

# THE FIRST SIMMON

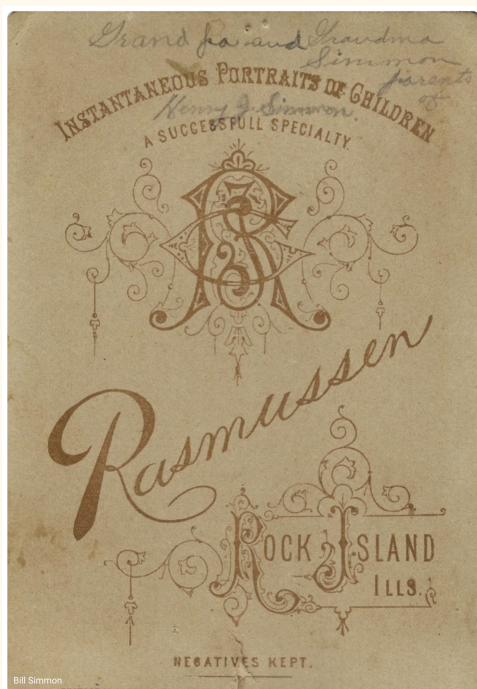
## a chronology

*Compiled by Bill Simmon from a combination of genealogical information, public records, family stories and histories, historical context, and just a little bit of conjecture.*



*Henry Peter Simmon and Eva Catherine (Gravius von Medard) Simmon [ca. 1870]*

The photo on the cover page of this chronology has been with me my entire life. Growing up, I knew that this couple in Victorian garb shared my last name and that they were ancestors of mine, but I never really knew any details. There were comments from various family members about them: He was an officer in Napoleon's army! She was born of noble blood! But no one in my immediate family seemed to know the details for sure, including just how many generations back this couple had lived, nor what all the connective family ties were. Family lore indicated that they had lived through the American Civil War, having emigrated to the U.S. from Germany or France (Alsace-Lorraine was what I was told), but not much else.



Not too long ago I purchased a new scanner and started posting family photos online for my aunts, uncles, and cousins to see. As part of that project, I decided to scan this old photo of my ancestors for the digital album, so I removed it from its old, metal frame. There was information on the back of the photo that I had never seen. It's printed on heavy card stock, the back of which indicates that the print was made by the Rasmussen photo studio in Rock Island, Illinois. In pencil, someone had written "Grandpa and Grandma Simmon, Parents of Henry J. Simmon."

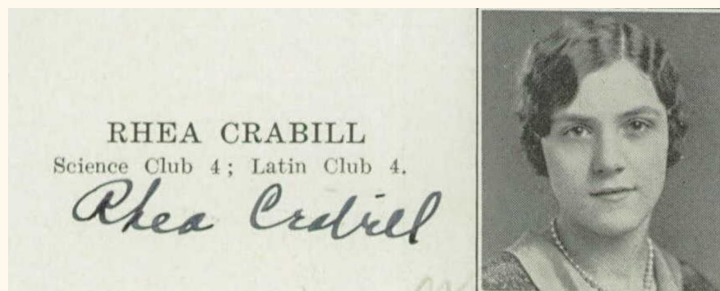
Who was Henry J. Simmon? How old was this photo, anyway? I knew enough about the history of photography to put an upper limit on the possible age of the thing, but could I learn more?

I found a website that specializes in old photo studios (God bless the internet). It turns out that J.C. Rasmussen ran a photography studio bearing his name in Rock Island between 1890 and 1894, when he partnered with another photographer named Michael Theodore Free and operated Rasmussen and Free until the studio was destroyed by fire in 1896. That means this print probably dates from 1890-1894, and certainly no later than 1896. That information took me five minutes to find and it was fascinating. What else could I learn with just a little digging?

Well, I learned that this type of printed photo on heavy card stock is called a "[cabinet card](#)," which was an albumen photographic process that was particularly in vogue in the 1870s and 1880s (it was a method of producing a photographic print on paper from a negative using the albumen found in egg whites to bind the photo chemicals to the paper).

I wanted to know more about the people in the portrait, so I signed up for an account at ancestry.org, and within minutes I was looking at my grandmother's Class of 1931 senior high school yearbook photo, which I had never seen — Science Club and Latin Club all four years. Grandma died in 1996 and I knew her as an elderly woman, but this was a photo of a 17 year old girl I'd never known!

I kept digging. The information came thick and fast and was difficult to parse, so I started making notes in a text document. I organized those notes by year and that's how this chronology began — with me just trying to keep the information



organized for myself. After a while I realized that the rest of the family would probably be interested in what I was learning, too, so I started writing the notes as though they were part of a running narrative. (Eventually I had to start a second notes document in order to organize my thoughts enough that I could write this document — taking notes to keep my notes organized!)

I learned that the couple in the cabinet card photo are Henry Peter Simmon and his wife, Eva Catherine (Gravius von Medard) Simmon — my great-great-great-grandparents. They died in 1875 and 1874, respectively. Based on what I had learned about albumen photography and the dates of their deaths, I'm now fairly certain the photo must have been taken somewhere close to 1870. That would make them about 77 and 75 years of age in the portrait (the print of the photo I have was created in the 1890s, after they had passed).

One thing I discovered fairly quickly was that, by themselves, names and dates of important events like births, marriages, and deaths aren't very interesting. It's context that makes those facts come alive. The best context comes from family stories — particularly if those stories are supported by some documentary evidence. But context can also come from an understanding of the historical circumstances of the time and place in which people lived, and it just so happens that Peter and Eva Catherine lived in a particularly compelling time and place, full of revolution, nationalist pride, and political intrigue.

Regarding the historical context of central Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, I must gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my friend Maximilian Owre, Ph.D., from the

History Department of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Max's historical focus is the Napoleonic era, and his guiding hand was essential in providing the social and political context for the time and place where Peter and Catherine were born and had their first seven children.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Orin Rockhold, a volunteer at the Rock Island County Illinois Historical Society, who graciously dug into the archives there and found some precious bits of family information and history.

