

# Without the Erie Canal You Wouldn't Be Here

Stories of our Ancestors Who Settled in the Amherst and Tonawanda NY Areas

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Holler, Unger, Demert, Ottney

Compiled by M. Mary Nuwer, daughter of the late Dr. Donald Nuwer the one who did most of the research. The internet supplied the background information on what times were like in the period discussed below. A gift for my nieces and nephews and those who come after.

Spring 2019

### **Introduction:**

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who came before us and the following pages are my attempt to introduce you to a sliver of the recent ancestors responsible for you being here now. Since I cannot verify how the conditions of life in the 1800s specifically affected our ancestors consider this a story of what their lives were probably like blended with historical data from my father's collection.

This monograph of my grandmother Bertha Holler Nuwer and her ancestors who came to this country is dedicated to her. She was the source of unconditional love in my life. To make it more manageable the monograph follows the direct line of relationship yet also touches on some of the siblings of those in direct line. Most of the information and photos are taken from the decades of work of my father, Don Nuwer, and his seeking help from relatives and professional genealogists to put the pieces together. If any readers are descendants of the children of Ma and Pa Holler (Fred and Mary) then most this information would apply to them as well. While names and dates are important for genealogy research my focus is on collecting stories about who our ancestors were and what their lives were like. Since some of the stories are passed down in oral tradition the information may vary from total accuracy because some memories differ from others.

### **Goals:**

To help us understand some of the influences that shape who we are today.

To appreciate what it took for recent ancestors to get us to where we are today.

To honor them even if we never met them. We wouldn't be here without them.

### **Legend:**

Names in blue are for ancestors of Fred 'Pa' Holler and they precede the names in green which are for ancestors of Mary 'Ma' Holler. The color coding makes it important to print this on a good quality color printer or the typing becomes illegible.

The designation of Grandparent, Great Grandparent, Great Great Grandparent and Great Great Great Grandparent apply to the great grandchildren of Fred and Mary Holler whose children were Bertha, Leo, Wilb, Chaunce (Charles), Cliff, Bob, Horace and Edgar (Frederick). Younger generations add additional Greats as appropriate.

**Ancestors being honored here:**

*Great Great Great Grandparents* pages 9-18

John Nicholas "Nick" Haller (Holler) 1801-1875

Katharina Leictnam 1799-1873

Christ Unger ?- 1840

Sophia Unger 1807-1864

Anton Diemert 1799-1866

Catherine Bastian 1791-1865

Anthony Ottney (many variations) 1815-1901

Mary Readling (Reitling) 1821-1907, (Hapsburg connection thru this line)

*Great Great Grandparents* pages 19-28

John D. Holler (Haller) 1842-1921

Emelia (Amelia) Unger 1840-1909

Lorentz Diemert (Demert) 1833-1911

Catherine Ottney (many variations) 1845-1916

*Great Grandparents* pages 29-34

Frederick John 'Pa' Holler (Haller) 1866-1948

Mary 'Ma' Holler 1866-1948, aka Mary Minnie Diemert, Maria Anna Monika Diemert

*Grandparent* pages 35-41

Bertha Amelia Holler Nuwer 1892-1989

## **Emigration from Europe**

The spellings of names change very frequently especially when ancestors landed in America. Not all could even read or write. There are lengthy lists of ancestors names and dates compiled elsewhere. Here I strive with what little information I have to tell some of their stories. There were many wars, plague, famine, cholera in Europe in the period before the stories I jot down. Wars were fought over religion, over the ownership of Alsace Lorraine because the area contained iron, and at an earlier time an uprising of the peasants against the elites of the time, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. No wonder they wanted to leave. By the 1850s most of the German Immigrants were farmers who came for economic reasons or to get away from the political unrest. There were few wealthy people or very poor people who came. It took about 1/3 of a year's income to bring a family over. Or was it the lure of the adventure and land ownership that drew them to America? We'll never know. Maybe both.

The boat trip from Europe took weeks and the conditions were very very bad.

<http://www.understandingyourancestors.com/ia/shipVoyage.aspx>

1831 was when our ancestors first emigrated to this area. Many left Europe because of the unrest there. It was mainly the middle class that emigrated. The rich had enough lands and wealth that there was not the motivation to leave. The poor just did not have the resources to do so. There were businesses in Europe that took the people overland, similar to a taxi service, to get to the ports that they departed from. Travel on the sea was very rough. Accommodations were very sparse, crowded and not private on the ships. Often there was not enough food and water and the conditions were so crowded on the ships that disease spread rapidly and many died from these conditions. Many boats did not even make it to land but were shipwrecked at sea. So we come from a family of survivors.

## **Erie Canal**

In 1825 the Erie Canal between the Hudson River and Lake Erie was completed making travel for immigrants and for their goods a lot faster and cheaper than traveling by carriage. Without the Erie Canal it is unlikely any of us would be here!

The Erie Canal was the vision of DeWitt Clinton, governor of New York, who aspired to become President of the United States. What seemed impossible and folly to others Clinton was able to accomplish with the help of 50,000 Irish immigrants. The Irish immigrants were motivated by high pay, earning 5 times what they would back home, yet it was dangerous work and 1,000 lives were lost. There was no qualified engineer at that time but they figured out what to do along the way and the Erie Canal became the basis of today's civil engineering. The men figured out how to pull up tree roots efficiently and created a cement that would harden under water. Limestone mountains were blown up with gun powder to pave the way for the canal. It took 8 years to dig 300 miles at a cost of seven million dollars and the lives of the lost men.

The digging of the Erie Canal, which ran between the Hudson River and the Great Lakes, was America catching up with the Industrial Revolution. It was the biggest construction project in

4,000 years, connecting the Atlantic to the Midwest. This created vast wealth, fast flow of immigrants into the center of the country and the flow of goods exploded allowing residents to buy what they wanted. Transportation costs decreased by 90 percent. New York became an economic powerhouse earning the name of the Empire State. Fifteen million dollars of goods were moved each year along the canal, allowing villages to flourish into cities. The term millionaire was coined in 1840 because of the economic progress. Even today 80 percent of New York's population lives within 25 miles of the Erie Canal. The success of the canal inspired other communities to build canals eventually creating a waterway system from the Atlantic to the Mississippi down to the Gulf of Mexico. America grew and flourished because of the canal.

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The Ottneys, Deimerts, Hollers and Nuwers all benefitted greatly from the Erie Canal. The Ottney and Diemert ancestors lived in the Amherst area while the Holler line lived in what became Tonawanda. Nuwers settled in Alden/Townline. Homes were often built small and then added on to later. The following is a bit of background of what the locales were like about the time they arrived. I am not certain where Anton and Catherine Bastian Diemert first settled.

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Ancestors in this generation probably ate beef, pork, corn plus vegetables they had grown. Those in Amherst may have had more options since the village was more developed and they lived closer to transportation lines. While the conditions they lived in seem primitive compared to what we experience in 2019 the area around Tonawanda and Williamsville developed rapidly after the Erie Canal opened. Buffalo had a post office in 1804 so they may have been able to get some mail. In 1825 Buffalo had 400 houses and stores yet in 1830 Buffalo was still considered a village. By 1832 Buffalo had sizeable beautiful buildings so things were starting to boom. In 1834 Delaware, a main connector between Buffalo and Tonawanda, was still a broad country road.

