

Carolina Wolf and Charles Clasen

Submitted by Jan Clasen Klein, 2nd Great-Granddaughter

Charles Clasen (Johan Henry Clasen) was killed on August 18, 1862.

His wife, Carolina Wolf Clasen escaped to Fort Ridgely.

His son, Johan Clasen escaped to Fort Ridgely.

His son, Friedrich Clasen was killed on August 18, 1862

Martha McConnell Clasen, Frederick's wife, and 2 daughters were taken hostage.

My great-great grandparents, Henry Charles (*Johan Heinrich, Charles Clasen*) and Carolina Wolf Clasen were married in Blankenhagen Parish on March 21, 1829. They had 5 children, Sophia, Friederick, Carl, Johann and Maria. Friederick, Carl and Johan came to America at various times. Sophia remained in Germany and Maria died young. Henry and Carolina immigrated to America in 1856 from Willershagen, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Germany. On the 1860 census, they were enumerated in Milford, Brown, MN living next to the Carl Heuer family, Henry's half brother and Carolina's sister. (See the Heuer Family History.) At that time, they were living with their son, Fritz and Martha McConnell Clasen. Sometime between 1860-62, Henry and Carolina moved to the Birch Coulee area. Even if they had remained in Milford, they most certainly would have perished there with the 46 others who died that day.

When I began researching my family's involvement with the Dakota War of 1862 in the early 1980's, I first visited the Minnesota Historical Society's manuscripts division on Mississippi St. I found, in Marion Satterlee's papers, documents that showed a Charles and Frederick Clasen were among those killed by the Indians in the Sioux Uprising. This brought chills to my heart. It was a family history that had been passed down through the generations, but now I found it was true. I then began the process of further documentation searching historic references by Charles Bryant (*A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians in Minnesota*) and Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge (*History of Renville County*). They all confirmed what Satterlee had said. I located a letter that my grandfather, Henry Clasen, had written to his niece on February 14, 1961: Here is a portion of that letter:

"The beginning of this war. Grandfather (*Henry Charles*), Uncle Martin (*Frederick*) and John had been to Birch Coulee. When they arrived home, Grandmother was gone. Thinking that the Indians had been there and that she was either captured or killed, they decided to head for Fort Ridgely. Before leaving a neighbor walked in the yard. They asked him to come with them, but he told . . . he would have to go back home and bury his wife who was killed and lying in the yard. Uncle John said he would help him bury his dead. They were just finished when some Indians spied them. They managed to get to a marsh nearby where they hid in the rushes for three days. They got to Fort Ridgely, but Grandfather and Uncle Martin as well as horse and wagon were never found. They figured that they were killed and drowned by the Indians. (*This is possible as their bodies were never found.*)

The people knew that this outbreak would happen sooner or later. Grandmother had a hiding place in their cornfield where she hid bread in damp towels for an emergency (sp.). Corn was in

the toasting stage. That is what she subsided on for some days. One day a French man came along on horseback driving a herd of cattle. He took her along to the fort. . . .”

It is not clear if this is all correct. Satterlee did not say when Carolina Clasen arrived at the fort, only that she and son John were there. So it could be possible. Carolina lived out the rest of her life, nearly 30 years after the outbreak, with her sons, Carl and John, at their homes. Family stories indicated her life was in shambles after the uprising. She was forced to live with her son’s family who helped with her care. She lived to the age of 91 and died in New Ulm at the home of her son, Carl Clasen. Carl and Christiana Clasen immigrated in 1876 probably because of the need to help care for his mother. His brother, John, who was the primary caregiver, was moving to town in Gaylord, MN to open a hotel.

In 2011, I discovered two other authors who had written about my ancestors:

Michno, Gregory F., Dakota Dawn

P. 75-76: “Beaver Creek: Others lived farther up the creek and on the surrounding bluffs, including George Buerry, John Kumro, Peter Perea, Joseph and David McConnell, John Vogtman, Clement Cardinal, Carl Witt and Charles Clasen.” (Map E shows homesteads on the east side of Birch Coulee, from the north to the south: P. Perea, C. Cardinal, **C. Clasen**, C. Witt, D. McConnell, and E. Piquar.) Some got away and others did not. The rampaging Dakotas moved north. Charles Clasen with his wife and son John, his married son Frederick, Frederick’s wife Martha and their two children, plus Thomas Brook, were preparing for a trip when the Dakotas appeared. Had they left the day before all of them would have survived. The Indians killed Charles and Frederick Clasen and Thomas Brook and captured Martha Clasen and her two children. Mrs. Charles Clasen (Carolina) and John Clasen made it to the fort.”

