

**Maria, Katy and Mary.  
A Story of Three Women Who Married  
Socolofsky Men.**



This story was prepared for the Socolofsky Family Reunion at the YMCA of the Rockies on July 2 through 5, 2022. A complete explanation of sources is at the end of this story. However, the story refers to books written by Homer Socolofsky in 1973, 1986 and 2003, and a memoir written by D.D. Socolofsky in 1953.

Rob Socolofsky, 2022.

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Every three or four years, the Socolofsky family gathers for a reunion. When most of the family lived in Kansas, many of these reunions were organized around important family events such as sausage-making time or Gottfried and Katy's 50th wedding anniversary in 1923. Beginning in 1976, the reunions have been more carefully planned. Until the late 1900s, the reunions were usually in McPherson, Kansas, and for the last 20 years they were conducted in numerous places in the U.S.

A reunion was planned for 2020, but was postponed twice due to the Covid pandemic. We finally were able to meet at the YMCA of the Rockies in Colorado in 2022. Those attending the reunion are descendents of Gottfried Socolofsky II and Maria Klohs Socolofsky, who, with their children and grandchildren, emigrated from Dreispitz, Russia to Marion County, Kansas in 1876 and 1877. Other family members joined them from Russia in the following few years.

This story was prepared for the 2022 reunion, and is about three women who married Socolofsky men. These women are Maria Klohs, who married Gottfried Socolofsky II in Dreispitz in 1853, Katharina Elizabeth Dick, who married Gottfried Socolofsky III on January 1, 1873 in Dreispitz, and Mary Belle Reneau, who married Abraham Lincoln Socolofsky on June 30, 1919 in Florence, Kansas.

## **1. The Socolofsky family In Russia.**

About two centuries ago, a man named Gottfried Socolofsky settled in a village named Dreispitz in southern Russia. Dreispitz is on the west side of the Volga River in the province of Saratov, and is about 1,000 miles south of Moscow. The Volga, the longest river in Europe, eventually reaches the Caspian Sea.

In the 1760s Czarina Catherine, Russia's monarch, encouraged 8,000 families, most of them from Germany, to establish farms on unsettled land along the Volga River by granting land to every adult male, promising that they could preserve their German

culture and religion, promising that they would be free from taxation for up to 52 years, and promising that their sons would not be drafted into the Russian army “forever.” Dreispitz was colonized by 151 people in 1767, and by 1870 about 3,000 people lived in the Dreispitz community.

We don’t know where Gottfried came from. David Daniel Socolofsky, known as D.D. to his family, was born in Russia and came to America with his parents in 1877. D.D. wrote a memoir for his family in 1953 that includes a story he was told explaining how his grandfather, Gottfried I, settled in Dreispitz. D.D. wrote that Gottfried I was a conscripted soldier in the Prussian army. During the Napoleonic Wars his unit was ordered to kill everyone in a village, including women and children, and when directed by his sergeant to kill a baby, Gottfried refused. He ran away and deserted. The Napoleonic Wars were fought on battlefields all over Europe and in 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia. Yet Dreispitz was many miles from anywhere the Prussian army was engaged.

D.D. tells us Gottfried I first went to Poland after deserting, and it may be that he was originally from Poland. Or it may be that he simply wandered until he came to Dreispitz and settled down.

The Napoleonic Wars lasted from 1799 to 1815, when Napoleon’s army was finally defeated at Waterloo. If Gottfried I deserted from the Prussian Army before the end of those wars, it could have been years before he reached Dreispitz. In any event, we do know that in about 1825, Gottfried I and his wife, whose maiden name was Schroek (we do not know her first name), had a son. They named him Gottfried II.

D.D.’s account may very well be credible. D.D. was Gottfried I’s grandson, and no doubt the story was told and retold many times by D.D.’s parents. The story also is consistent with the makeup of the Prussian Army, and tactics during the Napoleonic Wars. Prussia had annexed the Polish territories of Posen and Silesia, half of the army were conscripts from conquered lands, much of the fighting took place in France and Eastern Europe, and military tactics in the early 1800s were brutal, as they often are at any time. D.D. always identified his father, Gottfried II, as “Polish.” And the story says much about why the Socolofskys left Russia and emigrated to America in the 1870s, as we will see.

Most of the people in Dreispitz had German names, reflecting their origin. The name “Socolofsky” is Slavic, though, that is, Eastern European, rather than German. There are people all over Eastern Europe named Socolofsky, spelled in various ways, and there is a small town in what is now the Czech Republic named “Sokolov.” In the early

1800s Sokolov was in Bohemia and therefore part of the Austrian Empire, but perhaps Sokolov is the origin of the name. D.D. tells us that Gottfried I was drafted into the Prussian army, so he may very well have been culturally German despite his ancestral name. After all, "Gottfried" is a thoroughly German name, and was common as a surname among German Jews.

