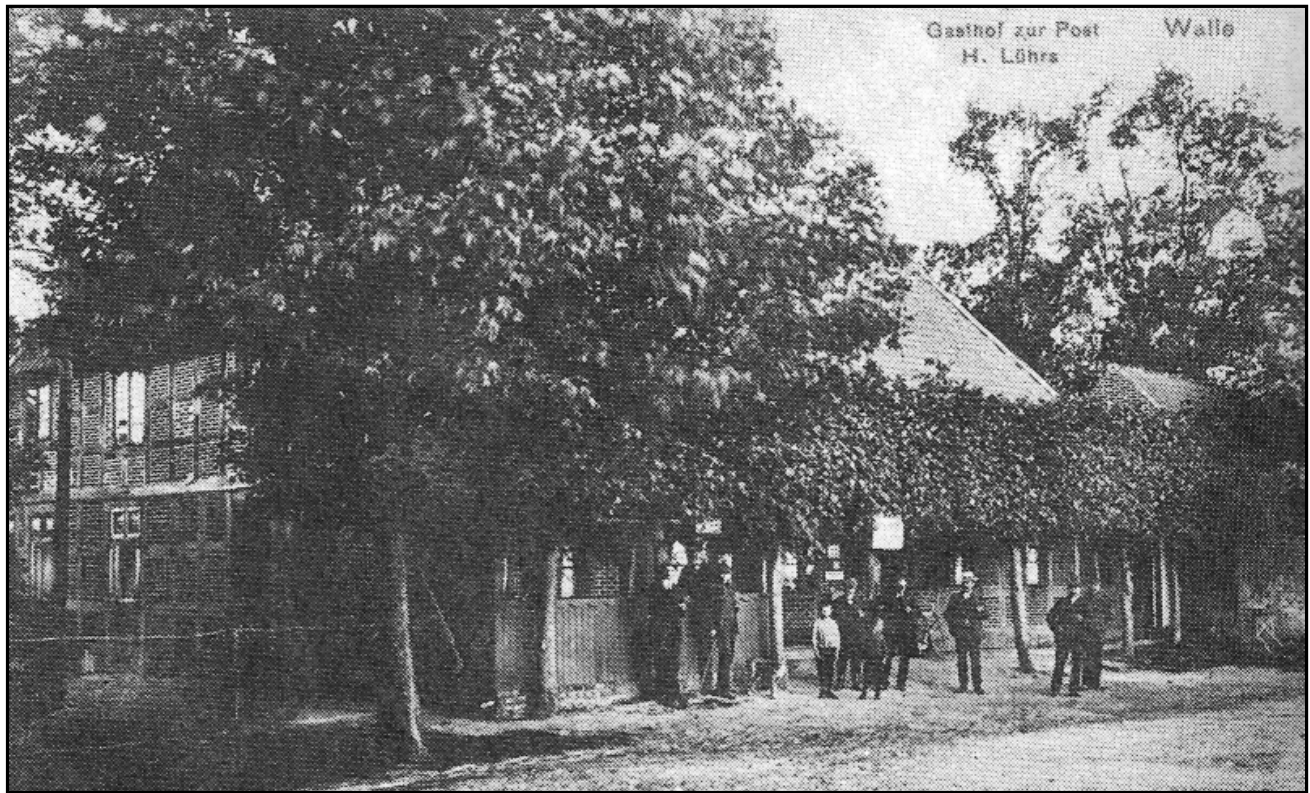


Zum Alten Krug

... the 350-Year History of a Family Business

by Vic Berecz

This is a story of our family (actually my wife Joan's family), and of a building that has been reconstructed and renovated many times on the same site. But, mostly it's the story of a business that in recent years went by the name *Zum Alten Krug*. That business is a "Gastwirtschaft" or "Gasthof" ... a tavern, which first opened its doors almost 400 years ago. The word "Krug" literally means pitcher or tankard. *Zum Alten Krug* means colloquially: *By the Old Tankard*. In northern Germany, all small town pubs are referred to as "der Krug." The proprietor of a tavern in the Plattdeutsch dialect is called the "kröger." In 1664, this Krug was purchased from the original owner and since then it has been passed down through our extended family. Until recently, it operated as a bar and restaurant in the village of Walle, in northern Germany near the city of Verden.



1910 postcard showing the Krug in Walle ... then called *Gasthof zur Post*.

In the early 1600's, the elected leader of all central Europe ... the Holy Roman Emperor ... still held sway over the many little principalities of what we now know as Germany. In 1615, the Emperor Matthias signed a contract with the *Prince of Thurn and Taxis* to provide postal service throughout the empire. A year later, he authorized a new 400 km imperial postal highway between Hamburg and Cologne. In the northern section of that route, between the cities of Rotenburg and Verden, the post road passed through the village of Walle. In 1619, Ferdinand II of the House of Habsburg was elected Holy Roman Emperor.

