

II. HISTORY OF THE HESS FAMILY

On December 24, 1847, a ship from Le Havre, France, docked in New Orleans, Louisiana, after a three-month voyage. Among the passengers disembarking in this unfamiliar port city in a country where an unfamiliar language was spoken was an Alsatian woman, traveling with her young children. She had had what must have been a difficult voyage. Sea travel then was always trying and hazardous; the ships were crude and lacked many conveniences; passenger traveled in cramped and close quarters; meals had to be cooked by the passengers themselves on a communal stove --and then only when the ocean was relatively smooth.

Despite these difficulties, she had safely completed the voyage; she had arrived in this strange, new country with eight of her ten children. But major obstacles still lay ahead. Except for her fellow passengers, she knew no one in New Orleans. Her husband was thousands of miles inland; she had had no recent communication with him or with her second-oldest son.

She only knew that her son might be there, expecting her to arrive on one of the ships.

For those of us in this era of virtually instantaneous communications via telephone and telegram, of computerized reservations systems, of bilingual travel guides and travelers' aid stations in every railway terminal, bus depot and airport, it is extremely difficult to imagine ourselves caught in such a dilemma-- and knowing what to do.

But this brave woman, knowing not one word of English, not one segment of the city, not one native who might befriend her, settled eight youngsters -- who must have been tired, cross and frightened -- in a hotel, locked them in the room for safekeeping, and set out on a search of New Orleans for her son.

What chain of events led Margaret Catherine Claude Hess, wife of Frederick Hess, to be spending Christmas Eve alone, searching an unfamiliar city for a son she had not seen for two years?

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Frederick Hess was born on March 4, 1796, at Belfosse, France, in the province of Alsace. His father died when Frederick was twelve, and in order to help his mother support the family, he began working in a textile factory, where he eventually became a foreman. In 1822, he married Margaret Catherine Claude, who had been born in Villersbaugh, France, on February 14, 1800. Eleven children were born -- one of whom died in infancy. The ten surviving children were Julien, Gustave, Sophie, Eugene, Frederica, Louise, Edward, Paul Emile, Fannie and Prosper. During this time, they lived in Rothau, a small Alsatian village, and Frederick operated a mill on a little brook called Le Bruche.

We can probably safely assume that until 1845 Frederick and Catherine led quiet lives typical of small landholders and merchants in the area. But in that year, the government issued a draft notice to Gustave, the second-oldest son. As was frequently the case in those days, he managed to buy a reprieve from

that summons. Word later reached the family, however, that Gustave was to be drafted again--this time to be taken away on the very next day--some say to serve in the Pope's army--with no chance of buying his freedom. Frederick and Gustave conferred with Pastor Oberlin, their good friend and the local minister, who advised them to come to America and have the family follow them later.

We can only speculate about the remainder of the day, but it must have been filled with furtive consultations, painful decisions, and hastily-made plans.

We do know, though, that within hours of hearing about the second draft summons, the two men stole away into the night, determined to reach the United States, establish a new life, and summon the rest of the family to join them there. They headed for Le Havre, France, a seaport and doorway to the New World. Valid though their reasons might have been, their escape, of course, made outlaws of them, and when they reached Le Havre, they saw a notice posted saying they were wanted men.

With signs proclaiming them as fugitives, and not having valid passports, they didn't dare to attempt to board a ship. The situation must have seemed dismal, until, in one of those twists of fate which can alter the fortunes even of ordinary individuals, they met a family they could trust and whose destination was also the United States. This family had the necessary documents to board a ship legally, and did so. The mother then came back and got Gustave and Frederick on board by having them pose as her son and husband.

It was a brave and daring--albeit illegal--decision to leave family, friends, occupation, and homeland in search for a new life, but, for better or for worse, these two men began their voyage. Like countless other immigrants of the nineteenth century, they dreamed of a better future for themselves and for their family in an unknown land. Accordingly, they sailed westward across the Atlantic Ocean in search for a new home for their family.

They reached the United States safely and made

their way to Somonauk, Illinois, where they lived for a short while until they moved to Ottawa, Illinois.

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Thus it was that on Christmas Eve, 1847, Catherine Hess and eight of her children were alone in New Orleans; Frederick Hess was in La Salle County, Illinois; and Gustave was somewhere in New Orleans after having ridden a barge down the Mississippi in December.