## 2. Maria

In 1852, Gottfried II married Maria Elizabeth Klohs, who was born April 3, 1828 in Dreispitz. Gottfried II was a farmer, as was his father. The farmers in Dreispitz did not own land. Instead, each male was allotted several acres at a distance from the village. Women did not receive allotments. Wheat, barley, buckwheat, and other crops were grown on the allotments and the women planted vegetable gardens near their homes in the village. D.D. remembered his mother growing watermelons, musk melons, cantaloupes, pumpkins and gourds, all watered by irrigation from a nearby stream. Although the vegetable garden was Maria's responsibility, D.D. remembered Gottfried II helping with harvesting. The men went to the fields only at planting time and harvest time, and rarely at other times, so we should not assume they did nothing when they were near home. They no doubt had much work to do there, too.

Maria used the watermelons to make as much as 150 gallons of syrup each year, and the pumpkins were mostly used for animal feed. Maria also saved all seeds from watermelons, pumpkins, and sunflowers to take to a mill where oil was extracted. Maria milked their several cows, fed six to ten hogs and the chickens, cooked meals and baked bread, and did the washing, all with the help of the children. Girls were expected to help their mothers with the work in the home, while boys as young as 4 or 5 helped their fathers.

Everyone had jobs at harvest time, and Maria worked in the fields along with the men. D.D. describes going to the meadow to cut hay with hand scythes, which they dried and put up in their barn, and women in the village worked on the threshing floor at threshing time.

D.D. also says that making clothing was the women's responsibility, again helped by children. D.D. carded wool and Maria spun it into yarn. They also had flax floss, which they bought, and Maria spun that into thread. The yarn and thread were then sent out to weavers, who made it into cloth which Maria used to make their clothes. Tailors were hired to make heavy winter clothes from sheep pelts, and cobblers came to the house to make boots.

The Socolofskys were Lutheran, as was nearly everyone else in Dreispitz. However, in about 1874 they were converted to a Pietistic sect by Rev. Frederick Dahlinger in Dreispitz. Pietists were an offshoot of Lutheranism that included Mennonites and Anabaptists and Amish. D.D. says they called themselves Anabaptists after their conversion. Anabaptists believe in baptism by immersion, and believe that the choice to be baptized must be made by someone old enough to make an informed decision. Everyone in the family converted. Although Mennonites and Amish are pacifists and refuse military service, the Socolofskys did not claim to be pacifists.

D.D. came to America with his parents in 1877. Gottfried II paid the cost for Gottfried III and his family to emigrate in 1876, and then a year later, Gottfried III paid for his parents and some of his siblings to leave Russia. At first, Gottfried II remained at the head of the Socolofsky family, soon contracting to buy a farm in Marion County. But Gottfried II died unexpectedly of heat stroke in 1880. After that, Maria lived with her sons, and was living with Gottfried III when she died in 1901.

One interesting illustration of how the German Russian families were organized is the exclusion of Gottfried II and Maria's only daughter from inheritance after Gottfried II died in Kansas. Although the estate was supervised by the Probate Court in Marion County, the brothers simply divided up the property with no provision for Johann, Maria's daughter.

We do not know much about Maria. She left us no writings and nearly the only things we know about what kind of person she was must be inferred from D.D.'s memoir. It seems clear that she worked hard to care for her family and her house, and D.D. describes no complaining or expressions of regret about the role that was expected of her. D.D. describes only a happy household, and Maria seems to have accepted her role and seems to have been proud of performing her responsibilities well.

Maria and Gottfried II had six children. D.D. was the youngest, but only one of the children was a daughter. The oldest was Gottfried III, who was born in 1854, and by the time he was 18, Maria's duties running the house had become almost too much for her. Gottfried II and Maria decided Gottfried III should have a wife who could help Maria.

Peter Dick was Dreispitz's town clerk and a teacher in the town school, and he had a nineteen year-old daughter named Katharina Elizabeth. Gottfried II and Peter Dick agreed late in 1872 that Katharina, known as Katy, would marry Gottfried III. They were married January 1, 1873. Although Katy was only 4 feet 9 inches tall, she brought to this marriage the willingness to work hard and she performed her responsibilities quickly. And Maria obtained the help in the house she needed.

Although the marriage of Gottfried III and Katy was arranged by their fathers, since both Katy and Gottfried lived in Dreispitz, they must have known each other. Surely, the bride and groom must have been told what the fathers were planning, and just as surely, the fathers would not have proceeded if either objected. They were married 59 years when Gottfried III died in 1931, and by all accounts, their marriage was mutually respectful and happy.

