

Lina Jäggi and Eugen Traugott Stöckli



by James L. Crawford
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Stöckli Ancestors in Switzerland

Hans Ulrich Stöckli (1763-1835)
 + **Anna Zimmerly** (1765-1820)
 |— Hans Ulrich Stöckli (1788-????)
 |— Anna Maria Stöckli (1791-????)
 | + Johannes Dätwyler (1790-????)
 |— Susanna Stöckli (1794-????)
 |— Hans Jakob Stöckli (1797-????)
 |— Elisabeth Stöckli (1799-????)
 | + Jakob Schenk (????-????)
 |— Verena Stöckli (1802-????)
 | + Caspar Stadel (????-????)
 |— **Johannes Kehrner Stöckli** (1809-1848)
 | + **Elisabeth Braun** (1814-1894)
 | |— **Freidrich Emil Stöckli** (1841-1897)
 | | + Elise Wullschleger (1843-1872)
 | | |— **Ida Stöckli** (1870-1950)
 | | |— Rudolf Emil Traugott Stöckli (1872-1872)
 | | + **Maria Speck** (1841-1897)
 | | |— **Marie Adele Stöckli** (1874-1943)
 | | |— Sophie Hulda Stöckli (1876-1882)
 | | |— **Eugen Traugott Stöckli** (1877-1946)
 | | + **Lina Jäggi** (1877-1948)
 | |— Maria Alina Stöckli (1843-????)
 | | + Jakob Haberstich (????-????)
 | |— Elisabeth Theresia Stöckli (1843-????)
 | | + Christopher Habagger (????-????)

[Yellow rows are people in photographs below.]

The first Stöckli that we know about was **Hans Ulrich Stöckli**, son of Ulrich Stöckli. His grandson was **Friedrich Emil Stöckli**, a school teacher who taught over 30 years in his home town of Rothrist, in the canton of Aargau, Switzerland. Emil's first wife, Elise Wullschleger, died during childbirth of their second child. The infant only lived a few months, so the only child of Elise who lived into adulthood was Ida, born in 1870. Emil then married **Maria Speck** from Oberkulm, and they had three children, Adele, Hulda, and Eugen. Hulda only lived five years before she died. We do not know how Emil and Marie met, or any other facts about

their life other than that they worshiped in the church in Rothrist, which still has a stained glass window with the Stockli name on it. Emil had two sisters, from which Eugen had cousins named Haberstich who lived in Suhr, 5 miles north of Oberkulm, and a cousin named Amman who lived in Basel.



Ida Stöckli in 1933 about 27, and probably took over the role of caring for her siblings. In 1891 Ida started teaching at the girls' school which she had attended for 9 years. She retired 43 years later in 1934, having studied and worked in the same school building for over 50 years. Ida built a house in Rothrist where she lived for over 40 years, before spending her last year in a nursing home in Zofingen. The house still exists on Glandstrasse.



Ida Stöckli's house in 1933 and in 2012

The writing on the wood trim below the roof says:

Daheim

*mit gottes hilf und macht -
zur notdurft nicht zur pracht -
haben mir dies haus gemacht.A.D. 1908*

Home

*with the help and power of God -
for necessity not for beauty -
I have made this house.A.D. 1908*



Adele Stöckli in 1920

Eugen's other sister, **Adele Stöckli**, was born March 2, 1874. We do not know anything about her life in Switzerland. She probably went to the same school as her older sister Ida, but we do not know what she did in the 1890s after her schooling. In November, 1901 she immigrated to the U.S. along with her brother Eugen, and she went to work as a lady's maid for Mrs. Caroline Ryerson in Chicago. Mrs. Ryerson's husband, Martin A. Ryerson, inherited a fortune from his lumber baron father and at one time was the richest young person in Chicago. He was a founding trustee of the University of Chicago and served as the President of the Board of Trustees for over 30 years. He was also a founder of the Art Institute of Chicago. Adele worked for them over 30 years, accompanying the Ryersons on their yearly trips to Europe and Asia, and to their vacation home on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Starting in 1934 Adele had medical problems and lived the rest of her life in Kansas, either at hospitals or with her brother in Garden City. She died in 1943, with her ashes put in the Stoeckly plot in Valley View Cemetery.



