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## Gisela Kriebel: A History of a German War Bride

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**Abstract:** Among the tens of thousands of GI war brides after the Second World War, a small fraction of them were German women who left their defeated and devastated homeland behind. The war story of Gisela Kriebel explores how her circuitous move from Berlin to Los Angeles, half a world away, meant the virtual severing of family ties and cultural connections that would leave her descendants with scant information about her genealogy and the fate of her family members in the war. Barriers of distance, language, and accessibility of records have made genealogical research particularly difficult concerning this specific population of war brides of defeated nations. The article explores Gisela Kriebel's family, and specifically how she was conscripted into service in the war, began a career as an interpreter and secretary, and was swept up in two love affairs—one tragic and the other life-long—that, in the end, brought her to Los Angeles. Throughout the article, genealogical sources will be used, such as newly available online military records, to demonstrate how researchers can discover the rich family history of war brides separated from their war-torn homelands.

### Introduction

#### Historical Background

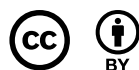
One of the remarkable ironies of the Second World War is that amid the devastation of nations at war, tens of thousands of American GIs met foreign-born women, fell in love, and sought to build families together. Approximately 125,000 GI war brides emigrated to the US from Great Britain, France, Japan, and the Philippines, among other nations—basically wherever American forces were stationed in the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> In Germany alone, by the end of 1950, 14,175 German women married American soldiers and came to the United States to begin new lives together.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, in the case of Germany, these love affairs had to overcome US policy. As the Second World War drew to a close—as the American and Soviet forces conquered Germany in their race to Berlin—the American government instituted a non-fraternization policy, forbidding American GIs to fraternize with German women. The predominant reason for this policy was to maintain the peace with the German population; young German men could become infuriated to see German women interacting in a friendly or flirtatious manner with Allied troops.<sup>3</sup> But, as can be imagined, nothing (not even American occupation policy) could keep American GIs and German Fräulein (unmarried German women) apart for long. The American policy simply forced couples underground to date secretly, away from the prying eyes of the American Military Government.

It took a matter of months for the American Military Government to amend its non-fraternization policy. By the early fall of 1945, couples came out of the woodwork and began to date openly, even attending dances and celebrations at German Army bases. The military not only quickly amended its policy, but the United States government altered its quota-based immigration policy to allow for the easy entry of the war brides of American GIs. On December 28, 1945, the United States government passed the "War Brides Act," which allowed foreign-born brides, adopted children, and natural-born children to emigrate to the United States without the limitations of the then-applicable immigration quota system.<sup>4</sup>

Gisela Kriebel, a Berliner, was one such young woman who met and married an American GI. His name was Captain Joseph Hale of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division, a native of Californian.<sup>5</sup> Their love affair, clandestine to start, transformed their lives as they settled into the post-war era. Joseph took Gisela to Los Angeles to begin a new life, and they would share their lives together for over 40 years until Joseph's death in 1987.

Gisela's identity as a German war bride presented several difficulties to her descendants in researching her genealogy and family records—challenges shared by the descendants of German war brides in general. Not only are the historical records located half a world way, but the



records are in a foreign language, and often in a difficult to decipher script called Sütterlin. In addition, the German language and culture was often suppressed at home and in local communities as German women and their children sought to “fit in” in American society. Some even faced anti-German discrimination in their new communities. This is to say that the history of German families during the war were often suppressed as too painful (or shameful) to remember and pass on to the next generation. Furthermore, given that Gisela’s immediate and extended family was separated during the war—for a variety of reasons to be discussed—she never learned the details of how and when some of her family members died in the war. For all these reasons, aspects of Gisela’s family history have always been uncertain.

By the year 2000, Gisela was the only surviving family member of her paternal grandfather Wilhelm Kriebel and her grandmother Selma Pfennig, who together had nine children (all male). In this article, I will explore Gisela Kriebel’s genealogy and history as one example of how to research the family histories of German war brides, whose stories have often been left behind in the old world, alienated by distance, language, and the bitter memories of war.

I have written this history to share the remarkable story of one woman’s experiences in Nazi Germany and the Second World War, to explore how the descendants of war brides of enemy nations can research family history. In telling Gisela’s story, I do not intend to justify or excuse her decisions or actions as a teenager and young adult in relation to the Nazi regime or its policies, but to set them in context so we can better understand this period of history, how it directly impacted one woman and her family, and how family researchers can uncover the contours and details of a past long since buried in the rubble of war. It also must be said that the suffering of any German in the Second World War and the years immediately following was a consequence of German violence against the peoples of Europe, including the Jews and other persecuted peoples.

### **Methodology**

I relied on a variety of sources to research Gisela Kriebel’s genealogy and family history. First, in the spring of 2001, and again in winter 2005, I conducted a series of interviews with Gisela, my maternal grandmother, at her home in Los Angeles, California.<sup>6</sup> She was 78 when we started the interviews, in good health and with a sharp mind. Her answers to my questions were more often than not precise and even vivid. Some might argue that an elderly person’s memories of events 50-60 years in the past are unreliable. I am reminded of the historian Alfred Young’s argument that in evaluating oral history, “A historian has to serve as defense attorney, prosecuting attorney, judge, and jury.”<sup>7</sup> To evaluate Gisela’s recollections, I found family photographs and letters, and I interviewed members of Gisela’s family. Nevertheless, the oral history pertained narrowly to Gisela’s personal experience and that of her immediate family. The story of her extended family was still largely unknown.<sup>8</sup>

Fortuitously, my grandmother kept in her possession an old family Bible, the *Evangelisches Predigtbuch für die Häusliche Erbauung* (Protestant Sermon book for Domestic Edification), published by Reinhold Schwarz in Berlin, sometime in the mid or late nineteenth century. It contains the the birth dates and some baptism and marriage, as well as some baptism and marriage dates of the 14 immediate descendants Gisela’s paternal grandfather, Wilhelm Kriebel, as well as his two wives, Bertha Weiss (1845-1883), whom he married in 1872, and Selma Pfennig (1856-unknown), whom he married after Bertha’s death in 1883, later the same year. This source provided a basis from which to research the historical record of Gisela’s extended family.