While waiting for his family, Gustave worked on the levee' and, when finished with each day's work, checked the newly-arrived ships to see if his mother and brothers and sisters had arrived. By December 24 he had already checked a number of times with no luck. So on that day he thought that surely they hadn't arrived and that he wouldn't bother checking. But he couldn't, after all, resist one more investigation, and, to his surprise, discovered that a ship had docked that day with his family. He eventually learned that all were safely settled in a hotel, Catherine having

rejoined the children. Early the next morning he went to find them, and with great rejoicing, they were re-united on Christmas Day, 1847.

After securing lodgings in New Orleans they planned to live in that city until weather would permit them to travel north.

Finally, on a spring day in 1848, with goods packed and arrangements completed, the family was ready to continue the last phase of the journey towards reunion. But even this portion of the long trip presented obstacles. A Frenchman planned to travel with the family but lost his way. Deciding not to go on without him they waited . . . and waited . . . and waited--and their steamboat slowly pulled away from the dock and left without them.

As if this were not sufficient inconvenience, a heavy rain began to fall, and all scurried for whatever shelter was available. Paul and Frederica climbed under a large canvas covering some salt barrels and there they were snug and comfortable

until the police, spotting the youngsters there, chased them out.

Finally, they all were able to board the next boat scheduled to depart, and they began their trip up the Mississippi. Ironically enough, they passed the first steamer and left it behind. Changing boats in St. Louis, they continued their way up the Illinois River.

River traffic at that time was very heavy, partially because of the large number of immigrants who chose that manner of travelling to their future homes. One man of the general period wrote about river travel, "These immigrants have a hard time of it. Poor fare and exposure to the elements, on the open deck of the boat, often engender disease among them, and break up families before they reached their destined homes." Boats were frequently crowded with personal gear, household goods, farming utensils and craftsmen's tools. Further adding to congestion and confusion were the cows and hogs often kept on board to provide fresh .

milk and meat.

Danger travelled with them, too. Because of the nature of the steamboats, explosions were fairly common. A newspaper of the time described one such explosion in this way: "She blew up, with an explosion that shook earth, air, and heaven, as though the walls of the world were tumbling to pieces about our ears. Huge beams of timber, furniture, and human beings in every direction, were alike shot up perpendicularly many hundreds of fathoms in the air."

Cholera was another very real danger. During the 1840's and early 1850's, this plague spread up and down the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. As a writer of the time said, "Men drank whiskey by day to 'ward off the disease' and buried the dead at night. Those well at dawn would be in their graves before another dawn." Fortunately, the cholera epidemic did not reach its most dangerous stage until the year after Catherine and the children travelled north. If they had arrived

in Peru in the spring of 1849--rather than in 1848-- they would have seen the town of Peru virtually deserted, and the bodies of riverboat crewmen who had died from cholera laid in rows on the river bank, to be buried at night.

At any rate, despite the inconvenience of river travel, the risk of possible fires or explosions, the dread of cholera, Catherine and the children arrived safely in Peru, Illinois, in the spring of 1848. Once again, they unloaded their possessions, then repacked them in an excart for the relatively short trip to Ottawa.

Now only a few miles from their destination, they must have felt a variety of emotions--relief that the long, arduous journey was virtually finished, curiosity about their new home, excitement about finally seeing Frederick again, fatigue, apprehension, and, who knows, perhaps even an occasional twinge of homesickness for the lovely pastoral farmland of Alsace.

We don't really know their thoughts or state of mind, of course, as they made their way along that

rough road toward Ottawa, but two of the younger children, at least, felt carefree enough to scamper ahead of the wagon. They noticed a stranger approaching them; when he drew even, he threw his arms around them and held them in a close embrace. In an almost storybook ending, their father was with them once more. Frederick had left Ottawa on foot to meet them, and now in the spring of 1848, after a separation of approximately two and one-half years and thousands of miles, and after journeys involving risks and discomforts and loneliness foreign to our experiences, they were re-united once again. Only Julien, who had remained in France and served in the army, was missing.

They lived in Ottawa for several years. During that time, Frederick operated a brickyard, known first as Hess and Colwell and later as Hess and Crotty. We have very little other information about the life they led while living in Ottawa. For some reason, few stories about this period survived to be handed down from one generation to the next. We do not

know where they lived, what kind of home they had, or what difficulties they experienced in adjusting to life in this still somewhat primitive land.