Eugen Stöckli in 1901

Eugen Stöckli went to grade school in Rothrist, and high school in the town of Aarburg, which is the adjacent town to the northeast. He graduated high school in 1893, and went to college at the Technical Institute in Winterthur, the largest technology school in Switzerland. After obtaining a degree in mechanical engineering, he took some advanced work at Munich, Germany. He worked for three years for "Dampfmaschinen System Frikart" at Akademiestrasse 17, Munchen.

He started writing postcards to his childhood sweetheart, **Lina Jäggi**, which she kept in an album. Unfortunately we do not have any of the letters she wrote in reply, nor the letters he mentioned writing in between cards. He often

mentioned taking train excursions or riding his bicycle, such as a 5 hour ride to Freising. After three years with the company, Eugen left to follow some of his classmates to America. Mr. Frikart gave him a letter of recommendation (original in German):

15 October 1901

Testimonial

I gladly confirm hereby that Mr. Eugen Stoeckli was employed from November 1, 1898 until today as Engineer and Construction Designer in my office for the manufacturing of steam engines and that the work was carried out to my complete satisfaction and with great diligence, so that I can recommend him to everyone.

His departure was by choice.

M. R. Frikert



First postcard - Nov 6, 1898, from Munich

Speck Ancestors in Switzerland

Samuel Speck (1809-1894)

+ **Anna Maria Mourer** (1815-1872)

├ Anna Maria Speck (1839-1839)

├ **Maria Speck** (1841-1889ca)

├ + **Friedrich Emil Stöckli** (????-1990ca)

├ Maria Anna Speck (1844-1917)

├ Johannes Speck (1846-1865)

├ Anna Speck (????-1867)

├ Rudolf Speck (1850-1906)

+ Amalie Mahrer (1850-1914)

├ Reinhold Speck (1882-1950)

+ Lydia Baumann (1879-1906)

├ Reinhold Speck (1907-1985)

├ Lydia Speck (1908-2005)

├ Fritz Speck (1910-1917)

├ Willy Speck (1912-1914)

├ Hans Speck (1915-????)

├ Lydia Speck (1887-????)

[highlighted people are in photographs below]

The Speck family has its roots in the town of Oberkulm, along the Wyna river in the canton of Aargau, about 12 miles east of Rothrist. The first Specks came to Oberkulm by 1567 when they first appeared in the church records. The first known direct ancestors were Hannes Speck, who died in 1703, and his wife Maria Stänz of Zetzwil, who died in 1708. The last of our Speck ancestors, **Maria (Speck) Stöckli**, was 8 generations later.

In 2012 I was fortunate to visit Oberkulm and the neighboring town of Reinach. In Reinach I met the widowed wife of Kurt Speck, my mother's 3rd cousin, who showed me a hand-drawn Speck family tree with over 400 Speck family members born between 1708 and 1948. Between this scroll and the official canton family register books, I learned that Maria had 3 sisters and 2 brothers, only two of which were still alive when she married Friedrich Emil Stoeckli. Her brother Rudolf lived in a large Swiss home-with-connecting-barn in Reinach. Eugen told my mother, Ruth, that he (Eugen) had spent many a pleasant time visiting his

aunt in that house. The aunt could have been either Maria Anna Speck, who never married, or Amalie (Mahrer) Speck, the wife of his uncle Rudolf. The house was probably where Maria Speck was born and grew up. The house still exists on Eichenstrasse next to open fields and forest, and at least 3 Speck households still live within 100 yards of the house. Ruth stayed with her cousins in the house in 1933 (see Ruth's *1932-4 Swiss Diary*).



Left: Speck Family Tree – Right: blowup showing Maria Speck / Stöckli



1913: The Reinhold Speck family in front of their house on the baptism of Willy Speck. Reinhold is on the left edge, while his wife Lydia (Baumann) Speck is holding the baby. Their 4 children are in front of them. Reinhold's only sibling, Lydia Speck, is probably behind him. The other people were probably Baumann relatives.