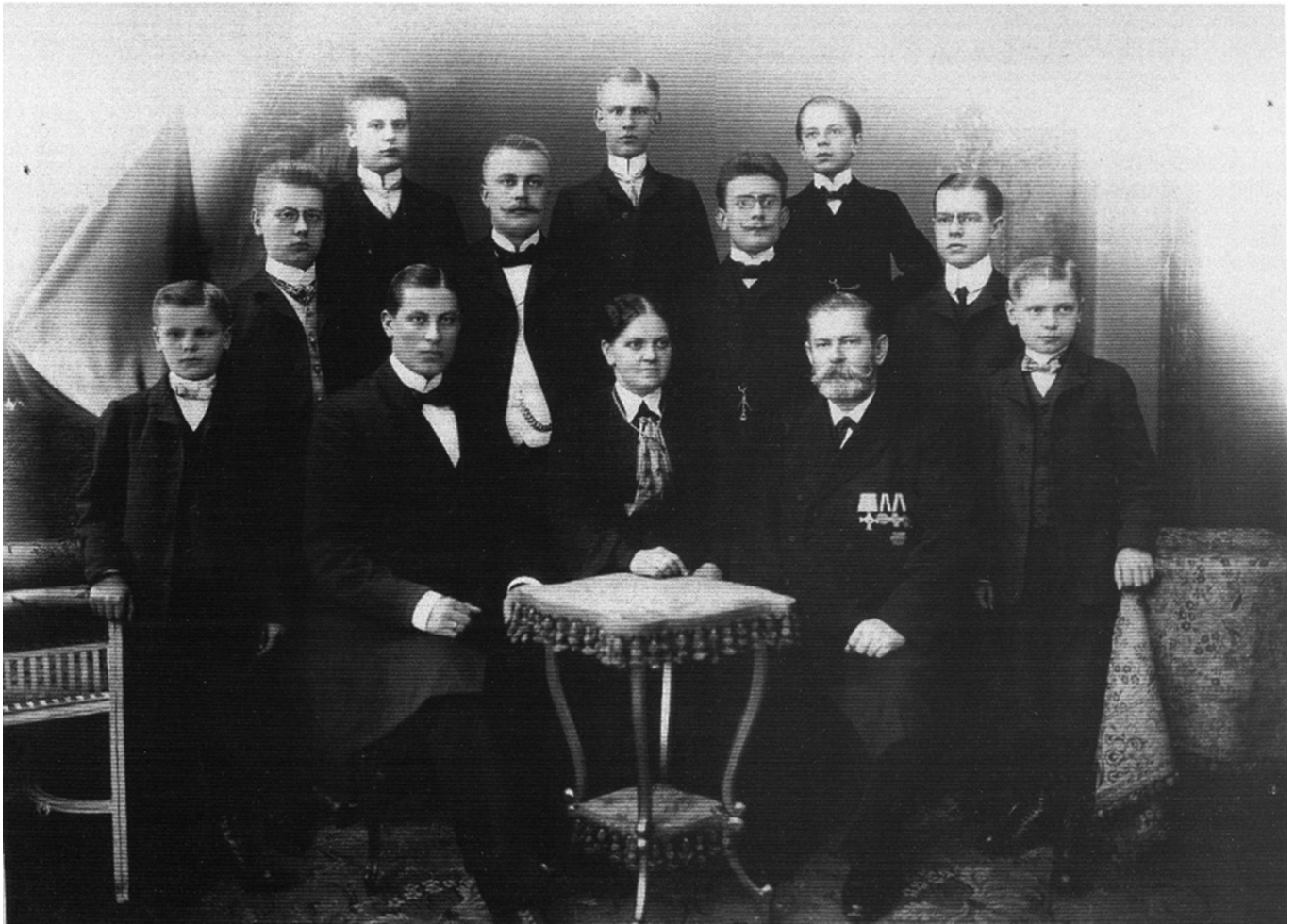
The genealogical data from Gisela’s oral history and the family Bible enabled me to search digital databases for German records of the Kriebel family. The online databases include the *Personenstandsregister* (Civil Status Register) 1876-1945 of the *Landesarchiv* (State Archive) Berlin; the *Kartei der Verlust- und Grabmeldungen gefallener deutscher Soldaten* (Card index of the loss and grave reports of fallen German soldiers) 1939-1945; and the Ansbach Lutheran Parish Register Extracts, among others. These and many others are available on Ancestry.com. These archival databases have only recently become available online, and are thereby easily accessible to the descendants of German immigrants in North America. The only impediment to reading these documents is the language barrier for monolingual English speakers. Nevertheless, the families of descendants of German war brides have unprecedented access to records that were previously considered virtually lost to American families in German archives.

### **Gisela’s Ancestry and Family Tree**

Gisela Ortrude Kriebel was born the first child of Richard and Margarete Kriebel on December 21, 1922, in the German capital of Berlin. Her father Richard came from a large Prussian family. His father, Wilhelm had 14 children, five with his first wife Bertha, and nine with his second wife, Richard’s mother, Selma. As the seventh living son of his parents, Richard was by custom honored as the godson of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Ten of Wilhelm’s children survived to adulthood.



Figure 1. Gisela and Ulrich Kriebel on the Ku'damm in Berlin, approximately 1943.



**Figure 2. Richard Kriebel, the boy on the far right, with his nine brothers and his mother and father, Wilhelm and Selma Kriebel.**

Richard fought in the German Army in the First World War as a non-commissioned officer and was taken a prisoner of war by the English. At war's end he returned to his hometown of Berlin and settled in the northwest neighborhood of Moabit to start a family with his wife Margarete (née Hollwitz). Richard soon began employment at the Philips Radio Broadcasting Company office in the inner city of Berlin, working his way up to a managerial position, a job that exercised his administrative and organizational talents.

Margarete Kriebel dedicated her life to caring for her family in the home and providing a loving and stable figure for her children. Richard's mother Selma also lived at the Kriebel household, supporting the family and caring for Gisela and Ulrich. Gisela's brother Ulrich was two years younger than her, born in 1925. He was an intelligent and caring brother whom she loved very much. Gisela and her family enjoyed all the privileges and opportunities of a middle-class Berlin family.

