

Frank Debuschewitz - separating fact from fiction

Aka: Frank Dwitz Aka: Frank Dewitz Aka: Frank Deubensuede

By John Baldwin, paternal cousin of Frank Debuschewitz's gr gr granddaughters

For two 1956 Gallipolis, OH newspaper articles, Frank Dewitz was interviewed on the eve of his '100th' birthday. In the articles Frank stated several, seemingly, tall tales about his origins and travels. Let's take a closer look at the stories and see if we can separate fact from fiction. Along the way we will examine the Debuschewitz family (aka Dewitz) and find that they are quite unique. In fact, I submit that this is the ONLY Debuschewitz family in America and that Frank Debuschewitz/Dewitz is its Patriarch.

Gallia Countian, 100, Visits Ironton

IRONTON, May 18 — The senior guest registered at MacArthur Hotel today is Frank Dewitz, Gallipolis, Ohio. He was born in 1856 and his birthday is May 26.

Manager Stanley Osborne is extending every courtesy to his distinguished guest, who was

born at Brumberg, Germany, but now has lost all knowledge to speak his native language. His son, Carl, retired C&O engineer, at 72, accompanied Dad on his visit to Ironton.

The centenarian was a machinist by trade before buying

a farm in Gallia County. He likes to talk about his trips West, many years ago, when he met Wild Bill Hickok and Kit Carson in Kansas in 1873 and General Custer in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He is also proud of the fact he eats with his own teeth.

The Gallia Times

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NO. 21

Bulaville Rd. Man 100 On Saturday Says He "Lives Each Day for Itself"

By Charley Butler

It would be difficult to guess accurately the age of Frank Dewitz, Bulaville Rd., who lives across the road from the Shrine club. An estimate between 75 and 80 probably would be about average for the casual observer. But Dewitz will be 100 years of age Saturday. He was born May 26, 1856, in eastern Germany near Bernburg, in a section now behind the Iron Curtain, he says.

That was before the Civil War in America, and young Frank came to this country during that conflict, when he was less than eight years of age.

Youngest of nine children born to Julius Dewitz and his wife, Frank was the only one to leave home, and so far as he knows, the rest of the family lived and died in Germany. He lost trace of all his relatives in Germany many years ago.

Young Dewitz came to America with a couple named Barent, and his first recollection is arriving in Baltimore by train. He does not recall where they disembarked after the ocean journey. Soon after reaching Baltimore, the boy struck out on his own, and before reaching eight years of age was employed in a woolen mill, where for three years he continued to support himself. He lost trace of the Barents, and was entirely on his own. He has been on his own ever since.

Next employment was in a glass factory where he fired a furnace for heating ingredients for the handblown glass products. Tiring of this after a couple years, and now at the age of 13, he began

learning the brickmaking trade, and has followed it mainly since. In excellent health, with only a hearing difficulty and changing eyesight which prevents reading the newspapers, Dewitz keeps up with day to day events by radio. Not only does he talk of events of many years ago, but of happenings

of last month, last year, or maybe yesterday — a trait considered unusual in a person of such advanced years. But he maintains an interest in people and daily occurrences, and maybe this is one of his secrets for keeping young. "I don't worry about tomorrow. I may not wake up in the morning,

but I know I am here now, and I live each day for itself," Dewitz explains his lack of concern about the future, not having much coming to him now he says, and expresses a philosophy that might be beneficial to some of the rest of us. Certainly he shows no effects of worry.

He has never had any serious illness. A few years ago he went to the hospital for a checkup, but nothing was found wrong except for his changing eyesight.

Dewitz no longer smokes, though he once smoked a pipe and later cigarettes. Before that he chewed tobacco, but got disgusted with the habit and quit. He drinks an occasional bottle of beer, having cut out other liquors long ago, though he never drank to excess "except on a party once in a while."

Born and christened a Lutheran he holds to no particular church, but has his own personal relationship with God to whom he has always prayed. Christian relations with both Catholic and Protestant have been enjoyed in his life, and he says "the churches are necessary to maintain our civilization."

He does not offer any panacea for the ills of the world, but appears to think it is a pretty good place. He has seen a lot of America, and refers to cities and states as if he were there last week. Except for a short period spent in the home of his son Carl, who lives on the same farm, Dewitz has "batched" since the death of his wife 48 years ago, and he continues to live by himself, in a

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Bulaville Rd. Man Reaches Century Mark

(Continued from Page 1)

comfortable room on the rear of a farm building. Living quarters are immaculate, with everything he needs present and in good order. He enjoys doing for himself, and his son and daughter-in-law, believing he is best satisfied with his manner of life, let him alone except for visiting with him.