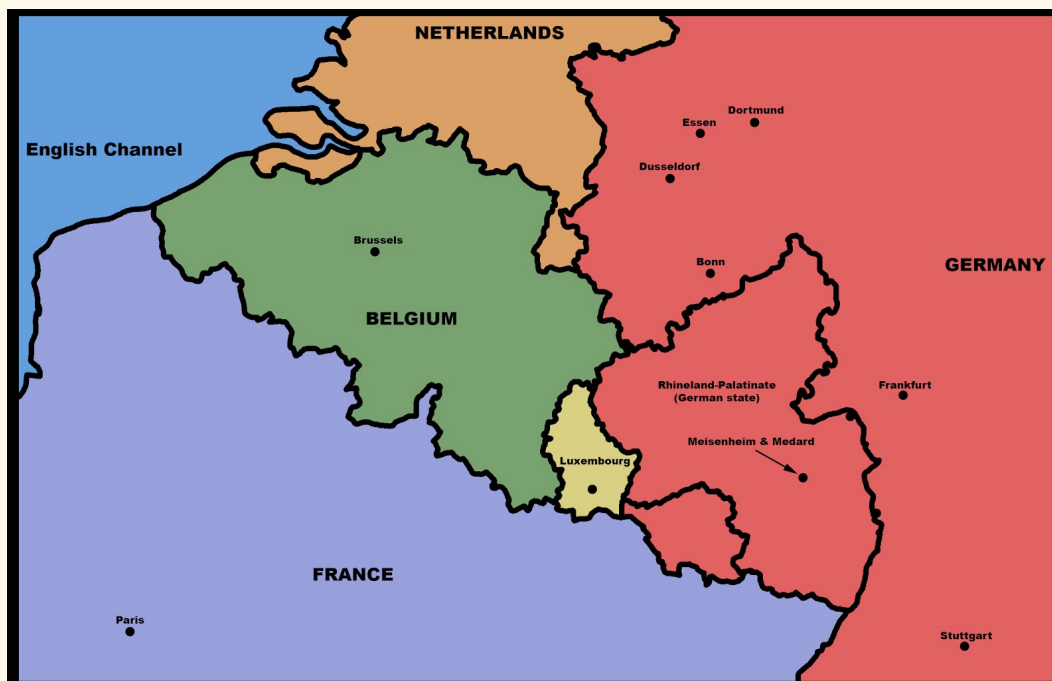
I must also acknowledge the assistance of my uncle, Harry Wayne Simmon, for the benefit of his memories, and his encouragement; and that of my mother, Virginia Anne (Lindauer) Simmon, for her own encouragement and editorial services.

This chronology is inspired in large part by a couple of Simmon family histories written by other family members, in particular, the *Historical Record of Peter Henry and Eva Catherine Simmon*, written in 1943 by Maria Simmon Darling (1866–1958), based on the notes of her father, Phillip Simmon; and *History of the Simmon's* [sic], written by Ruth Geneva Simmon (1899–1983).

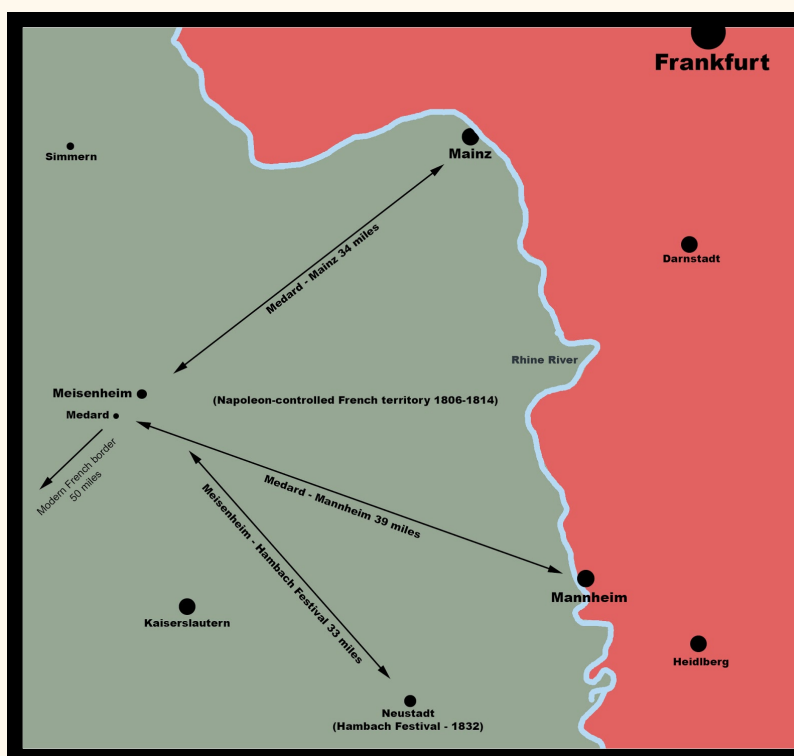
Finally, I must note: History is messy. Among the various documents that inform this chronology, there are multiple dates, different spellings of names, different orders of names (e.g. Henry Peter is sometimes Peter Henry or Heinrich Peter, etc.) and other confusing or misaligned details. Sometimes original documents outright contradict each other or provide incomplete or incorrect information. The single memorial document I found for my own father, for example, composed by his third wife, is full of inaccuracies, including his birthdate. All of which is to say that this chronology is definitely not 100% accurate. Rather than citing every original source or listing all possible versions of names and dates, I have chosen to use what seems like the most likely name, date, or event, given the information available to me at the time of writing. While I have sacrificed historical rigor in favor of a cleaner narrative, I have still tried to be as truthful to names, dates, and places as I can be, and where I have engaged in conjecture, I have tried to be transparent in my educated guessing.

I'm neither a historian nor a genealogist — I'm just someone interested in knowing the stories of my ancestors and sharing them with my family. I encourage others (in my generation and in future generations) to amend and expand this chronology to reflect more accurate and detailed information as it is discovered. To that end, I'm including a version number and date on the cover page, so the document may continue to grow beyond its initial creation.

Willam Sanford Simmon  
Burlington, Vermont – December 2020

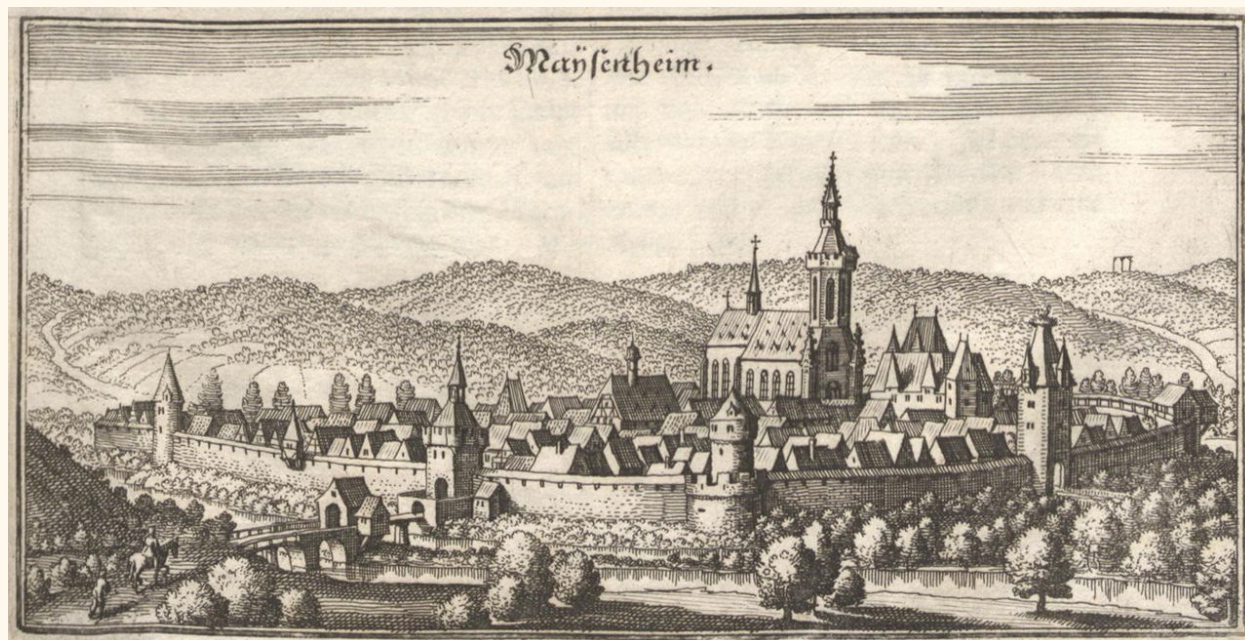


*Western/central Europe with modern political borders, showing the location of Meisenheim and Medard, Germany*