One way that we can try to reconstruct that period in their lives, however, is to read the Ottawa paper published during that time. Articles selected at random can do much to capture the flavor of the age. We can learn that one patent medicine unblushingly claimed to be the "only infallible Worm medicine ever discovered," never having failed in 400,000 cases. . . or that farmers could receive 6¢ a pound in cash or goods for butter delivered to the store. . . or that wolves were still such a public menace that wolf hunts were organized . . . or that a man was hanged in Ottawa for murder in 1853 . . . or that two men and a team of horses drowned while trying to cross the river on ice . . . or that one chew of tobacco was offered as a reward for a runaway apprentice indentured to a tailor . . . or that the county paid \$26.00 for "keeping a crazy woman 13

weeks" . . . or that a "very modest lady, who was a passenger on board a packet ship, sprang out of her berth and jumped overboard, on hearing the captain during a storm order the crew to haul down the sheets."

We do know definitely, though, that in 1855 Frederick became a citizen of the United States. Shortly afterwards, Julien, who had remained in France, decided to come to America. His wife had died, leaving him to care for two small children, Emile and Josephine, and he felt that he could best meet his responsibilities by bringing his children to rejoin the rest of the family. Sometime during this period, too, one of Frederick and Catherine's children, Edward, died. The cause of death is unknown.

Eugene married Eliza Widemann on October 16, 1854, in Ottawa. He worked with his father at the brickyard until his health failed, and in 1859, or 1856 or 1857 as it is variously reported, Frederick and Catherine bought a farm in Waltham Township.

They bought this property, the southwest quarter of Section 32, from Jacob and Rhoda Vaumeter. It must have been a very picturesque setting -- the Pecumsaugan Creek wandered through a hilly land partially covered with timber. For those of us who visit the present owners of the farm, Wayne and Polly Hess, and who see such modern conveniences as air conditioning, it is hard to imagine the life Catherine and Frederick and children led when they moved into a log cabin.

In 1858 some people, including Eliza, Eugene's wife, traveled in a hayrack to Ottawa to view what later came to be regarded as an historic event of major importance--the Lincoln-Douglas debate. In 1858, Douglas, in a campaign for re-election to the United States Senate, faced in a series of debates throughout the state his most formidable opponent, Abraham Lincoln, a rising figure in the new Republican Party. The local citizens apparently recognized the importance of this confrontation, for 10,000 people arrived by canal, packet boat, on

foot, on horseback, in carriage or wagon, or on the recently-installed Rock Island Railroad. Campfires gleamed all night as many arrived early.

On September 4, 1877, Frederick died at the age of 81. Catherine died on May 4, 1885, at the age of 85. The farm has subsequently been inhabited by Eugene and Eliza Hess, Burton and Ardelle Hess, and Wayne and Polly Hess.

I asked Verne Hess Munson, oldest of Burton and Ardelle's children, to record some of her memories concerning her parents and the family's life on the farm. The following is her account:

Some of the following incidents that I mention I can remember and some I have heard the folks talk about and today I am not always sure which way it was.

Burton C. Hess and Ardelle Pearson were married in June or July 1898 at the Baptist parsonage in Utica by the Rev. B. F. Duncan. Mrs. Duncan had previously given Mama the only music lessons she ever had and these were given without charge. Also Mama practiced her music on Mrs. Duncan's organ. Mama sang in the Baptist Church choir several years previous to her marriage and also sang at many funerals during those years. Many years later she sang in the Waltham Church choir.

After their wedding Mama and Papa drove out to the farm and lived with Grandpa, Grandma, Uncle Eugene O (O for Oscar) and Aunt Laura. It was a rambling old

house and the folks soon started keeping house in a few rooms at the north end. Grandma then had a kitchen built for herself near the center of the house. This room is now Wayne and Polly's bedroom and was Mama and Papa's bedroom for many years before that.

Papa was named after Burton C. Cook, a prominent pre-Civil War lawyer in Ottawa that Grandma worked for before her marriage. Mama was given her name by her mother's only brother, who died soon after her birth. His name was Charlie Davis. When asked to name the baby, he said, "Call her Ardelle."

It was probably soon after his 21st birthday Papa learned the Harness Makers trade at Fitzgerald's Harness Shop in Utica and worked there a few years.

Uncle Gene must have worked the farm during that time. Then Papa went back to the farm and he and Uncle Gene worked together. Then Papa married and Uncle Gene left while I was very young.