Gisela experienced the Third Reich as many young women of her generation had. She was 11-years old when Hitler came to power. She belonged to the *Bund Deutsche Mädel* (BDM, League of German Girls) from age 11 to 18. She remembered seeing her playmates in 1933 marching through the streets singing, neatly dressed in uniform. She wanted to be one of them, and she quickly joined. Gisela remembered the weekly meetings:

Bertha Henriette Pauline Weiss = Ernst Wilhelm Kriebel = Ida Mathilde Selma Pfennig  
 b. 1845 b. 1841 b. 1856  
 m. 1872 d. 1906 m. 1883  
 d. 1883

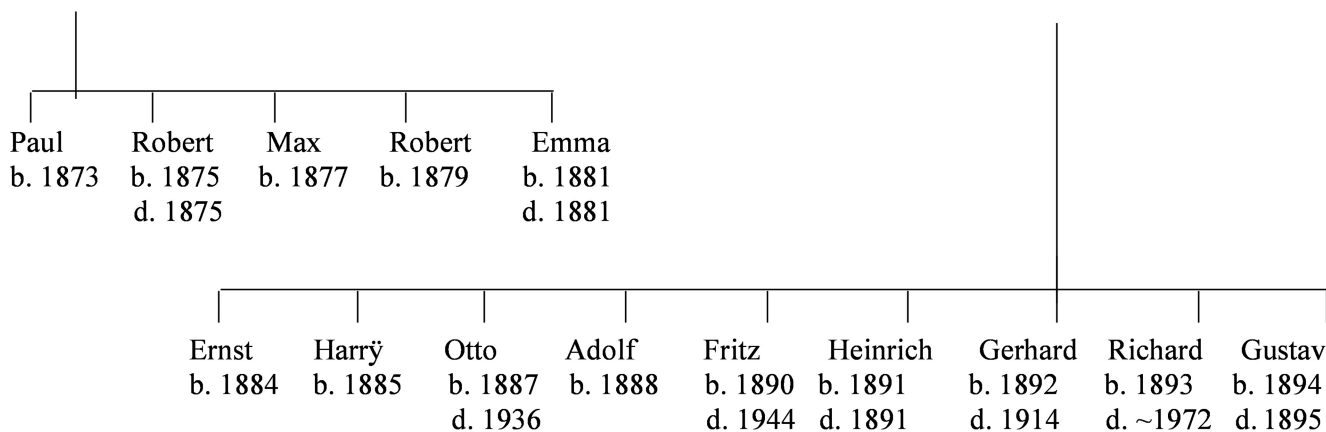


Figure 3. Genealogy of Ernst Wilhelm Kriebel's descendants.<sup>9</sup>

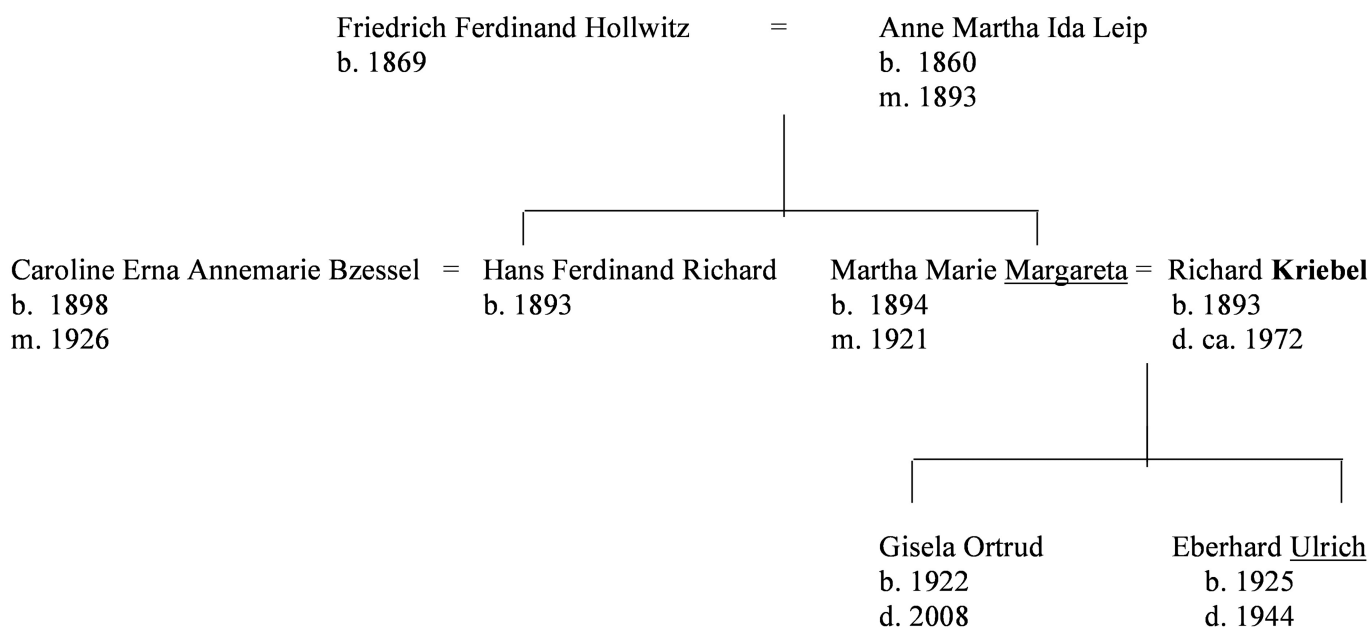


Figure 4. Genealogy of Richard Kriebel and Margareta Hollwitz.<sup>10</sup>

We would talk. We had a lady in charge of our group, and usually the groups were small, like maybe eight girls in one room and one lady talking to us, sort of like school. But maybe there were a lot of politics involved, which I don't remember. You know, it was all about Adolf Hitler, probably.<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, Gisela does not recall any specific instruction she received about Hitler or National Socialism while in the BDM, but acknowledges this instruction was an important aspect of the program. She joined the Hitler Youth to be with her friends, to sing and march through the streets, and to occasionally go hiking or camping in the nearby woods. As an "Aryan," Gisela was raised and educated in Nazi Germany to be the bearer of Germany's future as a mother and wife.<sup>12</sup>

At 18 she was drafted into the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labour Service, abbreviated RAD), the Reich's work-service program designed by Hitler's regime to send workers wherever they were needed, particularly in the newly conquered Polish territory. Gisela was sent to a small town named Wuthenow, outside of Krotoschin (Krotoszyn), in western Poland.<sup>13</sup> When she completed her service, she started working as a secretary at her father's place of business, Philips Radio Broadcasting Company. But within a year she took a job as a secretary and translator for the German government agency, the Amt Ausland Abwehr (Office of Foreign Affairs). And at 21 she married a service member, her long-time boyfriend, Luftwaffe lieutenant Heinrich Herderich. Ironically, it was her marriage to Heinrich that would change the course of her life, setting in place the conditions necessary for her, in the end, to move to the United States.