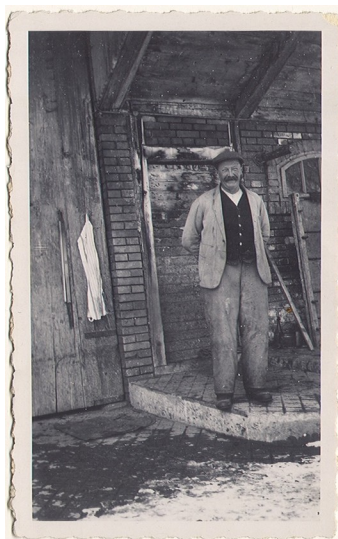
1933: The Reinhold Speck family in front of their house. Left-to-right father Reinhold, son Reinhold, Hans, and mother Lydia.



1933: Ruth in front of the Speck house on Reinhold Speck's horse, and Reinhold with his horse.



The Speck house in 1933



The Speck house in 2012 showing the same windows, doors, fence, and brickwork. On the right is father Reinhold

Jäggi Ancestors in Switzerland

Hans Jakob Jäggi (1744-????)

+ **Anna Wüst** (1746-????)

- ├ Samuel Jäggi (1773-????)
- ├ Hans Jakob Jäggi (1774-????)
- ├ Abraham Jäggi (1776-1843)
- └ **Johannes Jäggi** (1782-????)

+ **Anna Stambach** (1782-1804)

- ├ Elisabeth Jäggi (1805-????)
- └ **Johannes Jäggi** (1807-1892)

+ **Anna Matter** (1809-1894)

└ Johann Jacob Jäggi (1838-1910)

+ Louise Affenhausser (1839-1911)

- ├ Ida Jäggi (1870-????)
- ├ Johannes Jäggi (1871-1936)
- ├ Hermann Friedrich Jäggi (1873-1943)

└ **Rudolf Friedrich Jäggi** (1840-1921)

+ **Maria Theresia Bühler** (1835-1923)

├ Emma Jäggi (1869-1943)

+ Rudolf Blum (????-????)

├ Emil Jäggi (1871-1941)

+ Anna Howald (1871-1905)

├ Lydia Clara Jaeggy (1895-1976)

├ Hugo Otto Jaeggy (1898-1986)

├ Margaretha Martha Jaeggy (1900-1968)

├ Walter Paul Jaeggy (1901-1978)

├ Eugene Willi Jaeggy (1903-1903)

├ Hedwig Jaeggy (1905-1987)

+ Emma Knöpfel (1876-1954)

├ Otto Ernst Jaeggy (1906-2005)

├ Freder (Fritz Willi) Jaeggy (1909-1995)

├ Lina (Leny) Jaeggy (1911-1998)

└ **Lina Jäggi** (1877-1948)

+ **Eugen Traugott Stöckli** (1877-1946)

└ Emil Jäggi (1849-1873)

+ Amalie Staub (1848-1995)

└ Rudolf Jäggi (1812-1881)

[Yellow rows are people in photographs below;
the old spelling “Jäggi” changed to the modern
spelling “Jaeggy” in the 6th generation.]

The first Jäggi ancestors that we know about in Rothrist were **Hans Jakob Jäggi** and his wife **Anna Wust**, who were born in 1744 and 1746 respectively. However we don't know anything of the lives of the ancestors until 3 generations later. **Rudolf Friedrich Jäggi**, born in 1840, kept a small farm next to his saddlery business in the part of Rothrist called Fleckenhausen. Rudolf traveled a lot to Frankfurt am Main to buy leather and sell his work. He married **Theresia Bühler**, from Rönnhaltten, Rothrist. One of the stories told about him was that he became fond of schnapps. However one day he realized it was ruining his life, so he loaded his schnapps barrel onto a handcart and pushed it to the nearby Wigger river, where he dumped the schnapps. Rudolf and Theresia had three children: Emma, Emil, and Lina. Rudolf also had an older brother **Johann Jacob Jäggi**.



1890ca: The family of Johann Jacob Jäggi:
children Hans, Ida & Herman, and wife Louise



Jäggi house where Emma, Emil, and Lina grew up



1932: Rudolf Blum,
Ruth Stoeckly, & Emma Jäggi

Emma Jäggi married Rudolf Blum and lived in Zofingen. They had no children, but when Emma's sister-in-law died from childbirth, Emma took the baby Hedy and raised her as her own child. When Emma's parents died, Hugo handled the estate and gave Emma her share of the inheritance in her own name.

Her husband Rudolf Blum was upset he could not touch the money, and forbade Hugo to ever come in his house. When Emma died, he refused to pay funeral expenses and forced Hedy to pay out of the inheritance money.