Grandpa Hess died in February 1900.

Grandma and Aunt Laura lived together until Aunt

Laura married Otto Haage perhaps two years after Grandpa's death.

When Uncle Gene got the job delivering mail on a RFD route out of Utica, Grandma moved to Utica and there she kept house for him in a house two doors south of where Gene and Tina now live. I spent considerable time there with Grandma and was always fascinated by railroad trains.

Mama and Papa had eleven children in this order--

Vernie	January 29, 1899
Eugene Frederick .	February 18, 1901 <i>died Aug 81</i>
Kenneth	April 1903, deceased at 10 days
Elizabeth Davis .	April 18, 1904 <i>died Aug 7 - 1971</i>
Harold	January deceased at 6 weeks
Elsie Alice	December 13, 1906
Gladys Ardelle . .	March 15, 1909 <i>died Aug 4 1985</i>
Wayne Elbert . . .	June 8, 1912 <i>died Sept 4 - 1980</i>
Doris	March 19, 1917
Burton Otis	August 7, 1919
Frank Howard . . .	April 29, 1923

Burton and Frank were born at St. Mary's Hospital in La Salle. Before that we were all born at home. All were under Dr. Geen's supervision except once when he was in Europe and another time in Hot Springs.

I can remember both baby boys who died. Right after the birth of Kenneth--who was born the day after

Mama's sister Ettabell died--I was taken to Aunt Laura Haage's home in LaSalle and we knew nothing of what went on till the day after Kenneth's funeral when Papa came and took me home.

Harold was born with some kind of growth on an upper arm. Today he could have been operated on right away and probably would have recovered but Dr. Geen thought it was useless to try surgery on one so young. I can remember him saying that.

After Harold's funeral service at the house Papa, Mama, Gene and I rode in a hack to the cemetery where he was buried beside Kenneth. Papa held that little white coffin on his knees during the ride from the house to the cemetery.

I had colic for six weeks after I was born and they all took turns walking the floor with me. After that, Mama didn't have colicky babies.

Some of the earliest things I can remember are -- riding on a hayrack with Uncle Gene and Papa. Uncle Gene teased me because I lisped.

*she was born 1859
possibly 1879 →*

--Mama and I taking a drink of water to Papa who was plowing north of the house with a walking plow and team of horses. That doesn't seem possible but it was a walking plow and it wasn't headlands either.

--Also, Papa, Mama, Gene and I driving to Kangley with a top buggy and single horse to visit Aunt Annie Reeder and Greatgrandmother Wideman. She was standing on the porch when we drove up. I must have been either two or three years old at the time.

*more than
2 mi.*

When I was six years old I started going to school at the Crosiar School in Utica Township. Papa took me to school when the weather was bad or else I stayed home. Through the woods and along the gravel road seemed an awful long way. I was late for school most of the time. And then there were those cows. After two years Gene started and then it was better.

All nine of us graduated from that same school. We didn't belong to that school district.

Elizabeth, Gladys, Doris and Frank graduated from high school in La Salle. Except for Elsie, the rest

of us had some high schooling, either at Utica or La Salle. Burton had to stop after one semester when Papa died.

I can remember Gene's and my first automobile ride. Some man in what seemed to be a huge car stopped and offered us a ride to school. It sure was a thrill. It never occurred to us to refuse.

✓ Papa bought a double buggy in 1904 and that meant we could go places together. Visit relatives in Ottawa-
-Aunt Etta and the Widemans, parades, the Lincoln-Douglas 50th anniversary celebration and many other events.

The first Ford touring car was purchased in 1915, I think. Anyhow it was a 1916 model. Papa purchased it in La Salle and drove it home with someone showing him how. The next day he drove it around and around the pasture before he took it out on the road. It was only a few days till he took Mama to La Salle at about 12 miles per hour.

About the next year Papa and Aunt Rena took Grandma

to visit her last brother-in-law, Mr. Paul Hess (a real old-time French gentleman). That sure was some trip. It was a cold Sunday in the late fall. The top of the Ford was folded down. Grandma was wrapped in a shawl and scarf over her coat and hat. It was the last place Grandma ever visited. She had a stroke and died the next April.

