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Henry Wissner and his Son, Charles Wissner

Henry Wissner was born in August of 1842, but the exact location of where he was born is unknown. Records indicate that he was either born in Hesse – Kassel or Prussia. The discrepancy is likely due to the frequently changing political boundaries; Hesse -Kassel was briefly a part of the Kingdom of Westphalia and later became a Prussian province (“Hesse -Kassel”). Not much else is known about Henry Wissner before he moved to America in 1859.

Between 1859 and 1865 Wissner lived in Baltimore, and later Richmond, before permanently settling in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He began setting up his shoe and boot business partnered with Mr. G. Dumbler, however a notice in the *Virginia Herald* written by Wissner and Dumbler in 1867 states that “We the undersigned have determined by the first day of September to dissolve partnership...” (2). Newspaper advertisements from the following years show that Wissner was able to establish a successful shoe store on Main Street, which is now known as Caroline Street. The advertisements show that Wissner repaired and sold ladies and gentlemen’s boots and shoes. In the 1880s

Wissner's advertisements are frequently printed on the same page as advertisements for "H.J. Eckenrode, dealer in boots, shoes, and hats" (*Free Lance* 1887, 3). This was a rival shoe store in Fredericksburg which was owned by Hamilton John Eckenrode a descendant of German immigrants to Pennsylvania in the early 1700s. At this time Wissner's advertisements were significantly smaller than Eckenrode's, which may indicate that Wissner was not doing quite as well as his competition. However, by 1892 the advertisements for Wissner's shoes and boots were much larger and one proclaimed "7,000 pairs of boots and shoes must be sold within the next ninety days. Having contracted to have my store room enlarged...and being very much crowded for room I will sell my entire stock of boots and shoes...at a greatly reduced price to cash purchasers" (*Free Lance* 1892, 3). In 1894 Wissner had an advertisement printed on the front page of the *Free Lance*.

On June 3, 1866 Henry Wissner married Mary Michael of Baltimore (Rokus 63). Mary was also a German immigrant who came from the same area as Henry. According to her gravestone, she was born in 1845 (qtd. In Rokus 63). According to the 1880 census record Henry Wissner lived at 425 Caroline Street with his wife Mary and their four children. His oldest was his son, Charles, and he also had three daughters: Mary, Christine, and Henrietta. In 1888 a notice was published in the *Free Lance* that Wissner was moving his shoe store to a new location "opposite Lowery & Co. on Main Street" (*Free Lance* 1888, 3). Not long after an article appearing in the *Free Lance-Star Historical*

and Industrial Number claiming that “there [was] no man in Fredericksburg so well informed on shoes as Mr. Henry Wissner” (qtd. In *Rokus* 63). Mrs. Mary Wissner died June 23, 1896. Henry was married a second time in November of 1900 to Nannie Flippo. Henry continued to run his shoe business up until his death on September 5, 1914. He had been active in the Presbyterian church and was well liked in the community. According to *Rokus*, Henry Wissner stands out among German immigrants in Fredericksburg “because of his strong belief in providing the highest levels of education for his children” (64). This is especially evident in his son Charles.

Charles Wissner, who was born in 1867, graduated from Hampden-Sidney college when he was 18. He later attended the Protestant Episcopal Divinity School in Philadelphia where he studied Hebrew and the Semitic languages. The *Free Lance* reported that he was “at the head of his class, his usual place since he first entered college” (*Free Lance* 1888, 3). Charles then went on to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Yale University before going to the University in Leipzig, Germany to earn his Ph.D. An article published in the *Free Lance* in 1890 called Charles “one of the most accomplished scholars of his age in America” and concludes by saying “the *Lance’s* best wished together with those of a host of other friends and admirers, residents of his native place, will follow the young divine wherever an overruling of Providence calls him to do good” (3). In 1890 he married Bertha D’Oench.

Throughout his life Charles served as pastor at several different churches including in Greene, Iowa, Belmar, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Chicago where he earned \$4,000 a year, equivalent to about \$105,000 today. In the late 1890s Charles left the church and joined the U.S. Army around the time of the Spanish-American War. Wissner did not see much action during the war and was only briefly stationed in Puerto Rico. He left the Army in 1902 and returned to Fredericksburg and founded the Wissner School of Business and Mathematics, where he taught night classes for students who worked during the day. In 1904 he and Bertha were divorced and in 1906 he married Bettie Flippo, the sister of his father's second wife Nannie. He taught at the Wissner school up until his death in 1919. His obituary, published January 16, 1919, states that Charles "filled a position in the community which will be hard to fill, many young men and women owing their success in the business world to the training they received at his school" (*Daily Star*).

Census records from 1920 and 1930 show that Nannie and Bettie Flippo, the widows of Henry and Charles, lived together in Fredericksburg for the rest of their lives. Charles' sisters Christina and Henrietta were also well educated. Both sisters also attended Leipzig University and went on to become teachers. Christina taught in several different schools in Arkansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina as well as at Columbia University. Henrietta taught French, German, and music at the Fredericksburg Collegiate Institute for Boys and Girls. She also taught music at Piece

Institute in Raleigh, North Carolina. Henry Wissner is buried in Fredericksburg Confederate Cemetery with his first wife and Charles is buried in Fredericksburg National Cemetery. Charles was a member of the Woodsmen of the World, Live Oak Camp (a fraternal organization) and was given a large, obelisk monument by the organization.

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Schedule 1. Inhabitants in Fredericksburg, in the County of Spotsylvania, State of Virginia,
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