

## **A Kisslinger Genealogy**

This is a Christmas present to Eric and Kim, my sons. It is a result of a sudden, unexplained interest in my forebears. It is a genealogy with a narrow point of view. It only covers my direct ancestors. It starts around 1850 and ends around 1944.

I am the sole surviving member of my family of origin, so I have inherited a number of pictures, photographs, slides and artifacts. I also have Internet access to information I never thought I would find. For example, photographs of the actual ships my ancestors used to reach the United States. The website ancestor.com provides this kind of information. They charge a certain fee to allow access to USA data and a greater fee to allow access to European data. I used only USA data.

This is not just a collection of genealogical data—that would be boring. I am trying to reveal the personalities and emotions of my ancestors. I am trying to tell a complete story. I have come to appreciate that events of 100 years ago can still have a strong effect.

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[http://planetforlife.com/pdf/ancestor\\_kiss1.pdf](http://planetforlife.com/pdf/ancestor_kiss1.pdf)



**Eric, Jack, & Kim Kisslinger, 1978**

Jack Kisslinger      December 2007  
3041 Irvington Way  
Madison, WI 53713

## **Organization of Kisslinger Genealogy**

My Father's name is Gordon Henry Kisslinger. His father was named Franklin Kisslinger and his mother's maiden name was Amelia Melchert.

My mother's maiden name was Juanita Adeline Lambert. Her father was named Elmer Lambert and her mother's maiden name was Devina Fenhouse.

Juanita never knew her biological father, Elmer Lambert, as he died when she was 4. Within two years, Devina married Hugo Otto and Juanita always thought of him her father. And I always thought of Hugo as my grandfather. So he deserves to be included in this genealogy.

This is the story of the Kisslingers, the Melcherts, the Lamberts, the Fenhouses and the Ottos.

There are three sections in this genealogy. The first is devoted to Gordon Kisslinger's side, the second to Juanita Lambert's side and the third to Gordon's and Juanita's early life together.

## Gordon's side, the Kisslingers and the Melcherts

### Gordon's paternal grandparents, Fred and Catharine Kisslinger:

The 1900 United States census found online is partly obliterated but it is possible to surmise the following: Fred and Catharine were born in 1856 and 1857. They emigrated from Germany in 1881. They have sons, Joseph and Frank who were born in 1870 and 1882. All can read and write German but only Frank speaks English. Frank is Gordon's father and my paternal grandfather. They live at 1802 Jackson Street in the 6th ward of Merrill Wisconsin. All three men work at the sawmill.

Fred's real name is probably Ferdinand and apparently he did not like to be called Ferdinand. However, he is called Ferdinand on a later census and on his tombstone.

The 1900 census shows another family of Kisslingers living in the 6th ward. Anna Kisslinger is listed as the head and she is probably a widow. She is 54 and she lives with her 3 teenage sons. She is from Germany and her emigration year is the same year as Catharine's, 1882. One of Anna's sons is also named Joseph. It seems possible that Anna and Catharine married brothers.



The following appears on the back of this photograph:  
"1885 – 1886 Married 2 years,  
about 23 years of age "

She looks fancy and stylish.

Here is another picture of Catharine Kisslinger. Both pictures suggest a strong and imperious woman. It may have been the style of the photographer of the time to have subjects appear higher than the viewer. Even without the effect, Catharine appears stern and proud.





The name Catharine Kisslinger appears on a passenger list of a ship named the Scheidam that arrived in New York in 1879 from Rotterdam. This Catharine was born in 1853 and she had a boy of 8 with her so this is probably not the correct Catharine. It is reasonable to guess the Scheidam or a ship like the Scheidam brought Ferdinand and Catharine to the New World. I have found only 6 Kisslingers on ship passenger lists.

The Schiedam was 300 feet long, 40 feet wide and could do 10 knots with its single screw. She had sails because steam engines were not that reliable in 1879. She carried 17 in first class, 33 in second class and 347 in steerage. A crossing would have taken 14 days.

Photograph of the Scheidam



Romantic view of the Scheidam



## Gordon's maternal grandparents, Frank and Augusta Melchert

According to United States census data of 1900 and 1920, Frank and Augusta Melchert live in Merrill, Wisconsin on a 98 acre dairy farm. Frank was born in 1857 and Augusta was born in 1861. Both emigrated from Berlin, Germany, in 1881. Both could read and write English.

The Melcherts have 8 children ranging in age from 1 month to 16 years in 1900. The second child, Emelia, is my paternal grandmother. She was born in 1890. The spelling of her name seems to vary (Emilie, Amelia). Note her high and wide cheekbones.

The fourth child, John (Jack) Melchert has two children named Marjorie Melchert Schwartz and Norma Jean Melchert Crego. They are the only Melcherts I have met. They were contemporaries of my father who chose not to maintain contact with them.

According to the 1930 U.S. census, Jack was incarcerated in Hurley, Wisconsin. No reason is given.

Unfortunately, Melchert is a fairly common name and there are many variations. I was unable to find a record of the Melcherts' journey to the United States.

I think this is Emelia's confirmation photograph





## Frank Kisslinger and Emelia (Melchert) Kisslinger

Frank Kisslinger and Emelia Melchert were married in 1910 in Merrill. Their first child, Margaret was born in 1911 followed by Frank in 1913, Elaine in 1916 and Gordon in 1917. Gordon is my father. Frank registered for the military in September of 1918. He listed his occupation as "saw filer" at the Knizel Box Company of Merrill. His address was 1802 Jackson Street—the same as his parents.

Tragedy struck in 1919. For unknown reasons, Frank commits suicide by hanging himself in the barn. Emelia and her young family must have been devastated. Gordon would have been two years old. This tragedy still reverberates almost a century later.

In 1920 or 1921, Emelia marries Mark Jenny who brings two small children from a previous marriage. Mark lost his previous wife to tuberculosis and he has it himself. He infects all four Kisslinger children and two of them eventually die of it. Emelia is infected too and she is sent to a sanatorium in Rochester, Minnesota.

Margaret's daughter Marylin has an embroidered pillow made by Emelia at the sanatorium.

The 1920 census shows Katharine and Frank's brother Joseph living in nearby Scot, Wisconsin. Ferdinand is gone and Joseph is now able to speak English but Katharine, who is now 75 is still listed as unable to speak English. Apparently she never learned the language of her adopted country. Joseph is now 46 and has never left home and has never married. All of this suggests that this Kisslinger family did not cope well with life in Merrill. The strength visible in the pictures apparently did not translate into strength in dealing with life.



Mark Jenny built this house in the early 20s which still exists at 1802 Jackson Street in Merrill. The previous house was set on fire on purpose by Mark to collect insurance. He was caught doing it.

According to the 1930 census, the Jackson Street house is crowded. There are 2 Jenny children and 4 Kisslinger children. Emelia is home from the sanitarium and there is an elderly Frank Melchert. Gordon has bitter memories of this time. He and his siblings do not get on with Mark Jenny.

Gordon's mother Emelia dies in Wausau in 1932 of peritonitis—a result of a surgical procedure possibly following a miscarriage or a botched abortion. Gordon would have been 14 years old.



This may be Gordon's sister, Elaine. Gordon recalls giving blood to her in an attempt to correct the anemia associated with tuberculosis.

She dies of tuberculosis in 1934.

