

## **The Knapp Family History**

The progenitor of our branch of the Knapp family is Charles Knapp who was born in March, 1815 in Baden, Germany. His brother, David Knapp was born in 1827 also in Baden, Germany. Eva Carolina Knapp Ott, our great great grandmother was also born in Baden Germany in 1810 and is the sister of Charles Knapp and David Knapp. Eva is the wife of Peter Ott, and mother of Wilhelm Ott. Eva's husband Peter had passed away in Baden, Germany prior to Eva coming to America. Eva Knapp migrated to Detroit, Michigan around 1853 and lived with her son, Wilhelm Ott. Eva Knapp and Peter Ott had 11 surviving children: Justina, Xavier, Gottlieb, Angeline born 1849 in Baden, Ludwig who was the father of Judge Louis Ott, Fred, Wilhelm Ott born 1839 in Baden, father of our grandmother Elisabeth Ott Bender, Jacob, George born in Württemberg, John born in Württemberg and Johann George, born 1838 in Württemberg. Angeline Ott remained single and in 1870 she resided in David Knapp's household with his wife and 7 children. The family affectionately called her "Aunt Unchling". She was a thin woman with a very big appetite. At family gatherings she ate heartily and when full would go outside and jump up and down to settle the food, then go back in and eat some more. She was in her early 20s when she lived with David Knapp. In 1870 David also had another boarder in his home, Adolph Knapp, also in his early 20s.

Charles and David left Baden around 1848. It is believed that they first for a short period of time went to Bavaria and or Württemberg before immigrating to America in the early 1850s. There was a huge political upheaval in Germany around 1848 which is very possibly the reason that the Knapp family left Baden and settled in America. By 1853 Charles and David settled in Detroit, Michigan where David later founded a flourishing stone cutting and building business on Atwater Street in downtown Detroit on the Detroit River.

In 1855 Charles was just getting established in Detroit. He was a clerk and did not own a home. He was boarding with Charles Mellows.

On the 1 of December, 1859, roughly 6 years after settling in Detroit, David Knapp purchased property, lot 31 and 10 feet off the side of lot 32, Wells and Wormers subdivision of out lot 25 on St. Aubin Farm. It was on this property that he established his stone yard on Atwater and Riopelle on the waterfront of the Detroit River just outside of downtown Detroit. He purchased this property from Aaron and Eliza Fisher, and Elam and Esther Fisher who resided in Detroit.

In 1860 David Knapp's real estate value was listed as \$500, and his personal estate was listed as \$200.

By 1862 Charles Knapp had established a business on that property, naming it Knapp and company. He now owned his own house at 116 Elizabeth. His brother David Knapp also purchased a home on the north side of Catherine between Dubois and St. Aubin Ave.

Charles and David Knapp established their business which they named Knapp and Company, (David and Charles) stone cutters at the foot of Russell.

In 1864 Charles and David Knapp billed themselves as Knapp and Company, listing their stone yard being located at Atwater between Rivard & Russell.

In 1867 David Knapp went into partnership with William Springer, listing themselves in the Detroit City Directory as Knapp & Springer. They stated that their stone yard in the rear of 301 Atwater. Charles Knapp was not mentioned in 1867. David Knapp now lives at 421 Catherine.

In 1868 Charles Knapp Sr. was listed as a stone cutter, with yards at 171 Adams Ave E & 204 Elizabeth E. He now lives at 228 Elizabeth E.

David sent for many of his relatives who were still residing in Baden, asking them to come to Detroit to work in his stone quarry. Many Knapps and Otts did come, including our Great grandfather, Wilhelm Ott with his first wife Elisabeth Braun, his two very small children, Pauline and Adolf Ott, and his mother, Eva Carolina Knapp Ott.

David built many impressive buildings in downtown Detroit including the Detroit City Library on Farmer Street behind the old J.L. Hudson store.

Charles (Carl in German) Knapp became a citizen of the United States on the 4th day of October, 1856.