*Detail showing the relative distances to other towns/cities mentioned in the chronology*

## PART 1: A Secret Room



*A 17th Century engraving of Meisenheim by Matthäus Merian*

### 1793

**Henry Peter Simmon** (Peter, to friends) is born near [Meisenheim](#), in the [Rhineland](#) area of what is now Germany, on June 29. Peter's parents are Ludwig Christian Carl Simon (1775–1829), a [tanner](#) by trade, and Anna Maria (Schwind) Simon (1776–1806). At the time of his birth, Peter's father is 17 years old and his mother, Anna, is 16.

Peter appears to be the first "Simmon" in the family (records indicate previous generations of the family, including Peter's father, share the surname "Simon"). It's unclear exactly when or why the surname change occurs, but it is most likely associated with the family's emigration to the United States in 1833.

**Note:** *Henry Peter's name appears frequently in ancestry.com family trees as "Peter Henry." The name presents both ways in various records and places where he is mentioned. He is most commonly referred to as simply "Peter." I decided his name must have properly been Henry Peter because his gravestone in the Rural Township, Illinois, cemetery where he is buried is marked "Henry P. Simmon." Certainly the people who would have made the decision about what to engrave in granite*

(presumably, his children) would have known the truth of Peter's given name, hence my decision for this chronology.

## 1795

**Eva Catherine Gravius von Medard** is born in the late summer/early autumn. Her father is Jakob Gravius von Medard (b. 1770). "Von Medard" means "of [Medard](#)," which is a tiny hamlet only 3¾ miles down the road from Peter's hometown of Meisenheim. The presence of "von" in the family name technically indicates landed nobility, though by the time of Catherine's birth, the real pedigree of such prefixes no longer always connotes high status. At a minimum, however, such an honorific would indicate pretensions to status.

Family lore says that Catherine is born in a castle during politically perilous circumstances.

This castle was besieged so the old men, women, and children were put into a secret room. While in this room, Catherine von Medard was born. – *Historical Record of Peter Henry and Eva Catherine Simmon, compiled in 1943 by Maria Simmon Darling*

The family history written by Ruth Geneva Simmon tells of a similarly dramatic birth, saying that Catherine is "born in a castle on the Rhine. She was born in a secret room as the castle was being besieged during a war."

Indeed, the summer and fall of 1795 is an extraordinarily politically charged time in the area surrounding the tiny neighboring villages of Medard and Meisenheim. Revolution is in the air and the [War of the First Coalition](#) is in full swing (this is the name given to the wars that several European powers fight between 1792 and 1797, initially against the Kingdom of France and then against the French Republic that succeeds it). At the time of Catherine's birth, the [Siege of Mainz](#) is underway and in September the [Siege of Mannheim](#) begins, when French republicans led by General [Jean-Charles Pichegru](#) (who later famously attempts to overthrow Napoleon) captures the city on September 20. Mainz and Mannheim are each fewer than 40 miles from Medard, and the sieges are significant political developments in the region (though unsuccessful, from a French army perspective). French troops would have had to march through Medard to get to Mannheim, so the anecdote about Catherine's birth could be accurate, but Medard is very small (its population in 2020 is fewer than 500 people and there is no castle in the town). French republican armies would have stormed it in a single day. Perhaps Catherine is born in nearby Mannheim or Mainz, which are each under more legitimate "sieges" around the time of her birth. Crucially, both Mainz and Mannheim contain castles and are right on the bank

of the Rhine River, making each a suitable possible location for Ruth Geneva Simmon's anecdote about Catherine's being born "in a castle on the Rhine."

**NOTE:** *The lack of a definite birthdate (even on her gravestone) suggests that perhaps the time of her birth was so fraught that the exact date was not known, even to Catherine herself.*

*Possible alternate spellings of "Gravius" I've encountered include Gravin, Gravius, Kranwis, Crawfius, and Grafusch.*

## 1796

Eva Catherine's father, Jakob Gravius von Medard, dies on April 6 at the age of 26. Baby Catherine is just over 6 months old.

**NOTE:** *A biographical record of Rock Island County, Illinois, published after Catherine's death, says that her father "served for some time in the German army and died in his native land." Other family members refer to Catherine's father as having been a "ruling nobleman."*

## 1799

In November, Napoleon Bonaparte and allies commit a coup d'etat, establishing Napoleon as the undisputed ruler of France.

## 1804

Napoleon is given the title of Emperor of the French on May 18, and crowned on December 2, signifying the end of the French First Republic.

## 1806

Peter's mother, Anna, dies on January 7 at the age of 29. Peter is 12 years old.

Later this year, Napoleon Bonaparte annexes the entire west bank of the Rhine and the territory that includes Medard and Meisenheim is incorporated directly into the French Empire.

Napoleon has made a deal with German princes exchanging land for elevating titles, etc. This is when Bavaria becomes a kingdom and loses control of the territory.



## 1809

At the age of 16, Peter Simmon is drafted into the army on behalf of Napoleon Bonaparte.

## 1813

Henry Peter Simmon is 20 years old and a “commissary sergeant” for the French army (likely German troops under French arms).

**Note:** *What actual job Peter performed on behalf of the French is unclear. “Commissary sergeant” would seem to imply a post involving army supplies and logistics. The regime that covered logistics for French army supply was the “Intendance,” a part of the military infrastructure that was disliked and considered corrupt, and unlike the regular military in some important ways. The Intendance followed military ranking and wore uniforms, but they were forced to distinguish themselves from the regular military hierarchy by certain restrictions.*

They were forbidden to decorate their chapeaus with plumes or lace or to adopt epaulettes or other distinctive military insignia that would enable them to pose as officers. — Elting, John. *Swords Around a Throne*. Da Capo Press. 1997.

*To get a job in the Intendance, one had to prove ineligible for conscription. The note in Ruth Geneva Simmon’s family history that Peter was “drafted into Napoleon’s army” may suggest he was not part of the Intendance, but was in the regular army. If that is the case, we would need to learn more from his military service records to know what duties he actually performed (such records may actually be extant in the French military archives located at [Château de Vincennes](#), France).*

*There was also a transport corps created by Napoleon in 1807 called the “Train des equipages militaires,” which was part of the regular army.*

*There is no shortage of information about the ways Napoleon’s army was structured and what jobs soldiers had in what parts of the empire. We just don’t know enough about Peter’s specific service to tell us more at this point. Perhaps some research in the French military records archive would help. Even knowing the colors of Peter’s uniform would tell us something of his specific service.*

1813 is a dangerous time to be a German fighting for the French. It's this year that the [German Campaign of 1813](#) (or the “Wars of Liberation”) occurs, in which various German states (plus Russia and Sweden) battle Napoleon's French army for dominance of the Confederation of the Rhine states. The campaign kicks off a cultural and political awakening of German national consciousness, uniting German-speaking peoples from across the varied states. Guerrilla movements and eventually allied defections from Napoleon's army occur. Bavaria defects to the Allies in the fall of 1813, literally marching against the army they were just part of.