Dahlin, Curtis A., The Dakota Uprising, A Pictorial History

P. 257: Tehedonecha, or One Who Forbids His House, was the second person tried by the Military Commission on September 28, 1862. He was charged with killing Fred Clasen, Fred’s father, Charles, and Charles’s (it should be Frederick’s) nephew Thomas Brooks on August 19 near Beaver Creek. The witness against him for this charge was Fred’s wife, Martha. There was, however, a discrepancy in the location where these killings took place. The Commission stated that it was at Beaver Creek yet it actually took place a half mile south of the Birch Coulee battlefield.” There is the transcript of that trial found at <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/dakota/Trialrec1.html>.

I am certain my great-great grandmother’s remaining life was in turmoil after what she endured in her lifetime. She lost her husband, her son, and her sister’s entire family. Her son’s wife and her two granddaughters were taken hostage for 6 weeks. I can also imagine the horror when the remaining Clasen family in Germany heard the news of the violence against their now-American family.

Here is my great-great grandmother's obituary:

New Ulm Post, April 4, 1895

Mrs. Carolina Clasen, the aged mother of Carl and John Clasen, died on Tuesday morning in the apartment of Carl at the age of nearly 91 years. The deceased was considered to be one of the oldest settlers of this local region and she lost her husband and a son, who were murdered by Indians in the Indian Massacre of 1862; she herself escaped a close encounter with death by the tomahawk of the wild brutes. The funeral of the deceased will be held this afternoon at 2:00 at the Lutheran Church.

Gaylord Hub, April 13, 1895:

Mrs. Carolina Clasen died Tuesday morning at the age of 91 years and was buried from the Lutheran Church Thursday. She was one of the first settlers in Brown County and at the time of the Indian outbreak her husband and one son were killed. The above mentioned deceased is the mother of Mr. John Clasen of Gaylord.

Johan Heinrich Clasen

John Clasen was my great-grand uncle and son of Henry Charles Clasen (*Johan Heinrich, Charles Clasen*) and Carolina Wolf. He escaped to Fort Ridgely when the Dakota attacked their home on August 18, 1862. It is not certain if he accompanied his mother, Carolina, as family lore has it that he stayed back and helped bury a neighbor's wife. Could this be Fredricka Witt? Nonetheless, he lost his father and his brother, Frederick in the conflict, and he and his mother were among those listed as refugees at Fort Ridgely. John inherited the Heuer family farm in Milford, MN after his uncle, Carl Heuer and his entire family was killed at Milford. He shared that inheritance with the two small daughters of his brother, Frederick and Martha McConnell Clasen. John eventually enlisted and served in the Civil War.

He led an illustrious life. One of his children, Emil C. became an editor and publisher, and it is he who prepared this biography.

From the files of Sam (Floyd) Clasen, son of Emil and grandson of Johan Clasen:

'Comments from persons who knew Johann Heinrich Carl Joachim Clasen indicated that he led an extremely interesting life. Unfortunately, the events in Johann's life from the time he left Germany until he arrived in the United States in the New Ulm area is hard to trace. Additional research may produce some new and interesting bits of information.

John was born April 8, 1834, at Willershagen, Rostock, Germany, and was christened the same month of that year at the church at Willershagen. He was the third of four children born at Rostock to laborer Johann Heinrich Clasen and Carolina Maria Fredricka Wolf.

"The oft-told story" goes that John Clasen, to avoid conscription and service in the Kaiser's army, left home at about the age of 13 or 14, about 1848, and made his way to England. He may have at this time signed on as a cabin-boy in the Royal English Navy and later is also said to have enlisted on a merchant ship that sailed to Arabia. At the Gulf of Aden all the men aboard were put on a warship and taken to British India where he served three years as an English

Soldier. The year 1853 is mentioned as the date he fought with the Royal Marines in the "Sepoy Rebellion" in India.