Shortly thereafter, Heinrich Nacke petitioned the local authorities for an exclusive license to operate a tavern in Walle to service the increasingly frequent postal riders and other travelers passing

through on the new highway. Nacke already owned a tavern in the nearby city of Verden. On the 20th of April in 1621, Philipp Sigismund, *Bishop of Osnabrück and Verden and Duke of Braunschweig and Lüneburg*, granted him, his heirs and assigns the right to operate that tavern.



The *Urkunde* (document) shown above, granting that right was inscribed on pigskin in what is now barely legible ink, and in addition to the Duke's signature bears his seal and the seal of the Dom (cathedral) in Verden. The tavern was established on the property that became known as *Krögers*, and from 1745, when the village's houses were numbered, as Walle house #19. The grant also included small parcels of nearby land.

The annual tribute to maintain that *Kruggerechtigkeit* (license to operate a tavern) was set by the *Urkunde* at 13½ groschen and a pair of marsh-hens, in perpetuity. So, technically that license fee still applies! Let me explain the payment terms of the license. In that era, where the use of coin was just becoming common in Europe, it was not unusual to demand part of any payment *in kind*. The common *marshhen* (often called *moorhen*) is known scientifically as *Gallinula chloropus* and is a bird in the *Rallidae* family (which includes the American *coot*) with an almost worldwide distribution. The groschen is a small, thick silver coin used throughout central Europe in the 13th to 18th centuries. The name derives from the Italian *denaro grosso*, or large penny. It's value varied with the silver content. The groschen used in northern Germany in the early and mid-1600's was valued at 1/24 of a Thaler (the small gold or very large silver coin from which we get the word *dollar*).

Below: a marshhen and a 1649 silver 3-groschen coin picturing Emperor Ferdinand II.



Now back to the family business. We know virtually nothing about the early years, but they must have been very difficult because in 1618 the *Thirty Years War* began. During the next three decades German, Austrian, Danish, Swedish, and French troops marched back and forth over northern Germany pillaging and destroying virtually everything in sight. That's why the vital records of our ancestors can't be traced back to earlier periods.

We do know that by 1647, about the time the war was ending, Nacke had a man named Johann Wilckens operating the Krug on his behalf, and later it was operated by a Johann Münchhausen. The Martfeldt family are known to have been living in Walle since at least 1540. In 1664 the tavern in Walle was sold to a member of that family named Lorentz Martfeldt, who took ownership of the building, the business, and the precious *Urkunde*. From that date, until rather recently, the *Krug* and its *Urkunde* were not sold ... rather they were passed down by inheritance through the Martfeldt, Schloo, and Lührs families ... and finally to their surviving descendants.

It seems apparent that Lorentz Martfeldt and his elder son Hinrich, who succeeded him, had at best a marginal business in the early years. The basis of this supposition is a 1691 inventory book of all the properties in the area. Lorentz Martfeldt is identified as a Kötner (cottager) owning Walle house #19 with a tavern. The property is described as having an old three-room house without a full foundation and in disrepair. They also owned a single-compartment barn with space for a wagon and a stable with stalls for only two horses. They owned 1½ hectares on which they grew cabbage and fruit. Their fences were described as being only in fair condition. Basically it seems they were eking out a marginal living from their pub and four acres of land. But, despite his relative poverty, from 1664 until his death, Lorentz was a Walle parish official (*Untervogt*).

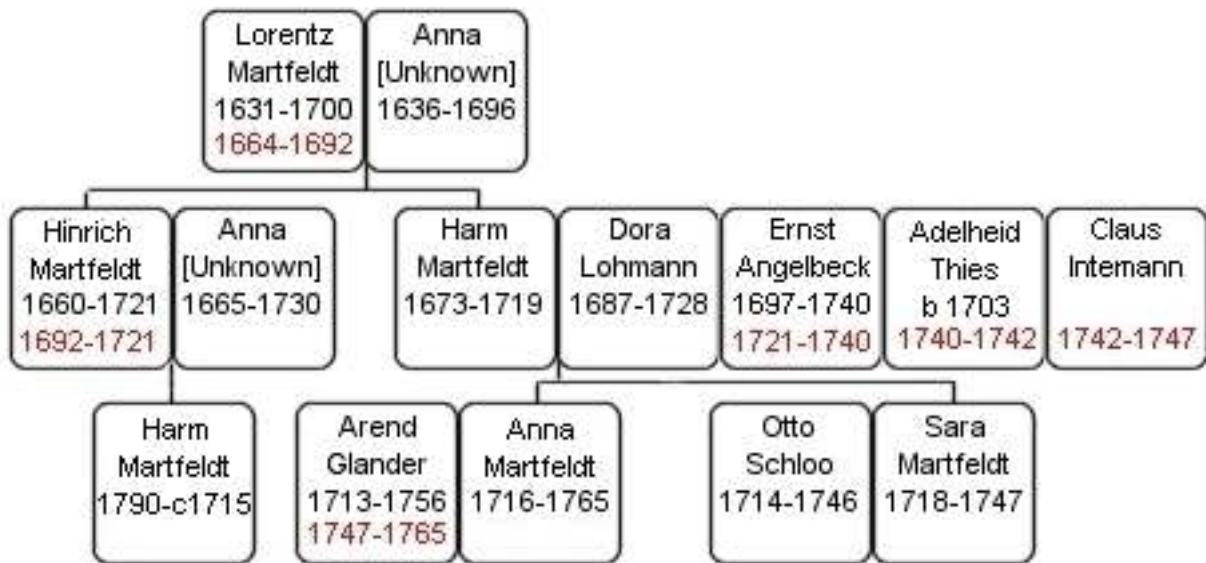
These on-going business difficulties are likely the result of the treaties that ended the Thirty Years War and left Verden, and the area to its north, under Swedish control for the next 70 years. The kings of Sweden ruled the area as the *Dukes of Bremen and Verden*. During the Swedish era, which ended in 1719, the entire area was largely cut off from the rest of Germany and traffic on the highway – which was necessary to support the tavern -- must have been minimal.

