

Felz Family in America

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Preface

The following family narratives cover the Felz family line starting with Nickolaus Felz born 1839 in the Saarland district of the Kingdom of Prussia and his descendants that prevailed in the Chicago area during the late 19th century.

The information being shared has been carefully collected from birth, death, marriage, and census records, family anecdotes, biographies, and hearsay. This has been woven together into a slightly more entertaining tale with the assistance of AI, so family lore as presented is delivered more aggrandized than the realities of emigrating and finding one's footing in a new world. Lost in time are the countless difficulties and challenges that were overcome along the way and the many realities of sickness, feuds, and starting anew that may have slowed their progress. How fortunate we would be if we had the full story! Still, the family that read this today are a testament to our ancestors' perseverance. May this collection of history provide the reader with a glimpse of their efforts, and an idea of what life was like and where we come from.

This book is also a culmination of my research efforts that have started and stopped in spurts but have accompanied me for the past 32 years. My research began in 1993 when I was given the family pedigree hand-drawn on an 11×17" piece of tattered ledger paper. I was 13 years old. Neatly printed next to the name of my great-great grandfather was the first clues I would receive that humbly stated "Log Cabin". I was hooked.

This curiosity was embraced by my maternal grand parents, Art and Shirlee, who would allow me to accompany them on visits to the local family research center. Sitting next to my grandparents turning the dials on the vintage microfiche machines and contemporary terminals, fit well with my burgeoning interest in the still new personal home computer. Each new discovery likened me more and more to that of an addict at a slot machine. What folly my grandparents unleashed.

Many have said since that my life could be better spent doing something else, but over the years I have discovered my family and my love for history which have produced memorable conversations and accompanied me on my travels. Research has yielded sudden treasure troves, introduced me to unknown cousins, and taken me to numerous dead-ends. Research has been slow, yet it has been very rewarding.

My first publishing being that of my paternal grandmother's family ancestry was never intended to be my first. Inherently, my interest and the majority of my research lie with my own

surname, but my research has revealed some important truths. First, I am Norwegian. Though my pale skin is a dead giveaway I had always assumed a primarily German heritage gifted by my name bearers. Both my Simer heritage and maternal grandfather contributed to my German roots, but it was my grandmothers that shaped my DNA. Apparently, I had learned nothing from my fifth grade elementary report on Gregory Mendel. Secondly, my looks are unmistakably from the Felz line. There is an uncanny resemblance between photos of myself, my great grandfather, and even my father around 19 years of age. Finally, though I am not completely inept of the lack of equality women have received since the dawn of man, it was on a recent historical tour through Charleston that yielded the truth that women are *erased* from historical documents. The act of marriage transforms a woman from Kate Hanson to Mrs. Felz, or worse, Mrs. Mathias Felz. This reduction of identity is evident in my own writing still, as I present the Felz family story from the male pedigree simply because I am limited in what I am able to find on the women that carried each new generation into this world. At the very least, I hope that with this document and the telling of Jean and Lois' stories that I have offered some acknowledgment to the women that brought us forth (and whom typically outlasted the men.)

Finally, I beseech my family and readers to give me their grace. No book that can fully and accurately capture the biography

of a family and I have surely rushed this to print due to my eagerness to share what I've accomplished. In my hurriedness I hope to prompt my family into share more stories and help me tidy up my research. To that end, my research is as accurate as the records I can locate which are often in conflict with each other; in resolving what I can, I simply hope that I am not be wildly off the mark.

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Part I

Origins

Chapter 1

”Felz”

The Origin of the Felz Name

The surname **Felz** is of German origin, and its meaning has been the subject of some discussion among linguists and genealogists. One interpretation traces it to the Old High German word *felisa*, meaning “rocky or stony ground.” In this sense, *Felz* would have originated as a topographic name, describing someone who lived near a rock outcrop, cliff, or stony field. Such features are common throughout the Saarland’s hilly landscape, making this a plausible explanation for families in the Merzig–Wadern district.

Another hypothesis views the name as a regional spelling variant of *Fels* or *Feltz*, both found in southern Germany and along the Rhine. Before standardized spelling, scribes often

recorded names phonetically, reflecting local dialects. Parish registers in Trier, the Eifel, and Saarland show the variants “Fels,” “Felz,” and “Feltz” used interchangeably through the eighteenth century.

A less common but linguistically possible origin links *Felz* to diminutive or patronymic forms of personal names such as *Volkmar* or *Valentin*—in which case the name might once have meant “descendant of little Valentine.” While this derivation fits some northern German examples, the Saarland occurrences more likely stem from the geographic root.

Given the family’s earliest confirmed presence in the Merzig–Wadern region, the topographic explanation appears the most compelling. The district’s red sandstone ridges and rock terraces are prominent landmarks, and it is easy to imagine an ancestral farmstead described as being “am Fels” (by the rock), which over time became “Felz.” By the mid-eighteenth century, parish entries in Wellingen already use the settled spelling “Felz,” suggesting that the name had long since become hereditary in its local form.

Names and Naming Traditions

Within the early Felz family, certain given names recur with striking frequency—*Johann*, *Mathias*, and *Nikolaus* chief among them. This repetition reflects both religious devotion and long-standing regional naming customs in Catholic southwestern Germany.

Johann (the German form of John) was by far the most common male baptismal name in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century parish registers throughout Saarland. Derived from the Hebrew *Yohanan*, meaning “God is gracious,” it was often used in combination with a second name—such as Johann Mathias, Johann Nikolaus, or Johann Peter. In such compound names, “Johann” was a *spiritual prefix* rather than the name used in daily life: a child baptized Johann Mathias would generally be called simply Mathias within the family and community. This custom honored St. John the Baptist while preserving individuality through the second name.

Mathias was one of the most popular names in Catholic German regions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, honoring Saint Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace Judas Iscariot. In parish registers from Merzig-Wadern, one finds multiple Mathiases in nearly every generation, often serving as both first and middle names.

Nikolaus likewise held enduring appeal, rooted in the veneration of Saint Nicholas of Myra—the patron saint of children, sailors, and merchants. Families named sons Nikolaus in hopes of invoking the saint’s protection and prosperity. In the Saarland region, which straddled trade routes and river towns, Saint Nicholas’s feast day (December 6) was widely celebrated, reinforcing the popularity of the name.

In a genealogical sense, this recurrence can sometimes com-

plicate lineage tracing. Parish records may list multiple Mathias Felz or Nikolaus Felz within the same decades, requiring researchers to differentiate them by spouse, occupation, or residence. The repetition, however, also speaks to the family's continuity and faithfulness to tradition: each generation honoring its forebears by passing down their names.

Chapter 2

Saarland Origins

The Setting: Merzig–Wadern

The earliest generations of the Felz family can be traced to the region now known as the Merzig–Wadern district of Saarland, Germany. Nestled between the Saar and Moselle rivers and bordering present-day Luxembourg and France, this landscape of rolling hills, forests, and vineyards has been inhabited since Roman times. The district’s villages—Wellingen, Fitten, and Büdingen among them—formed part of a shifting patchwork of small principalities, duchies, and ecclesiastical territories.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this corner of Europe belonged variously to the Electorate of Trier and to the Duchy of Lorraine. The Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) left much of the area devastated and depopulated; rebuilding the rural

economy required generations. Families like the Felz, Hoffmann, and Geyer were part of that renewal—farmers, tradesmen, and craftsmen who repopulated the Saarland’s small Catholic villages after decades of conflict.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the area that included Wellingen and Fitten had stabilized under clerical and later French administration. Parish life, centered on the Catholic church, provided not only spiritual guidance but also the official record-keeping that now allows genealogists to follow families through the centuries.

The Earliest Known Ancestors

The earliest recorded member of the family is **Mathias Felz** (born circa 1680 in Merzig-Wadern; died 1717), who married **Engel Hoffmann** (born 1683). Their son, **Michael Felz**, was born in 1710 in Fitten and died in 1791 in Wellingen. Michael married **Anna Maria Geyer** (1722–1796), thus linking the Felz line to another established Saarland family.

Michael and Anna Maria’s son, **Nikolaus Felz**, born December 4, 1746, in Wellingen, continued the lineage. He married **Anna Kaas** (1754–1815), daughter of Mathias Kaas and Barbara Welstein. Nikolaus and Anna raised several children in Wellingen, among them **Johann Mathias Felz** and **Margretha Felz** (1746–1871), who married Johannes Ripplinger and had three

children.

Johann Mathias Felz married **Elisabeth Hahn** (1799–1886), daughter of Joseph Hahn and Elisabeth Cremer. Their children are recorded in the *Saarland, Germany, Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1776–1875*, the earliest surviving civil and parish compilations for the area. The known offspring include:

- Nikolaus Fekz (died in infancy. 1815)
- Mathias Felz (died in infancy, 1816)
- Margarethe Felz (1820–1900). She married Peter Bohr in 1843
- Ludwig Felz (1823–1875). In 1854, Ludwig married Margaretha Bohr and together they had 9 children.;
- Johann Felz (1829–1893);
- Mathias Felz (1830–1894). Mathias immigrated to the United States some time before 1857 originally settling in Chicago, Illinois. He married Barbara Streit and together they had 6 children. By 1876, they had moved into the West Division Street corridor in Chicago, where their children—Josephine and Barbara—worked in the fur trade, and son John in warehousing. Mathias and Barbara and their youngest three children eventually would settle in White County, Indiana.;
- Nikolas Felz (1839–1889). Nikolas Immigrated to the United States and settled in Chicago, Illinois. He married Barbara Winterhold and together they had four children.;

- Anton Felz (1845–1916). Anton immigrated to the United States and settled in Keokuk County, Iowa. In 1868 he married Barbara Olinger. They had two girls.

