

Aschenbrenner Family expelled from the Sudetenland after WWII Family in America ... A Beacon of Hope

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Letters often reveal poignant details of family life not found in public documents. Such is the case in this letter written to Ruth Barnum from a cousin in Vienna in 1947. Following World War II, about three million ethnic Germans living in the Sudetenland, the northern, south-western, and western border areas of the Czech Republic (at the time, Czechoslovakia), were thrown out of their homes and relocated in Germany and Austria. This was in response to the atrocities committed by Hitler and Nazi Germany. Among those expelled were relatives of George Aschenbrenner (also spelled Aschenbrener) and Monika Bredl. George and his wife Monika had emigrated from Markt Eisenstein, Bohemia, on the German-Czech border, to America in 1877. The letter is short but it offers a glimpse of the dire straits in which many Germans in the Old Country found themselves after the war. One can imagine people with few resources searching everywhere for assistance. A family in America who might help? Certainly it would be a godsend! This is also the only letter discovered to date between the George Aschenbrenner family in America and descendants of family members who stayed behind.

George, born on July 8, 1850, was the youngest of ten children of Andreas Aschenbrenner and Katharina Artman. The other children were: Ignatz (B. 11/9/1831), Georg (B. 5/23/1833) (Apparently this child died young, as the name was given to a later child.), Franz Xavier (B. 7/24/1835), Katharina (B. 3/24/1837), Andreas (B. 5/26/1839), Joseph (B. 5/20/1841), Maria Anna (B. 5/16/1843), Johann Nep (B. 5/18/1845), and Thekla (B. 9/24/1847). (Source: Baptism records for Markt Eisenstein, now Železná Ruda, located in the State Archives in Pilsen, Czech Republic.)

The person writing this letter states she is the daughter of Thekla Aschenbrenner. In it, she mentions Katharina and Xavier, her mother's siblings, perhaps to remind the reader who she was. She also states that two siblings emigrated, but I have never found a record of any of George's siblings in America. We know the surname of the author of the letter is Zangerle. The signature does not include the first name and that has been lost to history.

Ruth Barnum, a granddaughter of George and Monika through their oldest child Louisa, had received and responded to pleas for help from the Zangerle family. Louise Brooks (daughter of Ruth) graciously sent me a copy of the letter below, as well as its translation, about a year ago. My grandmother, Marietta Gilman Aschenbrener, married to George and Monika's son George, received similar letters. (These letters have not survived.) Marietta sent care packages over the years to this family in Vienna and was still talking about them in the late 1960s.

Time passed, families moved on, and all contact between family in the Old World and those in America was lost. It may well be that one day cousins can be found and we can learn the rest of the story for family members expelled from Markt Eisenstein (now Železná Ruda, Czech Republic) at the end of World War II.

A copy of the original letter written in German, along with its translation to English, follows.

Wien, am 8. Juli 1947

Liebe Louise Ruth Rammann!

Den Brief mit Eurer Fotografie haben wir am 8. Juli 1947 mit großer Freude erhalten. Ihr seit alle liebe Verwandten nach Ansicht der Fotografie gut erhalten und habt ihr alle ein recht gesundes Aussehen. Es möchte uns recht freuen wenn wir Euch einmal persönlich sehen könnten das ist wohl für ein Traum.

Die Hauptsache ist liebe Verwandte das es Euch allen gut geht und man muß in deren Herzens danken das ihr von dem Kriegs Schreck und Kriegsereignissen die wir Euch ja gar nicht schildern können nichts wisst. Auch diese lange Zeit dieser Wirnisse sind wir alt geworden. Von den Entbehrungen die wir hinter uns haben kann man gar nicht sprechen.

Die nöthentlichen Rationen sind noch immer sehr gering. Wie bekommen wir nöthentlich 17-16 kg. Dosenfleisch oder Fleisch in Dosen. und Fleisch. Frischfleisch kennen wir gar nicht mehr. Unsere Hoffnung ist das es bald besser wird. Bei uns ist es sehr leicht.

Wir wohnen 7 Meilen vom Abgang der Ringfeld entfernt. Vor dem Krieg ist es uns sehr gut gegangen haben alles bekommen und auch kaufen können.

Our Family History

TRANSLATION:

Vienna, July 8, 1947

Dear Cousin Ruth Barnum,

The letter with the pictures arrived on the 8 of July. You are all dear relatives by the pictures and healthy looking. It would be a great pleasure to meet you personally and talk. That is just a dream.

The main thing you are all well and happy. I thank the dear Lord for that. The conditions before and after we could not describe to you. You wouldn't understand. With all the turmoil we got to be old. From sacrifice and things we did without. We don't want to talk about.

The weekly rations are still low. We receive 13-16 gms. [7/10 pound] of meat. We are hoping it will be better soon. By us it is very hot now. We live only 7 minutes from a burned down air field. Before the war everything went well with us. Had everything we needed and could buy it too. But today you cannot find anything to buy.

Dear Cousin Ruth, We thank you and all the relatives for everything – for shoes, pullovers and food packages. It was a wonderful help.

The daughter has a 14 ½-year-old son and he has outgrown all clothes and shoes and we don't know what he is going to put on next. He is 178 cm. (5 feet, 10 inches). He could use a pair of shoes, size 44[European] but we cannot get any here. And mine he cannot wear. Mine is a size 42.

My mother Thekla has a sister by the name of Katherine and two brothers, one name of Xavier. Two went to America- They left the country when I was still at home. In Eisenstein, all relatives left the country and went back to Germany. They are displaced persons.

Again, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for everything you have done for us. And I don't know how to thank you.

Zangerle