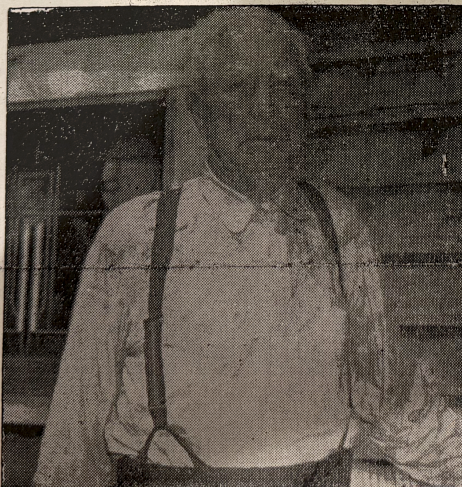
Dewitz has one other son, Ed, now living in Oregon, who has a sort of wanderlust like his father, and travels about in a motor trailer.

Always of an independent nature, Dewitz has covered most of the United States in his 22 years residence in the country, following the brickmaking and railroad-ing jobs. He lived for 25 or 26 years in Chicago, the longest ever in one place, but before that followed his trades about the country and says he "helped build the west when it was wild and woolly."

Asked about his education — a boy of eight going to work supporting himself can not very well get much formal schooling — he said he "got it along the railroads," associating with educated people, reading good books including the Bible, and retaining what was good, letting the rest go by. After learning to read, he read everything worthwhile he could lay a hand to, and must have done some pretty good self-educating judging by his conversation.

The present farm was bought in 1947, and Dewitz keeps in condition by cutting brush and similar work about the place. And for a man of 100, he is in remarkable condition.

Saturday marks the end of a century for Frank Dewitz, a century that has seen greater changes than all those which went before it. Dewitz has kept pace, and grown along with the times. He is far from being senile, and gives the impression of being a much younger man.



Surviving is addition to his son, his wife, Geraldine, another son, Donald of Iron

Age Considerations

The author of one of the articles stated correctly, "It would be difficult to guess accurately the age of Frank Dewitz..." For his part, Frank stated his birthdate to be May 26, 1856. There is no known birth record for Frank, so we have to rely on his memory and the statements provided to federal census takers.

Federal Census Ages/Birthdates reported:

1900 @ May 1866

1920 @ age 63 ~1857

1930 @ age 64 ~1866

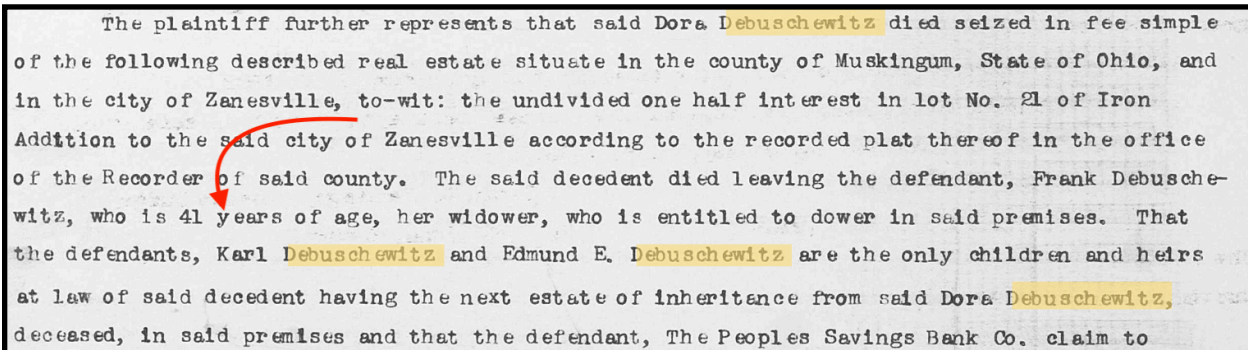
1940 @ age 83 ~1857

1950 @ age 93 ~1857

So, his birth year was either 1856/1857 or 1866. My experience with genealogy records and especially census records leads me to conclude his birth year was 1866. With no supporting evidence (i.e., birth record), I find that the earliest federal census record is usually closest to the truth. So, for me, I think, based on the 1900 census, Frank was born May, 1866.

It's interesting that the author of the main article stated: "An estimate between 75 and 80 probably would be average for the casual observer." And, in my opinion, that would be better aligned with known facts. He was ~90 in 1956, not 100.