Despite the little information we have of Maria, as I imagine her life, she holds a very important place in our family's history. In 1871, Czar Alexander ended the special privileges the German-speaking colonists along the Volga had enjoyed, and the colonists would be expected to assimilate into Russian culture. That meant the German schools that had been controlled by the German colonists would become Russian, that the villages would no longer be self-governing, and that all the men would be subject to conscription. About a third of all Germans in Russia emigrated, mostly to the U.S. and Canada.

Maria and Gottfried II's oldest son, Gottfried III was almost 17 when the end of the special privileges was announced, and the threat of being drafted into the Czar's army for the required 6 years service must have weighed on Maria. And in addition, although the Socolofskys had recently converted to a form of Christianity that expected each person to follow their own conscience, assimilation into Russian culture included becoming Russian Orthodox. They would have been expected to abandon their new-found religion. Maria and Gottfried II must have had conversations like this:

Maria: Gottfried, we cannot let them take our son. You remember what your father told us about war. What they tried to make him do is evil and God surely would not condone it. Our son is a God-fearing man, too. He would never permit them to make him kill others. He cannot be in the Czar's army.

Gottfried II: But Maria, what are we to do? Our lives are good here. The crops are good and our children are happy. Our friends are here. Our family is here, and this is the only place we have known.

Maria: But Gottfried, Rev. Dahlinger talked to Gottfried Schneider, who has been to America. Herr Schneider says the land is good there, and cheap, and that they would not take our son or tell us what to believe. Rev. Dahlinger is already planning to go there and we could go too.

Gottfried II: Maria, I don't know. What do we know about traveling to an unknown place? How can we just leave everything we know?

Maria: Gottfried, I will not have my son taken by the Czar. He is just married and already has a small baby. What would Katy do if he was taken away by the army? And how would we know what they would make him do in the army? And what if he dies, or is hurt? I will not allow it!

Gottfried II: Maria, my wife. I will talk to Rev. Dahlinger. I will find out what his plans are and learn more. Maybe we can go there, too.

It may be that Maria's courage is what spurred our ancestors to leave Russia and go to America. Gottfried III and Katy left in 1876 with their two children and Gottfried's sister, Johann, for Marion County, Kansas. Gottfried II and Maria followed a year later with D.D. and the rest of their children.

America wasn't an entirely unknown place. Land agents like Gottfried Schneider had been searching for suitable places for the Volga Germans, and by 1876, it was common knowledge in Dreispitz that good land similar to the southern Volga region was available in Kansas and Nebraska. The immigrants from Dreispitz did not end up in a place where they knew no one, either. Many German Russians were already in Marion County. Rev. Dahlinger emigrated there in 1875. Eventually, over 100,000 Volga Germans left Russia for America and 150,000 settled in Canada, but the Socolofskys were among the first.

After selling almost all of their possessions, Gottfried III and Katy left Dreispitz in the spring of 1876, and traveled by ox-cart to Saratov where they boarded a train, eventually reaching Hamburg, in Germany. From there, they sailed to Hull, on the eastern coast of England and took another train across the island to Liverpool. They sailed from Liverpool aboard the steamship *City of Berlin*, arriving at the immigration portal, Castle Garden, on the island of Manhattan. After a brief quarantine, they boarded a train for Kansas. They arrived in Peabody, in Marion County, on July 4, 1876, the centennial of the nation's independence. The trip took 42 days.

Gottfried III took jobs with farmers in the area. When Gottfried II and his other sons arrived, they also worked for farmers in the area until the family arranged for their own land. Gottfried II worked for a Danish family named Peterson, and the family remembered that they were honest and kind employers.

Other relatives and many other German Russian immigrants joined them in later years. At first, the Socolofskys attended a Mennonite Brethren church where services were conducted in German, and Gottfried II and Maria never learned to speak much English.

They must have resumed a life much like what they had known in Russia. They lived in the midst of a community of German Russian immigrants, grew hard winter wheat as they had in Russia, raised milk cows, pigs and chickens, and attended a German-language church. Maria continued caring for her family with the help of her daughter and daughter-in-law, as she had in Russia. However, shortly after arriving in America, in about 1880, Gottfried II died of heat stroke. He was buried in a field near where he farmed. There is no trace of the grave now.

After Gottfried II's death, Maria was no longer the head of a house, and for the remaining 20 years of her life she lived with one or another of her sons. Most often she lived with Gottfried III and Katy, and she died in 1901 in their home.

### 3. Katy

The *Peabody (KS) Gazette* reported in late June 1876 that, "Another invoice of Mennonites to the number of 60 reached here on" June 26, and that, "Our Mennonite neighbors will receive an addition to their forces of two hundred within a day or two." Katy and Gottfried Socolofsky III, their children, Godfrey George (or Gottfried IV) and Frederick William, and Gottfried III's sister, Katharinne (also called Johann), arrived in Peabody on July 4, 1876.

