

Christmans and Krattigers of Denison, Texas

Thanks to Freddy Lessly for sharing his family's story with us. In August 2010 and July 2011, he wrote:

"The Christman or Christmann Family of Denison, Texas"

Fredrick Christman was head of the Christman clan, who came over here from a village just outside Odessa, Russia. I haven't a clue as to who Fredrick Christman's parents were; however, I am sure they were left buried in Russia. It would be a great trip to Russia to try and locate their graves outside of Odessa.

To my knowledge, my great-grandparents always lived in the 600 block of West Walker Street in Denison and never lived in the home of Constantine "Mack" Christman at 931 West Woodard Street. Fredrick's sons and daughters are responsible for spreading the Christman family over Pottsboro and Denison. As far as I know, that is as far as we go back in the USA.

My grandparents were Constantine "Mack" Christman (1874–August 4, 1925) and his wife, Anna or Annie Christman (1877– July 25, 1924). They were Germans who immigrated to Odessa, Russia, and then to the United States. Mack was only seven when he arrived in this country (in 1881; the date conflicts with records). He and Annie were around the same age, and their parents were on the same boat coming over, as they were from the same village outside Odessa, Russia.

This was in the day when immigrants tried to "Americanize" themselves, so my grandfather called himself "Mack." I guess you can't get much more American than that name. His obituary reads "Mack Christman."

Christine Neu was my grandfather's sister. She was either his half-sister or his step-sister. She married John Krattiger and had several children. One of her sons, Albert, my grandfather's nephew, lived next door to 931 W. Woodard—at 927, I believe. That house still stands also.

THE HOME STEAM BAKERY

Mack's family members were all bakers, and he opened the "Home Steam Bakery" at his home, which early on was located at 928 West Woodard Street. None of his signage said "West" Woodard, though, since there likely was no 928 "East" Woodard. From what I can understand, they first baked behind their home in an

outside oven.



I have a photo of an unidentified man sitting in a horse-drawn "Home Steam Bakery" delivery wagon, on the property at 928 Woodard. The delivery wagon has both "Home Steam Bakery" and the name "Christman" on it, along with the phone number (69) and address (928 Woodard).

928 Woodard stayed in the family for a long time, as in 1946 I was brought home from the hospital to 928 Woodard. That property formerly had been the home of Albert Krattiger's wife's parents, the Amours (sp). Albert and Gertrude Krattiger became the parents of John T. Krattiger, dean of students at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. He held this position for many years before his retirement. [For more info on the Krattigers and their bakery connections, see *IMAGES OF AMERICA: DENISON*, by Donna Hord Hunt and Mavis Anne Bryant (2011, Arcadia Publishing), page 76.]

Next door was a big two-story house (torn down by American Bank around 2005) that belonged to the Bengels and later to the Jenkins family, the photographers who had the Jenkins Studio. That would have been 926, I guess.

Later, my grandparents, Mack and Annie, bought the building at 610–612 West Main Street and moved the bakery. The bakery played a vital part in Denison's history, back when you couldn't run to the grocery store and buy a loaf of ready-sliced bread. Mack and Annie made quite a bit of money there. When Mack developed heart trouble at a fairly early age, they sold the bakery to National Baking Company.



One 8x10 glossy photo is of Home Steam Bakery, located at 610–612 West Main Street, around 1915. The bakery is seen from the street and has Constantine "Mack" Christman and each of his employees lined up in front of the building, showing his entire fleet of delivery vehicles. In later years the 610 side of this building housed the Yellow Jacket Cafe and Morrison's Barber Shop.

My grandfather's bakery looks like the building does today, except it had an awning. You can still see the star-shaped brackets that held my grandfather's awning up. The current owner wondered what those brackets were for. The awning and the building all had "Home Steam Bakery" on them, as signage was very important back then.

THE DEATHS OF MACK AND ANNIE CHRISTMAN

In 1915, Mack and Annie built one of the finest homes in Denison, at 931 West

Woodard Street. This was across the street from the first Home Steam Bakery location.

My mother [Helen A. Christman Lessly, 1916–2000] was born in the upstairs master bedroom of that house at 931 West Woodard. My grandfather Constantine (Mack) died in the same room. He died in 1925 of a heart attack at age 52. His funeral was held in the great room of their home.

My grandmother Annie died three years later, in 1928, at the age of 53, from colon cancer. At that time, the three adolescent children inherited a few downtown buildings, but the home was sold.