In January 1943 the Allied forces began a devastating aerial bombardment of Berlin after a 14-month respite. Throughout the war hundreds of bombers dropped their loads on the German capital, destroying 6340 acres and killing 52,000 people.<sup>14</sup> It was only in the bombing of Berlin that Gisela remembers a sense of terror and fear for her life and the lives of those she loved. Night after night the Kriebel family found refuge from the bombings in their apartment building cellar when the bombs fell around them. By August 1943, the bombing had become so destructive that Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda, ordered the evacuation of all children and adults not employed in the war effort. Gisela did not yet leave her family, but a mass evacuation of Berlin had begun.<sup>15</sup>

One or two months later, Gisela discovered that she and Heinrich were pregnant with their first child. Now the bombings made Gisela fear for the life of their baby, and she made preparations to leave Berlin. By early December 1943, Heinrich arranged for Gisela to stay with her mother-in-law in the small Bavarian town of Uffenheim where she would be safe. So Gisela said goodbye to her parents and boarded a train heading south. Gisela waited out rest of the war in the small town of Uffenheim.

### The End of the War

The last years of the war were devastating for the Kriebel family, as for so many in Europe. Gisela's cousin Hugo was an Obergefreiter (or Senior Lance Corporal) in the Wehrmacht, serving in the 3. Lw. Feldkomp. 9. Flak Division.<sup>16</sup> He was just a year and a half older than Gisela. He fell in battle on the eastern front on December 11, 1942, south of the Russian town Ssulazkij (rendered in German).<sup>17</sup> Hugo's father, Pastor Paul Kriebel, died of unknown causes just two years later, before the war ended.<sup>18</sup> Another one of Gisela's uncles, Hauptmann (Captain) Fritz Kriebel, died on February 22, 1944, in Breslau (Wrocław), after being fatally wounded.<sup>19</sup> He served in the Wehrmacht Bez. Kom. V Berlin. But the worst for Gisela was yet to come.

Ulrich, her brother, had been stationed in France as a Luftwaffe flight cadet and officer candidate (Oberfähnrich, O-7) of the Third Squadron of the Jagdgruppe Süd Orange.<sup>20</sup> But around noon on March 9, 1944, something went terribly wrong in a training exercise in the south of France. Ulrich's commander, V. Pufahl, explained what happened in a letter sent just four days after the event. Ulrich was on a solo training mission flying a Messerschmidt BF 109 aircraft when the engine malfunctioned five kilometers south of the town of Numes.<sup>21</sup> Ulrich tried to make an emergency landing but crashed into the countryside, dying instantly.<sup>22</sup>

Ulrich was laid to rest with full military honors two days after the crash, in the afternoon of March 11, 1944.<sup>23</sup> His final resting place was then known as the "graveyard of heroes" (*Heldenfriedhof*) in Numes. Commander Pufahl concludes his letter to Richard Kriebel with these words: "When your son had to give up his life so shortly before the longed-awaited front action and not in the chivalrous battle, be it a comfort to you and your loved ones that he made this sacrifice for the existence and future of our German Fatherland."<sup>24</sup> Richard and Margarete were devastated by the news and mystified by Commander Pufahl's explanation. Why was Ulrich alone as a novice pilot in the BF 109? This was a complex aircraft, the one predominantly used by fighter pilots in the war. They immediately sent a letter to Gisela informing her of her brother's death. Asked about this event, Gisela responded:

I lost my brother before the war ended... He was learning how to fly. As far as we knew he was all alone in the plane, and I got so mad. Why did he not have a trainer with him, a second person who knew what to do in an emergency... What that must have been like for my parents. I could never have imagined until I was a mother myself what that must have been like. One son, nineteen years old, and not even shot by an enemy or anything. It went on fire, they told us. Then it came down, on fire it came down. And that he was all alone. It just did not seem right. A nineteen-year-old boy.<sup>25</sup>

It is unclear whether Gisela was informed about Ulrich's final resting place in Numes. She was under the impression that there was no final resting place for her brother, that there was nothing left to bury.<sup>26</sup> Gisela's mother came alone to Uffenheim for a brief visit to share in their grief. But Richard Kriebel remained in Berlin.

The details of these wartime deaths have been shrouded in mystery for decades for the descendants of Gisela Kriebel, who, after the deaths of her parents in the 1970s, was the only surviving member of her grandfather Wilhelm Kriebel's line with Selma Kriebel. And neither Gisela nor her descendants had access to these military records in the United States until they became available online within the last few years.<sup>27</sup>

Returning to Gisela's war story, just two months after Ulrich's death, on May 19, 1944, a ray of sunshine appeared. Gisela gave birth to her daughter Barbara, fondly nicknamed Bobbi, under the care of Heinrich's parents. Gisela was grateful to the Herderich family for the chance to leave Berlin behind to make sure her child was safe and well provided for. Heinrich was able to take a short leave of absence from his post and join Gisela and his baby girl in Uffenheim.