When Katy and Gottfried III left Russia, they had been married three and a half years and had two children. Gottfried II paid for their trip, and a year later, Gottfried III returned the favor, paying for his parents' passage and the passage of the rest of his siblings. In 1877 and 1878, twelve members of the family lived in a large sod house: Gottfried II and Maria, their six children, Gottfried III's wife, Katy, and their three children.

During Gottfried III and Katy's marriage, they lived in five locations in Marion County. Some of the land they farmed was mortgaged heavily, with interest rates as high as 12%. However, the years from 1880 to 1918 (when they left the farm and moved to Tampa), with only short exceptions, was a golden age for American agriculture, with adequate rainfall and sustainable commodity prices. And Gottfried III and Katy lived frugally and worked hard. Along with the good fortune they experienced, that was a recipe for a good life.



Two of Gottfried III and Katy's children were born in Russia. After arriving in America, they had seven more. All their children lived well into adulthood, a rarity at the time when about 20% of children in the United States died before their fifth birthday. Gottfried III's brother Andrew and his wife, Maria Catherine Dahlinger (the daughter of Rev. Frederick Dahlinger), lost four of their eight children.

We know nothing of Katy's childbirths, or who assisted her. There were certainly no doctors available. However, we can be certain that in a close community like the German community in Russia and then in Marion County, a strong network of women helped each other with illnesses, childbirth, and each other's daily lives. And, of course, someone in the community had midwife skills and general medical knowledge that was useful when someone was sick or injured.

This network of mutually helpful women also must have been invaluable when someone needed help with caring for children, overwhelming household tasks, or emotional support. It's curious that we have no specific information now about how these arrangements were negotiated, or any stories of how these relationships worked in practice. We know a lot about how Socolofsky brothers shared land and farming chores, and their relative farming success must have benefited from that mutual help. How the lives of the women in the community intertwined is simply one collection of details about daily life no one preserved.

Homer's books include much data from public records, such as court records and land sales, newspaper reports, and factual information included in census and tax records. Homer also corresponded throughout his life with his cousins (Katy and Gottfried III had 32 grandchildren who lived to adulthood), and in many of these letters they told him about memories of their childhoods and their grandparents. They told him many stories which he recorded in his books, and although his purpose was not to discover information about Katy's daily life, these stories are full of information that illuminates Katy's personality and how she lived.

By 1905, Gottfried III was farming 720 acres. Public records show his assets included winter wheat on 100 acres, corn on 115 acres, and some sorghum and alfalfa. Gottfried also owned 31 horses, two milk cows from which 200 lbs of butter was made, 105 beef cattle, 42 pigs, and numerous chickens which produced eggs sold for \$100. The public records do not state that caring for the chickens, collecting the eggs, feeding the pigs, making butter, and tending the garden for the family's own table were Katy's responsibilities, while she also cleaned the house, washed clothes, preserved vegetables and fruits, and cooked meals. Gottfried had the help of some of his sons

who still lived at home, and several other sons lived nearby. No doubt, he hired labor as well.

Farming was a dangerous occupation, and most of Katy's children did not escape injury. Abe (Abraham Lincoln) injured his left arm somehow in a farm accident, and the injury was serious enough to exempt him from military service in World War I, twenty years later. Abe also lost the end of his right ring finger in a feed chopper, and told his son, Homer, that he watched with amazement when a chicken picked up the piece of his finger and ran away with it. Katy's youngest child, Will (William Frederick) was kicked in the head by a colt when he was about three and lay near death for days before recovering. Homer tells this story in his typically dispassionate way: he says Will was kicked in the face by a colt and carried the scar "all his days." Homer's wife, Penny, was more typically blunt. She told me Will was kicked in the head by a mule and was quite "off" the rest of his life. Other injuries included a rattlesnake bite on Fred's leg (Frederick William), when he was taking lunch to his father in the field. Gottfried III cut the location of the bite so it bled freely, then made Fred put his leg in a hole full of mud until the swelling went down.

When the Socolofsky family was in Russia, the school was organized by the community and took pupils about four months each year. Lessons were conducted in German. In Marion County, the family followed the same formula, but with American practices. Gottfried and Katy sent all their children to one-room schoolhouses, and the schools were organized according to Kansas law. The Socolofsky children received their first exposure to English in these one-room country schools, and it's obvious that Gottfried and Katy thought educating their children in American schools was important. Gottfried was one of the organizers of the school in District 91 in Marion County, and Katy always voted in school board elections. Although the District 91 school was officially called the "Comet" school, there were so many Socolofskys enrolled that there were years when everyone called it the "Socolofsky" school.