In 1692, in accordance with tradition, Hinrich took over responsibility for the family home and business, his parents remaining as part of the household in retirement. This transfer typically took place when all the children were grown to adulthood, and the eldest son had attained the age of 25 and/or had married. So, when Lorentz died in 1700, Hinrich was well-established as Kröger.

Hinrich and his wife Anna we believe had at least one son named Harm, who is listed on the 1710 muster-roll, but who apparently pre-deceased him. He did have one younger brother, also named Harm, who lived to adulthood. Brother Harm also predeceased Hinrich, leaving two very young daughters., the older of whom, Anna, became legal heir to the Krug. After Hinrich's death in 1721, Harm's widow remarried to secure a man who could operate the business until the rightful heir came of age. Therefore, following the death of Hinrich in 1721 the job of Kröger fell first to Anna's step-father Ernst Angelbeck. Later Angelbeck's second wife and her second husband performed in this role. As we shall see, premature deaths caused similar situations in later years. Unfortunately, it was during these periods, when the Kröger was aware that there was nothing in it for him or for his own children, that the business had problems.

In the family trees shown in this report, the red (second set of) dates refer to the years as Kröger, of the man (usually) who operated the family business. Keep in mind that the Kröger was not necessarily the legal owner of the property. A non-owner Kröger was usually the case when the legal owner was a woman or a minor.

Zum Alten Krug ... the Martfeldt Era



So, from 1719, Anna Elisabeth the older daughter of Harm Martfeldt, was the heir apparent to the Krug. But, in accordance with the custom of the time, it was not until she married in 1747 that she actually took control of the Krug and her husband Arend Glander became Kröger. By this time Walle and its surrounding area had become a part of Hannover ... at that time, technically the *Electorate of Braunschweig-Lüneburg*, and was in personal union with Great Britain. Commerce was immediately improved, as likely were the business prospects at the Krug.

Like her uncle Hinrich before her, Anna and her husband Arend had no surviving children. But, her younger sister, Sara had married Otto Johann Schloo in 1739, and they had a son named Johann Hermann Samuel Schloo. Note that this name is spelled either Schloo or Schlou rather indiscriminately. Both Otto and Sara died prematurely, while their son was still a young child. As a result, Johann H.S. Schloo was raised by his aunt Anna and her husband in the Krug.

Shortly after Anna's death in 1765, Johann H.S. married and legally inherited the Krug. After 102 years, the surname of the legal owner had changed from Martfeldt to Schloo.

The family tavern seems to have prospered under three generations of Schloo ownership and management. This is evidenced by an 1836 inventory of farm animals done for taxation purposes. Walle house #19 was owned by Hermann Hinrich Schloo, and it was shortly after Schloo had married Margarethe Grobe. That inventory showed that Schloo owned more than any of the other cottagers and was right up there with the largest farmers of the village (*Halbmeier*). The records show that he owned three horses, nine cows, four pigs, and fifty sheep. Obviously, their land holdings must also have expanded considerably. The only major setbacks of this era were the Napoleonic Wars ... during which the entire area was occupied by French armies and the people were nominally ruled for a few years by Napoleon's brother as part of a puppet German kingdom.

The principal stories of the Schloo era from 1765-1842 come from a family history perspective ... each of the four Schloo marriages shown in the family tree segment below tell a story about the inter-connectedness of families in the small communities of the era. Remember, there was little opportunity for most people to travel or find mates from far-off places.

Johann H.S. married Cathrin Margareth Lüers of Langwedel in 1766. Note that during this era our Lührs ancestors were still using the old spelling of their family name ... that didn't change until

after 1800. And yes, she was from *our* Lührs family. Her younger brother was Johann Lüers, my wife Joan's great-great-great-great-grandfather.

The next Kröger was their son Johann Hinrich Hermann Wilhelm Schlou ... I suspect they felt the number of Christian names somehow correlated with status their in the community!

Johann H.H.W. married Mette Adelheid Müller in 1794. She was from the Müller family of house #1 in nearby Scharnhorst. That family in 1816 bought *Krögers* (house #11) in Scharnhorst and have owned that tavern ever since. Several generations later two siblings

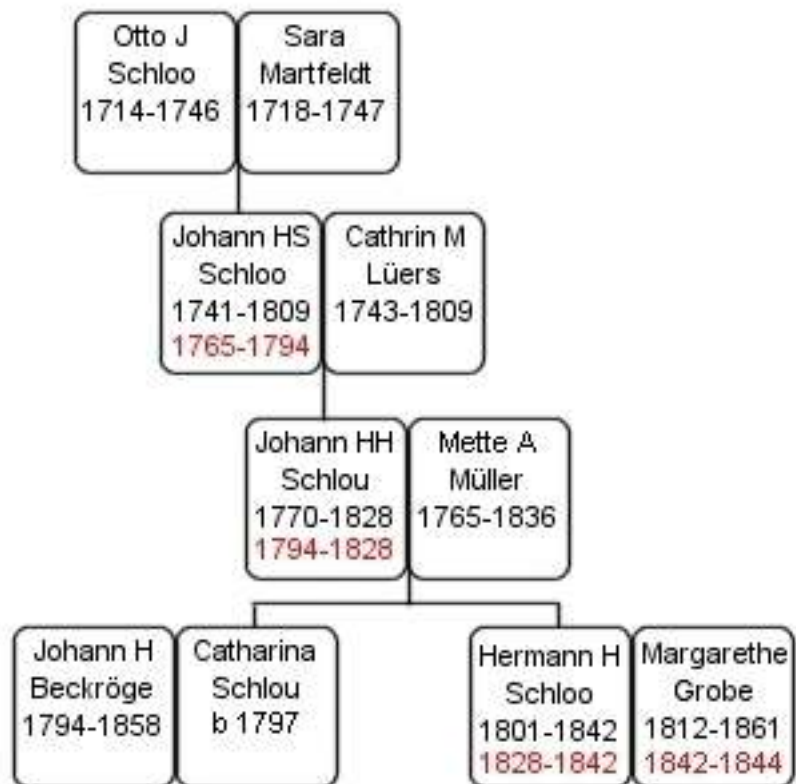
from the Müller family of Walle house #13 respectively married a Müller from Scharnhorst #11 and a Lührs descended from Walle house #19. The bottom line is that if you look hard enough, you'll find that everyone of the old families of Walle are related. By the way, the three old Müller families of Walle and the two old Müller families of Scharnhorst intermarried frequently and cause considerable confusion for the genealogist searching old church records.

Johann H.H.W. and Mette had two children who survived to adulthood. The elder, Catharina, married Johann Hinrich Beckröge (from another old Walle family in Joan's ancestry) in 1815. Their marriage contract stipulates the dowry to be paid by her parents, and it included 400 gold *Thaler*, a bridal coach, a horse, two cows, two oxen, four pigs, and eight sheep. Her father, the Kröger, must have been doing pretty well! Despite this large dowry, in 1831 they were divorced ... a very unusual thing for that time ... and she disappeared. Catharina's absence played out in a strange way a few years later when her brother Hermann H. Schlou, by then the Kröger, died prematurely in 1842.

This brings us to the four Grobe sisters and the two daughters of the eldest, all born in Ubbendorf near Wechold. These six women, between the 1830s and 1860s, seemingly took Walle by storm. Let's just say they enjoyed the company of men and apparently had very similar tastes in that department ... as we shall see.

The first of the Grobe women to come to Walle was Joan's great-great-grandmother Margarethe Dorothea Grobe. She married Hermann Hinrich Schlou in 1835. As noted above he died in 1842 without children. Therefore Margarethe inherited the Krug. Her two younger sisters, Sophie and Anna, joined her in Walle shortly thereafter.

Zum Alten Krug ... the Schloo Era



Schloo's widow married Harm Hinrich Lührs of Langwedel in 1844 and he took on the role of Kröger with considerable success. They had six children, three of which died in infancy, and unfortunately Harm also died at an early age. In 1854, shortly after Harm Lührs' death, Margarethe took as her third husband a widower, Johann Christoph Hermann Eggers. He was a much less astute businessman than Lührs ... and remember, he was basically a caretaker for Harm Lührs eldest son. By the time his tenure ended in 1870, the business and building were in a shambles and the Krug had lost its monopoly in the village.