Our ancestors in America lived in the eras of typhus, tuberculosis, cholera, Spanish flu, Scarlet Fever, Rheumatic fever and polio. My parents and grandparent's generation went through the great depression which left an indelible mark of frugality. Our ancestors in America had the Civil War, First and Second World Wars plus the Korean war to live through and too many lives were lost. President William McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo in 1901 and Teddy Roosevelt then became President in his place. Suffragettes took to the streets in protest and won women the right to vote. My generation had the Vietnam War and the assassinations of the President John F. Kennedy and his brother Bobby Kennedy as well as Martin Luther King. There were protests against the war on college campuses, racial and gender inequality that marked us.

## **1800s Tonawanda history**

1805 Tonawanda first settled

1808 they had a tavern

1812 War

1814 hotel

1816 the first school

1823 the first toll bridge and dam were built

1826 Tonawanda had 12 buildings

1827 first store

1825 Erie Canal complete

1828 *Buffalo* had foundaries making plough irons and small castings

1831 arrival of John Nicholas age 31 and Katherine age 33 with 2 children

1831 John Nicholas buys the 78 acre land from Holland Land Company

1831 John Nicholas also buys a 50 acre parcel donating an acre for a chapel and cemetery

1832 *Buffalo* became a city

1832 cholera, more followed, drastic reduction in canal traffic

1836 first steam railroad

1836 first lawyer

1838 first doctor

1840 first saw mill and Tonawanda becomes an important limber center

1842 John D. is born

1849 more severe cholera

1862 John D. and Amelia Unger marry

1864 first blacksmith and wagon shop

1866 Fred Holler is born, second child of John D and Amelia.

1870 census indicates John and Katherine living in Sheenwater on Grand Island with 3 servants

1872 first bank

1873 first cider, vinegar and yeast works

1873 John Nicholas dies

1875 Katherine dies

1883 toilet paper invented

1884 first gas light company

1885 first water company

1887 John D. opens a Fruit and Confectionary Store on Young Street

1887 John D. gets a license for a "Tavern, Hotel or Inn"

1889 Amelia buys a building starting a boarding house and store

1890 electric trains

1890 electric light system

1890 sewage system

1890 several streets paved

1890 Fred 'Pa' marries Mary 'Ma' Holler

1892 Gramma Bertha Holler is born

1898 very damaging tornado in Tonawanda

## **Tonawanda**

The Tonawanda area was first settled in 1805 and by 1808 they had a tavern. The U.S. Army built Military Road which ran through Tonawanda so that was an early main route. Niagara Falls Boulevard (the boundary between Amherst and Tonawanda) which is close to where our first ancestors lived, was not a main thoroughfare. The area was impacted by the war of 1812 when buildings were burned and there were war deaths. By 1814 there was a hotel and by 1816 a school. In 1823 a toll bridge and dam were built and finally in 1827 they had their first store, surely aided by the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. 1836 brought the Buffalo and Niagara Railroad, the first stream railroad in western New York. It went right down Main Street with up to 80 trains a day causing excessive soot, dirt noise, injury and death. By 1836 they had their first lawyer and by 1838 their first doctor.

The high volume of foot traffic through the area after the Erie Canal opened and the lack of sanitary safety resulted in a cholera epidemic. The farmers did not take their food to market because they feared getting sick. Traffic on the canal slowed dramatically because of the cholera which also meant a long delay in receiving any supplies. Cholera broke out again in 1834 causing some residents to flee the area, stores closed down and food was scarce. Trash and waste was being dumped in the canal which was causing the outbreak. Because the cause of cholera was not known at the time residents would burn rubber and lime and other things that caused a lot of foul air near Ellicott Creek which was the area where our ancestors lived. Cholera came several others times particularly in 1849.

Not many settlers could afford to buy the land from the Holland Land Company but they were allowed to clear the land and build and given 10-12 years to pay off the land. If they could not pay off the land the property reverted to Holland Land Company in better shape than it was before. Before the canal opened the land price varied from \$2 per acre to as high as \$20 per acre after it opened since population was quickly growing and because some of the land had been cleared by families who ultimately did not get a deed for failure to finish payment making the land more valuable.

There were a lot of trains in and around Buffalo starting in 1836 for the steam trains spewing a dark black cloud in their wake. By 1890 the electric trains were developed. For people who could easily get to the trains they would have a much easier time getting goods and services from other communities. For those farther out that had to rely on horse power, I wonder what they did with their horse and wagon while they were gone on the train?

In 1840 the first saw mill was opened and Tonawanda became an important lumber center as well as agricultural center. It took until 1873 for them to have their first cider, vinegar and yeast works plus a flour mill. The first bank opened in 1872. I wonder if people had to hide their money and valuables before then? John Nicholas Holler died in 1875 and his wife Katherine died in 1873 so they did not get to see the first gas light company (1884), water company (1885) electric light system, sewage system and several streets paved (1890) in Tonawanda.

Toilet paper was invented in 1883 and before that people used clay, stones, corncobs, leaves and sticks tipped with a sponge to clean themselves. They likely had some type of toothbrush, although nylon bristles were not yet invented, and some sort of tooth paste or powder. They may have had basins of water and a pitcher by their beds for washing their face and hands or other body parts since there would not have been bathtubs or showers.

**Amherst (excerpted from History of Town of Amherst 1818-1965, online):**

While the war of 1812 had soldiers passing through or living temporarily there the war did not bring destruction to the area. The war and post war time did bring activity and settlement to the area. While the paths of travel used to be Indian Trails, the Buffalo Road, which was later named Main Street, became a major east west route so business sprung up to accommodate the travelers and new settlers. As a result, Williamsville was more developed than Tonawanda.

By 1831 when our ancestors first arrived they may have come by way of the Erie Canal which opened in 1825 or by covered wagons led by oxen which took a lot longer. The settlers bought large tracts of land from the Holland Land Company. The area had good soil, it was well located for moving people and goods by land or water and there was a good source of energy for commerce from the waterfalls. Life there was considered an advanced civilization for its time. When they arrived there would have been a store, a mill, a hotel and many taverns. The store carried calico (a type of cloth), tea, nails, molasses, ribbons and salt. There were farms in the area so there was that source of food as well. For those who had guns, if someone were poor they would shoot an occasional bear, deer or even their oxen for food.

Plank homes were made with the help of neighbors raising the home. Furniture was primitive made from slabs or branches of wood, primarily oak and there were no bedsteads. There was a law that fences had to be 4-1/2 feet high to keep animals in or out and the animals had to be registered so if one escaped it could be identified and if you paid a fine you could retrieve the animal.