Gottfried and Katy bought three lots in the town of Tampa in 1903, about three miles from the farm. Katy had been ill and purchase of the lots may have indicated that they intended to retire from the farm and move to town. However, Katy recovered and instead, Gottfried built a wood frame house at the farm with a big porch, a slate roof, acetylene lights, and indoor plumbing. The house was completed in 1909, and was the first "modern" house Katy had. Many of the grandchildren's memories about Katy take place in this house.

Between 1901 and 1931, Katy's children gave her at least 37 grandchildren. Five of these grandchildren did not reach adulthood. One was stillborn, three did not survive

their first year, and one died at age 12. The latter was Kathryn Clara Socolofsky, Frederick William's youngest daughter, who died in 1929 of flu. In 1947, Kathryn's sister, Dorothy Erickson, named her own daughter Kathryn.

In 1918, Gottfried and Katy moved to Tampa, about three miles from the farmhouse. Nearly all of Katy's grandchildren lived in Marion County, and Katy's house on the farm and later, her house in Tampa, were often full of visitors.

Although the Socolofskys attended a Mennonite Brethren church in Tampa for their first 25 years in Kansas, various German congregations in the U.S. evolved into the German Baptist Church. Gottfried III and his uncle, D.D., were among the first trustees of the German Baptist Church in Tampa when it was organized in 1903.

This church was small and rarely had a regular pastor. But it became the center of Katy and Gottfried III's life. Services were conducted in German, and the members were mostly from the German Russian community that Katy and Gottfried III had known all of their lives. Their house in Tampa was directly across the street from the church. After Sunday services, all the family would congregate at Katy's house for a dinner of home butchered meats, home canned fruits and vegetables, homemade bread and pies, and homemade apple butter.

Katy always wore a simple shirtwaist dress, blue calico on weekdays and black silk on Sundays. Although her grandchildren tried to get her to adopt a newer style, she never would. Katy never used cosmetics, either. Neighborhood children often sold cosmetics door-to-door, and Katy always bought some. But they went straight into the stove. Her grandchildren affectionately called her "Grossmutter," or "Klein Mutter," because of her small stature, and she used endearing diminutives when speaking to her children and grandchildren. Katy also took time to play with her grandchildren, admiring their drawings and watching their activities.

On one occasion, when some grandchildren visited the house in Tampa they found Katy cooking on an oil stove. They asked her, "What happened to your fine coal stove?" All she would say was, "Die Meieren (the mission) needed it more than I." Emigration of German Russians slowed down and stopped by the time of World War I. However, in the 35 years after Gottfried and Katy arrived in Kansas, they helped 25 or 26 German Russian families leave Russia and come to the United States or Canada. Even if money or possessions were scarce, Katy and Gottfried were willing to share what they had with others.

Gottfried died in 1931, 77 years old. Katy left the Tampa house, spending her final years with her daughters, Maria and Lydia. After a brief illness, she died in 1934. Katy and Gottfried were married 59 years.

Katy's granddaughter, Leona, wrote that when Katy and Gottfried retired from the farm, Gottfried felt Katy "deserved a long rest" and he did most of the housework. Katy's hands were calloused and work-worn, and Leona remembered seeing Gottfried take her hands in his and pat them lovingly, telling her "how much he appreciated the many years of labor they represented."

This story has often been told at our reunions to illustrate what a good man Gottfried was. But for me, there is a different meaning. What a woman Katy must have been to inspire such devotion!

It's tempting to wonder if Maria and Katy regretted their decision to marry, or the expectation that they stay in the kitchen or what seems to us to be a disparity in status between the wives and their husbands. But it's not right to judge these 19th century people from a culture so much different than ours by our own standards.

And Gottfried III's and Katy's marriage, at least, seems to be based on mutual respect, cooperation, and love. We should not attribute our own views about her proper place to Katy without a reason. There is no indication that Katy ever regretted marrying and assuming a role in her household we think of as "traditional."

We know less about Maria's expectations. But if my belief about her role in encouraging her family to leave Russia is correct, it seems that when the issues were important to her, Gottfried II listened. Isn't that a definition of mutual respect and love?

#### 4. Mary

Mary Belle Reneau lived in Florence, KS, about 30 miles from Tampa, and graduated from Florence High School in 1910, when she was 18. The Reneaus were descended from French Huguenots who fled France in the 1600s because of religious persecution, arriving in America in the late 1600s or early 1700s. Mary's father, Jesse, operated the Standard Oil franchise in Florence.

After her high school graduation, Mary attended the Marion County Institute to obtain a teaching certificate, and then taught in rural schools near Florence for five years. Female teachers in rural schools were paid about \$50 per month, while male teachers

were paid somewhat more. Teachers usually boarded with the family of a student. One of the first things Mary bought with her salary was a piano, which she kept with her in each place she lived.