Emil Jäggi, the only son in the family, was a bit of a rascal in school; once he put glue on the bench of a schoolmate who proceeded to sit down but could not then stand up. Emil was punished by having to kneel four hours by the teacher's desk. Another time he knew he would be punished for something, and put several notebooks in his trousers to protect against the

thrashing he got. As a child Emil acquired a serious leg disease and had to have both legs amputated at the knees. The operation did not go well, and he needed to be transferred by horse and carriage to Bern, where he eventually recovered.

Emil took over from his father the farm, the saddlery business, and the role as the head of the Jäggi family. To supplement his income he built three ponds on his land and raised trout. In 1910 he started a wicker and cane furniture factory in a barn on the Hofmatt in Aarburg. A year later he moved the factory to a new building next to one of the train tracks. He traveled to Poland, Germany and France to obtain the willow supplies he needed. When at home, he traveled daily to the factory on his “Zehnder motorbike”. His company flourished making Easter baskets, potato baskets, cherry baskets, laundry baskets, laundry hampers, meat baskets, Bülacher bottles, doll wagons and handcarts, wastepaper baskets, etc. His son Hugo took over the business and lived in the residence adjacent to the factory.



Emil Jäggi



1906: Hugo, Emma Knöpfel, Lydia, Walter, Emil Jäggi, Margaretha



Jäggi-Knöpfel family about 1916:
 Fredder, Margaretha, Emil, Walter, Lydia, Otto, Emma, Lina, Hugo



Extended Jäggi family around 1940
 back: Hugo & Frieda, Hedy, Lina, Lydia, Margaretha, Lisa & Walter
 middle: Rudolf Blum, Emma, Emma Knöpfel, Emil
 front: Walter, Dora, Hanna, Rita, Ester, Gertrud, Lotty

Emil had a large family: nine children and 15 grandchildren. His first wife, **Anna Howald**, died when Hedy was born in 1905. Hedy was raised by her aunt Emma, while the other four children were raised by Emil's second wife, **Emma Knöpfel**, who was the best friend of Lina Jäggi. Emil and Emma Knöpfel had an additional three children. Of Emil's nine children, **Eugene Willi Jaeggy** only lived 2 months; **Lina Jaeggy** and **Margaretha Jaeggy**



Anna Howald

never married, and **Hedy Jaeggy** married late in life and had no children. The oldest daughter, **Lydia Jaeggy**, married Hans Aeberhard and had four children. The oldest son, **Hugo Jaeggy** took over the wicker factory and lived in Aarburg with his two children Dora and Lotti. The next son, **Walter Jaeggy** took over the farm and had six children. **Otto Jaeggy** moved to Schaffhausen and had one daughter, **Barbara Jaeggy**. The youngest son **Freder Jaeggy** moved to Argentina and had two children. **Emil** lived in a house adjacent to his parents' house in Fleckenhausen, and eventually his son Walter lived in a third house across the street. In 1976 a disgruntled employee burned two of the houses down, but Emil's house still stands on Rubenstrasse.



Lina Jäggi

Emil's younger sister, **Lina Jäggi**, grew up in the family home in Rothrist before studying at the Neue Mädchenschule (New Girls School) in Bern, where she graduated Mar 28, 1895. She taught kindergarten in St. Gaul. Lina probably met **Eugen Stöckli** in grade school, as they were only eight months apart and the population of Rothrist was only about 2500. Or they could have met at the church, which has a stained glass window for each family.

When Eugen went to work in Munich, Germany, in 1898 he wrote about 200 postcards to Lina over the next five years, which she saved in an album. For the first year his cards were usually sent a week apart and ended with "Friendly greetings...". However after sending a card on October 15, 1899, he sent his next card the following day. He thanked her for a letter, package, and card (his

birthday was the 16th), and ended with “Best greetings and kisses...” By spring of 1900 he not only included kisses but also signed them “your Julius”, “your Fedelio”, “your Romeo”, etc.