It's against this backdrop that Peter and Catherine are married on July 13, two weeks after Peter's 20th birthday. Catherine is 17 years old.

Catherine's supposed nobility would indicate the marriage is a “*mésalliance*” since Peter is the son of a tanner (or farmer, depending on which account you believe).

**Note:** *There is some confusion about how many brothers and sisters Peter had. The brief family history created in 1943 from the notes of Peter's oldest son claims that Peter “was the only one left of five brothers. The other four boys having died while in service to their country.” However, a biographical profile of Peter's eldest son, Phillip, published in 1897 says that Henry Peter's father “reared a family of four sons and three daughters,” while a different biographical profile published in the same record about Phillip's younger brother Jacob claims that Henry Peter's father had “six children, two of whom were soldiers under Napoleon.” It is possible that some of these numbers include Peter himself and some do not. If Ludwig and Anna Simon had seven children, including Peter, then there could have been four sons and three daughters in total, and Peter would have had six siblings (as opposed to there having been six children in total). Perhaps Peter's three brothers (not four) were killed in wartime, two of them while serving under Napoleon (along with Peter). Did Peter's other brother fight and die for the other side? That was certainly a possible outcome, given the political circumstances of Peter's later teenage years.*

## 1814

Napoleon is overthrown. The area of the Rhineland where the young couple lives reverts to Prussian control (technically, the area is part of the [Landgraviate of Hesse-Homburg](#) until 1866,

when it officially joins the Kingdom of Prussia), though many of the progressive governmental reforms instituted by the French during their control will remain in place for decades.

After exiting his military service, Peter takes up farming as a trade.

## 1815

Catherine gives birth to Cristoph Simmon. There is no further information about this person, and he is not listed among the children of Peter and Catherine in later family records, suggesting that he dies at a very young age, which is a far-from-uncommon occurrence in the era.

**NOTE:** *A biographical record of Rock Island, Illinois, published in 1897, indicates that during their marriage Peter and Catherine had three children who died in infancy or during early childhood.*

*The deaths of babies and young children was tragically common before the advent of antibiotics and vaccines. In 1850 in the U.S., the infant mortality rate was 21.6%, compared to the modern global rate of about 3%. Youth mortality (which includes deaths of children up to the age of 15), was as high as 60% in Germany in the 19th Century, and close to 45% globally.*

## 1818–1828

During this ten-year period, Peter and Catherine bring their first six (living) children into the world, all born in the vicinity of Meisenheim. They are:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Phillip Simmon</b> .....                | 10/10/1818 |
| <b>Jacob Henry Simmon</b> .....            | 10/28/1820 |
| <b>Caroline Louisa Simmon</b> .....        | 07/09/1822 |
| <b>Christian Simmon</b> .....              | 07/06/1824 |
| <b>Gustave Carl (Charles) Simmon</b> ..... | 07/26/1826 |
| <b>Catherine Phillippian Simmon</b> .....  | 07/30/1828 |

## 1829

Peter's father, 54-year-old Ludwig Christian Carl Simon, dies.

Political tensions are growing across the continent of Europe. Revolution is in the air.

## Part 2: Two Large Bags of Biscuits



*The Port at Le Havre, from: Album du voyage au Havre et aux environs, by Joseph Morlent (1841)*

### 1830

This is a significant and highly revolutionary year in Europe, generally. A contagious revolutionary sentiment, spurred on by the [July Revolution](#) in France, the [November Uprising](#) in Russian-controlled Poland, and the [Belgian Revolution](#), sparks unrest throughout the German region. There are demonstrations and insurgencies in Saxony, Hanover, Hesse, Brunswick and even in the Prussian capital of Berlin. A German nationalist movement is brewing.

## 1831

Catherine gives birth to **Henry Jacob Simmon** on December 17, 1831. Henry Jacob is the last of Peter and Catherine's children to be born in Europe.

## 1832

The briefly French [Palatinate](#) region where the Simmons live has been a last bastion of liberal reforms in the increasingly reactionary Bavarian-controlled land. In January, a number of journalists in the region establish a democratic association for freedom of the press and speech, which is immediately banned by the state government. Political demonstrations are prohibited, so liberal agitators call for a "fair" to be held at Hambach Castle, just down the road from the Simmons' hometown of Meisenheim. The [Hambach Festival](#) occurs in late May. It is disguised as a nonpolitical country fair, but it is actually one of the most important demonstrations of German unity and democratic reforms of the era. The festival establishes a flag that symbolizes German unity, featuring black, red, and gold — the same flag of the modern German republic.

## 1833

On April 4, 1833, the whole family — Peter and Catherine and their seven children (aged 16 months to 14 years) — leave Meisenheim forever. There is but one brief reference as to why the Simmons decide to leave Europe at this time in the compiled notes of Phillip Simmon:

Peter Henry Simmon, and his wife, Eva Catherine, decided to go to a more peaceful country. They chose the United States of America. They prepared provisions and clothing for themselves and their five sons and two daughters. — *Historical Record of Peter Henry and Eva Catherine Simmon, compiled in 1943 by Maria Simmon Darling*

The word "peaceful" suggests perhaps political unrest and the threat of war is what drives the family westward. If, as family history suggests, Peter has lost a number of his brothers to war, he may be anxious to avoid seeing his sons, the oldest of whom is now already a teenager, face a similar fate.

Whatever the reason, Peter and Catherine decide to pack up the whole family and undertake a months-long journey to a country they have never been to, and where they apparently have no family or connections.

They first travel to Le Havre on the Normandy coast (where the Seine meets the English Channel) and depart from there on a ship on April 26. Shortly before boarding, according to family lore, Gustave Carl's godfather gives the family two large bags of biscuits. They arrive in Norway 48 days after leaving Le Havre, on June 13, remaining there for ten days.

Norway is just across the North Sea from France. Forty-eight days seems like an awfully long time to spend at sea for such a short trip. A clue to the length of this voyage may lie in the historical record made from Phillip's notes. According to that record, The journey to Norway results in the sickness and death of the ship's captain.

In a short time, the captain was taken sick and later died. Eva Catherine Simmon had taken a large supply of medicine along and nursed the captain until her husband was taken ill and then she kept the rest of the medicine for him. – *Historical Record of Peter Henry and Eva Catherine Simmon, compiled in 1943 by Maria Simmon Darling*

The captain falls ill and dies, and Peter also becomes sick. Perhaps there is an outbreak of some kind aboard the ship and they are forced into quarantine? That could explain the extended time at sea.

Another clue is in the family history written by Ruth Geneva Simmon, which suggests poor navigation is to blame for the extended journey:

When they were a few days out at sea the captain of the vessel was taken ill and died. He must have also been the navigator as records show that no one on board was capable of taking charge and they drifted aimlessly about for days, finally landing in Norway.