Shortly after Heinrich returned to his post, Gisela received a letter in the late spring of 1944 from a colonel in her husband's Luftwaffe FLAK unit, explaining that Heinrich had been injured and taken captive by the Allied forces in Holland, and subsequently transported to a prisoner of war camp in Britain. It was there, the colonel explained, that Heinrich died. Gisela recalled receiving the news:

I got a letter from a colonel, from a German colonel, telling me that my husband had died in a German prison camp. I could not believe it... I cried because of little Bobbi. That was her daddy... He had only seen her once as a baby. I never answered that guy's letter and I never heard from him again. The letter came from Vienna. That's where originally my husband was stationed.<sup>28</sup>

Gisela received no further correspondence from this colonel and no additional details about the death of her husband. I have been unable to track down the name of the colonel or the letter he sent.

In the summer or early fall of 1944, her mother sent more devastating news that her father had been drafted by the Wehrmacht to work on the Eastern front railroads. Richard Kriebel was 55 years old. By this late in the war, the German government made use of many able-bodied older men and teenage boys to serve in the military. As it happened, just months later, in early winter 1945, Richard Kriebel and his unit fell into the hands of the Russian Army, and he spent the remainder of World War II in a prisoner of war camp.

The men in her life—her father, husband, and brother—had been swept up into the terrible conflagration of the war, fighting Hitler's war for German glory. Gisela felt utterly alone in the small, unfamiliar town of Uffenheim, distanced from her family and hometown and grieving the men she lost.

But the war was quickly coming to an end. By the early spring of 1945, the Allied forces made steady progress against the Germany Army. The end of the war in Europe was clearly within sight. In mid-April 1945, the American Army enveloped Uffenheim and surrounding towns. In preparation, Gisela and the townspeople of Uffenheim created United States flags, ready to hang out the window when the forces arrived. Laughing only after the fact, she remembered how difficult and painstaking it was to sew together a complex American flag full of stars and stripes. Why couldn't the Americans have a simple tricolor flag like most European nations?!

Gisela did not recall the day the Allied forces arrived, but she did remember when she received news of Hitler's suicide in his Berlin bunker and the subsequent end of the war. Hitler committed suicide in the bunker of the Berlin Chancellery on April 30, 1945, side by side with his new wife Eva Braun. Gisela could not believe the Führer was capable of suicide. In the years following World War II, Gisela would hear many horrible reports of the mass killings of Jews that she had considerable difficulty understanding.

The end of the war finally came on May 8, 1945, when Germany unconditionally surrendered to the Allied forces. It was time for Gisela to pick up the pieces of her life. The American Army imposed restrictions on travel and curfews to maintain a semblance of order. The war wreaked unimaginable chaos. Until the dust settled, Gisela would remain in Uffenheim.

Then, in late June 1945, on a cool breezy day, Gisela and her friend Annie went to pick some fruit in a local orchard. Gisela remembers like it was yesterday:

[We] heard about this plum orchard where you can go and pick as many plums as you want to carry. We took big baskets along and they charged you a reasonable amount for the plums... And the owners shook the trees before we came, and the plums were all in the mud and in the sand. And so we had to pick them up from the ground and put them in the basket...

And I stood with my girlfriend and the baskets on the road by that little village trying to hitchhike, and a lot of American vehicles would come. Germans had hardly any vehicles at that time. And [an American Army officer, Joseph Hale] came with a nice little OPEL, a pretty little car. And he took us, and we put the dirty baskets in the back, and then I sat right next to him. And my landlady's daughter was right with me, Annie, all three squashed in the front because it was a small car. And it was small like a Volkswagen.

And then we went to my house, and then Annie got out and took the baskets out. And he says to me, "Come with me, I want to show you something." So, we drove through the little town of Uffenheim into the forest like-area and we laid down in the forest... And we fell in love.<sup>29</sup>

Amid all the heartache and destruction, Gisela unexpectedly found in Joseph a love to begin anew. Captain Joseph Hale enlisted in the United States Army in 1941. Since then, through the course of the war, he had risen to the officer ranks. Little is known of his battlefield experience, except that he served in the second wave of D-Day, arriving on Omaha Beach to begin the Allied conquest of Nazi-controlled Europe.

Joseph and Gisela fell in love during those summer months, stealing time to be alone whenever they could. In the early days, Gisela remembers lying down on the floor in Joseph's Army Jeep trying to avoid detection as they rode through Uffenheim—trying to hide their relationship given the non- fraternization policy. They kept their fledgling romance a secret. They became the closest of friends and, at the same time, renegade lovers hiding from a military that forbade their relationship.

Yet within three months of their first encounter, Captain Joseph Hale was sent back to the United States to await reassignment in Japan. Before leaving Uffenheim Joseph promised Gisela that he would return for her and Bobbi. Gisela did not know how long Joseph would be away or how he would fare in Japan. Through the course of the following year, Joseph and Gisela had to correspond through mutual Army friends rather than depend on the unreliable American postal system. They were able to keep alive the hope of a reunion, yet they could not set a date.

Joseph had a couple months furlough in California, and by early winter 1945, he received his assignment in the Pacific. But before he left Joseph had a fortuitous meeting with a colonel friend in a local bar in Venice, California. As Gisela relates the story, this friend was given an unwanted assignment starting in a few months in Karlsruhe, Germany, and yet he wished to go back to Japan to his prior assignment. Over a few drinks and a long conversation, Joseph and his friend arranged a mutually beneficial plan for the exchange of their orders. Somehow, through the bureaucratic footwork of this colonel, the assignments were exchanged, and Joseph planned for his return to Gisela and Germany.

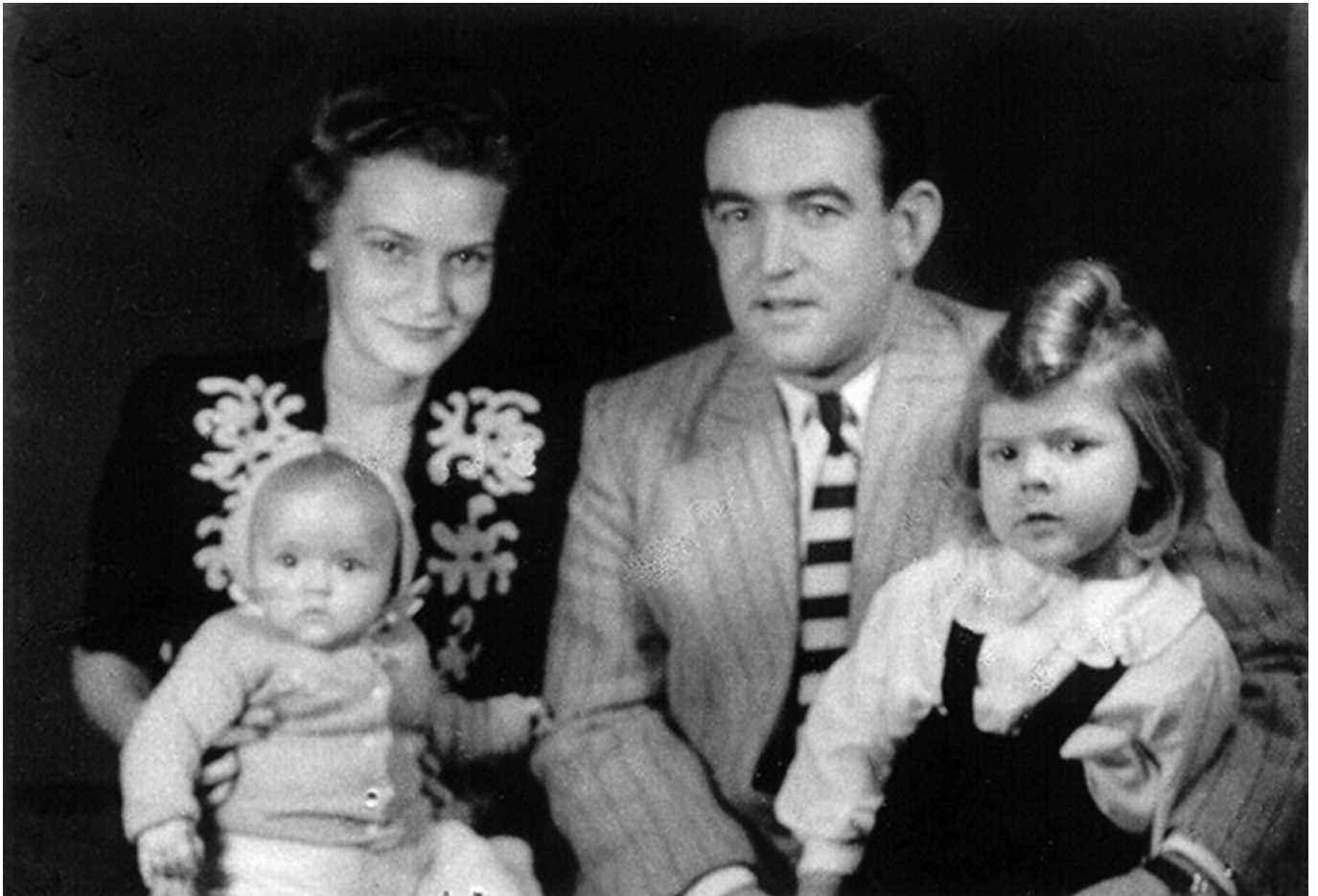
Meanwhile, still in the fall of 1945, Gisela received a strange and unexpected postcard in the mail. The handwritten script was familiar. The letter was from Heinrich, her husband, whom she thought was dead. The letter only contained a few words: "I'm fine, all my love, Heinrich." That was all he wrote, and it was postmarked in the fall of 1945, from Britain. Gisela was shocked. She reeled at the news. Her husband was alive—Heinrich was fine! But how can this be? Happiness that he was alive mingled with fear of losing Joseph. And the guilt rose up within her as she thought of her new relationship with Joseph. What could she do?

Gisela recalls receiving the postcard,

He was in a British prison camp there. I guess something happened to him in Holland where he became prisoner. And there was this false information that he got killed in Holland. Or something like this. I remember, I think [the colonel] told me in the [spring 1944] letter that he died in a British prison camp. But it was all mixed up, the wrong information.<sup>30</sup>

She was again suddenly married, not widowed, and yet she had fallen in love with another man—an American officer. She felt guilty and confused.

Gisela had met Heinrich in 1939, when she was just sixteen years old. She fell in love and married him when she was twenty. She stood by him her entire adult life, and yet she rarely saw him because of the war. He was stationed in Vienna, Potsdam, and on the Western front throughout most of their courtship and marriage. And they had just welcomed their beautiful baby girl Bobbi into the world only a year before. Their love deserved an opportunity to flourish, and it was as if the war prevented this at every turn.



**Figure 5. Gisela and Joseph Hale with Dorothy and Barbara (left to right) ca. September 1947, in the German city of Karlsruhe.**

And now she had fallen in love with another man. The twists and turns of history were stupefying. She moved to Uffenheim because of Heinrich, to give birth to their child in safety, and to wait for him when the war was over. She would never have been in Uffenheim had she not met him. And yet, it was here, in Uffenheim, that the American forces would march in conquest of Nazi Germany, with one man who would sweep her off her feet, Captain Joseph Hale. If not for her marriage to Heinrich, if not for the outbreak of war, she would never have met Joseph.

So Gisela asked Heinrich for a divorce and custody of Barbara. The American Office of Military Government, the new government in the southeastern portion of occupied Germany, had to grant the divorce before Gisela and Joe could marry. Heinrich refused to agree to the divorce until late 1947 when it was clear Gisela would not change her mind.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1946 Gisela discovered she was pregnant with twins, which pleased Joseph to no end, but further complicated their immigration process. On March 12, 1947, Gisela gave birth to two beautiful babies, Dorothy Margret and George Ulrich. But catastrophe struck just a month later. Dorothy and George were born prematurely, and George suffered from "frailty of life" (*Lebensschwäche*).<sup>31</sup> George Ulrich Herderich died on April 19, 1947, in the state hospital in Karlsruhe.<sup>32</sup> His death was a devastating loss that Gisela and Joseph endured in their early years together. But through it all, they were determined to leave Germany and start a new life in the United States.

On July 17, 1948, Joseph and Gisela were married in a simple service in an Army office building.<sup>33</sup> A few friends and colleagues gathered to witness the union, and the ceremony was spoken in German and English so all could understand.