In 1916, Mary and Abraham Socolofsky, Katy and Gottfried III's seventh child, were both students at Kansas State Normal School (Emporia State University). Abe had also been a rural school teacher, and was ambitious to become a school administrator, which required a college degree. Although Abe was engaged to marry a woman named "Billie," the engagement was broken and Abe and Mary soon became friendly.

Abe attended the Commercial Course at McPherson College, in McPherson (KS) as a substitute for high school. Rural high schools came into existence later. It was while Abe was a student at McPherson College that he adopted the middle name "Lincoln." His brother, Benjamin, who also lacked a middle name, adopted the middle name "Harrison" about the same time. They apparently were honoring their status as first-generation Americans by taking the names of American presidents.

Abe and Mary were attending college with money they had saved from their jobs, and often attended during summers, when their schools were not in session. In addition to teaching in rural schools, Abe had clerked in a store that was owned by his father and uncle, assisted in the Tampa post office while his uncle was postmaster, and went door-to-door in rural Marion and Morris Counties selling subscriptions to newspapers and magazines. However, in 1918 he was offered a job as assistant cashier in the Tampa State Bank. He was within one semester of graduating, but this job was too good to pass up. Abe and Mary were married a year later.

Abe and Mary took an extended trip after their marriage in June 1919. On this two-month trip, Abe and Mary visited Abe's brother Fred in Nebraska, his uncle Andrew in Saskatchewan, his uncle D.D. in Portland, OR, and a cousin in Windsor, CO.

At the time of Abe and Mary's marriage, Mary had been teaching 6th grade in the Arkansas City school. The Arkansas City principal recommended her to the Tampa schools, and she began teaching there after her marriage.

Abe bought a small house in Tampa, and four lots, and continued working at the Tampa State Bank. He and Mary lived just down the street from Gottfried III and Katy. At first, they attended the German Baptist Church in Tampa. The services were conducted in German, which, of course, Abe understood. But Mary knew no German and felt left out of the large Socolofsky family. Mary would often cry after Sunday services, and finally

Abe understood. They began attending the Evangelical Church in Tampa where services were conducted in English, and where Mary felt more comfortable.

When Abe was offered the job of Marion County Clerk to fill out the remaining months of the term of the incumbent who resigned, they moved to Marion. Abe was elected to two terms of his own, and then lost a primary race for the Republican nomination for Kansas Secretary of State. After that, he worked for the state Highway Commission, and then for the Samuel Dodsworth Stationary Company. Abe was a diligent worker, effective salesman and a politician, and was able to talk easily with anybody.

Mary's first child was a stillborn girl. Mary was devastated, and felt responsible because she had continued working while she was pregnant. She continued teaching for another year, but when she was pregnant again, she left the teaching profession. The first two of her four children were born at home in Tampa with a doctor's assistance, but the last two were born in Marion in the Marion "hospital." The hospital occupied the second floor of the drug store in downtown Marion. Mary and Abe's youngest son was named Marion, and he always joked that he was happy he was not born in Peabody.

When their oldest child, Homer, was ready to go to college they moved to Manhattan, where Homer enrolled at Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science (Kansas State University). They bought a house at 511 N. 12th, a few blocks from the campus. Since Abe's sales territory was the eastern half of Kansas, they could live anywhere in that area. Living in the town where their children would go to college saved room and board costs, which was by far most of the expense of attendance at a state school. The family joined the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Manhattan.

I'm old enough to remember Mary. I remember a scene in a darkened house in the heat of what must have been summer 1951 when Mary helped Abe walk to his chair in the living room. Although only in his early 60s, he looked like an old man, stooped and weak. Abe began to feel the effects of Parkinson's disease in 1942 or 1943. He continued working, but soon Mary, or one of their daughters, drove with him on his sales calls. Eventually, he became so ill that he needed assistance to get out of bed and he quit working in 1948. Finally, caring for Abe was too much for Mary. Penny, Homer's wife, had completed nurses' training, and after helping Abe bathe and massaging his muscles on one occasion, Mary was so appreciative she told Penny, "That man will be the death of me." At about that time, Mary's youngest son, Marion, began doing much of the care that required lifting and helping Abe walk.

When Abe died in 1952, his surviving brothers and other family members came to Manhattan for the funeral. I was about 4 1/2 at the time, and remember sitting on the porch at 511 N. 12th with my sister, Jennie, and cousin, Martha. Someone brought us bottles of Grape Nehi, the first time I had such a treat. And there were many solemn old men in black suits standing in small groups in the front yard talking. I assume the women were in the house, preparing the food.

