

My Ancestor – Pvt. Frederick Ferdinand Sievert/Sewart

Frederick Ferdinand Sievert/Sewart was born May 25, 1845 in a small village known at that time as Suckow an der Ihna [on the river Ihna]. This village was part of the Pommern Province in the Kingdom of Prussia.

Twenty-five years later, Prussia became the driving force behind the unification of its sister States into the creation of Germany. After WWII, the village of Suckow was absorbed into Poland and its name changed to Żukowo.

Frederick was the third of four children born to August Ferdinand Sievert and Auguste Wilhelmine Holzhüter. From baptism records, we know Frederick's father worked as a 'Tischler Joiner', a carpenter specializing in cutting wood as fitting joints for windows, furniture, and doors.

Frederick's three siblings were August Friedrich Ferdinand Sievert (1842-1842), Edward Hermann Sievert/Sewart (1844 - 1922), and Justine Wilhelmina "Minnie" (Sievert/Sewart) Krohn (1847 - 1926).

Unfortunately, Frederick's father suffered from Zurückgetretene Gicht (Arthritis/gout). Another old term for this disease is Arthritis Retrograde. Sadly, when Frederick was only one year old, his father passed away at age 30 from complications associated with that disease.

After the untimely death of her husband, Frederick's mother could only offer housework or laundry services to other families as a means to support her children. Consequently, Frederick and his brother often went cold and hungry.

Auguste Wilhelmine Holzhüter (1821-1893), mother of Frederick Ferdinand Sewart

Frederick's granddaughter, Wilma (Griffin) Logan, was very fond of her grandfather and related the following story he often told her about his boyhood.



One day, Frederick had no food the entire day and went to bed hungry. The next morning, he walked to school without a lunch pail and began praying quietly asking God for food. He noticed a boy walking a short distance ahead of him.

As he prayed, Frederick saw the boy ahead of him stop, open his lunch bucket, take out a sandwich and remark, "I don't like this kind of sandwich." When Frederick reached the spot where the other boy had paused and complained, he noticed the unwanted sandwich had been placed on a fence post.

Wilma related that her grandfather, to his dying day, gave God credit for inspiring that boy to place the sandwich on the fence post. She said she found it easy for her to understand why her grandfather could never bear to see a human or animal hungry. He fed every person or beast that ever stopped at his home in Kansas.

In November 1850, at age 29, Frederick's mother married her second husband, Christian Wohlfeil. From this new union, Frederick gained three half-siblings: Frederika Louisa Wohlfeil, Ernestina K. (Wohlfeil) Durant, and Mary Amelia "Emily" (Wohlfeil) Speer.



Christian and Auguste Wilhelmine Wohlfeil - mother and step-father of Frederick Ferdinand Sewart

A growing discontent in the German Confederation eventually transformed into a full-blown revolution by 1848. In addition, Prussia went to war with Denmark. In the decade from 1845 to 1855, more than a million Germans fled to the United States to escape the political unrest caused by riots, rebellion, and war. The Sewart/Wohlfeil family would soon join the exodus.

In 1860, Frederick was fifteen years old when his family emigrated from Prussia to the United States. They departed Hamburg on the immigrant sailing ship, *Sir Robert Peel*. Emigrant passengers on such sea journeys faced many dangers and never knew exactly how long the voyage would take. Not only was the north Atlantic Ocean an unforgiving place, but passengers had to contend with dangers associated with the ship itself.

When ship owners discovered that transporting emigrants was profitable, they often built a flimsy, temporary floor between the main deck and the cargo hold. It was called the 'steerage' deck. The flooring of the steerage deck was often set so far down in the hold that bilge water would seep up through the planking. Rats would be seen scurrying about.

Ventilation and light came only from the hatches when they were opened. The only other lighting in the steerage compartment was the dim glow from a few lamps hung along the sides. Privacy on a crowded steerage deck was minimal at best, especially for a family with six children.