Now, here's more of the story of the Grobe women. After the death of her first husband, Margarethe Grobe took over the Krug herself. While her right to inherit the Krug building and business was undisputed, the extended Schloo family felt entitled to many family heirlooms in the house. Catharina, the family member with the best claim to these items was not to be found. As a result the family could not expeditiously press their claims. In the meantime, all the items in question "disappeared." It is said that Margarethe carried them away in bags in the dark of night to hide them with her sister Sophie. This devious tactic got her the nickname of *Sackliechen* or *Bag Lady* – a fact which was passed down in family lore and came to us from Joan's dad.

Here's a quick summary of the marital escapades of the other Grobe sisters. The eldest, Rebecca, married a man named Dittmers in her hometown. They had two daughters. Her husband died. She then had two sons. She claimed her dead husband "came to her in the night" but the local pastor was somewhat skeptical and despite her protests listed the boys as illegitimate in the church baptismal registers. About the time that Harm Lührs died, she came with her four children to Walle.

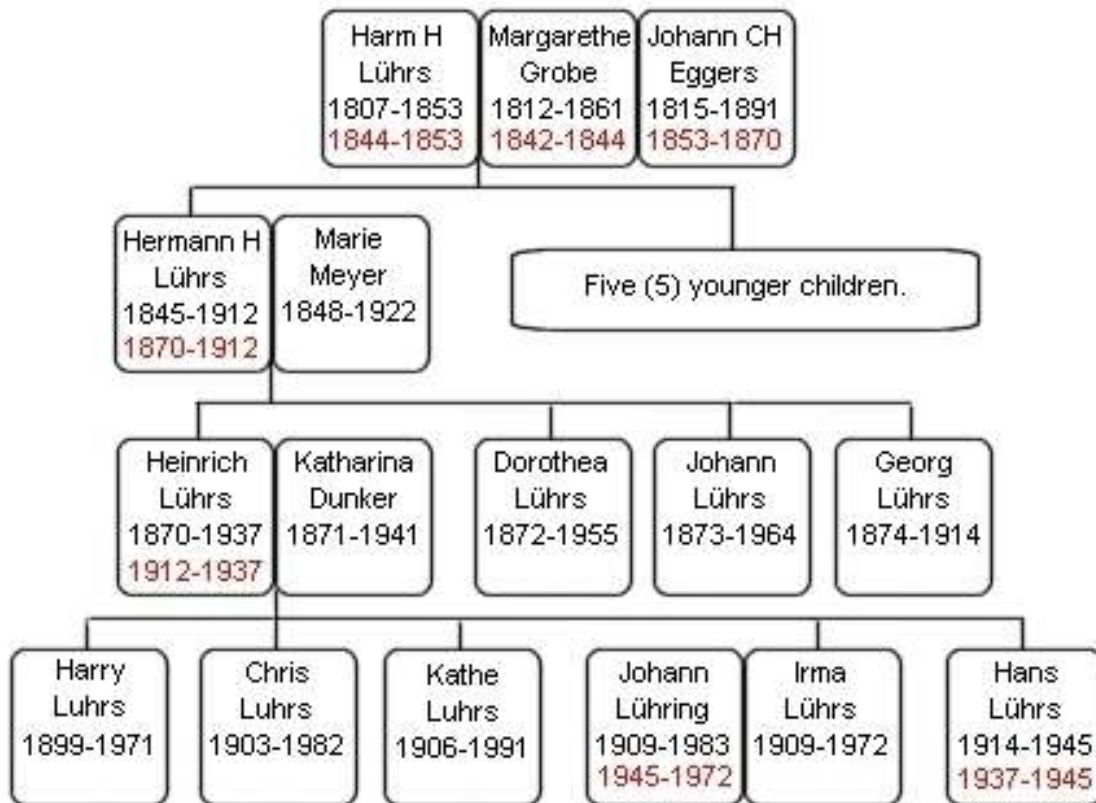
Of the younger Grobe sisters, Sophie became the second wife of Johann Hinrich Müller (born 1804) of Walle house #11. This was the man whose father had operated an illegal tavern in their house beginning in the Napoleonic era, until Schloo had the authorities shut it down in 1821. Youngest sister Anna married Christoph Müller of Walle house #26 (an old Martfeldt homestead) who is a grandson of another of Joan's ancestors, Cathrina Sündermann.

Next let's turn to the two daughters of Rebecca, namely Dora and Anna. They married the same man successively ... Dora died early at age 25. Their husband was Johann Hinrich Müller (born 1829) ... the son of their aunt Sophie's husband. And, to put an end to this strange litany, after Joan's *Bag Lady* great-great-grandmother died in 1861, not many months passed before her sister Rebecca took as her second (official) husband one Johann Eggers, the third husband of her sister Margarethe, the *bag lady*.