**Note:** *Passenger manifests from Le Havre were incomplete in 1833, only listing passengers of military and commercial vessels, not passenger ships. Ruth's reference to "records" makes me hopeful there is more information to be gleaned somewhere.*

The family finally sets sail for the United States from Norway on June 23. They land at Norfolk, Virginia, some weeks later, and finally arrive in Baltimore on November 26, 1833. All told, the transatlantic journey from Meisenheim to Maryland has taken seven months and 22 days.

As they begin their new adventure in the United States, Eva Catherine is several months pregnant.

The Simmons settle in Bedford, Pennsylvania, where they will remain for about nine years.

**Historical footnote:** *The day before Peter and Catherine's family departs Meisenheim, just 50 miles to the northeast in Frankfurt, a failed attempt to start a revolution in Germany occurs, known as the [Frankfurter Wachenstrum](#) (Frankfurt Uprising). According to Wikipedia:*

*About 50 students attacked the soldiers and policemen of the Frankfurt Police offices to try to gain control over the treasury of the German Confederation to start a revolution in all German states. However, because the plot had been betrayed to the police, it was easy to overcome the attackers.*

*The plot is largely organized by a young man named [Gustav Philipp Koerner](#) (1809–1896), a 24-year-old lawyer from Frankfurt, who is injured in the event. An arrest warrant is issued for him and “to avoid being prosecuted by the authorities and held captive for high treason which would threaten capital punishment, he escaped in female dress to France.”*

*Koerner boards a ship in Le Havre just five days after the Simmon family departs from the same port (this is a coincidence not only of timing — Le Havre is far from the most common departure point for German immigrants in the mid 19th Century; [the vast majority sail from Bremen or Hamburg](#)). On the ship he meets his future wife, Sophie Engelman, who hails from the same region of the Rhineland as the Simmons. Like the Simmons, Koerner and Sophie ultimately settle in Illinois.*

*Koerner goes on to become the 12th lieutenant governor of Illinois, the U.S. ambassador to Spain, and a close personal friend and advisor to Abraham Lincoln — he is a pallbearer at Lincoln's state funeral.*

*These events involving Koerner are almost certainly unrelated to the Simmon family (at least in any direct way), but the coincidences of their relative emigrations seem compelling enough to note here.*

## 1834

Now living in Pennsylvania, Peter and Catherine have their eighth child, **Elizabeth Simmon** — the first to be born on U.S. soil — on April 24, 1834. A little math indicates that Elizabeth would have been conceived in July or August 1833, at about the midway point of the family's journey to America.

## 1836

Two and a half years after Elizabeth is born, Catherine and Peter's youngest child, **Maria Eve Simmon**, is born on December 14, 1836. At the time of Maria's birth, Peter is 43 and Eva Catherine is 41.

## 1840

On November 26, exactly seven years to the day after the family entered the U.S. at the Port of Baltimore, Henry Peter Simmon becomes a U.S. citizen at the Court of Common Pleas held at Bedford, in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. His naturalization papers have some boilerplate language about renouncing "all allegiance and fidelity to every foreign Prince, Potentate, State and Sovereignty," etc., but also particularly renounce allegiance to [Louis William, Landgrave of Hesse-Homburg](#), "of whom he was before a subject."

## 1841

In December, 19-year-old Louisa Simmon marries 43-year-old Adam Diefenbach of Tuscarawas County, Ohio. He is a widower from Germany with two children from his previous marriage.

## 1842

Peter and Catherine and their younger children relocate to Tuscarawas County in Ohio, presumably to be near Louisa and her new family. The family will remain there for about eight years.

Just under a year after her wedding, Louisa gives birth to a daughter, Rosanna (Peter and Catherine's first grandchild), on December 1.



## 1843

Remaining in the Bedford area, Phillip Simmon, Peter and Catherine's eldest son, marries Anna Catherine Miller on March 19, 1843, in Sommerset, Pennsylvania. He is 25 years old.

Nine months later, Phillip's first son, George Henry Simmon, is born on December 29, 1843, in Bedford, Pennsylvania.

## Part 3: An Honorable, Industrious, and Reliable Man



*A bird's-eye-view of Rock Island, Illinois (1864)*

**1845**

Eldest son, Phillip, his wife Anna Catherine, and their young son, George Henry, relocate from Pennsylvania to Rock Island County, Illinois, in the springtime.

Rock Island is a small city situated on the largest island on the Mississippi River, dividing the states of Iowa and Illinois. It is one of four neighboring cities on that part of the Mississippi, referred to locally as the Quad Cities area. Rock Island is the county seat of Rock Island County.

## 1846

Phillip and Anna Catherine's second child, Elizabeth Cornelia Simmon, is born on January 7 in Rock Island, Illinois.

Phillip begins a business of draying (hauling heavy loads in a horse-drawn trolley with no sides) and commences a single term on the Rock Island Board of Aldermen.

An 1885 Rock Island County directory of notable people says Phillip's draying enterprise is a success, "winning for himself the solid reputation of being an honorable, industrious and reliable man; and he is one of the best known and most respectable of the old settlers (in Rock Island)."

## 1847

Back in Ohio, Louisa and Adam Diefenbach have their second child together, a son they name Jacob.

## 1848

On July 20, Phillip and Anna Catherine give birth to a son named Alexander.

Jacob Henry Simmon, the second eldest Simmon child — now 28 years old — joins his brother Phillip and family in Rock Island County.

## 1849

On August 1, Elizabeth Louisa Diefenbach, Adam and Louisa's third child, is born in Ohio.

## 1850

On August 22, Alexander Simmon, Phillip's 2-year-old son, dies.

Sometime after the month of August, the rest of the Simmon family (except for Caroline Louisa, who remains with her family in Ohio) finally joins Jacob and Phillip and his family in Rock Island County, Illinois (the 1850 U.S. Census lists the family as still residing in Ohio as of

August 27, but the family makes the move to Illinois before 1850 ends). Peter is now 57 year old, Catherine is 55 (though oddly, the census lists their respective ages as being 63 and 52, neither of which can be correct).

On November 15, three months after young Alexander's death, Phillip's wife, Anna Catherine, gives birth again, this time to a son named John.

## 1852

Phillip's wife, Anna Catherine (Miller) Simmon, dies on February 29 at the age of 35.

Peter and Catherine establish the Simmon Farm on 160 acres in Rural Township, along Mill Creek.

Rock Island County, Illinois, is now the home of the entire Simmon family (except for Caroline Louisa, still in Ohio) and it will remain the geographical center of Simmon life for generations to come. Farmland purchased by the early Simmon settlers will remain in the family's hands for over one hundred years. Direct descendents of Peter and Catherine remain in the county to this day (2020).

## 1853

Phillip is remarried on April 16, 1853, to Cornelia Jane Hitchcock in Rock Island.

## 1854

On Christmas Eve, young John Simmon, just 4 years old, dies. In just four years, Phillip has lost two young sons and his first wife.

## 1855

On December 20, Gustave Carl "Charles" Simmon marries Rachel Ann Wilson, the daughter of the Simmons' neighbor, Lewis Wilson.

