adam Kastner and others about politics. He was especially bitter toward the French and had fought fearlessly to keep the Alsace part of Germany.

After coming to America he became an alcoholic and was often involved in fights. He was a short, muscular man and very strong. He seldom lost a fight and almost killed a Frenchman at the county fair after being beaten in a logrolling contest. Karl was an abusive husband and father. He would often beat Sophie and the children when he was drunk. It is said that he came home from the Franco-Prussian war a "different" man. It is possible that he suffered from PTSD or something similar. Karl had joined the Prussian Army when he was a teenager or young man and he rose to the rank of field sergeant. As a field sergeant he would have led his men in hand-to-hand combat. It said that he was a fierce soldier and killed many French soldiers in the war of 1870 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Prussian_War). It is very possible that his war experience is responsible for the change in his personality. War has changed many young men into dysfunctional and difficult individuals. Following the war he was very disgruntled with the political climate in Germany and decided to leave for America.

Sophie didn't want to come to America. She came only because Karl did. She had trouble learning English and was not happy in America and talked about leaving Karl and going back home with the children, but was unable to get the money to leave. Sophie missed her more comfortable style of life and her friends and family in Königsbach. Karl was abusive and her life in America was hard and primitive compared to what she had in Germany. Eventually Sophie adjusted to her new life, became content, raised her family and enjoyed her grandchildren, friends and neighbors. My grandfather Charles said that things were better after Karl's death. He and his brother Jakob (Jack) helped to provide for Sophie and the younger brothers and sisters. Sophie was a very strong lady and a good woman and a devoted Christian. She raised some very fine sons and daughters. We can be proud of our heritage because of her.