And, there's this official Probate record from 1908 (more on this in a moment). In this sworn testimony, Frank, in 1908, stated he was 41. That would make his birth year 1866/1867.



The plaintiff further represents that said Dora Debuschewitz died seized in fee simple of the following described real estate situate in the county of Muskingum, State of Ohio, and in the city of Zanesville, to-wit: the undivided one half interest in lot No. 21 of Iron Addition to the said city of Zanesville according to the recorded plat thereof in the office of the Recorder of said county. The said decedent died leaving the defendant, Frank Debuschewitz, who is 41 years of age, her widower, who is entitled to dower in said premises. That the defendants, Karl Debuschewitz and Edmund E. Debuschewitz are the only children and heirs at law of said decedent having the next estate of inheritance from said Dora Debuschewitz, deceased, in said premises and that the defendant, The Peoples Savings Bank Co. claim to

And finally, there's this 1942 late birth registration application attesting that Frank's son, Karl Franklin Dewitz was born on Nov. 5, 1887. In this, Frank signed a notarised affidavit attesting that at the time of Karl's birth he was 22 years old. That would make his year of birth either 1865 or 1866.

FATHER OF CHILD		MOTHER OF CHILD	
9. Full name Dewitz Frank	15. Full maiden name Spinks Dora		
Surname First Middle	Surname First Middle		
10. Color or race white	16. Color or race white	11. Age at time of this birth 22 yrs.	17. Age at time of this birth 20 yrs.
12. Birthplace Germany	18. Birthplace Zanesville Ohio USA	(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)	(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)
13. Usual occupation brick maker	19. Usual occupation housewife	20. Industry or business	
14. Industry or business Employee in brick plant	22. Attending Physician or Midwife Dr. Brush (now deceased)		
21. Children born to this mother before this birth. none	Name Zanesville Ohio	Address	
(a) How many other children of this mother were living? —			
(b) How many other children were born alive but were then dead? none			
(c) How many children were born dead? none			

Answers must be given as of date of delivery of applicant

Thus, based on public record evidence, we can confidently say that Frank Debuschewitz was born May, 1866.

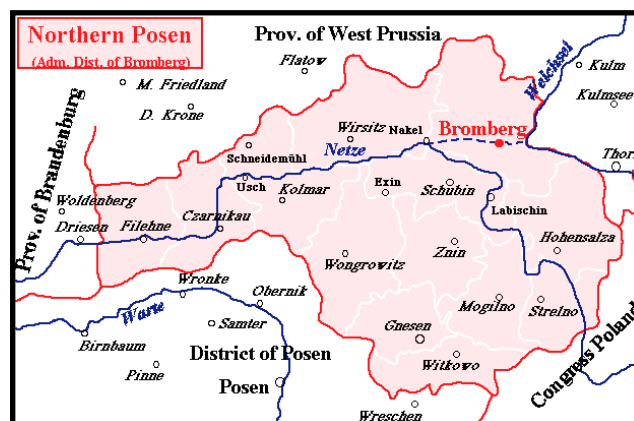
In the top news article, Frank, stated that he had met the following while on 'trips out west':

- 1) Kit Carson - died in 1868 in Colorado
- 2) Wild Bill Hickok - died in 1876 at Deadwood, Dakota Territory
- 3) George Custer - died in 1876 at Little Bighorn, Montana Territory

Well, we know that by at least 1887, Frank was living and working in Zanesville, OH. Again, in the 1900 census, Frank stated he immigrated in 1881. So, the claim that he met those famous people is simply not true. They had all died before he immigrated.

Birth Location Considerations

In the articles it was stated that Frank was born in Bernberg or Brumberg Germany. And, that his father was Julius. To check this, I conducted European research on the



Debuschewitz surname. And, in fact, I found this family in Bromberg, Germany. He named his father as Julius Dewitz. However, his father actually was Julius **Debuschewitz**. His mother was Henriette **Koebe**. I found at least six of the Debuschewitz children and confirmed Frank likely was the youngest, born in 1866.

Remarkably, this Debuschewitz family seems to be unique. Julius Debuschewitz may have had a brother, Friedrich, also in Bromberg. However, other than that, I found no other Debuschewitz's in Europe or the United States. Frank may have been correct in saying he likely was the only member of this family to immigrate, which would make him the sole Debuschewitz Patriarch of this family in America.

Now, we get to the part of Frank's story that is far-fetched. He stated that he immigrated to America with a couple named Barent and that he was not even eight years old when he left the Barents and 'struck out on his own' in Baltimore, MD.