The mid 1850s begins a particularly fertile time for the Simmon clan. Up to this point, only Louisa and Phillip have started families. For the next 25 years, an average of more than one new

grandchild per year will bless Peter and Catherine's family, as their other children begin raising families of their own.

## 1856

Peter and Catherine officially purchase the 160 acres of land they have been farming.

In September, 27-year-old Catherine Phillippian Simmon marries 45-year-old Lewis Wilson, who is also the father of Charles Simmon's new wife, Rachel. In addition to Catherine Phillippian's being Charles's younger sister (by two years), she is now *also* his mother-in-law.

## 1860

Henry Jacob Simmon (the seventh of Peter and Catherine's nine children), now 28 years old, weds Mary Allemang on February 23, 1860.

In November, Illinois Republican Senator Abraham Lincoln wins the presidential election, making him the 16th President of the United States. Almost immediately upon his election, slave-holding southern states begin seceding from the union.

## 1861

Shots are fired at Fort Sumter and the [American Civil War](#) begins in April.

## 1863

The American Civil War is raging. Forty-two-year-old Jacob H. Simmon is drafted by the Union in June but hires a substitute to fight in his stead, which is a common practice (fewer than half of Union draftees actually serve in the war themselves).

## 1865

General U.S. Grant accepts Robert E. Lee's surrender in Virginia on April 9, ending the Civil War.

Five days after the Confederate Army's surrender, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14.

During the four years of the Civil War, the state of Illinois has lost more than 34,000 men, most of whom (62%) die from disease.

1865 is unique as the only year that did not yield at least one grandchild for Peter and Catherine in the decade of the 1860s.

## 1871

On January 12, Elizabeth Simmon, Peter and Catherine's second-youngest child, marries Perry M. Cheney.

In August, Henry J. Simmon acquires a 160-acre piece of land for the sum of \$916.00. The plot is located south of the original Simmon homestead, along Mill Creek.

## 1872

Jacob H. Simmon marries Rosetta Engle on May 31. Rosetta is 22 years old. Jacob is 51.

## 1874

Eva Catherine (Gravius von Medard) Simmon passes away on October 23, 1874 at the age of 79. Her death notice [reads](#):

Funeral Sunday forenoon at Beulah church, in Rural. The procession will leave the residence of Peter Simmon, on Mill Creek, at 10 o'clock.

Mrs. Simmon was a native of Germany, and had resided in America 41 years, and in this county 24 years, and was well known to most of our citizens. She was a devoted Presbyterian and an excellent woman.

## 1875

On August 10, 1875, Henry Peter Simmon — the first Simmon — passes away at the age of 82 in Rural township. [Henry Peter's gravestone](#) (along with Catherine's and several other Simmon family members' stones) can be found at Beulah Rural Township Cemetery in Milan, Illinois.



*Grave markers of Henry Peter and Eva Catherine Simmon (photo credit: Colleen Noel)*

## Part 4: They Are Affectionate and Obedient Children



*Standing L-R: Henry Jacob Simmon, Gustave Carl “Charles” Simmon, Catherine Phillipian (Simmon) Wilson, Christian Simmon, Maria Eve Simmon; Seated L-R: Elizabeth “Lizzie” (Simmon) Cheney, Jacob Henry Simmon, Caroline Louisa (Simmon) Diefenbach, Phillip Simmon [ca. 1890]*

Eight of Peter and Catherine’s nine children lived in the vicinity of Rock Island County in the late 19th century. Caroline Louisa remained in Tuscarawas County, Ohio, after her husband passed. As of the composition of a county biographical record that was published in 1897, all were still living.

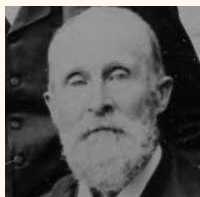
Between 1842 and 1884, seven of Peter and Catherine’s nine children gave birth to a total of 39 grandchildren that lived to adulthood. Those 39 grandchildren went on to produce 86 great-grandchildren (my grandfather’s generation), and so on. Living direct descendants of Peter and Catherine are likely to be quite numerous.

What follows is a brief accounting of each of Peter and Catherine’s children’s remaining lives — mostly just relevant names and dates — in order of their respective births. Many of these



ancestors had children who died at childbirth or at a very young age, which was not uncommon at the time. Generally, only children and grandchildren who reached adulthood are listed here.

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### Phillip Simmon (1818–1897)

Phillip Simmon was the oldest of Peter and Catherine’s nine children. It was Phillip who originally settled in Rock Island County with his first wife in 1845, after running a sawmill in Tuscarawas County, Ohio, for three years. He established a draying business in Illinois. In 1846-47 he served on the Rock Island Board of Aldermen. He was also the Street Commissioner of Rock Island for two years. He was active in politics, an “ardent Democrat” according to one biography.

With his first wife, Anna Catherine (Miller) Simmon (d. 1852), Phillip had two children.

- **George Henry Simmon (1843–1913)** married Ingy Robely and had two children.
- **Elizabeth (Eliza) Simmon (1846–1891)** married John Fleener and had four children.

With his second wife, Cornelia Jane (Hitchcock) Simmon (d. 1892), Phillip had four more children.

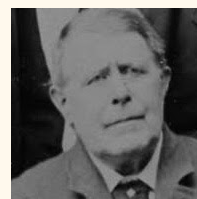
- **Peter Canna Simmon (1855–1928)** married Anne Richards and had two daughters.
- **Harrison Boggess Simmon (1864–1923)** married Emma Dindinger.
- **Maria Eve Simmon (1866–1958)** married William Darling and had four children (It was Maria who created the compilation of Phillip’s notes in 1943 that so informed this chronology).
- **Cynthia Matilda Simmon (1868–1912)** married George F. Linde and had one child that lived to adulthood — Julius “Judy” Linde, who fought in the Army in WWI (his other two siblings died in mid-childhood).

Phillip’s second wife, Cornelia Jane, predeceased Phillip in 1892 at the age of 58.

Phillip Simmon, Peter and Catherine's oldest child, having been married twice and twice been a widower, died on October 18, 1897, at the age of 80. He died just three months after the passing of his sister, Maria Eve, who was almost 20 years younger than Phillip, and the youngest of the nine siblings.

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### Jacob Henry Simmon (1820–1904)



At the age of 27, Jacob H. Simmon left the rest of the Simmon clan in Ohio and joined his older brother Phillip in Rock Island County. Phillip had begun a prosperous draying business and Jacob followed suit. He drove a dray for nine years and then began farming a tract of land in Rural Township. He acquired more land and eventually operated several pieces of land throughout the county, doing general farming and raising stock.

In 1863 Jacob was drafted by the Union Army to fight in the Civil War, but he hired a substitute to fight in his stead, which was a common practice.

Although Jacob was the second oldest of Peter and Catherine's children, he married quite late, waiting until he had reached the age of 50. His bride was 20-year-old Rosetta "Rosie" (Engle) Simmon. The couple bore five children and had three grandchildren:

- **Peter Henry Simmon (1873–1941)**
- **Eva Catherine Simmon (1876–1952)** married an Irish immigrant, John Harper, and had a son (her husband also had a daughter from a previous marriage).
- **Jacob H. Simmon (1879–1963)** married Emma Weigel and had a daughter.
- **Christian (Christ) Simmon (1881–1935)**
- **Philip Godfrey Simmon (1884–1961)** married Dorothy Louise Rettig and had a son.