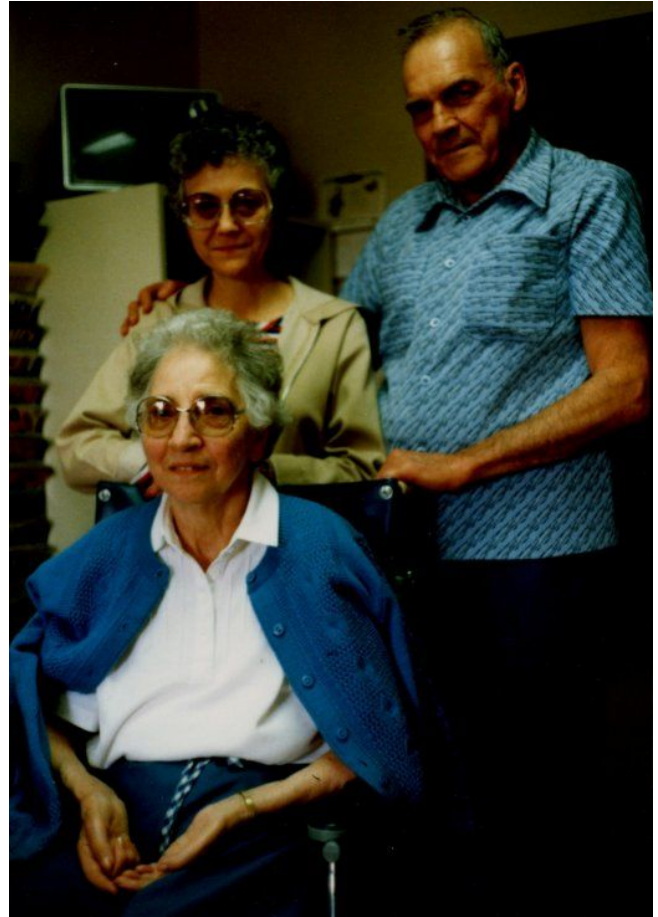




Gordon's older brother Frank is "riding the rails, working in CCC camps and in and out of TB sanitariums" during this period, according to Marylin Plansky, Margaret's daughter.

Gordon moves to Edgar, Wisconsin in 1936 to live with Margaret, his older sister. Margaret has married Richard Plansky and they have started a family. Gordon was a senior at the Edgar high school in 1936.

This is Gordon and Margaret in 1982 in Thorp, Wisconsin. Margaret is suffering from multiple sclerosis. Notice she has high and wide cheekbones like her mother, Emelia. That's her daughter Marylin Plansky in the middle.



Juanita Lambert (my mother) also attends Edgar high school in 1936. Apparently, Gordon caught her eye. I found this in a physics textbook used by Juanita. Yes, Juanita studied physics in high school in Edgar in 1936 and the book is more rigorous than you might expect. For example, the perfect gas law is used to explain how a refrigerator works and Ohm's law is used to explain how a watt hour meter works. In general, the 1936 textbook did a good job of connecting physics to the everyday world.

### Juanita's 1936 boy rating system

& X Q X A L X X L X R X X  
 Gordon Feilinger - Crazy (About You)  
 Eddie Leight - Love  
 Elsworth Reins - Dear  
 George Miller - Engaged  
 Ray Silling - Angry  
 Wally Boneske - Good  
 Thomas Sorcha - Jealous  
 John T. Miller - Kiss  
 John A. Miller - Bad  
 Ewald Harty - Hate  
 John Hall - Marry  
 Les Eselmain - Friend  
 Arvid McDonald - Invitations  
 Juanita  
 Juanita Lambert

## Class of 1937



Gordon and Juanita both graduate in 1937 although Gordon is more than two years older. After graduation, they go their separate ways. Juanita goes to Milwaukee where she lives on the east side and works in a drugstore. Gordon stays in Edgar where he has a job driving a livestock truck.

My aunt, Avis Tessmer (more on her later), tells me that Gordon's tuberculosis is active at this time and he is at a sanitarium in Wausau not long after graduating. Juanita visits him there.

Gordon's tuberculosis gets worse and he moves to this sanitarium in Wales, Wisconsin near Waukesha in 1938. His brother, Frank, is also ill and has been in several sanitariums including this one. It was known, even in 1938, that smoking was bad for tuberculosis, but Gordon smoked anyway. It is easy to imagine him smoking on the front porch of this place.

Living here must have been the low point in Gordon's life. He has already experienced many heart rending losses. He would be justified to feel apprehension about his own future.

His fortunes are about to turn.

But the story of Juanita's forebears must be told first.





## Juanita's side, the Lamberts, Fenhouses and the Ottos

Juanita's maternal grandparents, William and Minnie Fenhouse:



According to census data, William Fenhouse was born in the United States in 1859 but his parents were born in Holland. Minnie was born in Holland in 1863. She crossed in 1878. This picture was probably taken about 1880. Fenhouse is spelled variously as Feenhouse and Fuishouse.

The Fenhouses originally settled in Spencer, Wisconsin which is a little west of Wausau. However, something in Castlewood, South Dakota attracted the Fenhouses. They moved there with 8 children in 1897. Castlewood was new then. It was only platted in 1882. The city was named after Mr. Castle and Mr. Wood who happened to be the engineer and the conductor of the first railroad train to go through. The Fenhouses have two more children in Castlewood. One of them, Devina, born in 1897, is my maternal grandmother. The spelling of her name varies (Divina, Divia).