By 1850, 29 years after our ancestors arrived, there were 7 grist mills, several saw mills, 2 forges, tannery, carding works (preparing fibers to make cloth or yarn), bedstead factory, blacksmith and harness shops, cooperages (copper), staves (slender pieces of wood used for making barrels), lime kilns (lime used for making mortar for building and for stabilizing floors), tailor shops, paper mill, broom factory, wagon shops, maltsters (used in beer making), brewers, planing mills, cabinet maker, vinegar factory, 2 potteries, a slaughter house, churches and lots of taverns. It amazes me, whether in Amherst or elsewhere around the country, how very quickly communities developed. Stage coaches and Connestoga wagons made twice weekly trips through Amherst which added to the speed at which it developed and brought business to hotels, taverns and places where food was served. Several years later Williamsville had 5 general stores, 2 hardware stores, 2 shoe stores, a drug store, 1 jewelry store, a furniture and undertaking establishment, a weekly newspaper and printing office, 2 hotels, a large gelatin manufactory, 1 flouring mill, a feed mill, 1 brewery, a tinsmith, 1 harness shop and feed store, 2 meat markets, 3 shoe shops, 4 blacksmith shops.

## The first ancestors to emigrate: Great, Great, Great Grandparents

**1. John Nicholas Haller/Holler (1801-1875) and his wife Katherine Leictnam (1799-1873)** also arrived in 1831 from Langelsheim or Lengelsheim, Lorraine which was under German rule at that time. John Nicholas had been a farmer in Europe and he and Katherine had 2 or 3 children that died before they came over: Pierre, Balthazar and possibly Christine. During the voyage one of their daughters was born. Can you imagine!

### A. John Nicholas Haller/Holler

The Tonawanda area was less developed than Amherst and the Haller's were some of the early pioneers. It did not even become the Town of Tonawanda for 5 more years, a break off from Buffalo. They bought 78 acres of farmland near Ellicott Creek which had sandy loam soil, so great for farming. I wonder what they grew? The land would have been bought from the Holland Land Company. The property lay between Ellicott Creek and Black Creek which was later called Donner Creek 3 miles east of Tonawanda. On an old map it shows the property 7 properties to the west of what is now Niagara Falls Blvd, and the elder son John H. Holler had 40 acres, 5 properties to the west, from Niagara Falls Blvd. Both these properties would be on what is now South Ellicott Creek Rd. At the time this area was called North Bush and was part of Buffalo. Military road was about 3 miles away and that probably was the main road to travel to Buffalo if needed since Niagara Falls Blvd was not a main artery then.

John Nicholas Haller also bought a 50 acre site for \$675 in 1831 and donated more than an acre of that land for a chapel and a cemetery where many Hollers are buried. The North Bush Chapel was a mission chapel for St Peter and Paul Church in Williamsville and St John Neumann would travel to that chapel. Later, St John the Baptist Church would be built there. It is told that John Nicholas and Katherine had a terribly difficult passage on the ship due to a storm and the ship was almost lost at sea. Can you imagine giving birth when on a ship that is almost shipwrecked!!! He prayed and vowed to do a good deed if they survived and the Chapel at North Bush and helping to build the St Francis church may have been his promise fulfillment.

Besides being a farmer, John Nicholas helped haul stone from the Lockport area of the Erie Canal for the original St Francis Church in Tonawanda and probably helped lay the stone for the church. He was a farmer, mason and later a businessman. In the 1850 census his property was valued at \$4,500, which seems like a whole lot of money back then.

They had many children, two of whom were named John Holler. The elder John H. Holler was near death so they named a second son, **John D. Holler** and he was our Great Great Grandfather. The elder son lived so to avoid confusion, the elder son John's name was pronounced in the old country manner and the younger John's in the new country manner.

He gave each of his 7 children a home when they married. Their children were John H., Catherine who was born at sea, Ann Marie, Peter, Paul and **John D. our Great Great Grandfather**. Peter died of tuberculosis.

It appears in the 1870 census that John Nicholas and Katherine may have been living in Sheenwater on Grand Island and the census said they had 3 servants living with them. It appears that their will was contested. The writing was difficult to read but it looks like it was over his siblings already having gotten money from their parents. John D. Holler (our Great Great Grandfather) got the property but the money was to go to the other siblings, as best I could read the document.

John Nicholas' parents are listed as Henri Haller and Anne Marie Meyer. Alternate spelling are Jean and Haller. On ancestry.com the Hallers are documented back to 1555 and most males have a first name related to the name John. Online I found a Johann Haller from 1375 and a famous early printer Johann Haller in the 1400s. To this day the name John Holler continues.

The names Carney, J.N. Holler and J.H. Holler are circled on the 1880 map. Pa Holler's sister Mary married a Carney and they lived in that area and that is where Gramma Nuwer stayed during the week to go to school when she was a young girl.

#### **B. Katherine Leichtnam Haller**

Katherine was unable to read or write.

Her parents were Francois Leichtnam 1766-1788 M: Jeanne Lorman 1766-1809

Her grandparents were Jacques Leichtnam and Veronique Enckler

Her great grandparents were Balthazar Leichtnam and Christine Muller

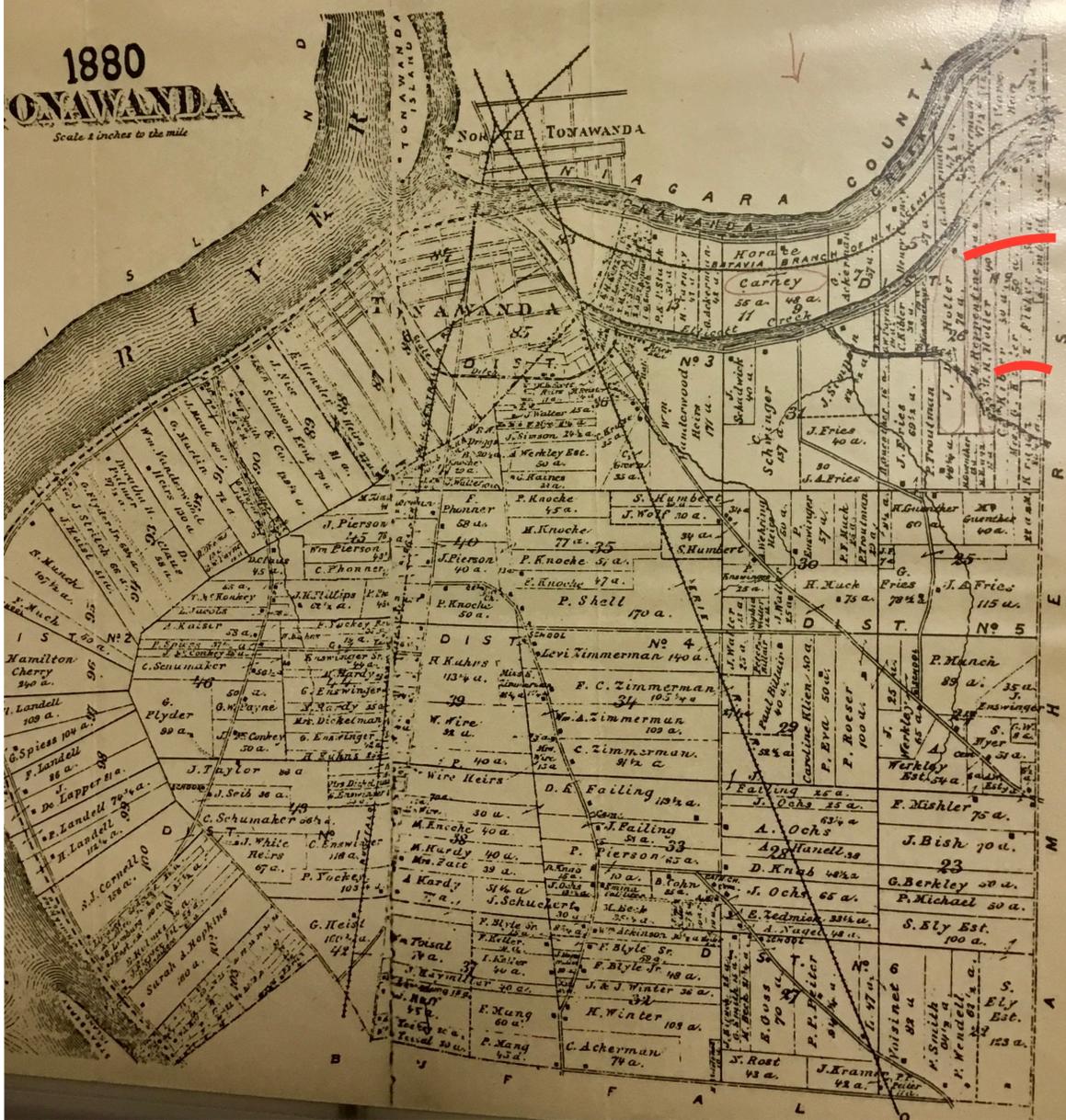
I cannot even begin to imagine how they fetched water for cooking, cleaning, drinking and laundry, grew their food on the farm, presumably raised animals, made meals for her large family, kept house, cooked over fire. They had fewer easily accessible resources compared to our ancestors in Williamsville. In 1826, 5 years before they emigrated, there were only 12 buildings in Tonawanda. Although businesses increased after the Erie Canal was built those businesses and resources slowed down during the cholera epidemics. They must have had a very hardworking life.

