

Walter Kleinwort
by Margarete Gillies
nee Kleinwort
German Immigrant
Thuringia
April 13, 1929



Walter Kleinwort, 1929-1965
By Margarete (Kleinwort) Gillies

At the age of 23, my father Walter Martin Kleinwort bade farewell to his parents, two brothers and two sisters from their Wedel home, located along the Elbe River a short distance west of Hamburg Germany. Although his family operated a successful rose nursery at which he had worked, my father with his sense of adventure wanted to make his own way in a country that held a certain kind of mystic for him.

Father initially departed from the port of Hamburg on the S.S. Thuringia with his childhood friend Gerhardt Neudoffer, two of his cousins Hans and Heinrich Kleinwort as well as another friend Heinz Rottger during the latter half of March. However, much to his family's surprise, a day after their departure Father unexpectedly appeared back at his parent's home as a Russian ship had collided with the Thuringia at the mouth of the Elbe River. Once repairs were completed on the ship, the five young men from Wedel departed Hamburg on April 3, arriving at the port of Halifax on April 13, 1929. In recounting his arrival in Halifax my father related the memories that he had of that event to me as a young woman.

Once immigration formalities were completed, Father was surprised and happy when he and the others were each given a grocery bag filled with staples such as bread, meat and cheese for the long train journey that they were about to embark. If there was one unpleasant memory of their train journey to the west, it was that of the train doors remaining locked for the entire trip's duration to Winnipeg. Because government policy of the day focussed on sending new immigrants to Western Canada rather than the more populous areas of Eastern Canada and Southern Ontario in particular, none of the passengers were permitted to depart from the train until its arrival in Winnipeg.

However the train journey to Western Canada was an adventure in itself for my father because of the vast distances that they travelled and the changing nature of the scenery that they passed. For my father, the miles of endless forest in contrast to the flat, treeless prairies was a memory

never to be forgotten. During this journey, Father took a few photographs that he eventually placed in an album. From the information on the back of the photographs, a chronology of dates revealed a few events that held special memories for him.

For a short period of time after their Winnipeg arrival about April 21 they enjoyed the hospitality of the Anderson Family on Langside Street. Revelstroke British Columbia became the final western destination for Father and the others in his group. Father's stay in the Revelstroke area didn't last long when he realized that his previous life's experiences had not prepared him for the sweat and toil of a railroad labourer. With picks and shovels Father and his best friend were put to work along the railway line that threaded its way through the Rockies. Somewhat dismayed, they made their way to Edmonton.

In recounting his short Edmonton experience, Father indicated that their lack of English speaking skills presented challenges when it came to purchasing food. For the first time in their lives, they saw and ate bananas. Rather than purchasing a small bunch of bananas, they inadvertently purchased a whole stock!

By the beginning of June, Father, Gerhardt and one of the Kleinwort cousins had returned to Winnipeg. Because they were low on funds, they like other unemployed men in the months before the official beginning of the depression illegally rode the boxcars across the dusty prairies to Winnipeg in the hopes of finding work. The photos of the Winnipeg experience tell a story of work and Sunday relaxation during the month of June at which time Father and Gerhardt worked for a farmer in West St. Paul near the Red River.

In one of his photos Father makes a humorous reference to an 'alcohol free Sunday' drink of beer with the suggestion of 'no work is good rest'. On a June 30th rowboat ride prior to their Winnipeg departure, my father humorously compares the river boating experience to another boat with the description 'Mit der Thuringia auf dem Red River'. With these events Father and Gerhardt's adventures in Western Canada came to an end. As much as he wanted, Father never did return to the west.

Although my father had some fond memories of his journey into Western Canada, the limited work that was available was basically for room and board. As a result, there were times when they found themselves hungry and resorted to the theft of things such as the farmer's chicken that was cooked over an open fire out of the farmer's sight. Later on, they resorted to picking cherries that were eaten by the basketful. Having left the other three in their group behind, by July 4th, Father and Gerhardt were riding the rails through Ontario's northland in search of work in Southern Ontario.