These names link the early Saarland generations to the later Felz families who would emigrate or establish themselves further north in Prussia and eventually across the Atlantic.

Life in the Villages of Wellingen, Fitten, and Tünsdorf

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Wellingen, Fitten, and nearby Tünsdorf (also known historically as Oscholz) were small farming communities clustered around their parish churches in the Merzig–Wadern district of present-day Saarland. The rhythm of life in these villages followed the agricultural seasons and the liturgical calendar: planting and harvest were interwoven with feast days, baptisms, marriages, and burials—all faithfully recorded in the parish registers that today form the backbone of genealogical research.

Wellingen lay within the parish of Büdingen, dedicated to the Visitation of the Virgin Mary (*Mariä Heimsuchung*), while Tünsdorf maintained its own long-established parish dating back to medieval times. Fitten, a hamlet of modest size, depended ecclesiastically on nearby Wellingen and shared many family connections through marriage and trade. The surrounding ter-

rain—rolling hills, forested slopes, and the fertile Saar and Leukbach valleys—supported grain cultivation, orchards, and livestock. Many families supplemented farming with crafts such as blacksmithing, carpentry, or weaving, trades often handed down through generations. Taxes and tithes were paid to both the local seigneur and the church, and while political borders shifted frequently—from the Electorate of Trier to France and later to Prussia—village life changed only gradually.

The Merzig–Wadern district, rich in forested hills and sandstone outcrops, was historically a place of endurance and continuity. Its people were known for their diligence, thrift, and devotion to family and faith—traits shaped by both the land and centuries of alternating French and German rule. The local dialect blended elements of German, French, and Moselle-Franconian speech, while cuisine reflected a similar mix: hearty Rhineland stews, Lorraine-style pastries, and wines from the Moselle valley.

During the Napoleonic era (1794–1815), the Saarland was annexed to France, and the introduction of civil registration created the detailed birth, marriage, and death records that now illuminate families like the Felz. After 1815, Prussian administration continued these practices, leaving an unbroken trail of documentation across regimes. The persistence of the Felz surname in parish and civil records from Fitten, Wellingen, and Tünsdorf suggests that the family remained settled there for more than a century—landowners, craftsmen, and tradesmen

whose roots ran deep in this borderland soil.

This landscape of modest farms and close-knit villages formed the cradle of the Felz family: a world of steady work, strong faith, and enduring ties, from which later generations would depart for America, carrying with them both the skills of their trade and the memory of home.

Legacy of the Early Generations

By the mid-nineteenth century, descendants of Johann Mathias and Elisabeth Hahn Felz began to look beyond the Saarland. Economic pressures, limited farmland, and the lure of industrial opportunities led some to migrate toward urban centers like Trier, Saarbrücken, and eventually across the Atlantic to the United States.

Their story—beginning in the small parishes of Wellingen and Fitten, shaped by faith and family—forms the foundation for the later generations who carried the Felz name to Chicago, where it would continue to flourish in the twentieth century.

The early Felz generations stand as the quiet architects of that legacy: their names inscribed in fragile parish books, their lives lived close to the land, their traditions enduring in the families that followed.

Chapter 3

Nikolaus Felz (1839–1889)

By the middle of the nineteenth century, members of the Felz family began to leave the hills and river valleys of the Saarland in search of opportunity abroad. Among them was Nikolaus Felz, son of Johann Matthias and Elisabeth (Hahn) Felz, whose journey carried the family’s craft traditions from the Moselle borderlands to the growing city of Chicago. Like many emigrants from Merzig–Wadern, Nikolaus brought with him the skills and discipline of a German tradesman, shaping a new life in the industrial heart of America while preserving the language, faith, and values of his homeland. His marriage to Barbara Winterhold of Alsace joined two borderland traditions—Prussian and Alsatian—at a moment when both regions were

caught between nations. Together, they would begin the American branch of the Felz family, whose story unfolds in the streets and workshops of nineteenth-century Chicago.

Nikolaus Felz was born in 1839 in Oscholz (also recorded as Tünsdorf), near Mettlach, in the Landkreis Merzig–Wadern district of Saarland, then part of the Kingdom of Prussia. He was the son of Johann Mathias Felz, remembered as the earliest known patriarch of the family. This border region along the Moselle River was known for its blend of German and French culture and its long tradition of skilled tradesmen.

Barbara Winterhold (possibly Winterhalt) was born about 1839 in Alsace (Elsass), a German-speaking province that lay between France and Germany. Her family background reflects the Alsatian tradition of home-based artisans and domestic craft workers whose lives straddled two national identities.

Immigration and Settlement

Both Nikolaus and Barbara Felz emigrated to the United States in the late 1850s, amid one of the largest transatlantic migrations of the nineteenth century. Political turmoil following the failed revolutions of 1848, coupled with economic hardship and limited prospects for small landholders, spurred millions of Germans and

Alsatians to seek new beginnings abroad.

Steam travel had shortened the voyage from Europe to America to less than a month, and emigrant agents advertised passage through ports such as Hamburg, Bremen, and Le Havre. While we have no record of their route or ultimate arrival, many travelers at this time landed at Castle Garden in New York, then boarded rail or lake steamers bound for the fertile prairies of the Midwest. It was through this network that Nikolaus and Barbara likely traveled, eventually reaching Chicago—then a booming city of 100,000—where a well-established German community offered work, churches, and familiar language.

Trade and Community Life

When the couple arrived, Chicago was a city alive with German energy and ambition. Their address by 1880, 541 North Ashland Avenue, lay in the West Division within a district known as “Klein-Deutschland” — Little Germany — where Division Street and Ashland Avenue were lined with wagon works, blacksmith shops, breweries, and boarding houses, and where German remained the language of everyday life. The scent of hops and coal smoke mingled with that of fresh bread from neighborhood bakeries, and the evenings often rang with music from beer gardens and Turnvereins (gymnastic clubs) that served as social and cultural centers. In this thriving community, faith, craftsmanship,

and sociability were tightly interwoven.

By the mid-1870s, Nikolaus Felz had become known in Chicago as a skilled wagonmaker—a respected trade in a city whose streets still echoed with the sound of horse-drawn carts. From his shop on North Ashland Avenue, he built and repaired wagons for merchants and haulers rebuilding after the Great Fire of 1871. His son Henry worked alongside him as a clerk and assistant, learning both the craft and the business of the trade. By 1878, city directories list the firm of *Felz & Kuehtz*, wagonmakers at 84 Augusta Street, operated by Nikolaus Felz in partnership with William Kuehtz. The venture marked a turning point: what had begun as a family trade had grown into a stable enterprise, reflecting the Felz family’s rise from immigrant artisans to established small business owners on Chicago’s industrious West Side.

The Great Fire of 1871 had devastated much of Chicago’s core but spared much of the West Side, where “Klein-Deutschland” continued to thrive. The rebuilding years brought steady work for wagonmakers like Nikolaus, whose craft was indispensable in hauling debris and materials for reconstruction. Their home—likely a two-story, wood-frame worker’s cottage—stood among bakeries, cobblers, and tailors, forming a microcosm of the immigrant enterprise that helped rebuild the city itself. Within that modest but secure household, the values of thrift, precision, and self-reliance took root. Mathias, the eldest son, learned his father’s

mechanical skills and absorbed the ethic of steady labor and self-improvement that would later carry him into his own career as a tradesman and family provider.

Barbara managed the household and raised their growing family while taking part in the social and religious life of the German-American neighborhoods surrounding St. Michael's Church and other early parishes. Together they embodied the diligence, faith, and craftsmanship that characterized Chicago's German community in the late nineteenth century.

The Children of Nikolaus and Barbara (Winterhold) Felz

- **Mathias Felz** (4 May 1860 – 2 May 1917) — Born in Chicago; worked successively as a milk peddler, tailor, and later as an engineer. Married Katie (Katherine) Hansen on 27 May 1882 in Chicago. Their children included Dr. John Hendrik “Henry” Felz (1894 – 1965). Mathias and Katie are buried in Forest Home Cemetery, Chicago.
- **Henry Felz** (1862 – 1935) — Spent his career as a blacksmith, vehicle dealer and later worked as an insurance broker. Married Clara Concilia Hamper (1875 – 1954), daughter of John Hamper and Marie Josephine Abel, on 27 May 1896 in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Both were Chicago

residents at the time; the marriage record lists witnesses W. G. Kellenback and James Pennelpacker, officiated by Rev. Jerry J. Keating. They had one son, Henry John Felz.

- **Josephine Felz** (1870 – 1957) — Married George Ernest Huch (1864 – 1934) on 18 May 1895 in Chicago. George Huch was president of the Huch Leather Company, later succeeded by their son Louis Huch. The couple lived at 2535 N. Sawyer Avenue, were members of the Lutheran Church, and had two children, Florence and Louis. They later resided in Evanston, Illinois.
- **Elizabeth “Lizzie” Felz** (22 Apr 1877 – 28 Jan 1967) — Married George U. Chamberlain (1878 – 1926) on 1 Jun 1901 in Cook County, Illinois. George, born in Indiana, worked as an auditor in the retail dry-goods industry. Elizabeth later moved to Anaheim, California, where she died in 1967. Her California Death Index record confirms her birth in Illinois and lists her mother’s maiden name as “Winterho,” corroborating the Felz lineage.