Apparently, things didn't work out in Castlewood. According to the 1910 census, the Fenhouses have moved back to Spencer, Wisconsin. They have one more child to bring the total to 11. Some of the older ones remain in South Dakota which explains why I have relatives there.

This is Minnie Fenhouse in 1944 at the Otto farm north of Edgar.



## **Juanita's paternal grandparents, August and Kate Lambert**

According to the 1900 census, August and Kate live in Fairchild, Wisconsin. Fairchild is still a tiny place located in the western part of the state near Eau Claire. Both August and Kate were born in Germany, he in 1854 and she in 1858. August crossed in 1873 and his occupation is listed as a butcher.

According to passenger lists, an August Lambert arrived in New York on 23 September of 1874 from Hamburg on the Pommerania. His birth year is given as 1851. It is a probable match.



The Pommerania was new in 1874 but she was ill fated. She sank in 1878 after a collision. She was 360 feet by 41 feet, had 2 masts and one funnel. She could do 13.5 knots with her single screw.

August and Kate have 9 children in Fairchild. Elmer, the second youngest, was born in 1895. He is my maternal grandfather.

Elmer Lambert registered for the military in 1917 in Laona, Wisconsin, and he lists his occupation as "saw filer." At that time, Laona was a classic company town. Everything was owned by the Connor lumber company and the workers were paid in script.

Here is Elmer. He has a certain swagger. This must be a lumberjack in front of his bunkhouse.





Here is Elmer in his World War I uniform. It is likely that he was conscripted since 72% of the army in World War I were conscripts. Yet, Elmer looks very proud in his new uniform. Elmer enlisted in 1917 and the war was over late in 1918 so the picture was taken during the winter of 1917-1918.



## **Juanita's parents, Elmer Lambert and Devina Fenhouse**

According to the 1920 United States census, Elmer and Devina are married and living in Laona. Inexplicably, Juanita is not mentioned although she was born in January of that year. According to family folklore, she was premature and she was kept in a shoebox. It seems they forgot to count her in the census. Juanita's name is surprising because it is Hispanic. One of the spelling variations of Devina, Divina, is also Hispanic which is equally surprising. In addition, my brother's middle name is Juan. I have no Hispanic relatives as far as I know. Maybe it all derives from a fad that started in South Dakota in 1887.

Elmer dies of tuberculosis in 1924. He must have contracted it in the war. According to the 1930 United States census, Devina is now married to Hugo Otto. They live on the Otto farm located 8 miles north of Edgar. They have 6 children—the oldest is Juanita. The first four are Lamberts. It is possible to guess from the ages of the older children that the marriage of Devina and Hugo took place in 1927. There would be 2 more children. Hugo Otto is the person I thought of as my grandfather as I was growing up. Hugo was from Germany and he could speak German.

The Otto farmhouse.



I have many fond memories of the Otto farm. That's my brother Phillip with both hands occupied. Devina's youngest son Jerry is kneeling and I'm in the middle. Behind us is a side rake and it is in use.



I have talked to Avis recently. She lives in Wausau with her husband Ervin Tessmer. She is the only surviving Lambert child. She emphasized that Elmer was a forbidden subject while she was growing up. I too never heard Elmer Lambert mentioned while Devina was living. Avis also emphasized that Hugo Otto and his relatives were kind and generous toward the Lambert children.

One of the Lambert children, Neal, had a son also named Elmer Lambert but he was never actually called Elmer. He was always called Butch. I have lost track of Butch but I discovered that he had given some interesting pictures of his grandfather to Avis.

Elmer Lambert died of tuberculosis in 1924. His 4th daughter, Avis, was born 5 days later. Juanita was 4 years old. He almost certainly caught it in the war. No family member caught tuberculosis from Elmer.

Here is Elmer Lambert in 1918 with his horse. The original is much too big for my scanner and so it had to be scanned in sections. You can see the sutures if you look carefully. I also removed some stains digitally.



