
Widdicombe Children's Odyssey

1904, Kansas City, Kansas

SUMMARY:

After the death of Margarethe Wendt-Widdicombe (the author's great aunt) in 1904, giving birth to Mary (her 12th child), husband Robert C Widdicombe Sr took their 10 living children (ages newborn to 17); Robert, Walter, Frank, Henry, Wilhelmina, Elizabeth, Margarette, Maude, Charles, and Mary) and moved from Kansas City, KS to Galveston, TX. Along the way, however, Robert abandoned his children. The children then had to make their way back to the Turner, KS area where their grandparents on their Mother's side, Max and Minnie Wendt, lived. The Wendt's were in their 70's at the time. The 10 children were eventually adopted and raised by other family members.

Margarethe's sister Elizabeth was married to Henry T Zimmer Sr (Deputy US Marshall, Chief of Police, Kansas City, KS, KS State Senator). They adopted Robert Jr, Walter (Hack), Frank, Henry, Wilhelmina (Minnie), Maud and Mary.

Margarethe's brother Fred Wendt was married to Anna M Curth. They adopted Lizzie, Margarette and Walter.

Widdicombe Children's Odyssey as recounted in the 1981 book: *Pride of the Golden Bear*, by Betty Gibson:

It is difficult to fathom the depth of human tragedy felt when the death of a very dear spouse is experienced or maybe even why people react in different ways, but this experience became reality for the Widdicombe family on April 7, 1904 when Margaret passed away during the birth of her baby girl. Within a short while, feeling the grief very deeply, Robert Widdicombe loaded up his family of ten children and their worldly possessions and proceeded to leave for Texas. The children are: Robert age 17, Walter (Hack) age 15, Frank age 14, Henry age 12, Minnie age 10, Lizzie age 9 (will be 10 in May), Margarette age 8, Maud age 6, Charles age 4, and the newborn, Mary. Getting part way to Galveston, Texas, Robert abandoned the children leaving them to fend for themselves. As best they could the children came back to the Turner area where the grandparents on their mothers side are living.

Margaret was the daughter of Maxmillian and Minnie Wendt who have been involved in the rebuilding and cleaning up of the Flood after effects for these two years in both their home area of Carlisle and of the home of some of their family in Armourdale. Maxmillian and Minnie are 75 and 76 years old now in 1904 and residing with their children. They had five children

(1) Fred, (whose first wife died in 1899 leaving four small children. Fred has now remarried to Miss Anna M. Curth and they have three children of their own: Otto, Henry, and Matilda and this family is complete.) (2) Max E. C. (who married Maude Ashwell and they became the parents of: Frank L., Maude E., Alma L., Effie E., Elizabeth E., and Max C. Alma L as an adult married Louis Rieke and Effie E. married Alban Rieke.) (3) Minnie (who married Frank Toenobohn and they became the parents of: Minnie who as an adult married Tice Meyers, Frank married Clara, and Hulda married Edmund Godard, son of Alfred and Irma Godard.) (4) Margaret who has just passed away (5) Elizabeth (who married Henry T. Zimmer. They have no children of their own and live in Armourdale.)

The Widdicombe children arriving back in this area find just the love and warmth they need from these grandparents, aunts and uncles of their mother's family. Robert, Hack, Frank, Henry, Minnie, Maud, and little Mary were taken and given a home by Henry and Elizabeth Zimmer. They took the Zimmer name dropping the Widdicombe name. Lizzie, Margarette, and Charles were given a home with Fred and Anna Wendt taking the Wendt name and dropping the Widdicombe name.[55]

BIOLOGICAL PARENTS:

Robert Clark Widdicombe Sr

BIRTH 15 JUL 1862 • Norristown, Montgomery, Pennsylvania

DEATH 26 JAN 1946 • Galveston, Galveston, Texas

Margarethe Wendt

BIRTH 3 NOV 1864 • Halle, Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

DEATH 7 APR 1904 • Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas

Married: Sept 29, 1886, Kansas City, KS



Mrs. Maggie Widdacombe.
Mrs. Maggie Widdacombe, aged 41 years, wife of R. C. Widdacombe, living on the John Gibbs farm a mile and a half south of town, died last Thursday. Her death was the result of child birth. The deceased was a daughter of Max Wendt and besides a husband, leaves a family of ten children. The funeral, which occurred Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock, was one of the largest ever seen around Argentine. Rev. E. B. Smith delivered the funeral sermon and interment was at Argentine cemetery.

OBITUARY FOR MAGGIE: APRIL, 1904, KANSAS CITY, KS

We know that within 10 days of his wife's death, the family farm was for sale.