Returning to the family business -- as noted above, Johann Eggers brought the business near to bankruptcy and allowed the building to deteriorate badly. Numerous complaints were made to government officials, because the Krug still had an exclusive license to serve beer and alcohol in Walle. It was the village's only *watering-hole*, at that time travel was difficult, and German men take their drinking seriously! The county government in Verden heard their voices and finally revoked the Krug's exclusive license in 1869, permitting others to operate taverns in Walle. One result of that situation was that in 1872 Hermann Rosebrock opened the *Schützenhof* ... a tavern in Walle house #21 ... which provided effective competition to the Krug through most of the 20th century.

The other result of Eggers poor management was that Hermann Hinrich Lührs, the oldest child of Harm Lührs and Margarethe Grobe, in 1870 decided to marry and take control of the business. His first act was to construct a new building. That house with its attached taproom is now the oldest existing part of Walle #19, the *Groot Doer* (big door) to the pub was on the courtyard side. Several additions have been made to the building since.

Zum Alten Krug ... the Lührs Era



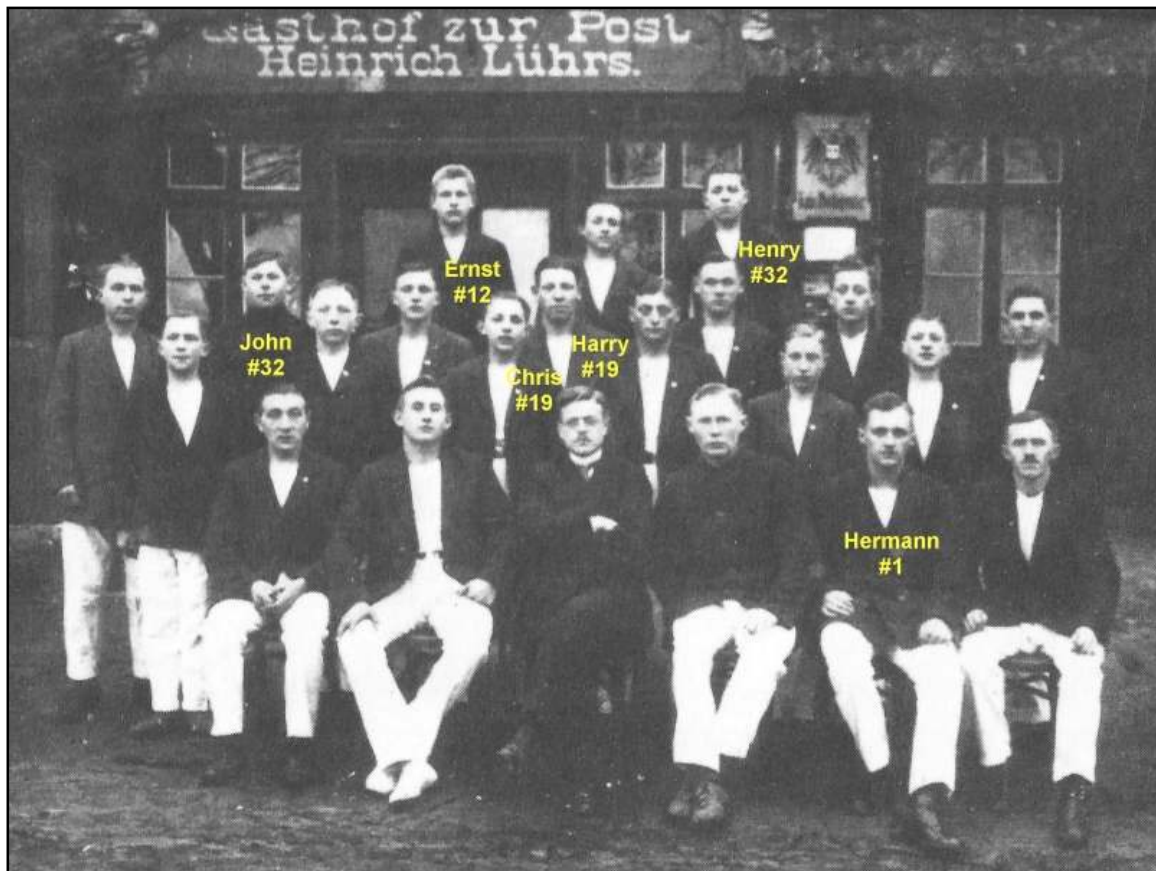
The years from the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 until the onset of the First World War in 1914 were a very peaceful era ... quite unusual in German history. As in America, a great



deal of industrialization took place in Germany during this period and there was a huge economic surge. Good times brought prosperity to the nation and to the Lührs family of Walle house #19, as is apparent from the 1890 property tax rolls and the 1898 photo seen here. The Kröger, Hermann Hinrich Lührs, his wife Marie Meyer, and their four children are shown. The children are (L-R) Johann (Joan's grandfather), Dorothea, Georg, and Heinrich (who succeeded as Kröger in 1912).