Again, it's likely that Frank was about 15 when he immigrated about 1881, not 8. The idea of a 7 or 8 year old boy wandering the streets of Baltimore, working first in a woolen mill, then a glass factory, is preposterous, even in the 1880's. And, what parents would allow a 7-8 year old to immigrate? This, unless the Barent family had adopted Frank. But, Frank never called himself Barent, that I can find.

I've checked multiple sources for any sort of passenger or immigration or naturalisation record for Frank Debuschewitz / Dewitz / Barent, but to date, found nothing. One is left to speculate about the possibility that a 15 year old Frank Debuschewitz was a runaway/stowaway from Bromberg in 1880/1881, jumped ship in Baltimore, worked in the woolen mill and glass factory for a few years and then made his way west, in his early 20's, to Ohio.

By the the middle 1880's, Frank Debuschewitz was in the Zanesville, OH area (~50 miles east of Columbus). This, because he married Dora Spinks in April, 1887 in Zanesville, OH. He was coal miner working at the Bridwell & Barton Mine.

Frank and Dora had two sons, Karl (1887-1971) and Edward (1889-1978), their only children.

In January, 1895 Frank Debuschewitz, aka Deubensuede, was arrested and charged with attempted murder of fellow coal miner, Sidney Spinks (a relative of his wife). **[Note: Check the full story in Frank's Ancestry Gallery: "A Bloody Deed".]** The story is graphic and gruesome and includes several weeks of updates. In the end, Sidney Spinks lived, though, we don't know what happened to Frank. Maybe the charges were dropped?

By 1900, Frank had moved the Debuschewitz family to the La Junta, Otero County area of southeast Colorado. There, according to a census record, Frank was a brick mason. Interestingly, the family name was changed from Debuschewitz to Dwitz.

Was Frank fleeing justice for his attempted murder charge and changing the family name to conceal their locale and identities? Probably not, since, by 1902, Frank and Dora Debuschewitz were back in Zanesville, OH, and purchased a homesite; Lot 21 in Iron Addition.

account.
 Mary J. Gray has made application to be appointed guardian of Arthur S. Gray.
 An affidavit in lunacy has been filed against Thomas Lyda.

REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS.
 Johanna Mourin to Frank and Dora Debuschewitz lot No. 21 in Iron addition. Con. \$650.
 Alonzo Cherry and wife to Oscar Amrine land in Newton township. Con. \$1200.
 Margaret Fehrentz to Wilhelmina Mylius lot No. 2 in Tenth square. Con. \$585.

ZANESVILLE TIMES RECORDER, SEP. 5, 1902

In April 1908 Dora Spinks-Debuschewitz died. The Lot 21 purchased Sep. 1902 became an object of contention in Probate Court. **[Note: Check the full story in Frank's Ancestry Gallery: "Probate Dora Debuschewitz".]**

Frank settled the Probate lawsuit and the contested property was sold for cash. After all claims were settled in the Spring of 1908, Frank received \$106.

Wherefore, it is ordered that the same be and is hereby approved and confirmed. And it is further ordered that said H. C. Wine as such administrator make to the purchaser, Mary Brennel, a good and sufficient deed for the premises so sold. And the said Mary Brennel desiring to pay all of said purchase money in cash, said administrator is ordered to accept the same. And the said Frank Debuschewitz having by his answer elected to receive in lieu of his dower in said real estate its value in money, the court find the just and reasonable value thereof to be \$106.01. And the court coming now to the distribution of the proceeds of said sale amounting to \$450.00, it is ordered that said administrator out of the money in his hands pay:

First, to the Treasurer of this county, taxes thereon against said property, to-wit, the sum of \$6.64

Secondly, the costs and expenses incurred in the sale of said land amounting to the sum of \$21.50

Thirdly, to Frank Debuschewitz the sum of \$106.01 which the court finds to be the reasonable value of his dower interest in said premises. And it is ordered that the balance of said sum amounting to \$322.51 be distributed by said administrator as provided by law.

IRWIN G. JENNINGS.
 PROBATE JUDGE.

After this, it does appear that Frank relocated to Dietrich, Mason County, Kentucky. Frank's son Karl Debuschewitz (now Dewitz) had married Myrtle Mitchell there in 1907 and was working for the C & O Railroad. By 1920, Frank Debuschewitz (now Frank Dewitz) was in the household of Karl and Myrtle Dewitz. As for Frank and Dora's other

son, Edmund, he enlisted in the US Army in 1909. He would serve in the Army for 10 years. More on Ed Dewitz in a moment.