### Elmer Lambert in his World War I uniform



This is a picture worthy of Hollywood. Note the cleft chin and the knitted eyebrows. Note the easy camaraderie between man and horse. Avis had several pictures like this of various sizes all made from the same negative. All were big—over two feet high. Maybe Devina wanted to have this picture while Elmer was away fighting in the great war.



According to Avis, Juanita saw this picture for the first time around 1990. Her reaction was disbelief. She questioned its authenticity. It seems there is a conspiracy to suppress the memory of Elmer Lambert and I don't know the reason.

This is Hugo Otto in 1953. He lost fingers to dynamite while removing tree stumps. It is easy to see the gentleness and kindness in him.



This is Hugo's mother. Avis tells me she felt greatly loved by her, but she confessed she did not know her name. She was just Gramma Otto to her. According to ancestry.com, her name is Louisa.

(This portrait is a good example of the mastery the old photographers had of lighting.)



Juanita and baby brother Neale.



Juanita Lambert at age 13. Probably a confirmation picture



Avis tells me she had a lot of "brass."



The Lambert/Otto family. Seven of the eight children are present. Juanita is at the left.



The Otto dairy farm was probably started around 1926. You make an agreement with the cows when you start a dairy farm. You agree to milk them twice a day which means you can never be far or long from your home as long as you live. When the cows were sold in 1961, the agreement ended making travel possible for Hugo and Devina. Unfortunately, Hugo had several strokes and died in 1972. However, Devina did travel. She went as far as British Columbia where Gordon and Juanita lived at that time. Here she is with some of her siblings in Castlewood, South Dakota in 1963. Devina is on the left.





## Gordon Kisslinger and Juanita Lambert

While reading the newspaper in the sanitarium at Waukesha on February of 1940, Gordon must have been surprised to see this:



This picture, which included Juanita's address, prompted him to, in his words, "walk out of the sanitarium to find Juanita." It is about 15 miles between the sanitarium and the Astor street address. Neither of them had a car so he may have walked.

## The Murder Trial

Accounts of the murder and the subsequent trial were prominent in the newspapers for months and Juanita was a key witness. The murderer, Harry Christiansen, turns out to be the son of a wealthy lumberman from Wausau. Harry turns his gun on himself after the murder and shoots himself in the head. He survives because his father can afford to hire the best surgeon in Milwaukee.

Juanita brushed by Harry as she was carrying a malted milk to Mildred Beil, the victim. Juanita bolted when she saw the gun.

The trial hinges on Harry's state of mind during the murder. The booth was reconstructed in the courtroom. The victim's fervid love letters were also read in the courtroom. The defense tries to get a verdict of 3rd degree manslaughter and they almost succeed. The bare facts emphatically point to premeditated murder. Harry is ultimately pardoned after serving a few years of a life sentence. Harry's father's money is evident throughout. It was the O. J. Simpson trial of the era.

Here is Juanita looking very self possessed, considering she is a 20 year old farm girl.