A biographical profile in 1897 mentions that the couple lost three additional children in early childhood. The surviving children, the profile says, "are at home and prove a great comfort and help to their parents, as they are affectionate and obedient children."

Jacob Henry Simmon died on March 7, 1904, at the age of 83. Rosetta (Engle) Simmon lived another 24 years before she passed on February 13, 1928, at the age of 77.



### **Caroline Louisa “Louise” (Simmon) Diefenbach (1822–1909)**

Caroline Louisa Simmon was the first child of Peter and Catherine’s to marry and start a family of her own. In late 1841 she married German-born Adam Diefenbach, a widower with three children from his first marriage. The couple settled in Tuscarawas County, Ohio, and had four children of their own and 14 grandchildren:

- **Rosanna Diefenbach (1842–1917)** married Jacob Denzer and had seven children.
- **Jacob Diefenbach (1847–1925)** married Rosina Schreier and had two children.
- **Elizabeth Louisa Diefenbach (1849–1923)** married Cyrus McQueen and had three children.
- **Philip Diefenbach (1858–1946)** married Fannie Reidenbach and had two children.

Louise was the only Simmon child to never relocate to western Illinois. She died in 1909 in New Philadelphia, Ohio, at the age of 86.

### **Christian Simmon (1824–1899)**



Christian Simmon never married. He was a drayman after settling in Rock Island County. The 1860 and 1880 U.S. Census records list his occupation as “teamster.” After Peter and Catherine passed in the mid 1870s, Christian’s sister Maria, who was also unmarried, moved in with him and they made a home together at 2014 Fourth Avenue in Rock Island until her passing in 1897. After Maria died, the aging Christian moved in with the family of his brother Henry J. Simmon,

who lived just down Fourth Avenue. Henry's family cared for Christian until his passing. His obituary says that Christian died of "paralysis" at the age of 75 on October 10, 1899.

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### **Gustave Carl "Charles" Simmon (1826–1908)**

Charles married Lewis Wilson's oldest daughter, Rachel Ann, in December of 1855, cementing a strong union between the Simmon and Wilson families, who were farming neighbors in Rural Township. The couple went on to have eight children and 15 grandchildren:

- **Catherine Maria Simmon (1857–1922)** married John A. Bosold and had three children.
- **Sarah M. Simmon (1858–1952)** married Charles W. Fowler and had three children.
- **George Robert Simmon (1860–1938)** married Katie Bailar and had two children.
- **Henry Peter "HP" Simmon (1863–1943)** married Bernhartha Mary Wonderlin and had three daughters.
- **Anna Rachel Simmon (1866–1950)** married James P. Coulter and had two children.
- **Charles Oscar Simmon (1869–1942)** married Virginai Estelle Bailar and had a son.
- **John Lewis Simmon (1874–1948)** appears to have been married three times, but only had one son with his last wife, Katherine Teresa Allen.
- **William H. Simmon (1876–1933)**

Rachel passed away just four days prior to Charles. They died on January 30 and February 3, 1908, respectively, having been married for 52 years.



*Charles and Rachel Simmon celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary in 1905*

### **Catherine Phillipian (Simmon) Wilson (1828–1909)**



Catherine was Peter and Eva Catherine's sixth child and she was born just five years prior to the family emigrating to the states. Despite being Charles's younger sister, she married his father-in-law, Lewis Wilson, and thus became both Charles's little sister *and* his mother-in-law. Lewis Wilson had twice been a widower and he had children from both of his previous marriages (including Charles's wife, Rachel). Lewis and Catherine raised eight children of their own together:

- **Henry Peter Wilson (1857-1935)** married Sarah E. Mulvance and had one daughter of their own and one adopted daughter.
- **Catherine L. Wilson (1858-1953)** married George Stewart.

- **James R. Wilson (1860-1909)** married Susanna Taylor and had one son.
- **Maria Lucinda Wilson (1861-1935)** married Charles J. Carlson and had three sons.
- **Lewis Edward Wilson (1862-1935)** married Ella V. Griffith, and had two daughters. Ella died young and Lewis later wed Nona Dack.
- **Charles C. Wilson (1864-1956)** married Jennie G. Bender and had two sons.
- **Jacob S. Wilson (1867-1930)**
- **Charlotte H. Wilson (1869-1907)** married John William Love.



*Lewis and Catherine (Simmon) Wilson [ca. 1870]*

Lewis lived to be 90 years old and passed in 1901. Catherine died eight years later in 1909 at the age of 80.



### **Henry Jacob Simmon (1831–1910)**

Henry Jacob Simmon was the seventh of Peter and Catherine's nine children and the last Simmon to be born before the family left Germany for the West. He spent most of his adulthood as a farmer, though some of his later years he spent as a tax collector for the town of Rock Island.

In 1860 at the age of 28, H.J. married 18-year-old, Canadian-born Mary Allemang. The couple had seven children and 26 grandchildren.

- **Henry Peter Simmon (1862–1950)** married Ida Grace Geneva Cruzan and had four children.
- **George William Simmon (1863–1934)** married Elizabeth B. Wylie and had six children.
- **Albert Joseph Simmon (1866–1943)** married Stella May Wilson (Lewis Wilson's niece and Rachel Ann's cousin) and had two children.
- **Isabell Simmon (1868–1946)**
- **Catherine Eva Simmon (1870–1936)** married Harold Couch and had two children.
- **Perry Louis Simmon (1874–1959)** married Minnie Adeline Brown and had one daughter. After Minnie passed, Perry married Maria Louise "Mamie" Lenser and they had six children.
- **Arthur Eaton Simmon (1880–1961)** married Mary J. Johnston and had five children.

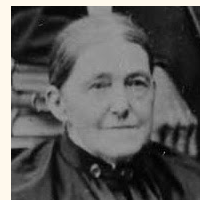
Henry Jacob died in 1910 at the age of 78.

I'll take an author's prerogative and mention that Henry J. Simmon's son, Arthur Eaton Simmon, married an Irish girl named Mary Jane Johnston and took over the Simmon Farm from

his father. Arthur and Mary Jane went on to have five children — four girls and one boy. The boy, Orville Woodrow Simmon, married Jessie Rhea Crabill and from that marriage came three children (Arthur Ray, Elsa Jane, and Harry Wayne Simmon). Arthur Ray Simmon married Virginia Anne Lindauer and they had two boys (Robert Woodrow and William Sanford Simmon), the younger of whom is currently typing this sentence.

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### Elizabeth “Lizzie” (Simmon) Cheney (1834–1912)



Elizabeth was conceived during Peter and Catherine’s transatlantic voyage from Europe to America, and was the first of their children born on U.S. soil, and thus was probably the first person in the family to be given the surname “Simmon” (as opposed to “Simon”) at birth. She married Perry McDonough Cheney in 1871 and they had one son together:

- **DeWitt Clinton Cheney (1872–1936)** married Margaret Jane Coulter and they had five daughters.