Cooking would have been done in a cast iron pot over an open fire which produced ash and smoke in the house. Meats would be preserved by salting, drying or smoking. Fruits were dried. Salt, pepper and spices had to be ground with a mortar and pestle. Dairy cows had to be milked and the cream was churned into butter.

Not only did she loose 2 or 3 infants in Europe but experiencing childbirth at sea and then continuing to have children soon after they arrived seems overwhelming to me. Many women died in childbirth back then and the family size averaged 5 children, so our ancestors were both lucky and fertile.

# 1880 ONAWANDA

Scale 2 inches to the mile



## 2. Christ Unger?-1840 and Sophia Unger 1807-1864 (I am uncertain if Sophia emigrated and Christ would not have emigrated)

These are the parents of **Amelia Unger** and there is some mystery about this relationship. A church document shows 3 children all listed as illegitimate for Sophia: Amelia, Josephine and Philipp Christoph. Amelia's 2 siblings were born 6 and 10 years after her. Amelia does not show her parent's names on her wedding certificate but Christ Unger and Sophia Unger are listed as her parents on her death certificate. Unger are her grandparents last name so in my estimation either the father of the children was a relative or the name Christ Unger was inaccurate. Sophie was the 4<sup>th</sup> child and her father died shortly before her birth. That must have been hard.

In those times some unmarried couples often lived as a family unit because they could not afford the marriage fee or the church was too far away. They were not always convinced that a ceremony was necessary. In Sophie's case, the mystery remains.

## 3. Anton Diemert (1799-1866) and Catherine Bastian (1791-1865).

The Diemert name was also spelled Diemert, Dimert, DeMare and Demert.

Anton was born in Bitschoffen, Neiderbronn, Alsace. His father was Georg Diemert a bricklayer from Bitschhofen, living in Wald, married to Anna Maria Wolff. Anna Maria was the daughter of Martin Wolff and Marie Anna Fasser.

Catherine (Katherine) was the daughter of Michl Bastian the young who was a farmer and Anna Maria Fuerness living in Bitschoffen. They emigrated in 1842 when their son Lorentz was 9. I have been unable to locate the original Diemert property on old maps. It does show up for later generations on Amherst maps for 2 of their sons.

Their children are Antony Jr, Joseph, Katharina Rost, Maria Gerber, **Lorentz** and George. They emigrated in 1842 and lived in the area with some offspring eventually moving to Lancaster and others to Cheektowaga while Lorentz and George were in Amherst.

Anton would have been about 43 and Catherine 51 when they emigrated. Considering their son Lorentz was a water boy for the French army during a war with Germany it is no wonder they left Europe. A 6 year old boy part of a war! OMG! Their youngest child George would have been about 6 years old during the passage across the sea with the rest of the family.

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Ottney farm at Main and North Forest

#### **4. Antony Ottney 1815-1901 and Mary Reading (Reitling) Ottney 1821-1907 (photos below)**

##### **A. Antony Ottney**

Antony and Mary's farmhouse stood until the 1950's next to the Mennonite church at Main and North Forest, now a red brick office building. While I do not find the property on early maps it's because the maps are of the small villages of Snyder and Williamsville and this must have been considered farmland between the villages. The 200 acres would have been bought from the Holland Land Company and extended down towards what would become Sheridan Drive.

Both Antony and Mary were born in Baden Germany and Antony emigrated with his parents when he was 16 in 1831. He was a farmer and carpenter. Possibly Antony had a brother Franziska who lived in the area and is buried in the family plot.



Antony and Mary Reading Otteny

A bit more of Antony's lineage:

**Hans Georg Otteni** B 1655 M: **Ursula Salinger**

**Mathias Otteni** B 1686 in Urloff Offenburg Germany (Baden), M: **Maria E Schmidt** B 1685

**Franz Otteni** B 1722-1776, M: **Maria M Kranz** B 1725

**Andreas Otteni** 1762-1835, M: **Maria Konig** 1763-1835

**Anthionius (Anton) Otteni** 1787- 1874, M: **Barbara Schneider** 1787-1824, they are buried in the family plot

The Otteny name is also spelled Ottene, Utney, Otteni and Ottone (which means brass in Italian).



### B. Mary Reading/Reitling

Mary Reading was told by her mother, **Mary Ann Beiler**, that they were descended from the Hapsburg (Habsburg) ruling family in Europe. Mary emigrated with her parents at age 11 (1832) and was said to be a good, kind person, bright and of genial disposition. Her parents had \$3,000 when they came over which would have been a lot of money for that time. There is a 4 generation photo of **Mary Reitling Ottney** with her daughter **Catherine Ottney Diemert**, her daughter Caroline Diemert Beavers and her daughter Mattie Beavers Corby.

Catherine is the daughter we are related to in direct line but her sister Caroline may be the one who owned the lovely large house at 94 South Forest in Williamsville, which was built by her brothers Albert and Robert. Elizabeth owned the house at 76 South Forest. Additionally, there

was a house at North Forest and Park Club Lane built for one of the sisters or for Mary, but I am uncertain that the information is correct about who each of these houses were for. In 1854 **Antony and Mary Otteny** bought the house at 4281 Sheridan for their daughter **Catherine and her husband Lorentz Diemert**.

Antony and Mary had 8 children: Joseph, John, Magdalena, **Catherine (our Great, Great Grandmother)**, Elizabeth, Caroline and Florence. Antony and Mary lived to their mid 80's which sounds very old for that time. Their cemetery monument is well preserved and the nicest one of all our ancestors. Anton Otteny's gravestone is next to it.