John eventually landed in France but did not want to go back to Germany for he was subject to the draft at Hamburg. At that time Germany was not united but the area consisted of free cities like Hamburg, Luebeck, and Bremen, and these were at war with one of their neighbors. He went from Europe to the United States, either to Boston or New York. Upon his arrival he became ill and was hospitalized. All his money was gone after his recovery so he enlisted on a coal boat which was going to Cuba. Upon his return to port he travelled to Minnesota, crossing the river at LaCrosse by ferry and passed through Owatonna. He went west and at a point about 30 miles from Birch Coulie, walked the rest of the way to the farm and home of his parents. Sometime during this period his parents emigrated from Germany to America. One brother Frederick, apparently, stopped off on the east coast, because, as was mentioned previously, "came to Burch Coulie, Minnesota, with his wife, Martha McConnell, from Massachusetts." John's parents had taken up a homestead in Milford Township, Brown County, near New Ulm.

The "War of Rebellion" occupied another part of John Clasen's life. According to the final records of Company "A" of the 11th Regiment Infantry Minnesota Volunteers, John Clasen was enrolled August 24, 1864, as a volunteer in the Union Army. He was described as "twenty-eight years of age, five feet 5 1/2 inches high, fair complexion, blue eyes, and light hair and by occupation when enrolled, a sailor." The unit was ordered to Nashville, Tennessee, and was engaged in guarding the railroad between Nashville and Louisville, until it was mustered out of the Regiment, June 26, 1865.

In the same Company A, was another man from Southern Minnesota, Andrew Bauer, whose life and death would affect the future of John Clasen. The two men were sent with Company A to the battle front of the Civil War in the Confederate state of Tennessee and there, in the Spring of 1865, Cpl. Andrew Bauer was killed in action."

Andrew Bauer was married to Emilie Klappenbach before going into the Army after being drafted and the couple had two children, Henry and Gustie (Augusta). Evidently Bauer and Clasen became friends and John, in the anxiety and uncertainty before going into battle, had promised Andrew that, in event of Bauer's death, John would go and see Emilie when and if he returned from the War.

The 1890 census, Special Schedule, Eleventh Census U.S. Surviving Soldiers - County of Sibley, indicated that John Clasen, with the rank of Private of Company A, Regiment 11, Infantry, was discharged with his Regiment, in 1865, having served 11 months and that he had a disability of Rheumatism after the war. Records show that he was receiving a pension for his service April 11, 1893.

John returned to Brown County, Minnesota, and to the farm in Milford Township. After the horrors of war had subsided a bit, John Clasen honored his promise and visited the widow Emilie Bauer and her two children. The wiry well-traveled bachelor must have appealed to the young widow, for they were married September 20 (28th), 1865, in the Township of Kelso,

Sibley County, by Justice of the Peace Delger. All records, including the marriage license, were destroyed by fire."

The couple eventually took up residence on the Clasen farm in Milford Township. John Clasen fought in the Civil War serving in Gallatin, TN under Adam Buck. He mustered in at Fort Snelling and applied for a pension citing eye sight problems and chronic rheumatism. Certificate 238907 filed in Gaylord, Sibley Co., MN. He received \$72/month until April 4, 1925. Date of death-May 3, 1925."

He married the wife of another enlistee from same company. Family tradition says that he agreed to look in on her if anything should happen to him. Andrew Bauer died in Gallatin, TN. John married his widow and had 8 children. John and his family lived on the Milford farm that he inherited after the uprising. In 1870 -1880, his mother, Carolina was living with the Clasen family. By 1900 they were living in Dryden in Sibley County and they eventually moved to Gaylord. He died at the home of his son, Emil in Cokato in 1925.

Obituary, Gaylord Hub, 1925:

Civil and Indian War Veteran Answers Roll Call

John Clasen, One of Last of Veterans Goes to His Reward at Age of Ninety-one Years

Father Time is gradually taking his toll, and this week one of the early settlers of our community, Mr. John Clasen, a Civil War Veteran. was called to his Maker. The passing of Mr. Clasen, came in peaceful sleep last Sunday, May 3rd, at the hour of Noon, at the home of his son E. C. Clasen of Cokato, with whom the aged veteran had made his home the past two years.

Mr. Clasen attained the age of 91 years, after a life well spent. He was born on April 8th, 1834 in Blankenhagen, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Germany. At the age of seventeen he chose the life of a sailor, which he followed for ten years. At the age of 21 he enlisted in the English Navy as a member of the 72nd Highlanders of Scotland and served in the Sepoy War of the East Indian rebellion.