David Knapp was appointed administrator of the estate of his relative, Ludwig (Louis) Knapp who died of dysentery while serving in the Union Army in Kentucky. Ludwig had designated as next of kin Caroline Knapp, age 19 and Eliza Knapp, age 17, residing in Baden, Germany. He left an estate values at \$200. The probate estate was filed on the 8 of December, 1863 and was proved on the 5 of

January, 1864. W.P. Yerkes was the Probate Judge who handled the matter. This probate file can be found in Book IV, file # 3691.

David Knapp was very active in Detroit's political scene. He was an Alderman in the 10 Ward elected in 1869. He was paid a sum not to exceed \$1.50 for attendance at each regular session. He served on the Board of Supervisors. He was also a member of the Detroit Board of Health. The Aldermen were called together especially when the City of Detroit was threatened by an outbreak of cholera, smallpox, diphtheria, or scarlet fever. (Detroit experienced an outbreak of cholera in the early 1850s. Citizens were told to sprinkle lime around their houses to lessen the chance of getting it.)

In 1870 Charles Knapp's real estate was valued at \$2000 and the personal estate at \$400.

David Knapp was one of the original officers of the Wayne County Savings Bank which was organized on October 7, 1871. The original capital of this bank was \$30,000, in September, 1875 it was increase to \$150,000. The bank was originally located at the northwest corner of Griswold and Congress Sts, but on December 5, 1876 to the rear of the old location, to a building erected by the bank.

This information was in the card file at the Detroit Library: Knapp, David. The contract for the Library building is awarded to David Knapp in 1875. This information was in the D.P.H. handbook, page 11, 1900.

David Knapp often had some serious disagreements with the City of Detroit, especially in regard to the Detroit City Library. David gave them the plans for the library which the City approved but did not want to pay proffered cost. David told them a number of changes would have to be made, reducing the scale and grandeur of the library if they insisted on the reduced price. When the Library was completed and the City saw that some of the beautiful accoutrements in the original plan were scrapped they were livid. David Knapp told them that the alterations had been discussed when they cut the cost and it was their fault if they did not read and understand the revised blue prints.

David Knapp advertised his building and general contracting in the Detroit newspapers. This ad appeared:

***David Knapp***  
***Dealer in all kinds of Building Stone***  
***Stone Cutter, Builder & General Contractor***  
***Atwater St. between Rivard & Riopelle Sts.***  
***Detroit, Michigan***  
***Estimates furnished on all Public & Private Buildings***

This ad was taken from Polk's Detroit City Directory.

David and Charles Knapp were very active in the stone yard on Atwater Street. There were other perils faced by Charles Knapp in his running of the stone yard. It was reported by the Detroit Free Press Digest on October 17, 1871 that Charles was injured by falling lumber in his yard on Atwater Street. He did recover from his injuries.

They worked side by side with their Knapp sons and Ott cousins cutting stone day by day in the quarry. What they did not know until it was much too late was the fact that the stone dust continually settled into all of their lungs, creating a severe breathing problem for all the workers. Great grandfather Wilhelm Ott succumbed to inhaling stone dust for 23 years and died at the early age of 54. Most of the second generation Knapp children died of stone lung at the early age of 35 to 39 years. It was a horrible death. The men couldn't breathe and were coughing up blood. Many of the men passed away from a sudden hemorrhage of the lungs. The affected Knapp men were horrified watching their brothers suddenly hemorrhage to death right in front of them.

Charles Knapp Sr., the founder of the Knapp stone yard on Atwater St in Detroit, died on September 14, 1879 at the early age of 63, dying from the same malady as afflicted all of the Knapp and family men who worked for over 20 years in the stone yard. He left behind a wife Elizabeth, a brother David Knapp, sons, Charles Knapp Jr, Michael, Joseph, Louis, William and Albert. He had one daughter, Mary.

Charles Knapp and his family were devout Catholics, a religion that they brought with them from Baden Germany. Charles Knapp Sr. was buried from St. Mary's Church in Detroit and was laid to rest in lot 132 Section B in Mt. Elliott cemetery in Detroit. This is a Knapp family plot with a monument stone. There are 10 other Knapp relatives and 2 babies interred in this plot. The last burial in this Knapp family plot was in 1933.

Mount Elliott Cemetery is the oldest Catholic burying ground in Detroit. It directly abuts Elmwood, the oldest Protestant cemetery, to the east.