Home and Legacy

By the 1880 U.S. Census, the Felz household was recorded at 541 N. Ashland Avenue in the 14th Ward of Chicago. Nikolaus (age 40) was listed as a wagon maker, Barbara (age 40) as keeping

house, with children Mathias (20), Henry (18), Josephine (9), and Elizabeth (3). Nikolaus's trade placed him firmly among the artisans who formed the city's industrial backbone, while Barbara's steady domestic management ensured the family's stability and respectability. Through skill, thrift, and perseverance, they provided their children with the education and footing that would allow the next generation to move upward into business and professional life.

Both parents died young: Barbara (Winterhold) Felz in 1881 at about forty-two years of age, and Nikolaus Felz in 1889 at fifty. Their early deaths left the four Felz children to find their own paths in a city still growing and reshaping itself after the Great Fire. With the loss of the 1890 Census, the record of these transitional years is fragmentary, but later sources allow glimpses of their progress.

By 1895, daughter Josephine had married George Ernest Huch, a leather manufacturer, and was living in Chicago with two young children. Henry married Clara Concilia Hamper the following year, 1896, and by the 1900 Census was listed as a carriage dealer—continuing the family's connection to vehicle trades even as the industry modernized. That same year, the youngest daughter, Elizabeth ("Lizzie"), was living with her brother Henry, soon to marry George Chamberlain in 1901. Mathias, the eldest, had already established his own household with wife Katie Hansen and their growing family, marking the

start of the second Felz generation in America.

Though Nikolaus and Barbara did not live to see their children's adult lives, the stability and values they instilled—craftsmanship, perseverance, and a commitment to work—carried forward. From their modest home on Ashland Avenue, the sound of hammer and wheel gave way, within a generation, to the quiet precision of the dentist's drill—a fitting symbol of a family's transformation from artisans to professionals in the city they helped to build.

Chapter 4

Mathias Felz (1860–1917)

*“Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,
erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.”*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I* (1808)

*“What you have inherited from your fathers,
earn it again to make it truly yours.”*

Mathias Felz was born on May 4, 1860, in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, the eldest child of Nikolaus and Barbara (Winterhalt) Felz. His parents had arrived from Saarland and Alsace only a few years earlier, joining Chicago’s growing German-speaking community on the West Side. Mathias was the first Felz born in America—a child of immigrants whose life would link the family’s European origins to its American future.

Marriage and Family

On May 27, 1882, at the age of twenty-two, Mathias married nineteen-year-old Katherine (“Katie”) Hansen in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. Their marriage united two immigrant traditions—German Catholic and Norwegian Lutheran—within the industrious neighborhoods of Chicago’s North Side.

Katie Hansen was born in Tromsø, Norway, about 1861–1862, the youngest child of Christian Frederick Hansen (1806–1890), a shoemaker, and Christine Maria Nielsdotter. In 1864 the Hansen family emigrated to the United States and settled in Chicago’s 11th Ward, joining the city’s growing Norwegian Lutheran community. Katie grew up as the youngest of six children—August Conrad, Minnie, Ben, Matilda (“Tillie”), and Anne (“Annie”—all born in Norway before the family’s migration. Her father and brothers found work in the trades and most of the family would later settle in Wyoming, forming part of the early Scandinavian community in Laramie. Her brother August maintained an architectural office in Chicago but it burned out in the Chicago fire of 1871, prompting him the head to Wyoming with *nothing but his drafting pencils*. Only her brother Ben remained behind and by 1880 was living nearby at 257 Division Street working as a Glazier. Ben and his wife Hanna remained in Chicago until his passing in 1927. His obituary lovingly referred to his sister as a *Mrs. Katie Feltz of Chicago*. Family ties remained close: Chicago newspapers and Wyoming correspondence later

recorded visits between the Katie Felz and her closest sister Annie Johnson, with Katie remembered in the West as “Mrs. Matt Felz of Chicago.” Her upbringing in this transatlantic household of artisans and pioneers emphasized thrift, literacy, and faith—values she would carry into her own family life. Katie’s father Christian passed away January 9, 1890 and is burried in Laramie, Wyoming in an unmarked grave in the Greenhill cemetery.

Work and Daily Life

Mathias’s working life reflected the adaptability of Chicago’s first American-born generation of immigrants. The 1880 U.S. Census lists him as a milk peddler—a modest but steady occupation that required early mornings and a working knowledge of the city’s streets and customers. By 1900, he and Katie had established their household north of the old German districts, at 425 Potomac Avenue in the 14th Ward near Humboldt Park. This neighborhood, developed after the Great Fire, was a mosaic of small brick houses and frame cottages inhabited by German, Norwegian, and Danish families, including many of Katie’s countrymen. There, the German core of the West Side blended with Scandinavian newcomers to form a multilingual, industrious community shaped by thrift, craftsmanship, and faith.

In the 1900 Census, Mathias is recorded as a tailor; by 1910,

he is listed as an entry clerk for a gas company. His death record later records his occupation as “engineer,” a designation commonly used for mechanical or maintenance work in early twentieth-century Chicago. Taken together, these sources trace a steady progression toward more stable, skilled employment. Their mortgaged home on Potomac Avenue signified ownership and stability—an achievement reached by many second-generation German Americans at the turn of the century.

Humboldt Park itself, opened in 1877 and landscaped with boulevards and a lagoon, offered respite and civic pride for local families. On Sundays, the Felzes and their neighbors picnicked under its trees or listened to concerts at the boathouse. For the children—Caroline (Barbara), Elmer, Clara, and John Henry—these were years of schooling, church socials, and new expectations. Mathias and Katie valued education; census records show them both literate and English-speaking while maintaining ties to their heritage through St. Paul’s Lutheran Church and neighborhood societies.

Streetcars along North and Lawndale Avenues connected their block to downtown and nearby industrial corridors, while local bakeries, grocers, and tailor shops set the rhythms of daily life. This was a stable working-class world—neither wealthy nor poor—anchored by steady work, thrift, and community respectability.

Children of Mathias and Katie (Hansen) Felz

- **Caroline (Barbara) Felz** (1883–1961) — married Edward Wickerski (1884–1962) on July 30, 1906. Edward, described in family notes as Filipino, worked in the printing and lithography industry in Chicago.
- **Elmer Felz** (1888–1980) — married Valvorg Betty (“Valley”) Homes (1892–1975) on April 20, 1912; he worked as a cashier for a newspaper.
- **Clara Felz** (1893–1910) — died tragically at age 17 from gangrenous appendicitis.
- **John Hendrik “Henry” Felz** (1894–1965) — became a dentist, establishing a practice on Lincoln Avenue in Chicago and continuing the family line.

Later Years and Passing

By the 1910s, the Felz family had settled in Chicago’s North Side neighborhoods near Lawndale Avenue. During this period, the family’s adult children began to establish their own lives. Daughter Caroline (Barbara) had married Edward Wickerski in 1906; their only child, Evelyn, was born the same year. By 1910, son Elmer was also employed as a clerk with the gas company, following in his father’s line of work. He married Valvorg Betty

(“Valley”) Homes in 1912, and by the 1920 Census he was listed as an advertising cashier for a newspaper—most likely the *Chicago Tribune*. Valley was then working as a stenographer in the insurance industry; both had completed one year of high school, typical for Chicago’s rising clerical class of the period.

The year 1910 also brought tragedy: Clara Felz, the family’s third child, died at just seventeen of gangrenous appendicitis. Her passing marked a sorrowful turning point for the household, which had already weathered the long working hours and modest means of urban life.

By this time, Mathias was employed as an entry clerk for the gas company, a position requiring accuracy and dependability. He continued this work until his death on May 2, 1917, at the age of fifty-six. The *Chicago Tribune* obituary listed his residence as 4640 North Lawndale Avenue and noted that funeral services were held at the family home. He was buried on May 5, 1917, at Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, Illinois.

After Mathias’s death, Katie lived with her adult children. The 1920 Census places her with her daughter Caroline Wicherksi and son-in-law Edward, together with her son John H. Felz, then a practicing dentist. Church records from St. Paul’s Lutheran Church note Mrs. Katie Felz, 5015 North Lawndale Avenue, as present at her son John’s marriage in 1921. In 1930, then 68, she is listed as living in her daughter Caroline’s household. Katie died on November 7, 1939, at her son’s home in Chicago, and

was buried alongside Mathias at Forest Home Cemetery. Her granddaughter Jean Felz later remembered her as “a kind and gentle presence” and recalled her passing as one of her earliest memories of loss.

Legacy

Mathias and Katie Felz embody the quiet endurance of the immigrant working class that built Chicago’s early neighborhoods. Mathias, born to German carriage-makers, and Katie, the Norwegian shoemaker’s daughter, blended two Old World traditions into a distinctly American story. Through thrift and perseverance, they established a home where their children could rise into the city’s emerging professional class. Their lives mark the transition from immigrant trades to middle-class stability—the bridge between Europe’s craftsmen and America’s citizens.