Lina waited patiently while Eugen spent three years in Munich and three years in the United States before they were married in the church in Rothrist on January 19, 1905. After the ceremony led by Pastor R. Grob, they took a sleigh ride to Langenthal and back through the Bohnwald. The guests at the wedding were mainly relatives: Eugene's sister Ida, his Uncle Speck, Aunt Haberstich, and cousin Frieda Haberstich; Lina's father and mother, sister Emma and brother Emil, uncle and aunt Zimmerli, and cousin Ida Jäggi; and four friends: Emma Knöpfel, Paul Weber, Lydia Weber, and Ernst Schmitter



Nov, 1903 - Detroit



Painting of the Rothrist Church (courtesy of Barbara Satkowski). This church has stained-glass windows for Stöckli and for Jäggi.

Stöckli Family in America

Eugen Traugott Stöckli took a big step in 1901 when he left his comfortable home in the beautiful country of Switzerland and traveled across the Atlantic to seek his future in America. He joined many other Swiss men who migrated around the turn of the century. He was a big success, and, along with millions of other immigrants, provided the skill and intelligence and hard work that helped make America into a great nation.

When he came to America, Eugen Stöckli became Eugene Stoeckly. While working for the American Construction Supply Co. of New York, he worked up to chief construction engineer and helped construct sugar beet plants in Canada, Michigan,



Factory in Billings, Montana

Wisconsin, Montana and Arizona. This was an exciting time for the sugar beet industry. Over two dozen factories were built between 1900 and 1905, ten of them in Michigan. We can not be sure which plants in Michigan and Wisconsin Eugene worked on. The factory in Canada could have been the one built by the American Construction Co. in 1901-02 in Dresden, Ontario. (The factory, located 40 miles northeast of Detroit, was closed in 1907 due to



Factory in Glendale, Arizona

lack of sugar beets grown by the local farmers.) The factory in Montana was probably the one in Billings, which was built in 1905-06. The factory in Arizona was the one at Glendale, which was finished in 1907.

Eugene's career in the sugar beet industry was on the rise, and he felt it was time to come get his childhood sweet-heart. The new

married couple moved to Chicago, where Eugene's sister Adele worked as a lady's maid for Mrs. Ryerson at the Ryerson mansion, 4851 Drexler Ave. They lived about 10 miles north of Adele, at 1323 Barry Ave. Their plan was to live 2 or 3 years in the U.S. before returning to Switzerland. Their first child, Alice Helen Stoeckly, was born there on January 23, 1906. Tragically, she died one day later. They moved to a new apartment at 4009 Vincennes Ave, just a mile north of Adele, where ten months later their first son, Eugene Emil Stoeckly, was born on November 8, 1907.

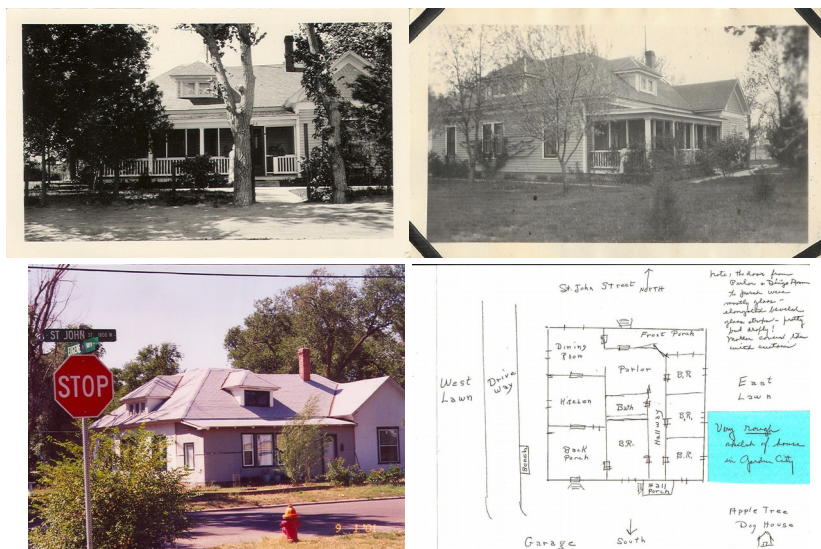


Modern photos of 1323 Barry Ave, 4009 Vincennes Ave, and 4851 Drexel Blvd. In Chicago

Soon after the baby was born, the family moved to Arizona, where Eugene worked on the new factory in Glendale. For Eugene, this was probably just one more factory that he felt comfortable working in. For Lina, it must have been a nightmare. She was pregnant again - the third of three almost continuous pregnancies - but this time, she had an infant to take care of. And now she had to live on the desert, full of wind and sand and heat, the opposite of her lush green homeland with the beautiful white-capped mountains forever in view. In Arizona she wasn't even in a country anymore: Arizona did not become a state until 1912. Their house in Glendale had only canvas on the upper half of the windows, and was very hot. Lina was often alone, and would find Indians staring in the windows at her.