The first purchase of land for the Mount Elliott Cemetery was the 11 acres from the Leib farm. The purchase of this land had hardly been completed on August 31, 1841 when Robert Elliott, who was one of a group of people promoting the purchase, became ill and died September 10, 1841. His burial on September 12, 1841, was the first in the new ground which was named Mt. Elliott.

A second purchase of land was consecrated on December 17, 1865 and a third on October 16, 1881. Charles Knapp is buried in the 2nd land purchase. The Knapp family members were Catholics in good standing with the Church and were buried according to the Rites of the Catholic Church, including Julius Knapp who slit his own throat. The Knapp family were very prominent citizens in Detroit and in good standing with the Archdiocese of Detroit. The Catholic Church had the final say whether one could be buried in a Catholic cemetery, so if one did not follow the rules one could be barred from burial in Mt. Elliott. One other prominent Catholic family that was the Knapp family contemporary got themselves in big hot water with the Catholic Archdiocese. The Catholic Church was very autocratic – if they refused to bury a person, you had no say. You also had to make your yearly confession and communion and failure to do so would bar you from a Catholic mass and burial in a Catholic cemetery. The Knapp family members were faithful to their obligations and remained in good stead. However the head of the prominent Campeau family refused to cow tow to the Church and angered the bishop with many of his politics. As members of the Campeau family died the bishop could not deny them a Catholic burial as they were faithful to their church and its teachings. But the Church made no bones about the fact that they were gunning for Joseph, the head of the family. Joseph realized that there was no way he could get buried in Mt. Elliott, however he knew it was important to his family to repose in a Catholic cemetery where one could get a 7 year indulgence when someone visited your grave and prayed an Our Father. So Joseph made a very clever move – he buried his wife and family right on the west fence of Mt. Elliott and then bought his grave in Elmwood right next to his wife, therefore allowing them to be forever in repose side by side.

After Charles Knapp Sr. died David Knapp formed a partnership with William E. Avery in 1884. They listed themselves as general contractors & stone dealers. They listed their business address as being situated at the south west corner of Congress & 4th. The partnership appeared to have dissolved in 1888.

Young Julius, the prodigy of his father David Knapp, slit his own throat at the young age of 37 as he could no longer tolerate dying by inches of lung disease, knowing what his fate would be after watching the slow death of his siblings. The Catholic Church understood this young man's mental and physical anguish, especially in light of the fact that he had watched his entire family die of the same ailment. The Catholic Church buried young Julius in full graces as a member of the Catholic Church.

David, having already buried his beloved older brother Charles, the founder of this stone cutting empire, to stone lung at the young age of 63 in 1879, and now his beloved son, Julius, was inconsolable over losing most of his family to stone lung so in 1892 David and his remaining family moved to Pasadena, California. David Knapp died in Los Angeles, California in 1893. He left behind a wife, Rosanne, and children, Elisabeth, Ludwig, Sarisa, Rose, Sophia, & David.

His grandsons, who never worked in the stone yard, went onto the university and obtained 4 year degrees as architects and surveyors. So the family members, who toiled so diligently in the stone yard, building up the building empire, succumbed at an early age to stone lung, while the next generation finished college, earned degrees thanks to the funds supplied by their hard working manual laboring fathers and uncles and inherited the fortune built up by those who died an early death.

The Ott and Knapp families intermingled socially long after the deaths of Charles and David. An interesting Knapp story was told by Edward Bender. His mother, Elizabeth Ott Bender was close to one of her Knapp cousins and they would visit back and forth regularly. The Knapp cousin loved to gamble and was always very lucky which made her very happy. Elizabeth Bender did not gamble as she was not lucky and needed to hang on to her money for necessities. The Knapp woman on the other hand gambled regularly and almost always won. She got the shock of her life when toward the last months of her life all her luck vanished. She died a very shocked and unhappy woman.

The Knapp and Ott families, once so close and their lives so intertwined have now gone their separate ways complete strangers. In today's impersonal & fast paced world very few of us have any idea that we are the descendants of such a dynamic branch of the family. Genealogy is a wonderful tool for connecting us to the past members of our long ago ancestors and giving us a glimpse of what their lives were.

Here is a family tree connecting Knapp and Ott members:

