

Weigel Family Tragedy 1933

Connection to St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Avon and the DeChant Family

Excerpt of the memory of Elmer DeChant (1914-1995), father of Leonard DeChant. "The most tragic event in my life was the death of 5 members of one family. The calamity devastated the Weigel family. It happened shortly after midnight, Christmas Eve of 1933 in Vermilion Ohio. **They were all buried at St. Mary Cemetery Avon** – all five in one grave – in the northeast corner of the cemetery. I (Elmer), my father's cousin Fred Balmert Sr (1894-1975), who was the church custodian at the time, dug the grave by hand."

Taken from Olde Homestead Acres Family History of the DeChant Family, page 81. Compiled and written by Leonard DeChant.

(See article below from Vermilion News for details of the accident).

Weigel headstone reads:

In Remembrance of my beloved family, who rest here and who died in an accident on December 25, 1933. Including Katherine Weigel (1880) George Weigel (1904) and his wife Catherine Stanton Weigel (1903) and Henry Weigel Jr (1915). Also buried here is Henry Weigel Sr. Beloved father (1878-1939) May God love all of you.

Connection to St. Mary's AVON:

Mrs. Katherine "Glockner" Weigel (1880 – 1933), her parents were Anna "Long" Glockner (1852-1880) and George Glockner (1841-1896). They were members of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception and are also buried in the cemetery in Avon, along with their other children: Mary Clockner (1875-1900); & Theresa Glockner Kanally (1878-1944). Their son Frank Klockner (1877-1965) is buried in Sandusky.

DeChant Family Connection:

George Glockner's sisters were *Anna "Fanny" Glockner* (1833-1916) married to Johann DeChant (1828-1873) and *Mary Glockner* (1838-1903) married to Franz DeChant (1837-1913). Franz (Frank) & Mary DeChant are Elmer's grandparents.

Johann DeChant & Franz (Frank) DeChant were brothers.

(Confirmed in Avon 1860 census pg 74 that George & Mary were siblings)

Find A Grave information for the Glockner family available via link below.

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11363075/george_glockner

Various family name spellings: Glockner, Klockner, Kloekner & Clochner

<https://www.vermilionohio.org/vermviews/vermviews-660.htm>



"...their car was hit broadside and completely demolished by an eastbound flyer, Engine No. 22, at the Division Street."

CHRISTMAS EVE 1933: On April 15, 1933 Henry and Katherine Weigel came from the Cleveland area to take the job as Caretakers of the Olympic Outing Club. The Weigels had four children, George, Henry Jr., Robert, and a daughter, Ruth. George and his wife, both 29, were married in July. Ruth was also married and had an infant daughter named Katherine. Henry Jr. was 18 and lived at home at the club with his younger brother, Robert.

Henry Sr. had been a member of the club since 1902, when the club was born. Living in Vermilion, and working for the club was a dream and opportunity of a lifetime. When Mr. and Mrs. Peake, who formerly took care of the club left, Henry and Katherine readily took on the job.

When we travel back to 1933 in Vermilion, Ohio, we need to understand that none of our railroad crossings had signals. At that time the state employed men as watchmen at each of the crossings. When they were notified of a train approaching, they lowered large gates to keep foot, auto, and horse traffic off the tracks. We also need to understand that there were three sets of tracks on the New York Central rail line. One track was a work track, another was a slow track, and the third was the high-speed track. The final thing to attend to concerns the fact that the watchmen only worked from 6:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. The rest of the time the tracks were unguarded.

The summer came and left. All was quiet at the Olympic Club. A majority of the members were Clevelanders who spent their summers in Vermilion and wintered in their homes in the city. Christmas approached. The Weigel's were happy. They invited their children,

George and his wife and their daughter Ruth Werle, to spend Christmas with them and their two younger boys at the club. George and his wife came from Reading, PA. Ruth (Weigel) Werle came in from Cleveland with her 20-month-old daughter. Ruth's husband was disabled so he couldn't come.

As Christmas Eve neared, Mrs. Weigel made plans with her daughter, daughter-in-law, and her three sons to attend the midnight mass at St. Mary's church on Ohio Street. Her husband, Henry, opted to stay home with infant Catherine while they attended the service. What a wonderful way to begin the Christmas celebration. It doesn't take much imagination (for myself at least) to understand the true magic of attending a late evening church service on Christmas Eve.

Mrs. Weigel was driving. After the service she and her family headed north Division Street toward the NYC tracks to go home. The reason of her decision to go home this way will never be known. They could have simply headed east down Ohio Street to West River Road home. Three days later (Thursday, December 28, 1933) this would be the headline on the front page of the Vermilion News: **Funeral For Train Victims Held Today.**

At about 1:20 Christmas morning' their car was hit broadside and completely demolished by an eastbound flyer, Engine No. 22, at the Division Street crossing. Mrs. Weigel, her daughter, and her daughter-in-law, were killed instantly. George and Henry Jr. still hung to life. A westbound train was halted and they were placed on board to be taken to Providence Hospital in Sandusky. George died while being transported, and his brother, Henry, passed a few hours later. Miraculously, Robert was thrown from the auto as it was pushed to the east of the railway station received a broken leg and numerous bruises.

Hundreds of parishioners were at the scene of the accident. They heard the sickening crash, and rushed to help. But there was little to be done, but pray.

Mrs. Henry Andress, walking home, was knocked to the ground by a piece of the automobile, but received no great injuries.

The silence of that majestic night had been broken in the flash of a second.

I (among others) have known about this particular tragedy for many years. It came a bit closer to me when I was contacted by Robert's daughter, two or three years ago. She wanted me to re-search the article in the archives of The News and send her a copy. She lives and works in San Francisco. Her father is still alive. The one thing she told me that really touched my heart is that her father never mentioned that accident to his family until she was well into her twenties. What a great tragedy to keep to one's self.

Having lived in Vermilion all my life, I am very familiar with train mishaps. I am always cautious about crossing tracks. I understand the power of the locomotive and the Diesels that pull/pulled these great loads. I know what can happen in an instant.

In September of 1934 the Ohio Public Utilities people recommended that flashing lights be installed at most of Vermilion's NYC crossings. They also mandated that all trees growing near the railroads be removed, and that crossing watchmen be kept at the crossings 24 hours a day until further notice.

In January of 1935, over two years after this tragedy, flashing lights were ordered to be installed at two of the crossings. It would be some 50 years (and many accidents) later before PUCO would order gates installed at the crossings in Vermilion.

Robert's daughter contacted me earlier this year (2015) to tell me that her dad has passed away. He was 94.