After a little under a year in Glendale, the family moved again, to Garden City, Kansas. Lina was probably glad to be away from the heat and Indians, but at least Arizona had mountains in view; what was a Swiss family doing on the prairie where you could see a flat horizon in all directions? They lived initially on 7th St., where

Margaret was born November 22, 1908. Soon they moved to 1122 St. John St., where they would live for almost 40 years. More children came, but at a much slower rate: Ruth in 1910, Erika in 1915, and Fred in 1921.



1122 St. John St. in the 1930s (top) and 2012 (bottom)
House diagram made by Erika Saltzman from memory

Eugene came to Garden City to take a job as master mechanic with the Garden City Company. The sugar beet factory had been built in 1906, but had some mechanical problems during the first year, and the company decided it needed someone more experienced in the operation of sugar beet factories. Eugene performed his job admirably, and in 1914 became general superintendent and engineer, which position he held 32 years until his death. In 1916 he designed and built a power plant, called the Garden City Irrigation and Power Company, to supply the power for both the factory and the rural irrigation systems. The power plant was so successful that in 1921 the city decided to scrap its power plant and instead buy power from the company.



BEET SUGAR MILLS OF U. S. SUGAR CO., GARDEN CITY, KAN.

In addition to becoming indispensable in the sugar factory and power plant, Eugene became active in the community in a variety of ways. Starting in 1928 he was elected a member of the Garden City board of education and at times served as its president. He joined the Rotary Club, which became one of his greatest interests. He served as chairman of the Boy Scouts, and as elder in the Presbyterian Church. He also took time to personally give tours of the sugar factory to hundreds of students each year.

In contrast to her husband, Lina had little involvement with the community. She had few friends, being too busy raising her five children and taking care of her gardens. She undoubtedly missed her Swiss friends and family. She learned English by reading a bible and comparing the English text with her German bible, but she always had a thicker accent than Eugene. She probably suffered the most when WWI broke out, and one of the teachers told the family it should stop talking German at home to avoid being accused of German loyalties. Lina's letters show she mastered English ok. We have few letters written in the 1930s, because Ruth spent the last half of the decade living at home.



The Stoeckly children in 1912, 1916, 1918ca, 1922, 1920s, and 1932.

In the 1940s Lina wrote scores of letters to her children. She always talked about her flowers, and in early 1945 she had a greenhouse built to replace the back porch. She owned and rented the house next door and a farm. Her letters were filled with War news - about Fred's enlistment and travels, about the influx of people in Garden City due to the air base built there, about the government taking her potato patch to build temporary housing for the air base, and about the war shortages. Ironically, she complained the most about not having enough suger - all of the suger processed in the factory had to be shipped elsewhere. Lina's weight went from 136 to 118 during the war, which she attributed to the suger rationing.

Ruth's family passed through Garden City in October of 1944 on their way from Poston to Belcourt. Lina always called Sharon by her middle name, Linda. When "Linda" broke her Dad's glasses, Lina thought she was "as bad as a boy to get in all this trouble".



Inside the Garden City home in the early 1930s.

Left photo: Eugene, Lina, Erika, Enos, & Margaret

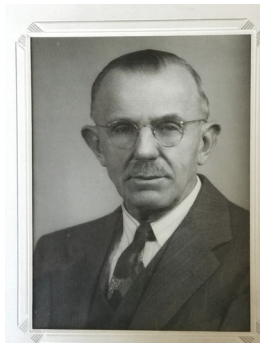
Right photo: Erika, Lina, Eugene, Fred, Eugene, Roberta, Ruth

Eugene traveled some for his work, mostly to Colorado where the owners of the Garden City Company lived or to trade conferences. The family usually took a one week summer vacation in the mountains of Colorado, usually around Colorado Springs, but at least in 1932 they went to Meeker (Ute Creek) where Ruth taught school for two years. Eugene bought vacation property on a lake in Minnesota, which the family owned until 1965. They never built anything on the land, and ended up treating it as speculation. Eugene and Lina traveled to Chicago in 1934 to see Adele, probably because she was not feeling well. The three of them soon ended up in Halstead, Kansas, where Adele had a goiter operation. In July, 1946, Lina and Eugene went by train to Marblehead to visit their son. Eugene bought \$100,000 worth of G.E. equipment for the factory on the trip.

In a letter to his sister Ida in 1945, Eugene said he and Lina wanted to travel to Switzerland one more time after the War ended and travel became easier. He also said he wanted to retire, but that with the labor shortage due to the War he thought he still needed to help out. Lina in a letter said Eugene promised her in 1945 to give up his work soon. In June 1946 Eugene wrote to Ida saying he was trying to get a passport for flying to see Ida (who was sick), but that War regulations still made it hard and plane flight was limited.

Saturday evening, August 31, 1946, Eugene was once again at the electric generating plant, working when Lina wished he would retire. He was there watching Albert Gass make a check of the

power plant switchgear, which had been damaged by lightning. A circuit was accidentally closed, and 3,000 volts of electricity bridged a gap in a blinding flash that burned both men and set their clothes on fire. Another company employee, Bob Calhoun, rushed in to beat out the flames with his bare hands. Eugene had first and second degree burns on his head and front part of his body. He slowly improved in the hospital until Wednesday evening when he suddenly died.



Lina was devastated, and had to rely on her children to pull her through the following months, crying every evening. Her son Eugene came for a week to help with the estate. Eugene and Fred did all of the tax work, with minor help from a lawyer. Margaret and her two sons came to live with Lina from January, 1947 until the summer, while Margaret taught school and Enos traveled to various dam sites. Lina's Swiss niece, Hedy, offered to come live with her, but in a letter to siblings Fred said he was against it because he felt Hedy would never want to return to Switzerland, and then what would they do with Hedy when Lina dies?

Lina and her five children contributed around \$5,000 to the Presbyterian Church to buy a carillon in memory of Eugene. It was dedicated at a concert held February 8, 1948. and consisted of 38 bells spanning three octaves housed in the church tower, the largest carillon in the Midwest. Lina was unable to attend the dedication, however, because on the previous Thanksgiving Day she had suffered a stroke which caused her to fall and become an invalid; she was still a patient at St. Catherine's hospital. She started losing

her memory and could not take care of herself. The family moved her to Erika's home outside St. Louis, where she died September 2, 1948. Once again she was reunited with her beloved Eugene. The carillon she donated to the church rang for her funeral.



Valley View Cemetery, Garden City, KS

Eugene T. Stoeckley's Death

The story of Lina's and Eugene's lives has ended, but I must add a postscript. There is much more to the story of Eugene and Lina's deaths! They died before I was born, so what I was told of their deaths when I was a child was the condensed version, which as I now know was seeped in fantasy (whether my own fantasy made up the missing pieces, or whether my older siblings had fun feeding me a tall tale, I don't know). For 40 years I believed that a big thunderstorm descended upon Garden City, and grandfather Eugene rushed to the factory to make sure everything was all right. Once inside the building, a bolt of lightning struck just as he was holding on to some large switch, and he was electrocuted. I still have the image in my mind of grandfather's hand on a 2-foot-tall switch on the side of a pillar. Then I was told he managed to survive a few days in the hospital, and was on his way to recovery when the nurse left him alone one night and he fell out of bed and died. Suddenly being alone in this world, grandmother Lina then died of a broken heart.

The nurse leaving grandfather alone was reinforced several times later in life by my Mother, who never said much more about the incident other than to say he was recovering, and if the nurse had done her job and stayed with him, he would still be alive. And the broken heart part of the story was confirmed as late as 2000 by Uncle Fred, who used the same words when I asked him how grandmother died. So here I was, over 50 years old, and still thinking that my grandfather was electrocuted by lightning, died because the nurse left the room, and that my grandmother died from a broken heart.

In the past five years, I have found all of the newspaper articles covering both deaths, read dozens of letters written by family members in the months after each death, obtained their death certificates, and talked to Aunt Erika. Finally, to end the myths I lived with so long, I here relate what I think happened when Eugene and Lina died (in much too much detail).

Saturday evening, August 31, 1946, Eugene was once again at the electric generating plant, working when Lina wished he would retire. He was there watching Albert Gass make a routine check of the power plant switchgear. A circuit was accidentally closed, and 3,000 volts of electricity bridged a gap in a blinding flash that burned both men and set their clothes on fire. Another company employee, Bob Calhoun, rushed in to beat out the flames with his bare hands. These are the bare facts printed in the Garden City Daily Telegram. What is left out, and never discussed, is how the circuit was closed. Did one of the three men close the circuit by mistake? Did rust or a loose screw or a broken part cause the accident? Did somebody trip? I would hope that the company made a full inquiry to determine the cause of the accident, but if they did, it was never reported. There is no mention of the cause in any of the family letters, and I assume it was simple human error.

The company whistle sounded, recalling all company employees to the plant. No call was made by the company to the fire department, but some other source sounded an alarm and the fire department responded. The three men were taken immediately to the hospital. Eugene had first and second degree burns on his head and front part of his body. Gass had first degree burns on his face, while Calhoun had painfully burned hands.

Fred and his new bride Louise were in Garden City before going to Boulder for another year of college. Son Eugene was able to fly from Boston and arrived in Garden City on Tuesday. Margaret and Enos were on vacation somewhere in California and could not be reached. They did not hear about the accident until 2 weeks later when they returned home to Parker, Az, on Sat, September 14. Ruth was at home, but instead of calling her Lina sent an airmail letter that Ruth received on Monday. She called immediately and was told not to come yet because Eugene was recovering, and the trip would be too hard for her to make because Jim was in Montana and could not be reached. With two children and five months pregnant, Ruth could not drive the 1000 miles to Garden City without Jim, and the trip would be 2 or 3 days by train via Chicago. Erika and George caught the first train they could Sunday. When they arrived in Garden City, Erika went to the

hospital to see her father. She vividly remembers walking into the room and smelling burned flesh. It overwhelmed her so much that she had to immediately go out to the lobby and even then was in danger of throwing up. Eugene was heavily bandaged: hands, body, and head, and was never really lucid.

The Monday paper stated Stoeckly was improved but still in a very critical condition, and would be for at least three or four more days with hospitalization for several weeks. Gass was considerably improved - the swelling in his face had gone down, and he was expected to be released in four or five days.

On Tuesday the paper reported that Eugene was "doing as well as could be expected and perhaps even a little better." He was said to have spent a restful night. Wednesday his condition was reported as being about the same. The critical point in his recovery was expected to be that day or Thursday, at which point he should show steady improvement. Many people had gone to the hospital to see Eugene, but all were turned away and would not be allowed to see him until he showed considerable improvement.

With Fred, Erika, and Eugene at home, they kept a constant vigil at the hospital during the day. A nurse was hired to stay with him overnight. On Wed., Lina went home at 7:00 P.M. when Fred came to relieve her at the hospital. Fred left at 10:00 when the nurse came. Ten minutes later, the nurse left the room for a minute. When she came back, Eugene was lying on the floor, dead. He had either rolled out of the bed, or fallen when trying to sit or stand up. His head hit a metal table, although the death certificate said the cause of death was "heart failure due to shock due to burns of face, arms, chest & thighs" and did not mention a fall or concussion. Erika recalled later that Eugene was in no condition to walk, and never really aware of what was happening. So she said he would not have tried to get up by himself - it would have been physically impossible (from all the bandages), plus his mind wasn't really working (he was probably taking something like morphine for the pain). Erika has no explanation for how he ended up on the floor. In any case, his death ended his suffering, and prevented a long, painful recovery that would have left him disfigured, perhaps

blind, and unable to lead any meaningful life.

The Thursday paper had a long front page article covering his life and lamenting what his loss meant to the city. Garden City public schools were closed Friday at noon out of respect for his long service on the school board. His funeral took place Friday at 4 p.m. Personal remarks in the paper tell a lot about what the town thought of him. Here are a few of the remarks:

"Despite the fact that Stoeckly was a genius at solving any problem that involved engineering skill, he was always so modest, so gracious--so eager to help his town, his friends!"

"I don't know of a single man who has lived in this community for forty years and who has done as much--meant as much to the community--as Mr. Stoeckly has."

"Mr. Stoeckly knew more about more things than any single man I ever knew."