Mathias Felz (1860-1917)



Katie Felz
(Karen - O - Ma)

Katherine Hansen Felz (1861-1939)



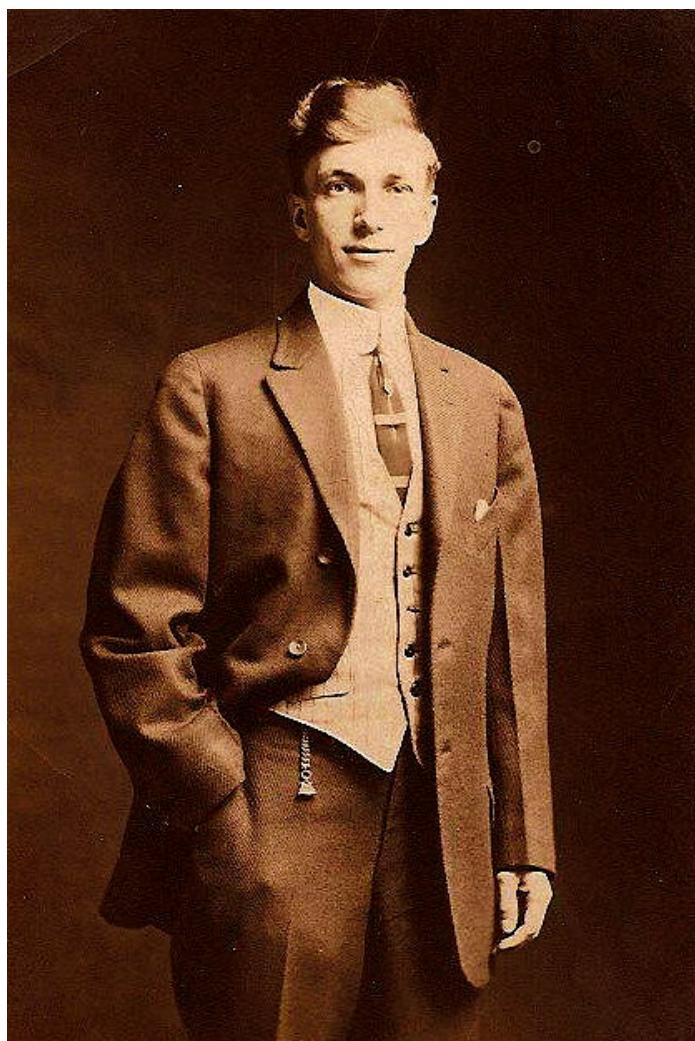
Family of Mathias and Kate Felz - Elmer, John, Edward Wickerski?, Caroline, Mathias, Kate



Hansen Sisters: Kate Felz, Minnie Larson, Annie Johnson



Mathias Felz and Kate Hansen Wedding



Elmer Felz



Clara Felz



Caroline Felz

Chapter 5

John Henry “Doc” Felz (1894–1965)

*“Far and away the best prize that life offers
is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”*

— Theodore Roosevelt

John Henry ”Doc” Felz was born on October 25, 1894, in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, the youngest child of Mathias and Katie (Hansen) Felz. His birthplace—a modest home at 680 N. Rockwell Street—stood amid the brick tenements and narrow wooden houses of Chicago’s immigrant West Side, close to the trolley lines that connected the city’s German, Polish, and Scandinavian districts. He grew up at the turn of a century that would carry the Felz family from the world of artisans to that of educated professionals.

Family Origins

The Felz story had already spanned two continents. His father, Mathias Felz, was born in Chicago to German immigrant parents from the Prussian borderlands of Saarland who had arrived around 1859, part of the great wave of craftsmen and tradesmen that helped build the city’s industrial base. His mother, Katie Hansen, born in Norway in 1861, came to the United States as a small child in 1864 and grew up within Chicago’s Norwegian Lutheran community, steeped in thrift, literacy, and faith.

By 1900, the Felz household lived at 425 Potomac Avenue in Chicago’s 14th Ward, a mixed German–Scandinavian enclave near Humboldt Park. Mathias worked as a tailor while Katie kept house and raised their four surviving children—Barbara, Elmer, Clara, and John—in a mortgaged home that reflected modest achievement and stability. Their neighborhood—bordered by North Avenue, California Avenue, and the park’s tree-lined boulevards—offered a blend of small shops, streetcars, and public schools typical of upwardly mobile working-class families at the dawn of the new century.

Youth and Education

By 1910, John was a bright fifteen-year-old student with a growing curiosity about the wider world. His father, then employed as an entry clerk for the gas company, and his mother, long settled

and fluent in English, modeled persistence and self-improvement. That same year brought heartbreak: John's sister, Clara Felz, died at seventeen from gangrenous appendicitis—a tragedy that left its mark on a close-knit family already acquainted with hardship.

After completing secondary school, John enrolled at the University of Illinois College of Dentistry in Chicago. University records and the 1918 *Illio* yearbook list him among the dental students in the Chicago division, and his 1917 draft card confirms his occupation as “dental student,” residing at 4840 N. Lawndale Avenue, with his widowed mother as his dependent. That address situates him within the growing neighborhoods north of Humboldt Park—an area linked by electric streetcars to the downtown campuses and professional schools that served Chicago’s ambitious second generation.

That same year, in May 1917, his father Mathias died at age fifty-six, leaving John as both student and provider. His completion of dental training amid such personal loss marks a quiet but decisive moment in the family’s rise from manual labor to professional life. During his studies, John joined *Psi Omega*, the professional dental fraternity founded in 1892, symbolizing not only academic promise but also adherence to the new ethical and scientific standards that defined the modern dental profession.

Marriage and Family

By the 1920 Census, John was listed as Dr. John Henry Felz, dentist, living with his mother Katie in the home of his sister Caroline and brother-in-law Edward Wickerski, a lithographer, on N. Lawndale Avenue in Chicago’s 27th Ward. This was a tree-lined, middle-class district of German and Scandinavian families—stable, church-centered, and close to the city’s expanding commercial corridors.

At the very same moment in 1920, Frieda Emilie Wegener—the woman John would soon marry—was making her own way on Chicago’s West Side. Her father, Herman Wegener, had grown up with only fragments of knowledge about his own parents. Later research reveals that they were Louis (or Lewis) Wegener and Wilhelmina “Mina” Jordan, both born in Bavaria and married in Chicago in 1872. By 1880, they lived on Ogden Avenue on the city’s Near West Side, part of a dense German-speaking community rebuilding after the Great Fire. Louis worked as a teamster while Mina kept house for their two young sons, Herman and Louis Jr. Tragically, Mina died in 1881, and within weeks the family’s property was foreclosed, leaving Herman’s father a widower and the boys effectively orphaned. One Robert Wegener served as surety of Mina’s estate; whether he was related remains unknown, though he was proprietor of a successful Chicago bakery—a detail that later seems prophetic, for by 1900 Herman’s occupation was listed as baker, earning him the affectionate

nickname Herman "Bakerman" Wegener.

Frieda's mother was Emma Amelia "Millie" Pankow, daughter of Johaun Pankow and Amalie "Mollie" Braasch, both of Germany, emigrating in 1876. Millie's family growing up remained in Lyons, Illinois, not too far from the present day Brookfield Zoo. By 1910, Herman and Millie, along with Herman's brother Louis were living in the 15th Ward. Herman and Millie, married three years prior, had started their young family, and Louis was working as a laborer for the railroad. Millie would die in August of that year on or around Frieda's 11th birthday, an indelible loss that Frieda would carry with her. The 1910 census would also mark the last confirmed record of Herman's brother Louis.

Five years later, Herman had married Emma Mueller. The 1920 census lists Frieda as living with them on California Avenue in Chicago's 15th Ward, in a household that also included Emma's sister, Anna Mueller. Employed as a stenographer for a roofing firm, Frieda belonged to the growing cadre of skilled office workers whose literacy and composure supported the city's commercial trades.

That year also brought Frieda a grievous loss. Her younger brother Emil Wegener, age twenty-two, was living with their mother's extended Pankow family—the William Pankow household on Archer Avenue—and working as a teamster in the coal-dealer trade when he died in a tragic interurban accident near Argo. Contemporary accounts reported:

“YOUTH KILLED ON INTERURBAN Emil Wegener, 22 years old, Mount Forest, was killed yesterday when he fell from the rear platform of a Chicago and Joliet interurban car, a mile and a half south of Argo. According to the conductor, the youth was standing at the rear of the car, leaning against the gate. The gate gave way and the man was plunged to the concrete road which runs parallel to the car tracks at this point. His skull was fractured and he died within a few minutes after he was picked up. Wegener had no parents or immediate relatives. He was living in Mount Forest, near Willow Springs, with an uncle.”

The stark phrasing—“no parents or immediate relatives”—belied the persistence of family connections and the quiet resilience that had carried the Wegeners through adversity since Mina’s time. That same resilience would become Frieda’s hallmark as she entered marriage and motherhood.

On October 25, 1921—his twenty-seventh birthday—John married Frieda Wegener at the parsonage of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church on the North Side, officiated by Rev. O. Ingooldstad, with his mother Katie present. Their marriage joined two well-established Chicago families and set the stage for a life of stability and purpose. They would soon expand their young family, having two daughters in the pursuing years:

- **Lois Elaine Felz** (b. July 9, 1923), who later married Adrian Cammelot, a furniture builder;

- **Jean Barbara Felz** (b. August 1, 1925), who married Dorr Simer, a teacher and farmer, in 1946.