Almost 100 years after Peter and Catherine were married in Meisenheim, their last surviving child, Elizabeth (Simmon) Cheney, died at the age of 78. She is buried with her family at Beulah Rural Township Cemetery in Coal Valley, Illinois.

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### Maria Eve Simmon (1836–1897)

The youngest of Peter and Catherine’s children, Maria Simmon never married. She lived at home, taking care of her parents until they passed. In 1876 she moved in with her brother Christian, who was also unmarried. The 1880 U.S. Census listed her occupation as a “house keeper.” Despite being the youngest of Peter and Catherine’s children, she died first, at the age of 60, on July 7, 1897. Maria shares a headstone with brother Christian in Beulah Cemetery, Rural Township, Illinois.



## Part 5: A Picnic Dinner Was Served



**SWORD, PORTRAITS** — At left Miss Harriett Darling of Moline shows portraits of her ancestors, Peter Henry and Eva Catherine Simmon. Her sister, Miss Cornelia Darling, holds a sword carried by Simmon in Napoleon's army. She is wearing a black skirt worn by their mother, Maria Simmon, at her wedding to William Darling in 1895. (Argus Photo by Jerry Ross)

*Harriet and Cornelia Darling showing off artifacts of Simmon family history in an article published in the Rock Island Argus on June 27, 1976*

Unbeknownst to me until I began doing the research that led to the creation of this chronology, the Simmon family used to be quite organized about keeping the legacy of Peter and Catherine alive. For many decades after the original Simmon settlers had passed, the family held annual events in Rock Island County, hosted by various family members in their homes, and growing in size and scope over the years. These reunions began in the 1920s and were still happening as recently as the late 1980s. One Rock Island Argus article from 1933 mentions 125 family members in attendance, a “business meeting,” and a program including the election of officers. “A picnic dinner was served,” the article said.

The 1963 reunion was held at the then-brand-new Mill Creek Country Club (now the [Pinnacle Country Club](#)) because that property includes the site of the original Simmon homestead, established in 1852 (and purchased in 1856).

During the 1976 Bicentennial celebration, the Rock Island County Illinois Historical Society began a program recognizing citizens who were descended from original settlers of the county. Several Simmon descendants applied for recognition, and those records are still at the Historical Society today.

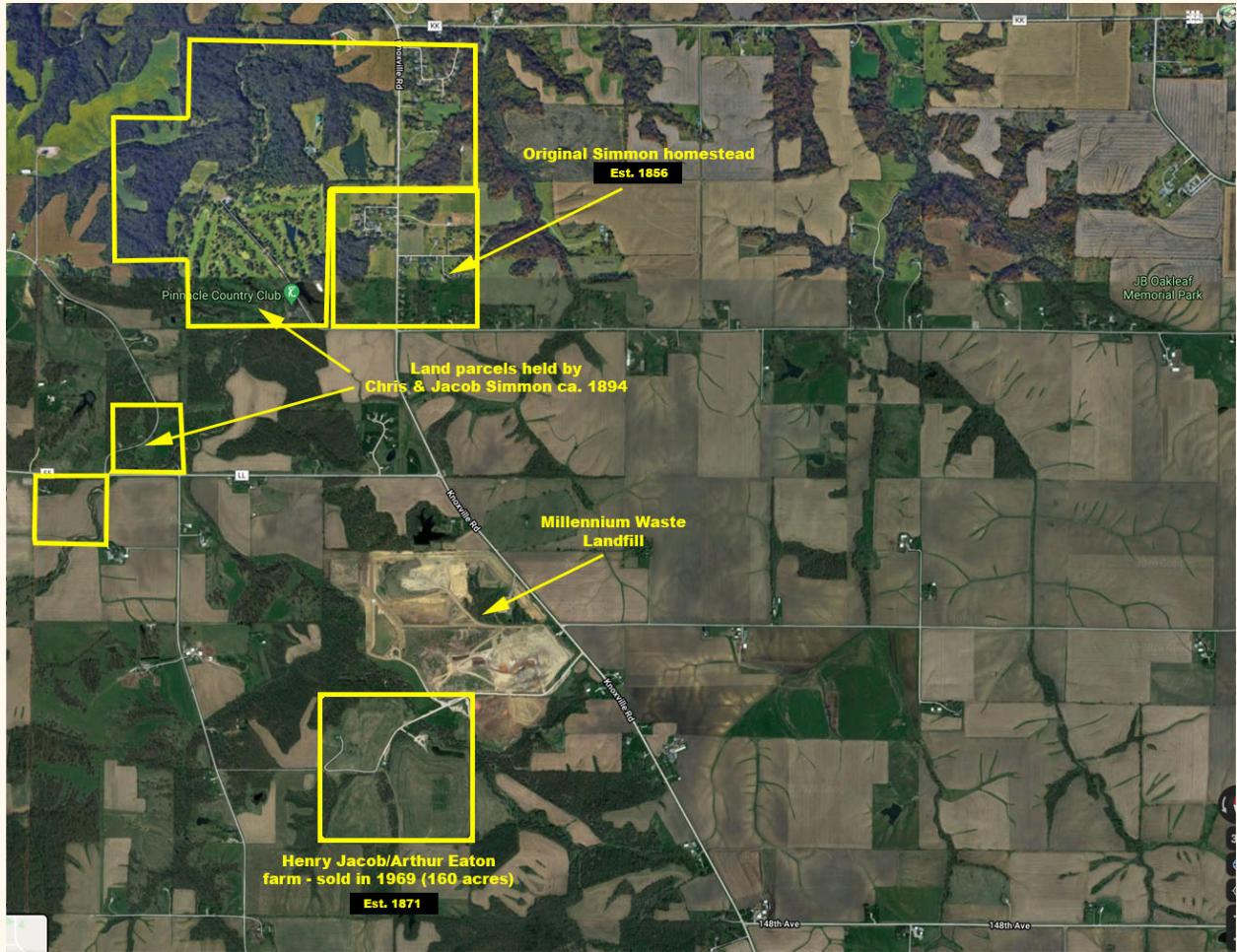
Sometime after the 80s, the family stopped having reunions. Perhaps the younger generations didn’t feel the personal connection to the past that their elders had felt.

I personally have remained in fairly close contact with my particular branch of the Simmon tree (the descendants of Orville and Rhea Simmon), but I’d had almost no contact with any other family members until I began this research and started finding some cousins online.

As part of this family research journey, I started up a Facebook group called “[Descendants of Henry Peter and Eva Catherine Simmon](#).” As I write this, there are 17 members. My hope is that the internet will help the various branches and twigs and leaves of this family tree find the roots again, meet other family members, share family stories, and feel connected to the living legacy of Peter and Catherine Simmon, whether it’s in person, on Facebook, or in some other social context.

Peter and Catherine had nine children, 39 grandchildren, and something close to 86 great-grandchildren. My grandfather was one of those 86 great-grandchildren. The number of descendants alive today is probably quite large.

Who knows? Maybe we’ll start those reunions up again one day!



*Simmon farmland in the late 19th century superimposed over a modern satellite image of Rural Township, Illinois.*