THE HOUSE AT 931 WEST WOODARD STREET

Mack and Annie's 1915 home at 931 West Woodard Street was one of the first—if not the first—houses in Denison to be equipped with natural gas. The candles that lit the walls were not candles at all. They were natural-gas burning outlets. After Mack and Annie died in 1925 and 1928, the house was sold.

That house has a storied past, as it once fell into the hands of the Harlow family! Olan ("Puss") Harlow was known as the highest-volume bootleg dealer in town. Clyde Driggs and the Harlow family were good friends. According to some old-timers whom I interviewed some years ago, on weekend afternoons people were lined up at the back gate of 931 West Woodard, buying pints and half-pints of bootlegged whiskey! Often the line would stretch down the alley a whole block and out into Scullin Avenue.

I'm told that the Harlows had the basement made into sort of a pool hall, and guys loved to hang out there! Many of them would play hooky from school to get to go over to the Harlows' basement and shoot pool all day! The home has had several other owners through the years, but none with the notoriety of the Harlows!

My uncle, Milton Leslie "Dutch" Christman (1906–1959), bought the house back in 1948, getting the old family home place back in the family. My cousin, Marianne Christman Hughes, had her bedroom in what was built to be my grandmother's sewing room. The half-moon window, seen on the west side of the house, is that room.

I think that house started life as a white house, but it has been green or gray all my life! My uncle had a light green on it that really looked good back when. However, the white likely looks best on that house.

My uncle, in the late 1950s, I think, sold the house and bought a home on Swiss Avenue in Dallas. I think my brother and our cousin, Marianne, as well as I myself, would love to see the house back in the family again.

Somewhere I have a photo of the house with snow on the ground. Remember when people had photos made into postcards? It was very popular back in the twenties!

MY MOTHER HELEN'S STORY

My mother, Helen A. Christman Lessly (1916–2000), the youngest of three children, was born in the upstairs master bedroom of the house at 931 West Woodard; her father (Mack) died in the same room.

Helen was ages 9 and 12 (1925 and 1928) when her parents died, so she was more or less an orphan. Her two brothers were teenagers. The older boy, my Uncle Milton, had to come home from Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, Missouri, when his father died.

When the three children were orphaned, they were 19, 17, and 12. Being so young, they were taken advantage of by older relatives, who ransacked the nice household goods at 931 West Woodard, but the teenage kids got out with items named in the will, plus the downtown buildings and other property. The home was sold and the proceeds split three ways, as no relatives were able to get part of the house.

Mack had owned the building that now houses the Mary Karam Gallery [404 West Main Street]; it had rooms upstairs that handled the overflow from the Denison Hotel (which explains the chute spanning the alley). My mother and her brothers lived for a while up in those rooms, as they had no other place to live at the time.

My mother was 12 years old when her mother died, and, per her parents will, was sent to the IOOF (Odd fellows) Orphanage in Corsicana, Texas. Our family went back to Corsicana for a number of years for the reunion of the kids who grew up in that orphanage.

LIVING WITH THE KOLLERTS

Helen's older brothers saw to it that she was brought back to Denison in time to graduate with the DHS Class of 1935. The Kollerts took my mother in to live with them her senior year of high school. Mrs. Kollert, Anna Christman's good friend, watched over my mother like she was her own daughter.

The Kollerts were also German immigrants and good friends of my grandparents. They owned a grocery market in what later became the old Ballard Biscuit plant; they lived upstairs above the store. The "Kollert Grocery" sign appeared in the last few years, when they were scraping and painting the building. They later added onto that building, and Pillsbury bought Ballard out.

Hugh Kollert, part of that family, worked in the men's department of Madden's Department Store for years. Some of that family had a peach farm across from what is now Wesley Village.

The Ben Hillermans (parents of Jackie Ben Hillerman, who played Higgins on the television show Magnum PI) were also immigrants and good friends of my grandparents, as were the Wenkens family. The Wenkens had two grandchildren around my age, Tommy and Lynette, but I don't know what ever happened to them.

COMMENTS ON FACEBOOK

Lyn Heidel wrote: The Krattigers lived at 1014 Woodward. So they were neighbors as well as business partners. It's an empty lot now.

Larry Sarge McKee wrote: My grandmother was Elizabeth Christman McKee (1890–1983), daughter of Peter, cousin to Constantine. In her memoirs she wrote of coming to live with her grandfather and grandmother on Walker Street and going to school in Denison.

Lavada Cuthbertson wrote: My grandmother, Lou Christman Perdue, was also one who immigrated from Germany. She was six weeks old when they sailed from Odessa, Russia.