Professional Life and Neighborhood Roots

By the mid-1920s, Dr. Felz had established his dental practice at 4763 N. Lincoln Avenue in Chicago's North Center neighborhood, at the heart of Lincoln Square. The corridor represented the professional and commercial face of the city's German-American community—lined with bakeries, cobblers, barbers, and shopfronts whose Gothic signage echoed Old World traditions. Streetcars clattered up and down Lincoln Avenue past the Davis Theater (opened 1918), cafés, and music halls, while nearby factories like Deagan's filled the air with the clang of musical chimes. It was in this lively, close-knit environment that Dr. Felz built a practice and a reputation for skill, steadiness, and kindness.

While John anchored the practice, Frieda anchored the home. Her stenography background and household management complemented John's long hours chair-side, creating the reliable routines that sustained a small business and a young family through the volatile 1920s and the lean 1930s. Her practical strengths—organization, thrift, and quiet resilience—formed the unseen scaffolding of John's professional life.

Home and Daily Life

In 1930, the Felz family lived at 5526 N. Artesian Avenue—John, 35, a self-employed dentist; Frieda, 30; and their two young daughters, Lois and Jean. Their rent of \$75 per month reflected modest comfort during the Depression years. By 1940, they had moved a few blocks north to 6210 N. Mozart Street, still within easy reach of John’s dental practice. John reported working 48 hours a week and having completed four years of college; Frieda managed the home and family with her characteristic grace and practicality.

Their daughter Jean later remembered those years warmly:

“My mother was a good cook. She made cake and walnut bread. Every weekend—rolls and coffee cake and coffee. . . . My grandma lived with us.”

Meals were hearty and traditional: kidney stew, rabbit (*Hasenpfeffer*), liver and onions, and lamb. On Christmas Eve, the family prepared a small smorgasbord—pickled herring, goat cheese, and beer or wine. “*My dad directed my education,*” Jean recalled fondly; and just as often, the rhythm of daily life reflected Frieda’s steady hand—her lists, ledgers, and the dependable clockwork of meals, chores, and family routines.

Family gatherings with “Aunt Goldie” and “Oh Ma” (Katie Hansen Felz) preserved their mixed Norwegian and German heritage. Jean remembered her grandmother passing away qui-

etly in a room next to hers, after which the family moved to 5842 N. Maplewood Avenue.

John's granddaughter Judy remembered visiting "Grandpa Doc" at his dental office on Damen Avenue in the early 1960s:

"One story I remember as a kid was going to grandpa (John Henry) Doc's office on Damen to get fillings for my cavities. I always seemed to need one, and my brother never did! My grandfather felt badly about filling them—without novocaine in those days. After pulling one of my baby molars, he walked me a few blocks to the corner store under the L tracks and bought me a cream soda. (Thinking back, now it seems a terrible idea to give a kid prone to cavities soda pop!)"

Other grandchildren carried equally vivid memories. Karen recalled:

"I remember he always made us toast with honey. He lived above his dental office. The stairs up to the apartment were straight up and steep. Mom said he never liked giving Donna, Dick, and me dental exams or work because he didn't want to hurt us."

Richard ("Dick") remembered the stories handed down by his mother, Jean:

"She told us about Al Capone visiting the apartment below them when they lived in Chicago. I don't remember

all the details—but I do remember stories of Grandpa Doc making beer in their bathtub.”

Whether the Capone story was true or simply one of those neighborhood legends that grew with time, Jean told it without embellishment. She wasn’t a teller of tall tales—just a keeper of memories that sometimes blurred at the edges between fact and family folklore.

Together, these recollections sketch a warm and lively portrait of the Felz household—a blend of immigrant tradition, Depression-era resilience, and the simple joys of family life centered around John’s gentle humor and Frieda’s quiet strength.

Later Years and Legacy

John registered again for the World War II draft, listing his home at 5842 N. Maplewood Avenue and his office at 4763 N. Lincoln Avenue. The card described him as 5'6", 160 lbs, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a sallow complexion—a small but vivid glimpse of the man behind the dentist’s chair. Through the 1940s, his Lincoln Avenue office remained a neighborhood fixture, serving a loyal base of North Side families who arrived by streetcar or on foot. He was active in the Ravenswood Lodge No. 777, A.F. & A.M., reflecting both civic involvement and the respectability that his parents had sought to build a generation earlier.

On July 15, 1955, Frieda passed away at the family home at 1971 W. Leland Avenue. She was laid to rest with the Felz family at Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park. Her death closed a chapter that had quietly sustained the household for more than three decades—the ledger-keeper, the cook, the steadyng presence whose work made John’s work possible.

Following the passing of his wife, John would continue to work and spend time with his daughter’s families. An affectionate recollection from John’s grandson captures the tenderness of his final days:

“We always knew of Uncle Al (Elmer Felz), and I vaguely remember visiting him when I was little.... On the weekend before Grandpa Doc died, we celebrated his birthday and Uncle Al came. It was a wonderful day as the brothers made up and promised they would stay in touch. Grandpa wasn’t feeling well the next day and went to the doctor. He had a heart attack and died in the waiting room waiting to be seen.”

Dr. John Henry Felz passed away on October 25, 1965 — poignantly, on his seventy-first birthday—in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. Funeral services were held at Ravenswood Lodge No. 777, A.F. & A.M., and he was laid to rest in the Felz family plot at Forest Home Cemetery beside earlier generations, near Frieda.

From the modest home on Rockwell Street to the professional offices of Lincoln Avenue, John Hendrik Felz’s life traced the arc

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of his family’s transformation. He lived through the shift from horse-drawn wagons to automobiles, from kerosene lamps to neon lights, from the immigrant artisan’s bench to the professional’s desk. To his patients, he was Dr. Felz—the friendly dentist on Lincoln Avenue. To his family, he was a steady hand and a kind heart—matched by Frieda’s constancy at home, a partnership that bridged worlds and embodied all that the Felz family had become.

“My dad was my hero, and my mother my confidant. We all had to be home and in our beds when Dad came home late, but he adored Mom and his girls. He never got angry—he was steady, gentle, and had a wonderful laugh when something struck him funny.”



John and Elmer Felz



John Felz and Frieda Wegener



Herman "Bakerman" Wegener



John Felz and Evelyn Wicherksi



Evelyn Wicherksi, Lois Felz, Jean Felz, Laurie Gavin, Caroline "Goldie" Felz, Kate Hansen

A City and a Family in Motion The Felz story unfolded alongside Chicago’s transformation from a wagon-ridden industrial hub to a modern metropolis of expressways and universities through three generations:

- Nickolaus and Barbara: artisans of the immigrant age, shaping the city with their hands.
- Mathias and Katie: literate tradespeople, homeowners, and civic participants.
- John and Frieda: a university-educated professional and a capable homemaker.

Each generation moved farther north—Ashland Avenue to Potomac Avenue to Lincoln Avenue, tracking the literal and symbolic rise of the family through the social geography of Chicago.

The Felz family’s Chicago narrative mirrors the broader story of the city itself: the endurance of skilled immigrants, the slow but steady climb toward education and stability, and the binding strength of family ties. The homes on Ashland, Potomac, and Lincoln Avenues mark more than addresses—they trace a path of progress, persistence, and belonging.

From wagon-maker’s hammer to dentist’s drill, the sound of work echoed through three generations of Felz hands. And though the neighborhoods have changed, their story remains embedded in Chicago’s streets—a testament to what immigrant families built, one block and one generation at a time.

Part II

Lois and Jean



Figure 5.1: Sisters, Lois and Jean Felz

Chapter 6

Lois Elaine Felz (1923–2004)

“A teacher affects eternity; she can never tell where her influence stops.”

— Henry Adams

Lois Elaine Felz was born on July 9, 1923, in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, the first child of Dr. John Henry Felz and Frieda (Wegener) Felz. Her birth marked the arrival of a new generation—one that would come of age amid the Depression, the war years, and the confident modernity of postwar America.

Childhood and Education

The 1930 U.S. Census recorded the Felz family living at 5526 N. Artesian Avenue in Chicago’s North Side, with Lois and her younger sister Jean. Her father maintained his dental practice nearby on Lincoln Avenue, while her mother, Frieda, kept the household in careful order. By 1940, the family had moved to 6210 N. Mozart Avenue, and Lois—then sixteen—was listed as a high school student in her third year.

At Nicholas Senn High School, Lois excelled both academically and socially. Her name appears frequently in the *Sennite* yearbooks of the late 1930s and early 1940s: in 1939 she participated in the S.G.A.A. Club; in 1940 she appeared in photographs for the National Honor Society and the choir; and by her senior year, she was a leader among her peers. The 1941 yearbook lists her as Vice President of the Letter Girls’ Club; a member of the A Cappella Choir, Intramural Sports, the Honor Society, the International Relations Club, and the S.G.A.A. Club. These entries capture a portrait of a poised, civic-minded young woman, representative of a generation shaped by the final years of the Depression and inspired by the promise of modern education.

Sisterhood and Family

Lois Felz Cammelot shared an enduring bond with her sister, Jean. Though their paths led them to different towns—Jean to

Beason and later Arizona, Lois remaining in Evanston—their closeness never faded. They spoke on the phone regularly, often for long, easy conversations filled with laughter and news of family. When Lois later visited Jean in Warner Estates, the two spent precious weeks reminiscing as they always had.

Their differences in childhood only deepened their affection. Jean loved tennis, figure skating, and riding her bicycle to the park, while Lois preferred to read. Lois would hand Jean a stack of books to return to the library, and Jean would come back with another pile. As Karen remembered, “They were both happy.” The sisters often said they had enjoyed a wonderful childhood with loving, devoted parents who gave them a deep sense of home and family.