FARM OF 80 ACRES, MOSTLY ALL planted; stock and all implements; reason for selling, account death in family. Inquire R. C. Widdicombe, one mile west of Argentine cemetery.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR, APR 17, 1904

ADOPTING PARENTS ONE:

-adopted Robert, Walter (Hack), Frank, Henry, Wilhelmina (Minnie), Maud and Mary

Henry Theodore Zimmer Sr

BIRTH MAY 1862 • Saint Joseph, Buchanan, Missouri

DEATH 17 OCT 1938 • Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas

Elizabeth Helen Wendt

BIRTH NOV 1869 • St. Louis, Missouri

DEATH 23 DEC 1945 • Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas

ADOPTING PARENTS TWO:

-adopted Lizzie, Margarette and Walter

Siegfried Friedrich Theodore "Fred" Wendt Sr

BIRTH 31 OCT 1866 • St Louis, Missouri

DEATH 15 JAN 1953 • Kansas City, Jackson, Missouri

Annie Mary Curth

BIRTH 31 AUG 1885 • Cross Timbers, Hickory, Missouri

DEATH 26 OCT 1941 • Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas

ROBERT WIDDICOMBE RELOCATION:

It's not known exactly what motivated Robert Widdicombe Sr to leave Kansas City, where, following the tragic death of his wife, he seemingly had family resources to help with his children. Family stories suggest Robert was a heavy drinker and was physically abusive to his wife, Margarette. Thus, Wendt family members at the time may have harboured strong negative feelings regarding Robert.

Also, we know that there was a massive reconstruction going on in Galveston at that time. The September 1900 hurricane had devastated the city. Thus, there were vast opportunities for the construction trades and general labourers. Robert was a house painter and paperhanger, so he likely had the right skill set for the reconstruction effort.

Nor, do we know why Robert abandoned his children mid-route, sending them back to Kansas City, while he continued to Galveston. Robert Jr and Walter were 17 and 14 respectively in 1904. Thus, they were not children. Moving several kids is one thing. Moving a small army of children 750+ miles is another thing. In 1904, this must have been an extraordinary effort, and must have been by train. This, amid the overwhelming loss of their mother just a few months earlier.

Railroads in 1900



Assuming the 1904 trip from Kansas City to Galveston, TX was by train, it's clear that there was no direct route. They could have gone west or east to connect with a Houston bound train. From Houston, they would have made their way to Galveston overland.



I theorize that, somewhere along the way to Galveston, Robert Jr and Walter had a falling out with their father, Robert Sr. The argument, which could have been about *'why leave Kansas City where we know people, people that can help us, to go to a town where we know no one'.* *'Who will help us there?'* This argument may have escalated into a mutiny/insurrection of sorts, overriding Robert Sr.

Led by Robert Jr and Walter, the ten children and their collective belongings left the Texas bound train, refusing to go any further. Robert Sr perhaps gave them an ultimatum to stay on the train, which was futile. Robert Sr then gave them money to travel back to Kansas City, and proceeded alone to Galveston, where he would remain the rest of his life.

WIDDICOMBE CHILDREN BIRTH STATISTICS:

1) Robert, June 26, 1888

2) Walter, Nov 19, 1889
Interval: 16 months

3) Frank, Aug 14, 1891
Interval: 20 months

4) Henry, Nov 6, 1893
Interval: 26 months

5) Wilhelmina, July 16, 1894
Interval: 8 months

6) Elizabeth, May 19, 1895
Interval: 10 months

6a) Possible child, approx. Nov, 1896 (died an infant - gravestone M / W @ Maple Hill - adjacent to Maggie Wendt-Widdicombe)

7) Margarette, Aug 10, 1898
Interval: 38 months

8) Maude, Jul, 1899
Interval: 12 months

9) Charles, Mar 17, 1901
Interval: 17 months

10) Freddie, Sep, 1902 (died Mar, 1903)
Interval: 18 months

11) Mary, Mar 29, 1904
Interval: 18 months

Average - one child birthed every 16 months. Excluding the 38 month gap between Elizabeth and Margarette, one child birthed every 14 months

WIDDICOMBE CHILDREN FAMILY BURIAL LOCATIONS:

* Has Find a Grave Record
(adopting parent surname)

Biological Parents:

1. Margarethe / Maggie Wendt (d.1904): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
2. Robert Widdicombe, Sr (d.1946): Dickinson Cemetery, Galveston, TX *

Adopting Parents:

1. Henry T Zimmer (d.1938): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
2. Elizabeth / Lizzie Wendt (d.1945): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
1. Fred Wendt (1953): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
2. Annie Curth (1941): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *

Children:

1. Robert, Jr (Zimmer) (d.1955): Quindaro, Kansas City, KS *
2. Walter / Hack (Zimmer) (d.1973): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
3. Frank (Zimmer) (d.1962): Highland Park, Kansas City, KS *
4. Henry (Zimmer) (d.1971): Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens, Kansas City, KS *
5. Wilhelmina / Minnie (Zimmer) (d.1979): White Chapel Memorial Gardens, Kansas City, MO *
6. Elizabeth / Lizzie (Wendt) (d.1991): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
7. Margarette / Maggie (Wendt) (d.1986): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
8. Maude / Mandie (Zimmer) (d. 1938): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
9. Charles (Wendt) (d.1984): Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens, Kansas City, KS *
10. Frederick / Freddie (1902-1903): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *
11. Mary (Zimmer) (d.1996): Maple Hill, Kansas City, KS *

WIDDICOMBE CHILDREN, 1927:

Back Row (L-R): Robert, Walter, Charles, Frank, Henry

Front Row (L-R): Minnie, Elizabeth, Margarette, Maude, Mary



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