After their deaths a 1909 map shows the Lehigh Valley Railroad going through their farm. It shows 2 buildings across from Reist St and North Forest.

Alternate spellings: Readling, Reitling, Rietling



94 South Forest. Ottney family but not direct line of descent. Built by relatives for relatives.

## The Second Generation in America: Great Great Grandparents

### 1. John D. Haller/Holler (1842-1921) and Amelia Unger (1840-1909) (photos below)

#### A. John D. Holler/Haller

He was born in Tonawanda. I was unable to learn what the initial D stood for in his name but I am very curious. The 1860 census says he was 18 years old living with his father Nick Holler and he was likely a farmer at that time. As an adult may have run a hardware store that burnt down and a little dog barked to warn people so no one was hurt. In 1882 he was living at his late parents farm and sold farm equipment at auction. Perhaps they were preparing to move to town. He opened a fruit and confectionary store on Young Street and he also got a license for an 'Tavern, Hotel or Inn'. Might that be his tavern shown below? I took the photo from an historical photo on the wall in City Hall of Tonawanda.

John was 20 when he married Amelia and they started having babies soon after. John D. and Amelia's children were Louis, **Fred (our Great Grandfather)**, Maria, Joseph, Elizabeth, Emelia (Emma), Sophia, Lucy and Benjamin.

John D and Amelia lived at 154 Adam Street. At a later date their son Fred "Pa" Holler and his family lived at that address after Amelia was deceased. The house is a 2 bedroom 1 bath house., 1562 square feet. That sounds so small for a large family.

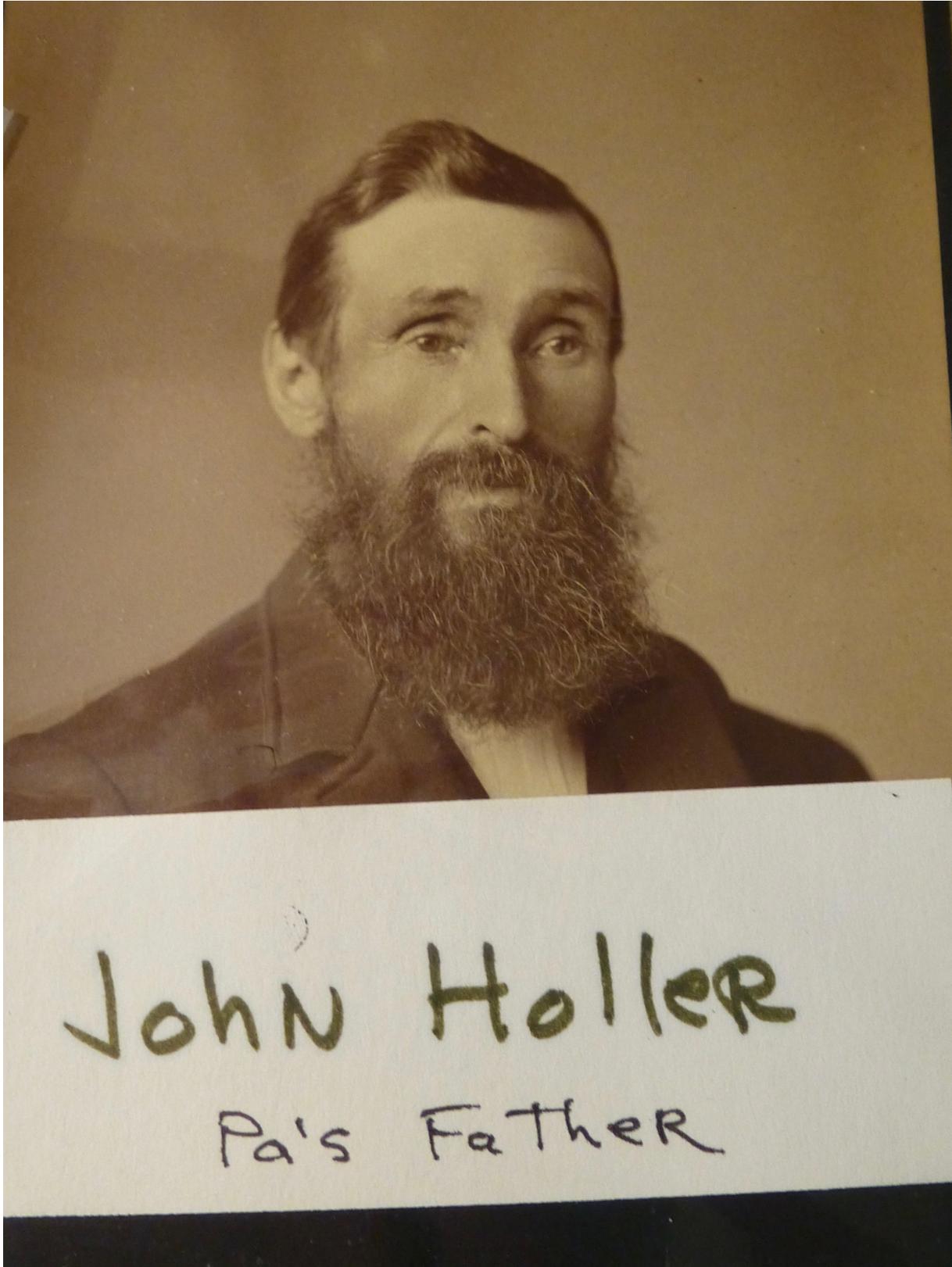
In 1898 there was a very damaging tornado in Tonawanda with some homes being leveled and others very damaged. While John and Amelia may have been OK, that must have been a very threatening event for them.

Later in life John D. lived with his daughter Emma Taylor until he died.

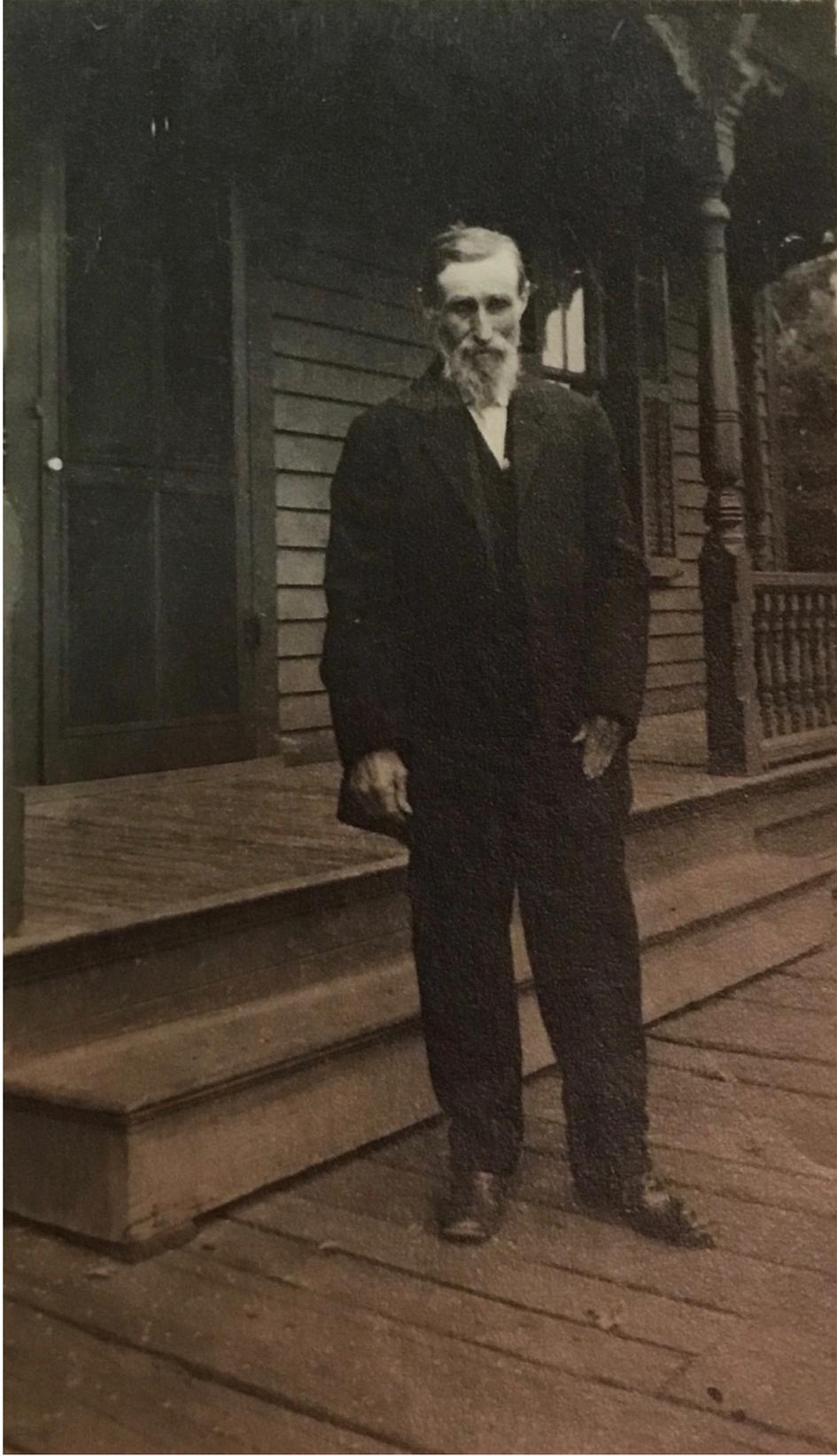
Photo below is the house today from a photo online.



John D Holler and Amelia Unger Holler's house, later Fred and Mary Holler's 154 Adam St Tonawanda. Built in 1910 but Amelia died in 1909. Maybe another house stood at this address during her lifetime.



John D. Holler



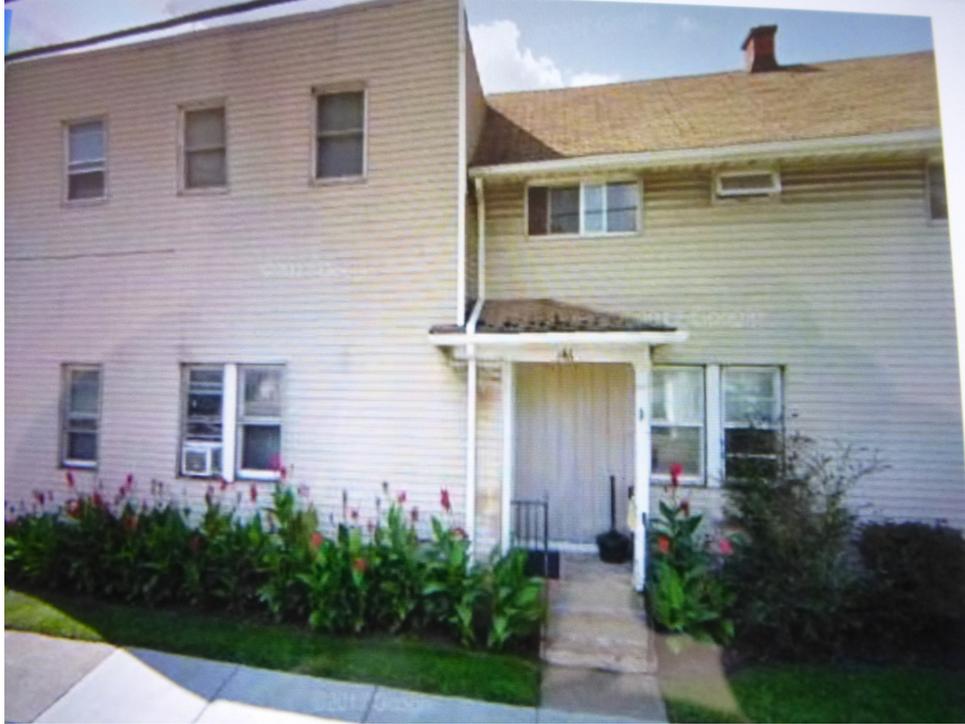
John D. at a later time



Could this be his Saloon?



Amelia Unger  
Holler  
(Pa's Mother)



This house was built in 1900 yet she bought the house-store in 1889. That was the year of the great tornado causing much destruction. I wonder if she had to rebuild? She died 9 years after this house was built. Mystery.

**B. Amelia (Emelie) Unger Holler (her photo above plus current photo of her house/store)**

Her grandparents were Johann Unger and Magdalena Hurstin from Woeschbach and her mother Sophie was unmarried. I believe her Aunt Elizabeth brought her and her younger brother Phillip Christoph to this country, perhaps with another Unger relative named Rudolph, though these are just my best guesses.

She and John D. were married at St Francis Church in Tonawanda and Elizabeth Unger stood up for them at the wedding.

Interestingly, Amelia bought a house at 146 Main St and Johnson in Tonawanda in 1889 and she ran a small store on the lower level. The house currently is 4393 square feet and a multifamily home and could have been a large home when she bought it considering there were boarders there plus a store on the lower level. I wonder what kind of store she had? During the time she had this house-store the noisy, stinky, soot emitting trains would have gone right down Main Street in front of her place until electric trains replaced them. The trains were not moved until 11 years after her death. This would not be John D.'s Fruit and Confectionary store since that was on a different street. It seems like she must have had a go-getter independent streak.

Considering that she had a boarding house I wonder how she did laundry for all the beds in the days before electric washing machines. She may have used a wash board and a hand operated wringer. I read it would take the person doing the laundry 8 hours to do a week's worth of

laundry, and that was for a family much less a boarding house. What did she do with the dirty laundry water? The water company did not open until 1885. The sewage company did not start to operate until 1890 which means they may have periodically been digging pits for new out houses as well. It gets cold in Tonawanda in the winter and that means using a very cold out house in the winter. Since electricity may not have gone to her house in her lifetime she would not have had refrigeration for food so possibly daily trips to the store for meal prep.

Stoves were around by the late 1800's and needed an average of 50 pounds of fuel per day to operate and ran on wood or coal. The chore of gathering fuel typically fell to the women. Housewives had to remove ashes from the stove at least twice a day and adjust the flues and dampers before lighting a fire. Women also had to rub cast-iron stoves with black wax to prevent the metal from rusting. A housewife often spent about four hours each day tending to the stove. Stoves in the late 1800s lacked temperature gauges or numbered dials, so housewives checked the temperature with their hands. The stove was hot enough to use if a woman could hold her hand inside it for 15 to 20 seconds. If the woman could keep her hand inside for more than 30 seconds, she added more fuel. Stoves were messy, so after cooking, a woman had plenty of cleaning to do. Wood- and coal-burning stoves spewed smoke and soot everywhere. The soot blackened carpets, curtains and walls. Cleaning the mess was a daily chore for families, unless they could afford to hire someone else to do it for about \$1.50 a day according to Classroom/synonym.com.

At the time of her death she lived at 154 Adam Street which is the address for the John D. Holler house. Perhaps she had a business address separate from a home address. This house is very close to the Adam Street house.

When Amelia died at age 63 she deeded the house to her husband John D. The house remained in the family. Amelia to John D. to Fred 'Pa' and he continued owning the apartment building, collecting rent until he died. Rent from the house was used to pay his bills by his sons when Pa was at the end of his life. In 1949 after Pa's death the house was bought by Wilb and Eugene Holler (Pa's sons) and after that the house went to Horace then to Michael Holler. Amelia's clear candy dish in my parents' display cabinet is hers, so we know she had at least one item of beauty.

I would love to know more of the story of Amelia and wondered how she got the money to buy her property. I suspect it was from an inheritance.



This is the only photo of Lorentz Diemert His wife, Catherine Otteny Diemert is shown in a prior 4 generation photo with her mother, sister and niece. The house is also shown earlier in the Antony Otteny and Mary Reading Otteny section. My father was not positive this was Lorentz.

## **2. Lorentz Diemert (Demert) 1833-1911, Catherine Ottney Diemert 1845-1916**

### **A. Lorentz Diemert**

Lorentz was born in Alsace where he was a waterboy at age 6 for France in the French German War. He emigrated from Germany in 1842 which would be about the age of 9. He worked as a blacksmith in this country and lived in the house on Sheridan with his wife Catherine. He was known as an honest and reliable man.

Being a blacksmith meant very hard work in front of intense heat. He would have been very strong to do this type of work. He may have made axes, plow blades, pot hooks, nails, andirons or scythes for cutting hay. He would have had to hammer over and over and over again the hot

metal for shape it into the object he desired to make. There was an outbuilding towards the front of the property that my father speculated was his blacksmith shop.

Lorentz brother George owned 62 of acres in Snyder which became Burroughs, Smallwood and Audubon Drive per 1910 map. Lorentz brother John lived on Transit and was a builder who built many of the houses in Williamsville.

### **B. Catherine Ottney Demert**

The Hunzinger rocker in the Brookedge cloak room was probably hers and is a valuable antique. She was born on the farm at Main and North Forest. I think she looks beautiful and somewhat regal.

Lorentz and Mary's children are: Lawrence (married Helen Nuwer and they lived in the large white house at the corner of Brookedge and North Forest on the Ellicott Creek), Robert, Albert, Caroline (Beavers...in 4 generation photo) and **Mary (our Great Grandmother)**. I know that Mary went to school at Maple and North Forest so her siblings may have gone to the one room school house as well. I imagine that they walked from the Sheridan house to school. How interesting to think of them walking in our Brookedge neighborhood. Their children were Mary, Caroline Robert, Albert, Lawrence, Louis, and Daniel. Louis died in his 20s and Daniel died in his teens, which must have been heartbreaking for his parents.

Her parents gave her the house at 4281 Sheridan that sat on 1.3 acres. There is a 1909 map of Amherst that shows where the property was and interestingly it says Demert rather than Ottney considering the property was a gift from her parents. The Main and North Forest property on the 1909 map, after the Ottneys were gone, did not have an owner's name on the map but there were 2 contiguous parcels in section 9, one immediately behind the Mennonite Church with a railroad running diagonally through it. The larger parcel showed 2 buildings located immediately across the street from where Reist Street comes in, where a school is now. Possibly the original buildings were torn down when the railroad came through the land. There was water on the property and a train crossed a west corner of it. Streets were named differently then with no Sheridan Drive. Their land extended slightly past the corner of Park Club Lane on east and west sides of the street. The west property line would have been the later Neumann High School land but not the quarry.

Lorentz and Catherine's land had 2 buildings with some water at the NW corner and a train crossing at the SW corner. Water would have been very handy for a blacksmith.

Catherine and Lorentz were married for 35 years. She was 12 years younger than her husband! The Demerts are buried in St Michael's cemetery where my father Dr Donald Nuwer is buried.



4281 SHERIDAN - 1997



Catherine Otteny Diemert and Lorentz Diemert house on Sheridan

## The Third Generation in America: Our great grandparents:

### Frederick John “Pa” Holler (1866-1948) and Mary “Ma” Demert (1866-1948)

Notice that each of them were born and died in the same year. Both were senile at the end.

This is the first generation where I see eyeglasses in photos. Did the earlier generations not need them or could not get them I wonder?

**A. Fred “Pa” (photos below)** He was baptized John Frederick but went by Frederick John. The church may have insisted the first name be a saint’s name. He appears to have been born in Sheenwater on Grand Island. He rented farms and share cropped with owners of the land. He was a very hard worker. He walked long distances on foot to work or to visit. He never had a car, but he had a horse and wagon.

In 1924 he lived on State Street in a rented property and he was arrested for cruelty to animals. After an argument the land owner turned off the water. When this was explained and water turned back on the sentence was suspended.

Since the farm on the canal was so far from Gastown where the nearest school was, Pa would drop my grandmother off at Mary Carney’s house in Gastown so my grandmother would be close to school. Her father brought her home for weekends.

He bought his first house at 218 Grove Street. Fred tended furnaces for rental properties. He also worked for his sons Holler Brothers Construction business keeping the lumber yard organized and he worked as a watchman there. He had worked at other lumber yards in Tonawanda as well. He also worked as a bread wagon driver.

He was a kind man but was not effusive in affection toward my father, Don Nuwer.

When Fred died his estate was worth \$23,122 and each of the children got about \$2,890

### **B. Mary “Ma”, aka Mary Minnie Demert, Maria Anna Monika Demert (photos below)**

As a girl, MA went to school at the historical school house at Maple and North Forest.

When she was young she saw her mother hide her ring in a clock for safe keeping. When her mother wasn’t looking Mary took the ring from the clock so she could wear it for play. Then she went outside to be with the cows and lost her mother’s ring. Her brother Robert tattled on her. Years later when a cow was slaughtered the ring was found inside the cow.

The beautiful white bridal vase that my parents have was a wedding gift to Ma and Pa from a relative. My grandmother, Bert, kept her parents’ wedding vase on her dining room mantle for years. She inherited \$2,500 from her brother Robert’s estate. He was a contractor who built the South Forest house and was killed by an automobile.

Ma had all her children at home. Their first house was an apartment (probably a flat) on Johnson Street which was close to Amelia Unger's house and store. They moved to many places, including Harriet Street near Delaware, Grove Street, Benton and Hanover Streets. They also lived on Adam Street at her parents' house until Amelia died.