At the close of Mr. Clasen's enlistment, he came to America, to the home of his parents in Birch Cooley, in the year of 1862. In the same year after his arrival here, he enlisted with General Sibley, seeing service during the Indian outbreak, and was one of the recruits who captured Little Crow. Duty to his adopted country again called him into the service, when the Civil War came on. He enlisted as a volunteer with the 11th Minnesota and endured all the hardships of that great and memorable struggle.

Returning to this state Mr. Clasen lived in the vicinity of and later in New Ulm, before coming to this place in the year of 1882, when Gaylord was just building, only a few buildings dotted this section then.

He and his family were among the first to settle here, conducting a hotel for many years. He retired many years ago. He was married to Emelia Klappenbach before settling in Gaylord, his

helpmate passing to her last rest in 1894, at this place. Since that time he has resided with members of his family here, until two years ago, when he went to Cokato, to the home of his youngest son, E. C. Clasen.

His memory is mourned by 5 daughters and two sons: Mrs. L. A. Papke, St. Paul; Mrs. J. B. Hieber, Lidgerwood, N. Dak. Mrs. Frank A. Burgen, Wakhon, Minn.; Mrs. Emile Cabillot, Hankinson, N. Dak., Mrs. G. C. Gaylord of this place; sons Chas. Clasen, St. Paul, and Emil C. Clasen, Cokato, Minn. A host of old acquaintances in the old home also mourn his passing.

The deceased was a member of the Masonic order of New Ulm. He had served this community as a member of the village council during the early days, and was a public spirited citizen; a man who was honored and well thought of by everyone. At the completion of the new State Capitol in St. Paul, Mr. Clasen took part in the ceremonies, sharing the honor of carrying one of the regimental flags from the old capitol to the new edifice.

The last rites for this veteran were held on Tuesday at the Congregational church, at 2 o'clock, when relatives and friends paid their last respects to his memory. Rev. Thomas W. Barbour conducted the service, a vocal quartet and duet being contributed during the services. Many pretty floral offerings adorned the casket, which was draped with the flag under which the departed saw service. The procession formed down Fourth street, with members of the Manthey-Asmus Post forming the escort. Brother Masons of New Ulm, Winthrop and this place were next in line, with relatives and friends and Civil War veterans. Interment was made in the family lot in the cemetery south of town under auspices of the Masonic lodge of New Ulm, assisted by the Winthrop order, the services closing with taps and usual ceremony by the Legion squad. Messrs. Dr. W. P. Olson, E. P. Hoerschgen, Andrew Nelson, S. J. Maurer, R. H. Werges and A. H. Schue, were pall bearers.

The Hub offers condolence to the bereaved family in their loss of one near and dear to them.

Friedrich and Martha McConnell Clasen

Friedrich was my great-grand uncle. He came to America in 1856 with his parents, Johan Heinrich and Carolina Clasen. According to another Clasen genealogy, Friedrich must have stopped in Massachusetts upon emigrating and married Martha McConnell. He may have stopped there but he married her in Minnesota. Martha and her mother and siblings were living in Dedham, MS after emigrating from Scotland. A marriage document between Fritz Clasen, of Milford Township and Martha McConnell of Milford Township was found at the Brown County Courthouse. Date of Marriage, April 21, 1860. Witnesses were David McConnell and Henry Clasen, her brother and his father.

Fritz and his wife Martha were living in the Birch Coulee area with her mother, Ellen Carson McConnell and her son, David. (See the McConnell family story in this section) They were the parents of two children, Ellen Jane born January 11, 1861 and Mary Ellen, born May 10, 1862, both born in Birch Coulee. He was killed while trying to escape to Fort Ridgely. Martha and her two small children were taken hostage.

Footnote

I have carefully driven around the Birch Coulie area where the murders supposedly took place, and there are no commemorative markers noting the deaths of Charles (Henry) and his son, Frederick. I believe they were buried where they fell by a burying party led by Colonel Sibley. It would be my wish to someday place a marker near where they died.

(In doing research on the Clasen family, I noted many name discrepancies. Henry was baptized, married and known as the father of his 5 children as Johan Heinrich, enumerated on census in Germany as Carl, listed on Passenger Arrival Records as Hein. Classen, and listed on the 1860 census in Minnesota as Henry. But all of the records regarding the uprising have him named as Charles Clasen. One source spells the name Closen.)