Crowded Immigrant Steerage Deck

The length of a sailing ship voyage between Hamburg and New York depended on wind conditions and the weather. The average crossing took 43 days, and sometimes took up to 63 days. My ancestors' voyage started in late March and they arrived at New York on May 12, 1860. A review of the ship manifest indicates the Wohlfeil family was headed for Canada, but Frederick's obituary indicates he lived in New York for 2 years.

Family church baptism records indicate Frederick's father's surname was, "Sievert." However, various U.S. historical records identify his family name as, "Sewart." It is unclear if this change was the result of a misspelling, an anglicization of his last name, or a personal choice.

In 1862, as the Civil War raged, Frederick Sewart and his family migrated westward to Illinois and settled in the farming community of West Township in Effingham County. Historical reports indicate many immigrants to Illinois in those days did so as tenant farmers hoping to save enough money over time to eventually buy their own farmland.

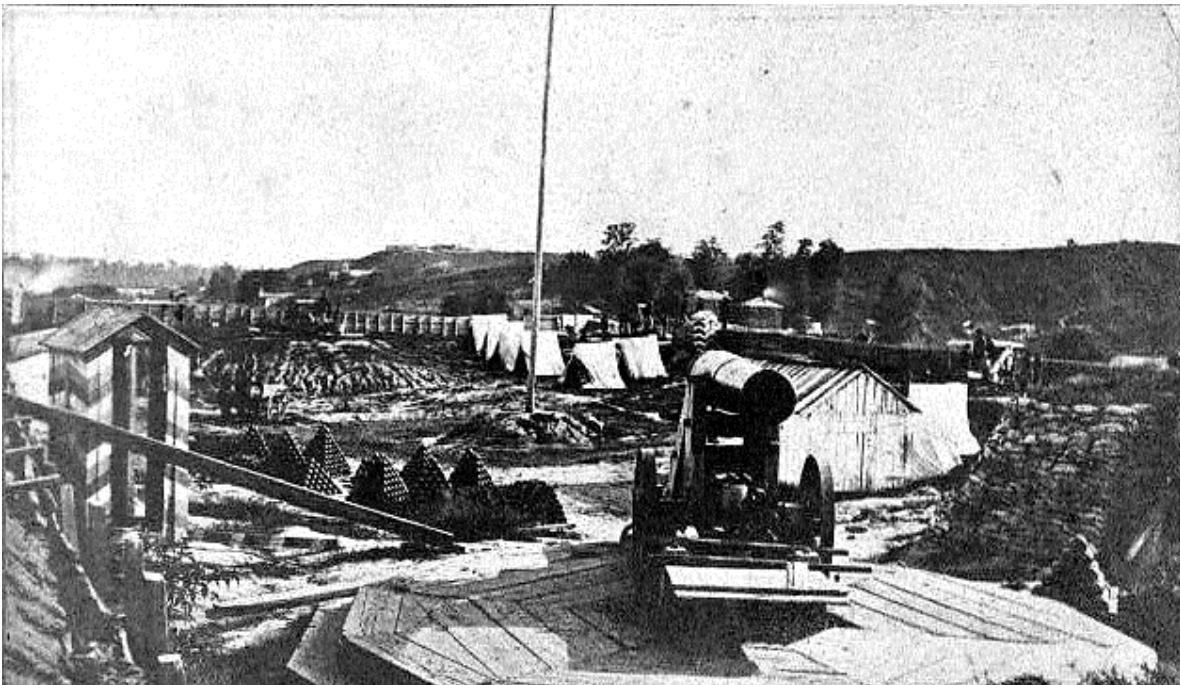
Active recruiting efforts by the Union Army in Illinois was common at the time. The pay and bonus incentives offered by the Army attracted young men from the farm communities. According to a contemporary poster, new recruits were offered a bonus, or 'bounty', of \$300 - plus a salary of \$18 per month. When adjusted for inflation, the \$300 'bounty' translates to \$7,241.12 in 2023 dollars. Many recruits joined up believing the Army pay to be their ticket to faster land ownership.