That bond carried them through life’s hardest moments—illnesses in the family, Dorr’s farm accident, and the deaths of their parents. When their father, “Doc” Felz, passed away, Lois and Jean held one another and wept, finding comfort in shared memory. Through joy and sorrow alike, they remained each other’s steadfast friend.

The Camelot and Simer families gathered together every Thanksgiving, rotating between Evanston and Beason. These holidays were filled with laughter, cousins, and the smells of turkey and pies. When the Simers traveled to the Seattle World’s Fair, baby Julie stayed with Aunt Lois for several weeks; on their return, Julie called Lois “mama” before quickly recognizing her

true mother, to everyone's relief and amusement.

On holidays spent in Evanston, Lois and Jean carried on one of their oldest traditions: taking the "L" downtown to Marshall Field's, enjoying lunch beneath the great Christmas tree in the Walnut Room, and bringing home boxes of Frango Mints. They laughed that they had done the same thing together as little girls and delighted in keeping the ritual alive.

College Years and Marriage

Following her graduation from Senn High School in 1941, Lois attended Wright Junior College, completing her program and graduating in January 1943. She then continued her studies at the National College of Education in Evanston (now National Louis University), earning her Bachelor of Education in June 1944. During her years there, she was active in student life and served as Treasurer of the Travel Club—a fitting role for a young woman whose curiosity and independence reflected her parents' values of education and service.

On October 13, 1945, Lois married Adriaanes Antone ("Adrian") Cammelot in Chicago. Adrian, born November 14, 1917, was the son of Johannes Lambertus ("John L.") Cammelot and Cornelia Piaternella (Duhem) Cammelot, both natives of the Netherlands who later settled in the western suburbs of Chicago. After Cornelia's death, John L. married Henrietta B. Cammelot,

who became stepmother to his four children: Elizabeth (Klett), John Jr., William, and Adrian. John L.’s obituary later remembered him as “beloved husband of the late Johanna; dear father of Elizabeth (Wilbur) Klett, John Jr., William (Evelyn), and Adrian (Lois); grandfather of ten; great-grandfather of seventeen,” a testament to the enduring bonds of the Cammelot family.

Early in his career, Adrian operated a custom furniture business, reflecting the artistry and precision of his Dutch heritage. He later joined the Bell & Howell Company, where he worked for thirty-five years, ultimately serving as Audio-Visual Product Manager.

Family and Work

The 1950 Census records Lois and Adrian living at 7345 Jarvis Street, Apartment C, in Chicago. Lois, then twenty-six, was listed as a substitute elementary teacher, though not working at the time of enumeration; Adrian was proprietor of a custom furniture shop. Their first child, John Felz Cammelot, was born later that year on December 27, 1950, and baptized in 1951. A daughter, Judith Adrienne Cammelot, followed on December 22, 1954.

The young couple’s early married life was framed by family events of deep significance. Frieda Felz, Lois’s mother, passed away in 1955, and her father, Dr. John Henry Felz, died ten years later on his seventy-first birthday, October 25, 1965. His

obituary in the *Chicago Tribune* named “Lois Cammelot and Jean Simer” as his daughters and listed seven grandchildren. Through these years Lois balanced family responsibilities, part-time teaching, and civic life—an example of the educated postwar woman combining domestic and professional ideals with quiet competence.

Later Life and Legacy

By the early 1980s, Lois and Adrian were living in Evanston, Illinois, where Adrian continued his long career with Bell & Howell. A gifted craftsman turned manager, he combined the precision of an engineer with the artistry inherited from his Dutch forebears. In 1985, after more than three decades with the firm, he retired—only months before illness overtook him. Diagnosed with cancer, he died at home in Evanston on December 18, 1985, aged sixty-eight. His obituary in the *Chicago Tribune* described him as “recently retired audio-visual product manager for Bell & Howell Co., who lived in Evanston for thirty-one years.” Funeral services were held at Covenant United Methodist Church, 2123 Harrison Street, Evanston.

Lois faced her husband’s death with quiet faith and resilience. She remained in Evanston, active in church and community, and found purpose in service. She supported *Over the Rainbow*, an Evanston-based organization providing accessible housing for

adults with physical disabilities—a cause close to her heart, as her son John lived for many years with multiple sclerosis. She stood by him with unwavering love and pride, admiring the courage and creativity with which he met each challenge. She delighted in her growing family, treasured time with her daughter Judy, and kept close contact with her sister Jean. Holidays remained her favorite time of year—especially Thanksgiving, when the Cammelot and Simer families reunited to share laughter, recipes, and stories that carried the memory of their parents forward.

Lois Cammelot passed away in June 2004 in Evanston, aged eighty. Her memorial service at Covenant Methodist Church was filled with friends, former students, and family—testament to a life of kindness, intellect, and quiet endurance. She was laid to rest with her parents and husband in *Forest Home Cemetery* in Forest Park, Illinois.

Legacy and the Next Generation

Through Lois and Adrian, the Felz and Cammelot families joined two enduring traditions: craftsmanship and care, artistry and discipline. Their children carried these values into new realms.

Her son, John “Mr. Tune” Felz Cammelot (1950–2014), embodied the family’s creative spirit through music. In 1979 John married Pamela Jarret and they would have their one daughter, Dawn Michelle Camelot, in the following year.

A gifted pianist from the age of four, he performed professionally across Chicago and toured with *The Buckinghams* during the 1980s. In 1980, he helped form the pioneering multimedia project *Squadron*, producing one of the earliest rock music videos—ahead of the MTV era. *[diagnosis after marriage]*

It was during this time that John's diagnosis and battle with Multiple sclerosis began. Despite of his diagnosis, John continued to compose, perform, and mentor others. John put up a strong fight for 27 years until he succumbed to his disease in 2014, not before getting to see the birth of all three of his grandchildren. John is remembered for his humor, kindness, and resilience and now rests in a plot alongside his parents.

Judy Cammelot Devore carried forward her mother's love of teaching and her father's inventive energy. As a teacher at Johnsburg High School, she led courses in home economics that celebrated culture through food. Her students researched and prepared dishes from around the world, culminating in a popular international dinner that showcased recipes from Spain, Germany, England, Italy, France, and Poland. As she told a local reporter, “The sharing experience really involves them—and this is what makes teaching a joy.”

As a student, Judy had also taken part in an international study tour to Mexico City through the *American Study Travel Abroad* program. The eleven-day trip, reported in the *McHenry Plaindealer*, brought together students from across the Midwest

to explore Mexican culture, history, and language under the guidance of their Spanish teacher, Mrs. Cathy Abreu. This formative experience reflected the enduring Felz and Cammelot family emphasis on education, travel, and cross-cultural understanding.

In her professional life, Judy evolved from classroom teaching into technology and design. An experienced project manager and instructional designer, she specialized in developing custom e-learning and browser-based training applications. For many years she worked alongside her husband, Michael Devore, under the name *Devore Software & Consulting*, combining creativity, technical skill, and a shared dedication to helping others learn. Judy and Michael currently reside in Naperville, Illinois.

Through John and Judy, the spirit of education, music, and innovation continued—a living reflection of Lois’s lifelong belief that knowledge, kindness, and perseverance could shape the world for good.



Lois Felz



Lois Felz and Adrian Camelot

Chapter 7

Jean Barbara Felz (1925–1997)

“The good times far outweighed the bad.... We feel nobody could have a better life than Jean and Dorr Simer.”

— Dorr L. Simer, family letter, c. 1990

Jean Barbara Felz was born on August 1, 1925, in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, the younger daughter of Dr. John Henry Felz and Frieda (Wegener) Felz. Her early years unfolded on the North Side of Chicago, in a series of rented flats near Humboldt Park and later West Ridge, where the family lived on Mozart Street next to a vacant lot. The Felz household, warm and industrious, was rooted in the blend of German and Norwegian traditions her parents carried forward—faith, thrift, and education.

Childhood and School Years

Jean's recollections describe an active, curious child who loved sports, music, and crafts. She spent hours at Greenbriar Park taking lessons in tennis, golf, dancing, weaving, and art, and joined ice-skating races and parades downtown. A proud member of the Girl Scouts, she achieved the rank of First-Class Scout and even ran the switchboard at headquarters. Her fourth-grade teacher, Miss Hogan, became a lifelong model of kindness and professional devotion—Jean once wept all day when the teacher appeared bandaged after an accident.

Education and the War Years

Jean attended Clinton School and later Senn High School, walking home with neighborhood friends such as Virginia Nelson, Phyllis, Shirley Braband, and Carol De Callawe. She excelled academically and musically, ranking forty-third in a graduating class of several hundred, and played “Malagueña” at the graduation luncheon. At Senn she served as president of the Senn Girls Athletic Society, while her future husband, Dorr Simer, was vice-president of the senior class, football player, hall guard, and member of the Hy-Y Club. He was a popular presence on campus and would be recognized with a exuberant cheer from his classmates when he walked across the podium to accept his high school diploma. Jean and Dorr's friendship—beginning

with Dorr's persistent courtship after dating several of Jean's friends. Over time it would grow into an affectionate partnership grounded in shared humor and diligence.