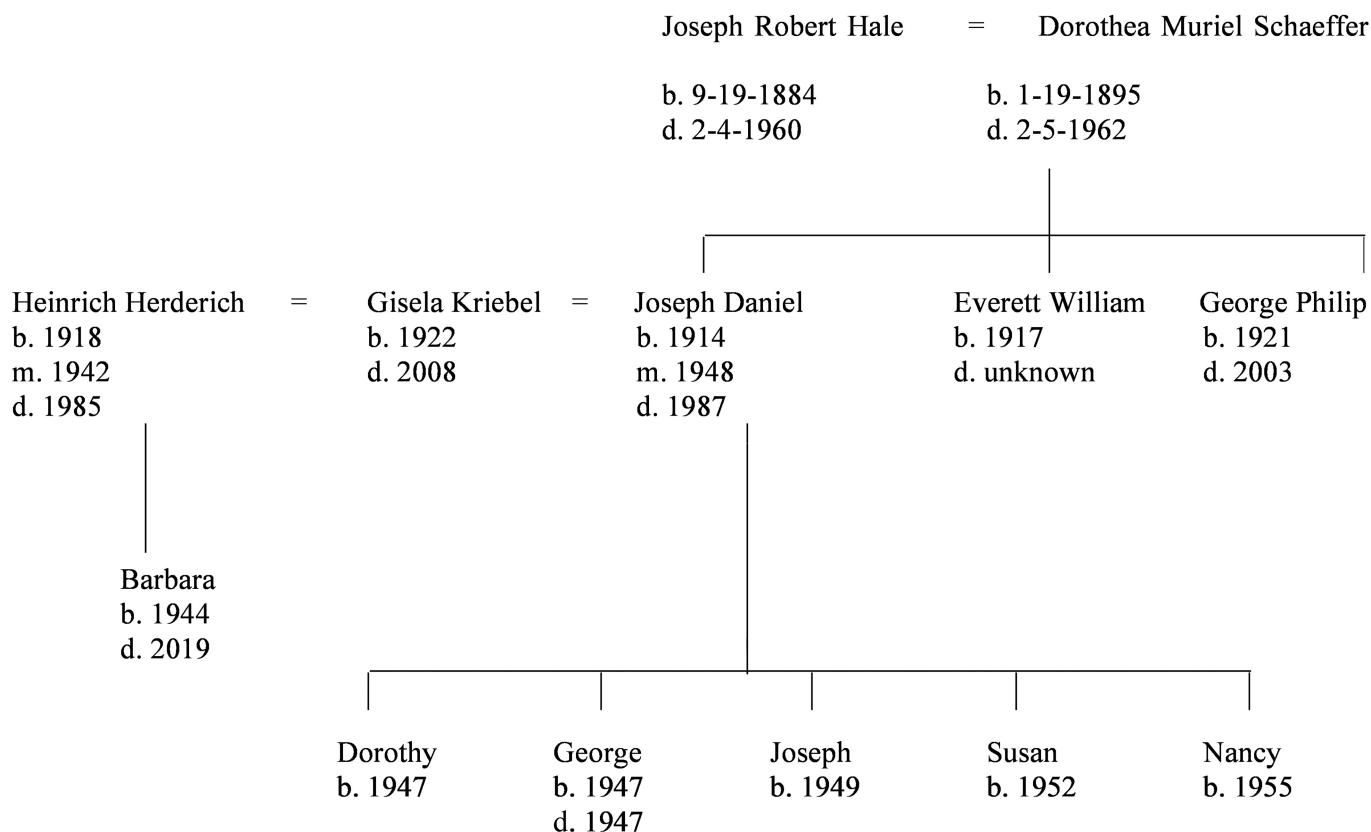


Figure 6. Genealogy of Gisela's descendants.<sup>34</sup>

On October 12, 1948, Gisela, Joseph, and their new family boarded the United States Army Transport (USAT) ship, the Edmund B. Alexander, in the German port city of Bremerhafen, and made their way for the shores of the United States. The ship's manifest separately lists Gisela Hale and Barbara Herderich as German immigrants, each with one suitcase for the trip.<sup>35</sup> The Hale family arrived in New York, on October 23, 1948, and began their trek west by train to Joseph's home in Venice, California. Joseph's mother, Dorothea Hale, met the young couple at Union Station in Los Angeles, and embraced Gisela in love and acceptance as her new daughter-in-law.

### Conclusions

The war story of Gisela Kriebel illuminates the history of Nazi Germany from the perspective of an ordinary, middle-class, young woman from Berlin. After the war, Gisela and Joseph made their permanent home in Los Angeles, California, where they grew their family. In addition to little Bobbi and Dorothy, they had three more children, Joseph, Susan, and Nancy. Gisela was busy raising her family, and Joseph ran a variety of businesses including an accounting service and a neighborhood liquor store. They were married for nearly 40 years, when Joseph died of heart disease on July 4, 1987.

Heinrich settled down in Uffenheim, remarried, had three children, and became a well-respected teacher in the community. After Barbara had grown to adulthood, the two reconnected and crossed the Atlantic many times to visit each other. She loved her father and her new siblings dearly. Heinrich died on one such visit to the United States, on Father's Day, June 16, 1985.

While the story itself is remarkable, this research also clarifies the genealogy of Wilhelm Kriebel's family tree. Gisela was the lone surviving member of the third generation in his marriage with Selma Pfennig, which produced nine boys. Of Wilhelm's sons, only Richard had children. Of Richard's children, only Gisela survived the war—and she left Germany for a new life in the United States. This distance from the ancestral homeland of the Kriebels meant not only difficulties accessing local records in Berlin, but also challenges translating the records into English, as English had become her new family's only language. (Gisela insisted that her children speak English in the home to assimilate into American society.)

Online research of newly available German digitized documents enabled Gisela's descendants to learn previously unknown facts of Gisela's family history, such as the locations and dates of death for her cousins Hugo and Fritz, the final burial place of her brother Ulrich, and the name of the ship Gisela, Joseph, and their growing family boarded to come home to the United States, among other details.