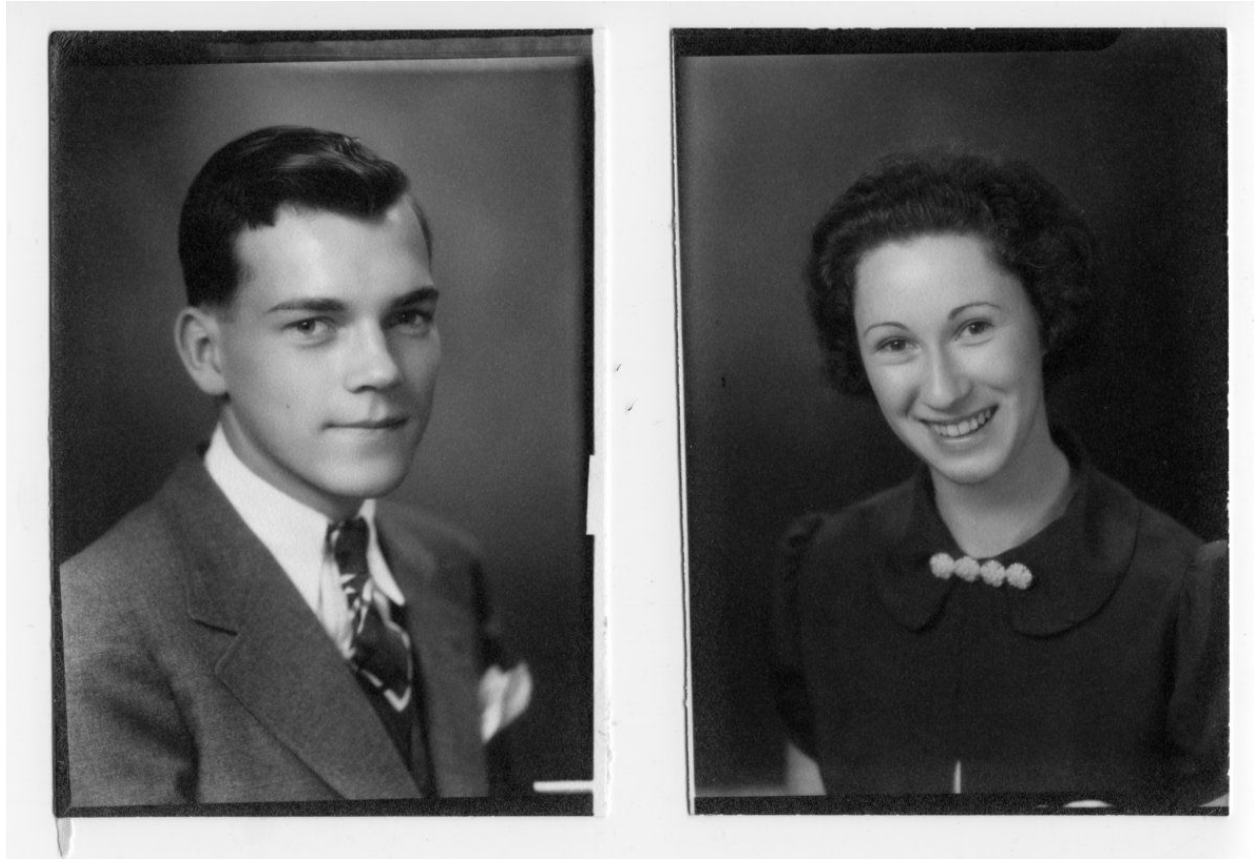
There was a whirlwind romance and I was born in Wausau on 24 May 1941. Gordon and Juanita skipped the marriage part. They did that in June of 1941—exactly one month after I was born. Here is the marriage certificate.



This was a secret wedding with no real witnesses. Even Juanita's sister Avis didn't know about it until 2008 when I told her about it.

Waupaca is far enough from Wausau for it to be a secret. No one in Wausau knew about this wedding. Gordon never lived in Clintonville. Pastor Reier probably did not know about me. The event was never celebrated and there are no wedding pictures.

However, there are wedding pictures of a sort.



These are high quality professional portraits yet they were never on display. They look like they could have been made in 1941. I recently came to the conclusion that these must be clandestine wedding pictures.



There was a 50th wedding anniversary celebration in Wausau. It was a quiet affair. I was the only guest. The wedding was still a secret 50 years later.



Gordon and Juanita moved to Appleton, Wisconsin where my brother Phillip was born in September of 1943. A few months later, in 1944, Gordon's brother Frank died in the same hospital Phillip was born. According to Marilyn, Frank checked himself into the hospital where he died with no family members present. There may have been a fear of contracting tuberculosis. Yet, I remember being told by Gordon that he took Frank to the hospital knowing that he was about to die.

According to Avis, Juanita was very concerned about disease transmission at this time. She required visitors to wear masks around her children. She also used her own food containers where ever she went. It is not hard to understand the fear.

I have no pictures of Frank and I know little about him. I could never get Gordon to talk about Frank, but I do have his gold watch. It is a 15 jewel American Waltham with a 14K gold case. It contains over an ounce of gold and the movement has a serial number. It is possible to determine the date of manufacture from the serial number. It was made in 1904 so it is possible the previous owner was Ferdinand Kisslinger.



According to Marylin, Frank is buried in the Catholic part of the Merrill cemetery. He is the only Catholic Kisslinger buried there. He must have converted to Catholicism but I have no information about this.

Gordon made a complete recovery from his tuberculosis. I always knew him as a 6 foot 3 inch, well muscled man with good coordination and in good health for most of his life.



This is Gordon with Hugo Otto in Appleton after the pact with the cows was broken.