During the summer months of 1929, the two men worked for a Mr. Stevenson who farmed near the village of Clarkson just west of Toronto. Photos taken during this period indicated that they lived in a rundown frame house located on the farm property. It was during his Clarkson farming experience that Father was introduced to a variety of corn that he had not known about in Europe. He made a notation on the back of one photo with the words (translated) 'that this corn was for human consumption'.

Apparently Father and his friend discovered the intense heat of a Canadian summer that August as they chose to sleep outdoors on the ground wrapped in a blanket. During their Clarkson experience that summer they managed to find time for a Sunday sightseeing excursion to Niagara Falls. Sunday relaxation was important throughout my father's life but he noted on another photo that before relaxation took place, there was 'Sonntagmorgen Arbeit', which included preparing food and doing the laundry.

As autumn faded toward winter, the two men were once again in search of work. With the help of the German Club in Toronto, they were taken to a Dundas Street boarding house owned by the Kopp Family. After a two-week stay they then made their way to Brampton, a small town north west of Toronto that was known as the flower capital of Canada. By Easter 1930, Walter Calvert & Son had hired Father and his friend to work in their large greenhouse business. Father was now at least satisfied with his situation as he was working at something that enabled him to use his skills.

Due to the many difficulties encountered during his first year in Canada, Father said that there were many times when he felt discouraged and wanted to return to Germany. However, once his first year in Canada had passed, there was no real desire on his part to return permanently to his homeland. In time, new interests and places that Father discovered in the Brampton area replaced the cultural pursuits that he had once enjoyed in Germany. In his later years, I recall Father encouraging other disillusioned immigrants by telling them that things would get better once they had turned the corner of that first year.

In spite of the depression, things gradually had begun to look brighter for Father after his arrival in Brampton. Although Father was pleased to be employed in an area of work for which he had been trained in Germany, he knew that it had been at the expense of other workers. The knowledge that he was paid less did not please Father because he felt the resentment of those who became unemployed.

During his early days in Brampton, Father lived in a boarding house operated by a Mrs. Giffin. During his free Sunday hours, Father had become friends with several other immigrants working in the greenhouse industry. One of their favourite pastimes was to gather together around the record player listening to their favourite music over Sunday coffee and cake. The song 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips' was the piece of music Father remembered most during those early Brampton days. The Toronto newspapers and a dictionary became important sources in helping Father improve in his English language usage.

A year after their arrival in Brampton, Father and his friend Gerhardt purchased a plot of land in Brampton and thus became partners in a market gardening business. This was the beginning of 'The Brampton Nursery Company'. For two years, the business partners continued with their daytime jobs while they spent evenings and weekends maintaining the market garden. During the summer of 1932, they grew a field of tomatoes as well as several varieties of cut flowers that were sold at the local Saturday market. That autumn, construction began on the first of two greenhouses.

By the summer of 1933, Father and his partner were operating their business on a full time basis. They had expanded their business to include the sale of nursery stock, especially roses. Father's family in Germany had provided the initial stock of roses for this part of the business.

Construction of a small cement block, one-storey house took place in 1934. By this time, Father's business partner had married but Father continued to live in this house until after his own marriage in 1936. Although Father devoted much time to his work, he still continued to enjoy a variety of Sunday excursions to the outlying Brampton areas.

In late 1935 with financial help from his family and feeling secure with his newly acquired Canadian citizenship, Father returned to Germany for a wintertime family visit. It was during this visit, that he married Charlotte Ossenbruggen who was a friend of his eldest sister. Disturbed by worsening political events in Germany, Father and his new bride sailed for New York and Canada in March 1936. Another low point in Father's life occurred shortly after his return to Brampton that spring. As a result Father unexpectedly sold off his share of The Brampton Nursery Company that summer.

While Father pondered his next step, he spent the fall and early winter months working in the Kopp Family bakery in Toronto. Finally in the spring of 1937, Father purchased a six-acre parcel of property with a rundown greenhouse and an older two-storey brick house on Sidney Street in Trenton Ontario. From that time until his untimely early death

twenty-eight years later, Father devoted his life to 'Kleinwort Wholesale Greenhouses' and to his family of three children that included Margarete, Gunter and Edda.

As a result of Father's sacrifices and hard work, the second generation Canadian off- spring of Walter Martin Kleinwort and Charlotte Ossenbruggen Kleinwort have been richly rewarded in enumerable ways.