In the 1956 news article, Frank stated that he lived in Chicago, IL for about 25 years. So, we can assume that about 1922, Frank relocated to Chicago. In fact, we find him in the 1930 federal census living alone, widowed, in apartment #16, at 3224 Monroe St.

In the 1940 federal census, Frank reported living alone, widowed, at a home, 3215 Madison St, in Chicago. He apparently was a boarder in the household of Max and Ruth Morrison. He reported working in a restaurant. He reported his birth place as Ohio. With WW2 looming, reporting a birth place as Germany was not prudent. One other item of note was his education: Highest Grade Completed: 0. This somewhat matches what he stated about his education in the news article - "he got it along the railroads".

By 1950, Frank was in the household of his son, Karl and his daughter in law, Myrtle Dewitz, on Bulaville Road, Addison, Gallia, OH. The 1956 news article stated that Frank bought the Bulaville Road farm in 1947. A 1947 city directory record for Karl and Myrtle Dewitz shows they were living in Ironton, OH. So, it's certainly possible that Frank and Karl combined their financial resources to purchase the property in about 1947.

Frank Debuschewitz/Dewitz lived out the remainder of his days in the household of his son, Karl. He never married again. He died, at the age of 90, March 16, 1957 at Gallipolis, Gallia County, Ohio and was buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Zanesville, OH, likely close to his wife's grave.

Children of Frank and Dora Debuschewitz

- plus ongoing family mysteries

As previously discussed, Frank and Dora Debuschewitz/Dewitz had 2 children, both sons; Karl Franklin (1887-1971) and Edmund Elsworth (1889-1978).

Karl "Carl" Franklin Debuschewitz/Dewitz worked his entire life for the C&O Railroad, from about 1910 to about 1945. He married the former Myrtle Mitchell in 1907 and they remained a couple until her death in 1966. They celebrated their Golden Anniversary in 1957.

Together, they had seven children:

- 1) Margaret Doris Dewitz (1907-1999)
- 2) Catherine Edna Dewitz (1910-2006)
- 3) Theodora Stanley Dewitz (1912-1981)
- 4) Esculine Dewitz (1915-2009)
- 5) Evelyn Dewitz (1915-?) [Note: Esculine and Evelyn were twins]
- 6) Carl Woodrow Dewitz (1918-2004)

7) James William Dewitz (1920-2013)

Family mysteries:

Daughter Catherine E Dewitz (1910-2006) married Carlos Cecil Grant (1910-1998) in 1929. Following the end of WW2, Carlos attended the Apostolic Bible Institute in St. Paul, MN. Upon graduation he obtained a United Pentecostal Church Minister License.

He and Catherine became missionaries and church leaders in Manila, Philippines in the late 1950's. Carlos apparently died in Manila in 1998. This cannot be confirmed. His Social Security death record shows his last residence as: Newark, Alameda County, California.

Catherine died in 2006, apparently in Newark, Alameda County, California. Oddly, she is buried next to her parents, Hillcrest Memorial Park, Bakersfield, CA, with no mention of her husband in her Find a Grave Memorial.

Where did Carlos C Grant die and where was he buried?

Also, a photo was found of the Grant family, ca. 1955. In this photo is a young girl. To date, I cannot locate any information suggesting the Grants had any children. So, we are left with a mystery as to the identity of this child.



Daughters Esculine Dewitz and Evelyn Dewitz were both born Aug 30, 1915 - twins. Esculine is well documented. But, Evelyn, after a 1937 Ironton, OH news article disappeared from public records. What happened to Evelyn Dewitz?

Edmund Elsworth Debuschewitz/Dewitz enlisted in the US Army in January, 1909. He was discharged in January, 1919. He served with the American Expeditionary Forces 21 Oct 1918 to 20 Dec 1918 in Europe in the 118th Artillery Battery. He briefly married Ruby F Stine in 1924. The marriage only lasted at most, 2 years. No children are known to have been born to their union. Edmund never married again. Through the years he had a variety of jobs in various locations; OH, CA, AZ, KY. He died leaving no known children.

Thus, all Debuschewitz/Dewitz American descendants of Frank and Dora Debuschewitz/Dewitz are through Karl Debuschewitz/Dewitz. Likely though, there are still Debuschewitz cousins in the Bromberg area of Germany.

My suggestion for this unique American Debuschewitz/Dewitz family is to reach out and try to locate and reacquaint with remaining Debuschewitz family in Germany and restore long lost family connections.

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