During World War II, Dorr enlisted in the U.S. Navy Reserve in 1944, training at the Submarine Base in New London, Connecticut, and later serving aboard the U.S.S. *Falcon* and the new submarine *Diodon* (*SS-349*). While Dorr was at sea, Jean attended Wright Junior College for two years, balancing work and study while awaiting his return. Two of her close friends from high school service clubs—part of the self-styled “Three Musketeers”—were killed in the war, a loss she carried quietly throughout her life.

Marriage and Family Life

Dorr Lester Simer was born April 9, 1926, in De Land, Piatt County, Illinois, the son of Dorr Miller Simer and Anna Huisenga. Raised partly in Decatur, he spent summers visiting family farms, where his love of agriculture took root. He and Jean became engaged in 1945 while he was stationed in New London. Jean traveled alone by train to Connecticut to receive her ring, postponing her planned piano recital for the occasion. They married on August 20, 1946, in Chicago, soon after Dorr's honorable discharge from the Navy.

Their move from the city to rural Illinois marked a dramatic

shift. Settling first in the small town of De Land, which was comprised of a few hundred people, where Dorr took over as the farm operator of his father's 80 acres, working long hours amid the austerity of the postwar Midwest. Dorr's parents had scrimped and saved to purchasing the land to join the many Huisenga farmsteads that lie nearby. Jean, still the city girl who wore high heels to their rural church, adapted to farm life with humor and discipline. In fact, Jean would maintain some simple principles throughout her life on and off the farm. Jean loved her pearl necklace and believed that every woman should have a nice set. She believed that a lady shouldn't leave the house without putting her lipstick on, and she always made an effort to look a little dolled up. Even in the middle of farm life, she believed in also being a lady.

However, even for a lady, the realities of the farm couldn't be avoided. A humorous story always told by Dorr in his grandiose manner was regarding a night Jean and Dorr slept outside under the stars. In the middle of the night, Dorr casually rolled over to put his arm around Jean only to discover that he had wrapped his arm around a hog that had wandered up beside him instead. Dorr retold this story to anyone who would hear it, and with each telling the both the hog and the tale grew a little bit bigger. Not all moments were spent comforting pigs and farm chores, occasionally Jean and Dorr would still get up to Chicago for entertainment. They had always enjoyed getting dressed up and

dancing the *jitterbug*. Together they raised five children—Donna Lou, Karen Sue, Richard (Dick) Dorr, Julie Anne, and Robert (Bob) John Simer—while balancing teaching, farming, and community service. Jean was teaching home economics, physical education, and science classes at the small school in De Land, once claiming that she *spent all day changing clothes*.

In the early years of their marriage, hardship struck when Jean contracted polio shortly after the birth of their second child. The illness left her partially paralyzed, and for a time Dorr feared he might be left to raise their young children alone. These moments were especially fraught, as fear of the endemic kept others from assisting. But Jean's determination and faith carried her through a long and difficult recovery. She learned to walk again, resumed her household duties, and eventually returned to teaching—never speaking much of the pain she endured, but always grateful for her restored strength. Her resilience during this time became a defining example for her family, who remembered her quiet courage and perseverance. Jean would have a miscarriage around this time but undeterred Jean would shortly after bring their third child, Karen, into the world.

Music was a steady thread in Jean's life. An accomplished pianist in her Chicago youth—once even performing in a small theater—she later expressed her talent mostly through the church organ and the quiet, private moments at home in the Illinois farm community, surrounding her family, filling the house with

hymns and classical melodies.

Her son later reflected on the deep connection he felt through her music:

“As a boy, I was mesmerized watching her feet dance on the pedals while her hands pounded the keys with firm determination. She would nod as she read the notes, turn the page without missing a beat, and sometimes weep as she played the melancholy tunes that reminded her of her own father. Music, for her, was emotion and memory, and for me, it became a lifelong inheritance.”

Jean’s strength and spirit sustained the family through these demanding years, grounding them in faith, hard work, love, and her always present sounds from the piano.

Teaching, Adversity, and Achievement

In 1959, a farm accident left Dorr blind in one eye, forcing him to give up full-time farming. That same year, he earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from the University of Illinois and he moved the family to the small town of Beason, Illinois where he began teaching vocational agriculture at Beason High School. Jean later taught science at Beason Grade School across the street, eventually completing twenty years in the classroom. Their shared commitment to education became the hallmark

of their marriage—each supporting the other's ambitions while nurturing a household of five children.

Dorr later earned a master's degree and helped establish an agribusiness department at Lincoln College, all while continuing to farm and with his son Dick. Dick had married Vicki Miersch in 1974 and together established a home and hog venture across the 5-acre cornfield from Dick's parents keeping their work and their daily lives closely linked. In 1976 Dick and Vicki had their first daughter, Kelly. Recalling growing up in Beason, Kelly fondly remembers precious moments with Jean. Kelly's day would start with her fathers, early in the morning and sitting across from her grandparents as Dick and Dorr planned the daily activities of the farm. Jean would get ready for the day and then Jean and Kelly would lead Kelly across the street to Jean's classroom at Beason elementary. While Jean readied her lesson plans for her students, she would also lay out telegram puzzles for Kelly to work through. These precious moments would continue after school as well as Kelly would recall,

"once a week after schhol I would come over to her place instead of going home from school and she would play pionao for a little bit and then she would give me a piano lesson... shhe would take out her glass ice cream dishes, and she would give me a big scoop of vaniulla ice cream and make it into an ice cream sundae. I loved piano lessons."

Dorr became known for his leadership in the Future Farmers of America, his community work as weighmaster for the Logan County Fair, and his service as chairman of the Beason Centennial Committee. Students remembered his booming voice and humor. Dorr was always able to teach at the drop-of-a-hat, relying on his ability to speak extraneously while pulling from his working knowledge of agriculture in lieu of careful lesson planning. Dorr would get to teach both his sons, direct Donna in a school play, and coach Karen on the speech team. That is to say the Simer family was well represented at the small Beason High School.

Jean, too, continued to advance her education. In 1981 she earned her own Master of Science in Education from Illinois State University—an achievement that reflected both her independence and her lifelong love of learning. She approached teaching with the same patience and discipline that had defined her recovery from polio: quiet determination, empathy for her students, and unshakable integrity.

In the summer of 1983, in the latest “Beason Supplement”, Jean and Dorr’s letters to their children, Dorr wrote of a dry spell that might cost the growing season, finding out they would lose out on a cash-rent opportunity of 240 acres at the Hall farm the following year, and detailed the latest news from the hog business. With the kids gone and his usual affable manner, he chimed in on the freedom Jean and him were having in life.

Mother and I have been on vacation..., we take off about

every afternoon, have explored all eating establishments in the area. Today we took a load of hogs to Peoria and stopped at [a] place called River Station located on the Illinois River. We do kooky things now like ordering strawberry daiquiri, clam chowder, sharing shrimp cocktails and whip cream cake with coffee. Your mother and I get along real well with everybody gone, with a little effort we might get to like each other. We have a real good minister so ware going to church together and even occasionally hold hands.

Dorr's sweet words reflect the love and joy held between Jean and Dorr dutifully maintained amidst the hustle of farm life. Dorr and Jean were balancing hogs, farming, and both teaching classes in Beason. Jean would occasionally travel to attend workshops at Illinois State University in furtherance of her career.

In a future installment of the *Supplement*, working through his feelings on religion, Dorr lovingly reflected on the impact of Jean on his faith in others:

Jean has a very good feeling about herself, and she truly lives the ten commandments plus about ten more of her own that she didn't get from the bible, and I have yet to find the source for the last ten. From Jean I have learned personal communication, I have watched her establish the lines of communications with the members of our family, my kids tell her things I would have never have told my folks and with her communication the message

was conveyed that mother didn't judge you, she cared about you, and was there to help you, no matter what happened. This business of communicating love, not judging and actual caring began to shape my feelings and belief about people.

It was a season of reflection for Jean and Dorr. It was at about this time that a terrible corn blight wiped out 70% of their seasonal crop, which brought financial loss and the difficult sale of their land. With characteristic resilience, they chose to begin anew, relocating to Mesa, Arizona, near two of their children's families who had gone ahead of them, with Dorr's mother also being moved into a nursing facility in Mesa, Arizona. Jean's son-in-law had offered Dorr an opportunity to work and a place to stay. It was a move that closed one chapter of hard work and opened another filled with faith, family, and gratitude.

Later Years and Legacy

In Arizona, Jean would occasionally work as a substitute teacher in area schools, while Dorr worked for Dave Nicolay. When Dorr and Dave parted ways, Jean and Dorr relocated to Chandler Arizona and established themselves in a small, but suitable apartment. Dorr became property manager of Dayspring Methodist Church in Tempe, a role he embraced with energy and faith. The church's pastor later recalled his first impression:

“Here was this huge man with an interesting smile and a big hat.... He looked as if he was much more comfortable in bib overalls than in a suit. But he said, ‘Preacher, that’s a beautiful building you just built, and someone’s going to have to take care of that—and I’d be privileged to be the one.’”

Family remained at the center of their lives. In Arizona, Jean and Dorr would gather with their family for holidays, often rotating between homes. Christmas was Jean’s season: her creamy eggnog, soft caramels, and flaky apple turnovers were always dutifully present, symbols of her warmth and tradition. The holidays were filled with laughter, the smell of baking, the energy of grandchildren and the quiet joy of being together.