Ma had the factor 7 genetic bleeding disorder. She was once in a car and her nose bled so badly that the car had to be replaced!!!

Ma and Pa had 8 children, **Bertha**, Leo, Wilb, Chaunce, Bob, Edgar, Cliff and Horace. Cliff had polio and had horrible pain and the youngest son Horace had rheumatic fever so Ma had a whole lot to handle raising her family. The youngest son Horace, later in life, had a rare genetic disease called Periarthritis Nodosa which causes blood vessels to swell.

It was not in Ma's nature to express intense anger which says a lot when she had 8 children. She was also a seamstress which would have come in handy with a big family. In those days sewing was done on a treadle sewing machine which is the kind that has no electricity and each stitch comes from your feet moving up and down on a piece of metal at the bottom of the machine, so your hands and your feet are both working at the same time. Where did she get the energy to handle all her never ending work?

Ma and Pa's 218 Grove Street house is a nice large house, very accommodating to their large family. Everyone had to enter through the rear door. Only very special guests entered through the front door. Ma was a good cook so her house usually smelled wonderful. My father's favorite foods that Ma cooked were fry cakes and grumbar wurst, which is stuffed pig stomach. Ma cooked on a stove that was fueled by wood. Can you imagine trying to control temperature with a wood burning stove!

Women finally got the right to vote during her lifetime in 1920. Prohibition of alcohol lasted from 1920-1933. She and her children would have been alive through the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism and World Wars I and II.



Fred Holler  
"PA"

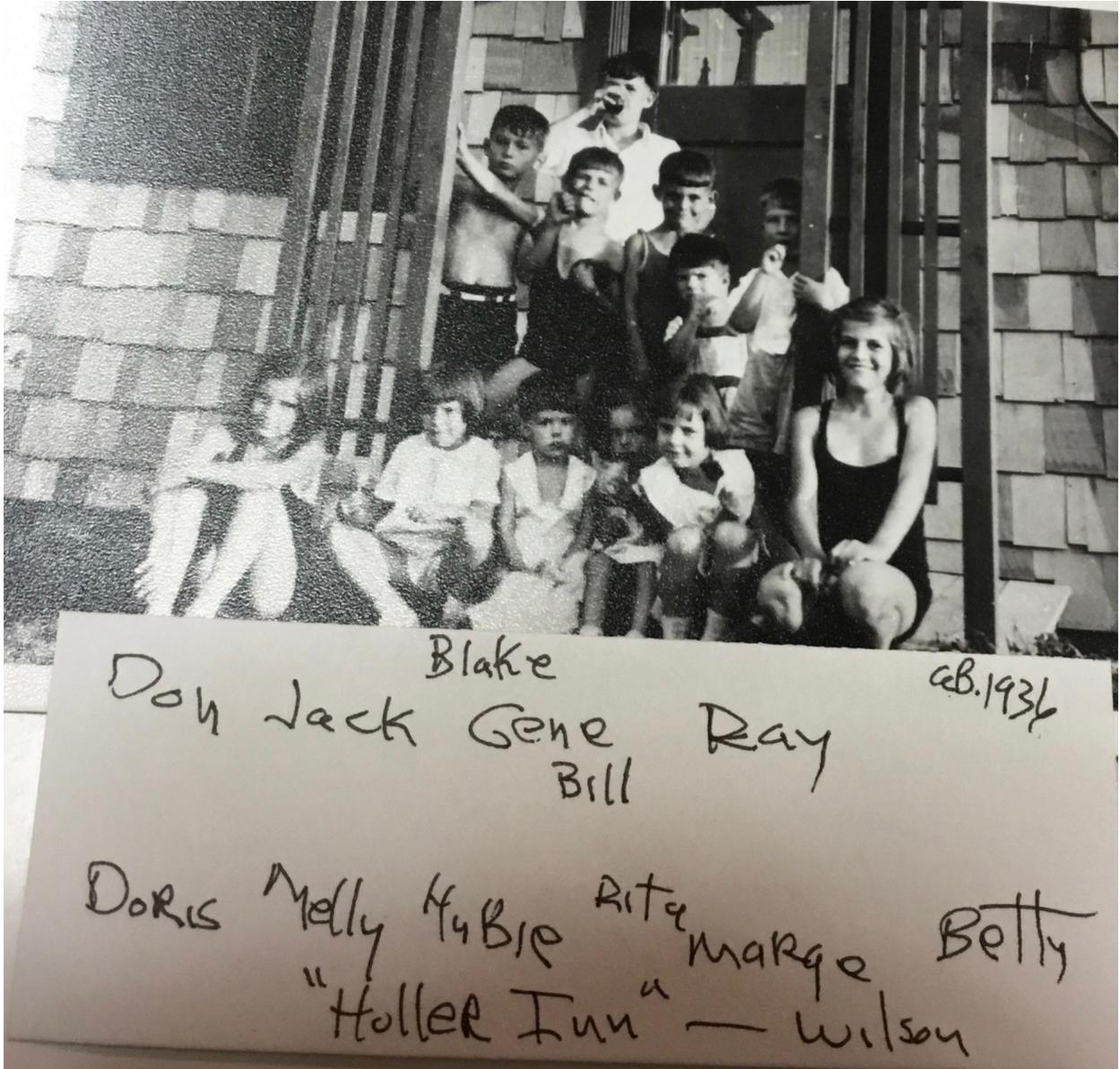




Ma and Pa later in life. The first time I see glasses in photos.



218 Grove Street. Ma and Pa finally bought their own house.



The Wilson cottage which meant so much to my father, playing with his Holler cousins

### **Observations and generalizations:**

Some Diemerts lived in Williamsville. The Ottneys lived in an area that was not on old maps presumably because it was farmland between villages of Snyder and Williamsville. The Hollers were, and many still are, in Tonawanda. I met Guy and Wayne Holler (sons of Jack Holler) while searching for John Nicholas' farm and they commented "There are a whole lot of Hollers here."

Many of our families had some water running through their property or they lived close to water, as best I can tell, and there were trains that ran on the property or close by.

The large families seemed to be close knit. Homes often stayed in families, or homes were built for other family members. Parts of families often moved in with others in the family. Families tended to stay in the same community. Church was an important part of their lives. Construction was a common theme on most sides of the family that continues through the generations.

Our ancestors were hard workers and considering all it took to emigrate and build new communities they have an endurance for survival. A lot of the deaths were related to heart issues. There were some memory issues on both sides and some cancer. All in all, though, there are a lot of ancestors who lived to old age. The men were very slender perhaps from all the hard work.

There are a LOT of first names that are used over and over again in a family with John (Jean) being the best example from the Holler side of the family with variations going back 100s of years and Maria for females in general back into European lineage. There are also a lot of strong women in the family.

I was also surprised in doing this work how many last names I recognized from my school days in the area. I wish there had been a history class at the time, or at least a family awareness of the area's history, that may have led to a greater appreciation and connection with my classmates.

Here are some attributes of our ancestors that may have influenced who you are: brave, adventurous, hardworking, endurance and stamina for overcoming hardship, cautious, faith, family centered, nurturing, fertile, love of good food and a frugal streak. They also are long living for their time and some of the wives were older than their husbands. What other values and attributes from your ancestors may also apply in your life?