Previous to about 1910 there never was any access to the farm by public road, only over adjacent property. At that time a Mr. Jack Brennan, who owned the timber land south of us which we always drove through every time we left the place, locked the gate opening to the Utica township road. However, he gave us a key. Grandma and Papa bought a narrow strip of land along the township line from Thomas Burke Sr. and gave it to Waltham township who then had the hills graded down and large culverts put where the two small creeks were. Incidentally flash floods washed those culverts out twice before something more permanent was built. The work was done by slip scrapers pulled by horses, driven by

a man. It was several years before that road was even gravelled. No comparison to Interstate 80 which was built along the south of the farm in the early 1960's.

Papa and his father before him raised horses as long as it was profitable. Both driving horses and work horses. I have heard that Grandfather Hess sold a pair of matched dapple-grey carriage horses to Mrs. Cary in Utica. There was one horse called "Old Paddy" safe on the road; he never went very fast and we learned to harness and drive him when we were quite young. He died of old age. Gene wasn't very old when Papa bought him a nice pony colt. "Queen" they called her. We all rode or drove her to Sunday School on hot summer days. Gene once drove her to La Salle for a three-day visit with Delbert Haage. She eventually died of old age. Another driving horse we used a lot was "Old Ben." Papa bought him. Papa raised some very nice black driving horses before Ford cars became popular. One or two eventually were sold to the Army

during World War I. When a horse grew old Papa "turned it out to pasture." He sold many young horses but never an old one.

Knowing Grandmother Hess, I presume Aunt Lida and Aunt Rena were married at her home. But I never heard anyone mention it except I have heard Ed Wideman tell that a brother of Grandma's brought a canary in a cage all the way from California as a wedding gift for Aunt Lida. That would have been some time during the 1880's.

I don't remember when Aunt Laura married Otto Haage but I have heard Mama talk about it. The minister took a wrong turn in the timber and went over to Hartshorn's first and also Uncle Otto was late for some reason. It was an evening affair and was followed by a big family meal.

The first wedding I have any knowledge of was that of Fannie Hess (Everett Chalus' grandmother) to Benoit Chalus. It took place in the same parlor as all the later weddings long before our time and when that part of the house was still on the north eighty.

I was married at home in June 1923 to Walter Munson, in the front yard. Elizabeth next to Harvey Bottomley in 1924. Eugene to Christine Rosencranz in 1925. Elsie to Joseph Rosencranz in 1927 and later Doris to Charles Robinson in 1930.

These weddings were all performed in Mama's parlor. Gladys married Everett Chalus in 1929 and Wayne married Louise Brown in 1941. Both weddings took place at the Waltham Presbyterian Church. Burton married Mary Flaherty in the Arlington St. Patrick's Church in 1941. Frank married Betty Claggett at the Ottawa Presbyterian Church in 1943 while in the service during World War II.

Since coming to this country there has always been someone in Grandpa and Grandma's branch of the family by the name of Eugene--actually four in all. The youngest now is Leslie Hess's son Eugene in Silvis, Illinois.

Grandma Hess died in April 1917 and was buried I think the same day our government declared war on

Germany in WWI.

Papa built up a large herd of Holstein cows and started a milk route in Utica in 1918 and for 11 years that was an everyday job. I think there was only one day when it was too stormy for him to attempt to deliver the milk. Then in 1929 he sold the cows and Cecil and Elisa Crosiar took over the milk route.

After Grandma's death Papa and Mama bought the farm from Papa's nine brothers and sisters and things went fairly smooth. Besides the milk route a great deal of gravel was sold for roads and building purposes.

After the depression started in 1929 the folks had a very hard time for some years.

Papa died in February 13, 1934. Just three weeks before Papa's death Wayne had an attack of acute appendicitis and was operated on. After Papa's death Wayne and Burton did the farming and kept the gravel business going.

Mama died November 20, 1941, just three weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Frank was 10 years old when Papa died and 18 when Mama died. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942. He never was in combat and was discharged in December, 1945.

I want to record the number of children we each are the parents of:

Frank	2 boys, 2 girls	
Burton.	2 boys, 1 girl	
Doris	2 boys, 1 girl	
Wayne	3 boys	
Gladys3 boys, 1 girl	
Elsie1 boy, 2 girls	
Elizabeth.5 boys, 1 girl	
Eugene3 boys, 3 girls, 1 girl died at about	
Vernie3 boys, 4 girls	1 month

This is the story of Papa and Mama's married life as I remember it. If I haven't mentioned the younger children and their contributions as often as I could have I am sorry. By that time I was raising a family of my own.

- - Vernie Munson
August 1, 1969