According to the records, in 1890, there were 72 taxable properties in Walle. Only eight taxpayers paid more taxes, based on the value of the property, than did the Kröger.

Hermann Lührs paid 32.58 Reichsmarks tax on the house #19 property. It is notable that one of those paying slightly more was H.H. Rosebrock, proprietor of the *Schützenhof*, the other tavern at house #21. It is clear that the tavern business was doing well during this period. In any case, Hermann Lührs successfully brought the Krug back from the brink of disaster. Upon Hermann's death in 1912, his oldest son Heinrich took over as Kröger

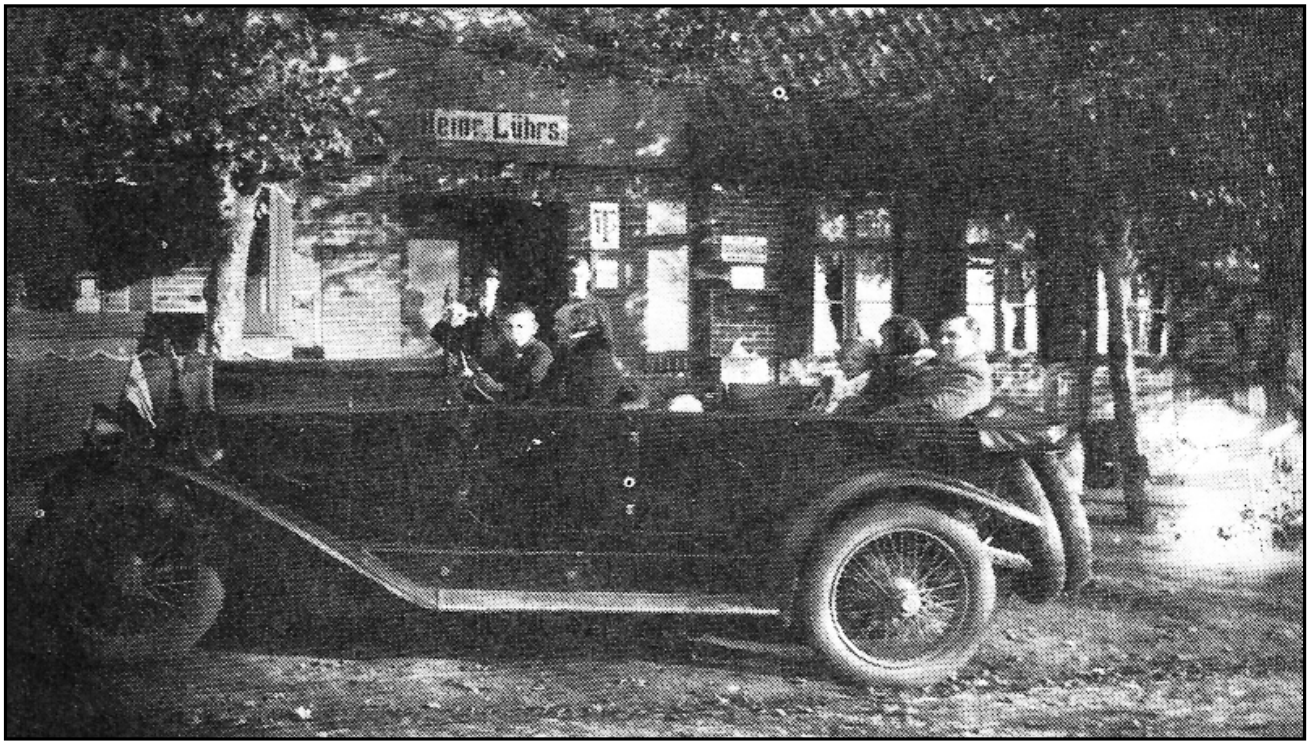


1920 photo of the front entrance of *The Krug* with the members of TSV Walle. *Turn-und Sportveren Walle* – the Gymnastics and Athletic Club of Walle -- with their coach. Identified in the group are young men from all four Lührs families of Walle. Houses 19 and 32 were first cousins, houses 1 and 12 were first cousins, and the two pairs of houses were more distantly related (5th cousins).

The long wartime period and the economic disasters that befell Germany after the war took their toll on both the nation, the family, and the family business. In wartime men served in the military and the women of the family had to take on all the tasks at home. The economic collapse after the German defeat made savings and investments worthless. The Krug was a hard asset, but there was little money, few jobs, and less hope. As a result, Heinrich's three oldest children ... Heinrich (Harry), Christian (Chris), and Käthe ... emigrated to the United States. Chris and his cousin John (Joan's father) arrived together at Ellis Island aboard the *SS York* on 21 December 1923. Older brother Harry joined them in October 1926. The plan was that Hans, the youngest son of the Kröger, would take over the family business when the time came. In 1929, Heinrich Lührs bought the nearby house #35 (more on that later). He died in 1937 and young Hans Lührs became Kröger.