By 1864, one option for volunteers was enlistment in short-term regiments known as, "Hundred Days Men." Such regiments were lightly trained and designed to serve as guards, laborers, and rear echelon soldiers, so that veteran combat units could be reallocated to the battlefield.

In May 1864, Frederick Sewart was 18 years old when he enlisted in the Union Army for a 100-day term of service. He and his 19-year-old brother, Edward Sewart, enlisted at Mattoon, Illinois. Both were assigned to *Co. K, 143rd Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry*.

The *143rd Illinois* mustered on June 11, 1864 and immediately marched to Memphis, Tennessee. They arrived on June 16 and were assigned to the *4th Brigade, District of Memphis*. Union forces had taken control of the town during the June 1862 *Battle of Memphis*. For the next forty days, Frederick's regiment supported Union objectives for maintaining order in the town, guarding federal assets such as lines of transportation and supplies, managing Confederate POWs, and ensuring continued control of the Mississippi River.

Meanwhile, seventy miles to the south, Federal forces also occupied Helena in Phillips County, Arkansas. Fort Curtis was located at Helena on the banks of the Mississippi River. The fort was used as a base during the successful campaign to lay siege to Little Rock.



Fort Curtis – a defensive position used by the Union Army to defend Helena, Arkansas

In late July 1864, one thousand Confederate cavalymen, under the command of Brig. General Joseph Shelby, were dispatched to raid the plantations in Phillips County which were being operated under the auspices of the U.S. government.

On July 25, Brig. Gen. Napoleon Buford, the Union commander at Helena, sent out a reconnaissance of *US Colored Troops (USCT)* to locate and hinder the operations of the approaching Rebel horsemen. The *USCT* soon found themselves several miles outside the security and relative safety of the Union garrison at Helena. The Confederate cavalry was a serious threat to the Phillips county countryside – and to the isolated federal troopers.

On July 26, 1864, the *USCT* became surrounded by the Confederate forces and the battle of *Big Creek at Wallace's Ferry* commenced. The fighting lasted for five hours before a Union cavalry unit finally arrived and opened a gap to allow the *USCT* to escape back to Helena.

The next day, the *143rd Illinois* was also ordered to Helena. They arrived the following day and were assigned garrison duty.

Helena was a miserable place at the time. It was still recovering from April flooding and became seriously overcrowded with federal troops. The town suffered from housing shortages and poor health and sanitation facilities. Conditions during July and August 1864 were such that soldiers had to endure 93°F temperatures with high humidity levels. Such conditions contributed to soldiers having to contend with illnesses such as pneumonia, typhoid, diarrhea/dysentery, and malaria. Union soldiers occupying the town dubbed it, "Hell in Arkansas."

It was into this environment that Pvt. Frederick Sewart arrived and performed his military duties. His pension application paperwork indicates that while in the line of duty, he contracted rheumatism in his arms and hips due to exposure.

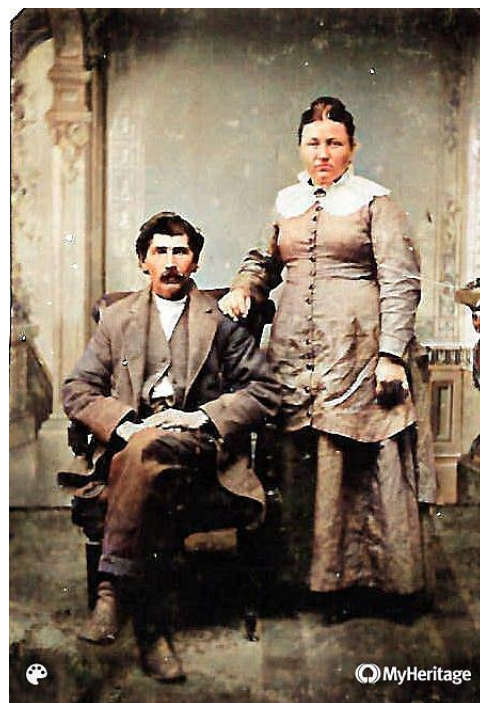
On September 10, 1864, the *143rd Illinois* began its return to Mattoon, Illinois. By the time they mustered-out on September 26th, they had sustained 55 casualties - all due to disease. Many soldiers who returned home would subsequently file claims for Invalid Pensions, including Pvt. Frederick Sewart.