I (*Kent*) always loved visiting my grandparents when they lived in Chandler. During the summer months my grandmother would occasionally watch me during the day. I was always excited to visit as I was surely guaranteed that she would have a fresh batch of cookies waiting for me—often stored with a small piece of bread inside the tin to keep them perfectly soft. It was such a simple gesture, but it captured everything about her: thoughtful, nurturing, and quietly devoted to the happiness of those she loved.

In their waning years the couple’s mornings often began with breakfast together or with friends and family. Their devotion endured through hardship and change. As Dorr later wrote to their children, “We laugh at all the fun and good times we have

had.... We feel nobody could have a better life than Jean and Dorr Simer."

Jean would be diagnosed with multiple myeloma. The diagnosis did not come quickly and the family was focused and concerned for Jean's health. However, it was Dorr who would surprise the family, passing suddenly one night in January 1991 just a few months after her diagnosis. He had been up and about earlier in the day and had a visit from his son, preceding with the rest the day as usual. I remember that evening I took a phone call from my not-so-concerned grandfather telling me that all was fine, not to worry, and he wanted me to relay to my father that he was being kept overnight out of an abundance of caution. He passed during the night from a sudden heart attack, a heavy loss felt by the always tight-knit family and a phone call which I will never forget. After awhile, Jean would come to live with Dick's family for about a year before moving in with her daughter Karen for another year. Jean faced her final illness with the same courage that had defined her life. She died on June 11, 1997, in Ankeny, Iowa, while being cared for by her son Bob and his family.

Jean joined her Dorr, resting together in De Land Cemetery, Illinois, not far from the fields where they first built their life together.

I remember attending her service in De Land at age seventeen. The day was heavy with loss, yet it was not without moments

of laughter—a brief, necessary reprieve amid the grief. As the family gathered quietly at the funeral home, someone suddenly asked, “*Who brought mom’s wig?*” The question broke the somber air, and laughter rippled through the room. Only later did I come to understand how essential that moment was—a small act of release, a reminder that love and humor endure even in the shadow of loss.

An Enduring Partnership

Jean and Dorr Simer embodied the bridge between city and country, intellect and labor, faith and perseverance. From the skating rinks of Greenbriar Park to the classrooms of Beason and the churches of Arizona, their lives reflected a steadfast belief in work worth doing—the same ideal that had guided her father, Dr. John Henry Felz, a generation before. Their story remains a testament to endurance, education, and love—threads that continue to run through the families today.

Generations Forward

After marrying, Jean Felz exchanged city streets for the rhythms of farm life with Dorr Simer in central Illinois, embraced by an extended family whose inheritance of values—learning, labor, and unwavering discipline—became the foundation on which

their children built their own lives. Jean and Dorr had five children. The first three arrived close together, while the younger two—born more than a decade later—formed their own unique relationships and experiences within the family.

Donna Lou Simer, their first child, was born in 1949 at Kirby Hospital in Monticello, Illinois, just a few miles from the family farm in De Land. She was well-liked in school and served as class secretary during her senior year at Beason High School, as well as historian for the school's Future Homemakers of America chapter. Donna was active in Chorus, Girls Sextet, Contest Chorus, FHA Reporter, and was elected Snowball Prom Queen. She went on to attend the University of Illinois to study home economics and became a member of Alpha Delta Pi sorority. It was there that she met her future husband, David (Dave) Nicolay, son of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Nicolay of Chicago. Dave, a Lincoln High School graduate, studied accounting at the University of Illinois, joined Kappa Sigma fraternity, and worked as a college counselor for a subsidiary of Alcoa Aluminum. Donna and Dave were married in 1970 at the First United Methodist Church of Lincoln. Donna's sister Karen and cousin Judy were bridesmaids, her brother Dick served as a groomsman, and siblings Bob and Julie participated as ring bearer and flower girl. The couple eventually settled in Mesa, Arizona, near Dave's parents, and welcomed three children: Beverly, Donald, and Charles. Donna currently resides in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Richard “Dick” Dorr Simer was born a year later on October 26, 1950. By age four or five, he was already helping his father with chores—tossing hay, milking cows, and bucket-feeding calves. From these early experiences he developed a lifelong appreciation for physical work. Dick attended Beason High School, where he was an honor student, active in sports and band, though he often spent his afternoons on a tractor in the fields, watching his teammates practice across the road. In 1969, Dick received the American Farmer Degree, the highest honor in the Future Farmers of America, recognizing his establishment of an agricultural occupation. His draft number was the seventh selected in the first Vietnam War lottery, sending him through a series of boot camps and National Guard service but ultimately keeping him out of combat. Between training periods, Dick took courses at two colleges to stay on track academically, earning a Bachelor of Science in Education from Illinois State University in 1972. Dick’s sister Karen later introduced him to Vicki Lynne Miersch, and after a brief courtship they married in July 1974. They literally built their first home next door to Dick’s parents in Beason and went on to have three children: Kelly, Karin, and Kent. In 1984, Dick followed his sister Donna to Arizona, accepting a job offer from his brother-in-law Dave and moving his family to Chandler. Dick currently resides in Crossville, Tennessee.

Karen Sue Simer, born in September 1952, was, like her sister, very active at Beason High School. She participated in F.H.A.,

student council (serving as class secretary and treasurer), band, chorus, girls sextet, jazz band, school plays, speech, cheerleading, and was elected Snowball Prom Queen. She also served as editor of the B-Hive staff and received both the Illinois State Scholar and V.F.W. speech awards. Karen would go and receive a degree in Education leading to life in teaching. Karen married Terry William Eckhardt in 1974, and the couple settled in Gibson City, Illinois, where they began their family while Terry established his law practice. They had two sons, Doug William Eckhardt and Steven Dorr Eckhardt. Eventually, the family relocated to Arizona after Jean and Dorr had established their home there. Karen currently resides in Chandler, Arizona.

Eleven years after Karen's birth, Robert "Bob" John Simer arrived in June 1963 in Champaign, Illinois. Bob attended Lincoln Community High School, where he served on student council and played both tennis and football. He later enrolled at Lincoln College, completing the two-year program in 1983 and earning several honors: the Alex Gordon Award for best academic record, the Lord Baden-Powell Award for exemplifying the ideals of Scouting, and an agribusiness award. He also played on the college tennis team. Bob continued on to the University of Illinois to study veterinary science and, after graduation, accepted a position with the Texas Animal Health Commission in Liberty, Texas. In 1987 he married Leda Trachtenberg, and together they had three children: Rachel, Michael, and Brittany. Bob later

became the author of the critically acclaimed 2019 novel *The Bangs Man*. Bob currently resides in Waco, Texas.

The youngest of the family, Julie Anne Simer, was born in March 1961 in Champaign, Illinois. Like Bob, she attended Lincoln Community High School, where she was active in debate, Future Secretaries Association, Future Homemakers of America, school plays, and tennis. Julie then attended the University of Illinois, joining Alpha Zeta, the National Agricultural Honorary Fraternity, while studying Agricultural Industries. After earning her degree, she entered law school at Southern Illinois University and ultimately graduated from Drake University Law School in 1986. While in school, Julie met Gary Wayne LaForge, whom she married in 1982. The couple moved to Arizona, where Julie passed the State Bar and began her career in commercial litigation and creditors' rights with the firm of Kahn and Freeman in 1992. She quickly advanced to partner in 1994. Julie and Gary had three sons: Josh, Justin, and Jeremy. Julie currently resides in Dana Point, California.



Jean Felz



Lois, Frieda, and Jean



(Left-Right) Frieda, Dorr Miller, Anna, John, Jean, Dorr Lester, ?, Lois, ?,
?. (In Front) ?



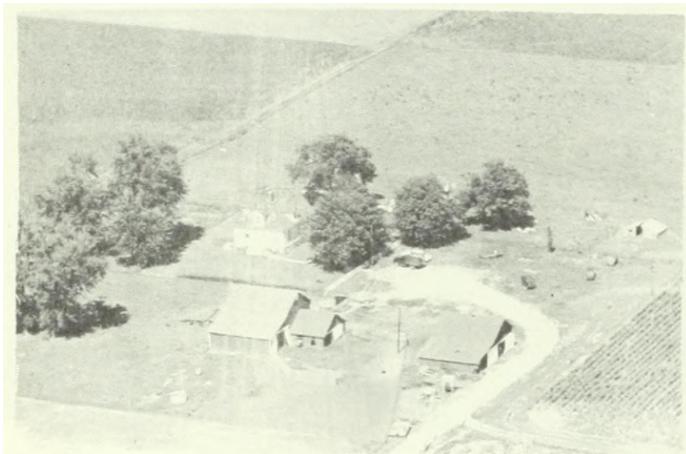
Frieda, Jean, Dick, John Camelot, Donna, John Felz, Karen, Dorr Simer



Anna Simer, Dorr Simer, Jean Felz, Dick Simer, Karen Simer, Donna Simer

D. M. Simer of Chicago purchased from the Equitable Life Assurance Society of New York, an 80-acre good black grain farm well improved, located about three miles southeast of DeLand. The sale was handled by the Rinehart-Swartz agency of Monticello.

Purchase of the Simer Farm, 1938



SIMER, DORR M.
Rt. 1-D.L. Simer, Opr.

Monticello
80 acres

Simer Farm, 1950

Afterword

Like our own personal stories, genealogical research is never finished. As new stories are collected and corrections to old ones are made it will be impractical to publish or circulate new versions of this book. I shall, however, try to keep my most recent record of our story available online. Feel free to scan the QR code below to be find the most up-to-date version.



www.simerfamily.com/stories/felz_family.pdf