Mary remained in the house for a few years, but eventually she moved to a newer house on McCollum St., west of the KSU campus. By the time I was 9 or 10 my father would put the push mower in the car and take me to mow Mary's lawn, giving me two quarters for the work.

Mary planned to take trips with her grandchildren, and as the oldest, I went on the first one. I went with Mary on the train to El Campo, TX, to visit Mary's sister-in-law, Violet, who was Benjamin's wife. Other than Mary, Violet was the only one from outside of the German community to marry one of Katy's children, and she and Mary were always friendly. I was 6 or 7 and don't remember much about the trip other than riding in the observation car. We climbed the stairs to seats in the observation dome, and I was mesmerized by watching the countryside roll by from a height of 20 or 25 feet. I don't remember talking to Mary or her talking to me at all on the trip. Although Mary took trips visiting her children and their families, she did not take any other trips with grandchildren.

Mary often made cinnamon rolls, which Homer loved. She also babysat Homer's kids, and she was a frequent visitor in our house. She would stay with us when our father was at work and our mother had an appointment or a meeting to attend. On one occasion in the middle of the summer, when I was about 5 and Jennie was about 4, Mary went outside looking for us and found us playing in the side yard next to the faucet. We had a hose and a washtub and were enjoying the cool water in the hot Kansas weather. But to Mary's surprise, we had taken our clothes off and were wearing just our underpants. Mary was scandalized and told us so, or at least in my memory that's how I thought she felt. Jennie and I saw nothing unusual about it. That's what we did all the time. Remembering this scene, I now realize Penny had read Dr. Spock's best-selling book, *Baby and Child Care*, and Mary had not.

After Abe died, Mary began working at the Methodist Church as the church hostess. This job involved managing the kitchen and organizing events at the church. She was required to attend the weekly staff meeting, a task she disliked.

She also continued meeting with several social groups organized around the church and the college. Homer was on the faculty of Kansas State, and Mary was one of the organizers of a Faculty Mother's social group and its first president. It seems that Mary had an easier time socializing in a more formal setting.

Mary died in Manhattan in 1959, of colon cancer, after a two-year illness.

It is hard for an eight or ten year old boy to understand an adult's thoughts, but as I remember, Mary always seemed to me to be very dignified and stern and sad. She did not talk down to kids, and seemed to expect us to listen to her and understand what she wanted from us. She did not chat much, either. She was much shyer than Abe, who was quite talkative and friendly. Looking back, I think she was still a stern school teacher, even though she was more than 30 years removed from the classroom. Esther, Marion's wife and Mary's daughter-in-law, told me Mary was proud of her teaching career. Of course, it was uncommon for a married woman to continue working in the 1920s, and that's one of the reasons Mary quit.

One of Abe's nieces, Ruth Socolofsky, was a much loved and respected teacher in Manhattan and won awards for her teaching. Another niece, Virginia Socolofsky, also pursued a career in education, and traveled all over the world. Neither of these women married and knowing them well, Mary may have wondered how her life might have been different. But at the same time, Mary felt a strong sense of duty to care for her children and her husband. Wondering how her life might have been different is not necessarily the same thing as regretting the choice she made.

Mary's life was much different than Maria's life or Katy's life. Of course, advances in technology and the differences of town life compared to farm life also mattered. But Maria and Katy never really left the German culture, which was the only thing they knew, when they moved to America, a dynamic so common in immigrant families. Maria and Katy never even learned to speak much English.

Mary was thoroughly American, perhaps more so than any of the others Katy's children married. Most of Katy's children married spouses from the German Russian community in Kansas, but Mary was not part of that community. She and Abe met at Kansas Normal School (Emporia State University), where they were both students. Their four children, Homer, Mildred, Dorothy and Marion, all graduated from Kansas State University in Manhattan. The two sons, and the two men Mildred and Dorothy married, all earned PhDs. Education was clearly valued in that family.



In the recent few decades there has been an explosion of popular commentary and academic research emphasizing how, when we think of our ancestors, we have discounted “women’s work.” “Women’s work” is housework, child care, or other work in the home, no matter how valuable, that was not paid. Maria, Katy and Mary were all engaged in “women’s work,” but it was invaluable for their families even though it was unpaid and often unacknowledged. Despite the differences in their backgrounds, Maria, Katy and Mary devoted their adult lives to their families.

#### 5. What is the value of remembering?

I have repeated many times in this story, “we don’t know much about . . .” The reason we know anything about Maria, Katy, and Mary is that their children and grandchildren thought so much of them that they wanted their own children and grandchildren to remember. Katy’s grandchildren were the source of many of the stories about her that Homer put in his books, and Mary’s children and grandchildren remembered so much about her that we can repeat what they knew. We would know almost nothing about Maria or her life in Russia without D.D.’s memoir.