For the next 7 years, Frederick worked as a laborer on his family farm in West Township, Effingham County, Illinois. Sometime during this period he met and fell in love with a farmer's daughter from Avena Township in adjacent Fayette County.

On July 30, 1871, Frederick Sewart and Sarah Ann Cochran were married in St. Elmo, Illinois. Shortly after their marriage, the couple moved to Missouri where they farmed near Bethany, in Harrison County. They lived there for about seven years and added three children to their family: Catherine Elmina (1872), Ala Edward (1876), and Louis Elmer (1877).

**Frederick Sewart and his wife,
Sarah Ann (Cochran) Sewart**

In March 1879, Frederick and Sarah Sewart moved again - this time further west to Hollis, Cloud County, Kansas. A fourth child was added to the family shortly thereafter, Maude Beatrice Sewart (1879).





Children of Pvt. Frederick Sewart and his wife, Sarah Ann (Cochran) Sewart

L-R: Catherine Elmina (Sewart) Griffin (1872 - 1953), Maude Beatrice (Sewart) Cook (1879 - 1965), Louis Elmer Sewart (1877 - 1949), and Ala Edward Sewart (1876 - 1923)

Frederick continued laboring as a farmer in Hollis. A Cloud County Warranty Deed indicates that on November 14, 1881, Frederick purchased 80 acres of land in Lawrence Township for \$440. An 1885 Atlas of the township shows Frederick had acquired an additional 80 acres that were adjacent to his farmland – giving him a total of 160 acres.

By 1882, Frederick's sister, Minnie (Krohn), his brother Edward, his half-sister Emily (Speer), his half-sister Lina (Durant), and both his mother Auguste and step-father Christian had also moved to Lawrence Township, Cloud County, Kansas. They remained a close-knit family for the rest of their lives.

In her written account, Frederick's granddaughter characterized him as a good Christian man who was very generous to his Church. Having lived his early boyhood years in Prussia, Frederick's exposure to Christianity was in the Lutheran tradition. His obituary indicates he experienced being Confirmed by the Lutheran church in his early teens and that at about age 22, he had a conversion experience where his faith in Christ became very personal and meaningful for him.

Frederick and his wife were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Hollis, Kansas. Cloud County historical land documents indicate Frederick donated an acre of farmland to the church (technically he sold the land to the church for \$1.00). A church building was constructed on the donated acre which was used for several years as a place of worship.

Years later, when the parishioners wanted to move the church building into the village of Hollis, Frederick generously purchased his land back from the church at the current fair market value. Frederick and his wife later became members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and remained in good standing until their deaths.

Frederick farmed his land in Hollis until he retired in 1909. He then moved with his wife, Sarah, to Miltonvale, Kansas. They lived in a very modest home at the corner of South George St. and Duckworth Ave., which was next door to their daughter, Catherine Griffin, and family.



Frederick Ferdinand Sewart and his family



Sewart family on the front porch of their farmhouse.

Frederick's obituary describes him as a loved man who was a kind and thoughtful husband and an affectionate father who, "exhibited an earnest effort to promote the work of God and so long as physically able he labored faithfully and unceasingly in the Lord's service."



It goes on to state that, towards the end of his life, Frederick expressed himself as prepared to go by remarking, "I wish God would take me home." On October 20, 1913, Frederick passed away at age 68 in Miltonvale of complications associated with a cerebral hemorrhage and paralysis. He is buried in Hollis Cemetery.

*... biographical sketch by 2nd great-grandson,
John C. Vander Meulen, June 2020*