At right is a 1924 photo of Kröger Heinrich Lührs, his wife Katharina Dunker, and son Hans.





1928 photo of the Krug in Walle ... then known as *Gasthof Heinr. Lührs*.

In the auto, we believe, are (backseat) John and Marie Lührs visiting from America and their youngest sister, Leni; in front, beside the driver, is brother Hermann ... all of the Lührs family of Walle house #32.

By then Germany, under Hitler, was on a path toward war. Hans was of course drafted, and as during the First World War, the business was again sustained solely by the efforts of the women of the family. As Germany was collapsing in early 1945, Hans Lührs went missing in action and was presumed killed. Irma and her husband Johann Lühring, who returned from the war uninjured, took over operation of *Zum Alten Krug*.

Technically, the siblings in America had legitimate claims of ownership. But, the brothers Harry and Chris promptly gave up their share of the inheritance in favor of their sister Irma. Sister Kathe in New York is reported to have said she'd give up her claim only "over my dead body." Therefore, with disputed ownership, over the next several decades financing options on the property were limited. It wasn't until Kathe's death in 1991 that clear title to the Krug could be established. By then it was too late.

Here's the unfortunate ending to the story. During Germany's recovery after World War II there was again a general sense of prosperity. Irma and Johann decided to improve their personal circumstances and expand their local business presence. They sold the old house at Walle #35 that her father had purchased three decades earlier and built themselves a large house near Walle's railway station and they opened a grocery business. The Krug and its operation was leased out for a few years, while they built the grocery into a successful business. When their oldest son decided to marry in 1966, they turned the grocery over to him and returned to operate the Krug themselves.

Following Irma's death in 1972, Günther, the younger son of Johann and Irma, took over the Krug with his wife Hannegrete Heine. For a few years things went well. In 1980 when we visited Walle, Hannegrete proudly brought out the ancient *Urkunde* to show us. In 1981 the family undertook a major expansion and renovation of *Zum Alten Krug* which included a large banquet hall ... but probably over-extended themselves financially. Business problems multiplied and eventually by the early 1990s, in an attempt to keep the property in the family, Hannegrete's daughter (the step-

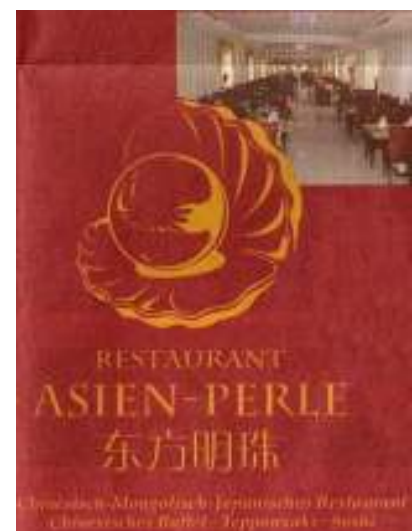
daughter of Günther Lühring) stepped in and bought the place with the help of a bank. She continued to operate the Krug with her husband. But, times were difficult for a business of this type ... especially in a small back-water town like Walle. People were much more mobile, and the younger “in” crowd preferred the more modern and lively bars and restaurants of nearby cities like Verden.

When we last visited Walle in 2002, *Zum Alten Krug* was still a going business. Actually we attended a *Golden Wedding* celebration in the banquet hall of the Krug for Hermann Lührs and Marlise Müller and enjoyed ourselves immensely. But, when I sat for a few minutes in the dimly-lit and empty bar room talking to the owners, it was obvious they were having business problems. It was shortly thereafter that the Krug was closed due to financial and other problems. The unused property quickly fell into disrepair and became a blight in the community.

Below: a 1990 photo of *Zum Alten Krug* taken by the author.



Finally, in 2010 there was a bank sale – by this time the *Schützenhof* had also closed and sold at the same auction. A local auto dealer bought both properties with the intention of doing some modest renovations and reselling them. Since then, *Zum Alten Krug* was sold to a young Chinese restaurateur for 200,000 Euros. On January 27, 2012 he opened it as a Chinese restaurant named *Asien Perle*. According to a news article, in addition to “traditional and modern Chinese dishes,” the *Geschäftsführer* (manager) plans to feature Mongolian and Japanese food in a grand “all-you-can-eat” buffet table ... served “with traditional German hospitality.” At right is part of a newspaper advertisement announcing the grand opening with the extensively remodeled interior ... painted in lavender and gold.





Recent view of *Zum Alten Krug* showing a sign which reads *Lühring Gasthof*.

That's the rather sad ending of *Zum Alten Krug*, which had been ... for almost 350 years ... a family business which supported many generations of our ancestors.

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