Just as important is the professional interest Homer developed into detailed historical research as background for the personal stories. His thorough research verifies what Maria’s and Katy’s children remembered, and gives us cultural context.

Now . . . What is the point of telling these historical stories? Although reading about history is fun and interesting, even historians do not live in the past. Like everyone, historians live in the present and in the future.

Talking about our ancestors helps us understand who we are and where we came from. For example, Maria and Katy’s Pietistic Lutheranism, which evolved in America into the German Baptist Church, instilled in them frugality, humility, restraint, the importance of service to others, and a sense of duty and order. Although the German Baptist Church no longer exists and many of our family are no longer church-goers, do you recognize any of these qualities in your relatives? Surely, Maria’s and Katy’s influence has lasted for generations.

Talking about our relatives also inspires us. How much courage it must have taken for Maria to urge her entire family to leave everything they had known and emigrate to a new place 8,000 miles away. Maria knew that if they stayed, they would lose

everything she valued most. And how much love for her family that decision shows. We have much to learn from her determination.

Katy's belief in the grace and giving of the divine creator encouraged her to give so much to others. Or, to say the same thing in a more contemporary way, Katy recognized her great good fortune and her life of abundance, and wanted to give back. Her life of work and service to others tells us a lot about her character and values.

And Mary's devotion to her husband and her children and her quiet determination that they would have a good life says much about her character.

But still, this story repeats often, "we don't know much about . . ." While we know much about our parents, our grandparents, and our siblings, what will our great-grandchildren know if we do not write it down?

Now I'm talking to you younger people. It is your responsibility to talk to your parents and grandparents. Ask them about their childhoods, what they did and what they dreamed, and how they lived. And write it down or record it and keep it so it can be shared by your great-grandchildren.

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A note about sources:

We are fortunate that one of our family was a historian, and that he was interested in preserving family information. Homer Edward Socolofsky was Mary and Abe's son, born in 1922. He earned his PhD in History from the University of Missouri, and for about 40 years taught history at Kansas State University, specializing in Kansas history and history of the Great Plains. He wrote three books about the Socolofsky family, all self-published. *The Socolofsky Family: A History* was published in 1973 and included much original research in addition to a compilation of family stories, genealogy, and descriptions of life in Russia and on the farms in Kansas. *The Socolofsky Family: An Update* was published in 1986. In it, Homer filled in information not available when he wrote the first book, and updated the genealogy. The third book, *Jesse David Reneau and Ella May Ferguson: Their Lives, Their Ancestors and their Descendents* (2003), is about Homer's parents and their ancestry. Jesse and Ella's daughter, Mary Belle

Reneau, married Abraham Lincoln Socolofsky. Abe and Mary were Homer's parents. It is quite rare that a family has as much information about their ancestors as contained in these books, and rare indeed that a professional historian compiled the information. The summary here of the lives of Maria, Katy and Mary owes much to these books. Homer's "Socolofsky" books are digitized on the family website, [www.socolofsky.org](http://www.socolofsky.org).

David Daniel Socolofsky (known as D.D.), who was born in Russia and is Gottfried II and Maria's youngest child, wrote a memoir intended for his children. The memoir, *The Life of David D. Socolofsky 1870-1959: From Saratov, Russia to Salem, Oregon*, includes much information about life in Russia and the family's move to Kansas. D.D.'s memoir is on the family website.

Go to the website to see pictures of all the people in this story.

In addition, I was curious about the lives of women in the 19th and 20th centuries in America. Some of the sources I consulted are:

Stratton, Joanna L. (1982). *Pioneer Women: Voices From the Kansas Frontier*. Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Smith, Michelle C. (2021). *Utopian Genderscapes: Rhetorics of Women's Work in the Early Industrial Age*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Faderman, Lillian (2022). *Woman: The American History of an Idea*. Yale University Press.

Vandenberg-Daves, Jodi (2014). *Modern Motherhood: An American History*. Rutgers University Press.

Coburn, Carol K. (1992). *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German-Lutheran Community, 1968-1945*. Kansas University Press. (Available in print or as a free download from the KU Press website - [kansaspress.ku.edu](http://kansaspress.ku.edu))

Socolofsky, Homer E. (1977). *Kansas in 1876*. Kansas History: a Journal of the Central Plains, Spring 1977, Vol. 43, No. 1. (Available at [ksks.org/p/kansas-in-1876/13268](http://ksks.org/p/kansas-in-1876/13268)).

There also is much historical information about Germans from Russia on the Internet, no doubt because there are millions of descendants of German Russians in the United States interested in their ancestors' lives.

Finally, some information used here about Mary and others was told to me by my mother, Penny (Helen Margot Wright Socolofsky), and by my aunt Esther (Esther Marie Green Socolofsky).