I had the privilege to interview Gisela Hale over an extended period, but if a researcher cannot interview the men or women integral to a family history, various online resources are available to help verify facts and second-hand stories. Perhaps the obvious first choice is the subscription service Ancestry.com, which includes an impressive variety of German records, including vital, military, and city directory records. For those subjects who crossed the Atlantic from Bremen, the website for Die Maus: Gesellschaft für Familienforschung e.V. Bremen (The Mouse: Society for Family Research, Registered Association of Bremen) at [www.schiffslisten.de](http://www.schiffslisten.de) provides a searchable database for the years 1920 to 1939. Moreover, the Association for Computer Genealogy ([www.compgen.de](http://www.compgen.de)) provides lists of German genealogical societies, including links to forums to post information and ask questions. This website is a tremendous resource for those looking for guidance and available online resources. And if you still cannot find what you are looking for, it is always a good idea to revisit online queries or check online for new databases or resources. Given the current boom in online genealogical research, new resources and databases are surely on the horizon.

This article offers a revealing glimpse into "ordinary life" in Nazi Germany. It also fills in the gaps in the genealogical record of the Kriebel family, connecting Gisela's descendants to ancestors half a world away. It has never been easier for descendants of German war brides to conduct research into their distant and even unknown ancestors.

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4. Reimers, David M. (March 1981) "Post-World War II Immigration to the United States: America's Latest Newcomers." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 454. p. 2.
5. Gisela Kriebel and Joseph Hale are the maternal grandparents of the author.
6. I conducted three interviews in 2001, and four again in 2005. For the 2001 interviews I recorded each session by taking copious notes. For the 2005 interviews I recorded each session by audio tape. All seven interviews took place at the home of Gisela Hale in Venice, California. The quotations have been edited for clarity. Digital copies and transcripts of the sessions are in the possession of the author.
7. Alfred Young. (1999) *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution*. Boston: Beacon Press. p. 193.
8. Specifically, I have corroborated information with Barbara Masterson (daughter), born in May 1944, in Uffenheim, Germany; and Dorothy Skiles (daughter), born in March 1947, in Karlsruhe, Germany. Unfortunately, everyone else named in this essay as part of Gisela's story is now deceased.
9. The foundations of this family tree were researched by my father, Bill Skiles. I have further corroborated these dates using Ancestry.com. The relevant documents include the following. Birth records for Robert Louis Max Kriebel, Gerhard Richard Hans Kriebel, Adolf Friedrich Wilhelm Kriebel, Otto Wilhelm Richard Kriebel, Gustav Adolf Georg Kriebel, Fritz Gustav Eduard Kriebel, Harry Edward Ernst Kriebel, Ernst Heinrich Eduard Kriebel, Richard Friedrich Wilhelm Kriebel, and Heinrich Eduard Adolf Kriebel can be found at Ancestry.com, Landesarchiv Berlin, Berlin, Deutschland, Personenstandsregister 1876-1945, laufendenummern: files 63742, 335, 324, 637, 354, 310, 302, 630, and 368 (accessed 7 June 2020). The birth record for Bertha Henriette Pauline Weiss can be found at Ancestry.com, Hamburg, Germany, Births, 1874-1901 [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015 (accessed 7 June 2020). And the birth record of Ernst Wilhelm Kriebel can be found at Ancestry.com, Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1500-1971 [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016 (accessed 7 June 2020). The marriage record of Bertha Henriette Pauline Weiss and Ernst Wilhelm Kriebel can be found at Ancestry.com, Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1500-1971 [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016 (accessed 7 June 2020). The baptism record of Paul Ernst Albert Kriebel can be found at Ancestry.com, Germany, Lutheran Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1500-1971 [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016 (accessed 7 June 2020). Fritz Kriebel's military record can be found at Ancestry.com, Deutsches Bundesarchiv; Berlin, Deutschland; Kartei der Verlust- und Grabmeldungen gefallener deutscher Soldaten 1939-1945 (-1948), Bundesarchiv B 563-2 Kartei (accessed 7 June 2020).
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11. Gisela Hale, Oral Interview of March 4, 2005.
12. For three excellent sources on the Hitler Youth, see Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); H.W. Koch, *The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development, 1922-1945* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000); and Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).
13. I have been unable to locate the town of Wuthenow on a map. However, there is a town by the name of Wuthenow just outside of Neuruppin, which is where the Kriebels would vacation in the summers. It is possible that Gisela mis-remembered the name of the town outside Krotoschin, or that I simply could not locate the small Polish town, which would have a Polish name rather than the German "Wuthenow."
14. Alexandra Richie. (1998) *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin*. New York: Carroll & Graf. p. 573.
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17. Kartei der Verlust- und Grabmeldungen gefallener deutscher Soldaten, Bundesarchiv B 563-2 Kartei.
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23. Pufahl, Letter to Herr Kriebel, dated March 13, 1944.
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25. Gisela Hale, Oral Interview of March 4, 2005.
26. Gisela Hale, Oral Interview of February 25, 2005.
27. For example, it is my understanding that the Kartei der Verlust- und Grabmeldungen gefallener deutscher Soldaten 1939-1945 (-1948) in the Bundesarchiv became available online only in 2020.
28. Gisela Hale, Oral Interview of March 4, 2005.
29. During an interview in 2002, Gisela said that she and Annie asked an American GI for a ride home, who then, in turn radioed Joseph Hale to pick them up.
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33. Bescheinigung der Eheschließung [Certificate of Marriage], Joseph D. Hale to Gisela Ortrude Herderich, 17 July 1948, Karlsruhe, Germany. Standesbeamter in Karlsruhe. Digital copy in possession of Bill and Dorothy Skiles.
34. The foundations of this family tree were researched by my father, Bill Skiles. In addition, I have used the Kriebel family Bible to fill in and corroborate dates of birth and death for Ernst Wilhelm Kriebel's descendants. I have further corroborated these dates using Ancestry.com. The relevant documents include the following. Death Record of George Ulrich Herderich, Ancestry.com. Karlsruhe, Germany, Deaths, 1870-1951 [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016 (accessed 7 June 2020). Birth Record of Heinrich Herderich, Ancestry.com. Ansbach, Germany, Lutheran Parish Register Extracts, 1526-1940 [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015 (accessed 7 June 2020). Death Index Record of Joseph Daniel Hale, Ancestry.com. California, Death Index, 1940-1997 [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000 (accessed 7 June 2020).
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