

## How to be Buried in Two Places at Once

### Karl Schneider's Mystery Grave

by Charles Swenson

There are many unanswered questions about who's buried at Camptown Cemetery. There are an estimated 400 burials there but little more than a hundred have been documented. Some of the souls resting there are known from death certificates, while others are revealed by their markers. These markers range from elaborately carved plinths to etched names added in concrete on plot borders. The Isaacs family plot even has both a cement tablet with George and Martha's names written in cursive freehand before the cement set, and next to it one of the most elaborate plots, with four vaults enclosed by a cement footer.

But there is one gravestone that truly unique. Karl Schneider's tombstone is strikingly unlike any others in this black cemetery in that it is in German. Why a Prussian emigrant was buried amongst so many previously enslaved freedmen remains a mystery that raises far many questions than answers, especially since he also has a grave marker which may indicate he is buried a county away.



There is no Karl Schneider listed in the census records that accords with the listed birth date, February 23, 1824, or the month of his death, July, 1881, and no death certificate has been found. Absence in the official records is not uncommon for persons buried in the Camptown Cemetery, and what records do exist are often riddled with inconsistencies and errors. This may be partially due to the high rates of poverty and illiteracy among the recently emancipated population buried there. Census enumeration prior to 1870 listed whites only, while slave censuses for Texas are for slaveholders and list simply the age of slaves.

But even for the literate and well off, records can be scarce and inconsistent. Waltman Bynum, a mulatto merchant and city alderman whose funeral was attended by Mayor Kerr and other city officials at the Camptown Cemetery, does not have a death certificate; he appears in the 1880 Census as W.B. Bynum, but not in the 1870 Census. He is listed on his marriage certificate as Waterman Binum. His political office was only first uncovered in a fragment of an obituary in a badly worm-eaten online copy of the Brenham Weekly Banner with the wrong date, and later in two Council Hall records, one noting his election and the other the vacancy occasioned by his death. The obituary refers to him as Waterman, rather than the Waltman engraved on his gravemarker, leaving it uncertain which spelling is correct.

But Camptown cemetery is a predominantly black cemetery, though there are a few exceptions. There is a record of a John Richard buried in July of 1925 in "Camps", which the Camptown Cemetery is frequently referred to in death certificates of the time. Richard was born in 1843 in Germany according to Census records, listed as single until the 1920 census. He lived in Brenham in the household of Alec Simon, a Polish born dry goods merchant, along with Simon's sons, whose occupations are listed as "Gents Furnishers" and "Capitalist." The only other listed non-white buried in "Camps", per his death certificate at least, was Donaciano Ramiols. He is listed as a laborer born in Mexico, about 70 years old, dying as a result of being "shot in pistol, in left side, by unknown party."

But, at least in 1880, there were some restrictions on who could be buried in Camptown Cemetery, and when. The Brenham Weekly Banner from July 8, 1880, has an article touching on the subject titled "Wouldn't Have It."

*Sam Stinnett, colored, took the contract to bury the body of Barney Tullis, who was found dead on Monday. He hauled the corpse to Camptown and proposed burying it at night in the colored cemetery. Deacon Chiles heard of this and interposed his objection, saying that no white paupers should be buried there; some others were of the same opinion and Tullis was buried on Monday night. Early on Tuesday morning the remains were taken to the old cemetery and interred.*

So Karl Schneider's tombstone raises some interesting questions. Although he clearly was not a pauper, judging from the quality the work done on his tombstone, up until this time no other whites are known to have been buried in Camptown, and would not be for almost a half century. So who was Karl Schneider? Sorting through the census records for a Schneider eventually led to only one clear match for Karl (or Carl, or Charles, or C.) Schneider (or Snyder, or Sneider) for the dates of birth and death on the Camptown tombstone - Karl Peter Daniel Schneider.

Karl seems to have been better known, after emigrating to the United States from his native Prussia, as Carl, Charles and Charley in various records, with Snider as one variant of his last name. He was born Peter Carl Daniel Schneider on February 27, 1823 in Lauterecken, Pfalz, Bayem, Germany. He moved to Millheim, a community in the vicinity of Cat Spring, an area where a number of successful emigre communities were established prior to the founding of the Texas Republic. He was a successful businessman who operated a general merchandise store where he also served as the town's postmaster (for which he received a salary of \$20) from March of 1869 until his death. This store, which was also the location of the post office, stood "on the high bluff of the Constant Creek" and "was a landmark until recently rzed. In the front of the store was the Millheim post office with its many open pigeon holes and where one anxiously waited to be handed the Galveston Weekly News."

Schneider, his wife Theresa, and their eight children lived in a large stucco house previously owned by Dr Hermann Nagel, a doctor who had fled to Mexico in 1863 due to his opposition to both secession and slavery with his son Charles, who was later to serve as Secretary of Commerce and Labor under the Taft administration. The only indication of Schneider's political leanings comes from the front page of the Houston Daily Mercury for September 5, 1873, where he listed as an accredited delegate to the Texas Democratic Convention in Austin. Adalbert Regenbrecht, in his 1916 article "The German Settlers of Millheim (Texas) before the Civil War" wrote "All Germans of Millheim were Democrats, but, as the democratic Party in the Southern States was for slavery, many Germans did not join said party...Ninety-nine votes were cast against secession, eight for secession at the Millheim-Catspring box. Nearly every one voted."

The Austin County tax rolls refer to Schneider by variants of his name from at least 1858 to 1871. Judging by these tax rolls and the estate he'd left his wife after his death, Schneider was quite well to do. The year after his death his wife is listed for his properties on these records, which included \$4000 in cash, \$2500 in goods and merchandise, two wheeled conveyances (whether wagons, buggies or carriages is not clear from the records), 15 horses, 25 cattle, and three tracts of land totaling 127 acres and valued at \$1500. After his death, the office of postmaster was taken up by his son Charles F. Schneider on July 18, 1881 until July 7, 1894, when the office passed on to Charles' brother Alfred, who in turn held it until 1897.

Theresa Loeffler was born on April 19, 1831 in Josthal, Schwarzwald, Baden-Wurtemberg in Germany, and after her arrival in Millheim was married on November 23, 1854. She survived him and died on November 18, 1907. Their children included Julia, Augusta, Charles, Louis, Oscar, Alfred, Paul and Alma. While no death certificate or obituary has been located for her, an obituary for Theresa has surfaced.

*"Died at Channing.*

*Louis Schneider received a telegram Tuesday morning conveying the sad intelligence that his mother, Mrs. Theresa Schneider, had died at an early hour at the home of her son Alfred. The sad news, ever the same to all who are compelled to recognize the inevitable and give up their very best friend, was heard with sorrowing hearts by the lady's many friends here. From Channing the remains were taken to Millheim, her old home, and there interred in the new cemetery by the side of her husband, who preceded her on the great journey in 1881.*

*Mrs. Schneider was born in Germany and in the early 40's when but a child her parents emigrated*

*to America. Shortly after landing at Galveston they journeyed to Millheim, then a wilderness, where she grew to womanhood and as Miss Theresa Laffere became the wife of Chas, Schneider, a merchant at that point. Twelve children were born unto them, seven of whom have passed to their reward. Those living are Louise Schneider, Oscar of Amarillo, Alfred of Channing, Paul of Houston, and Mrs. Julia Wertha of Eagle Lake. Besides these, the deceased has left to mourn her departure twenty-four grand children and several great grand children. At the time of her demise, Mrs. Schneider was 76 years of age. May she rest in peace. “*

This obituary indicates that Theresa Schneider was interred by the side of her husband in Millheim Cemetery, which only serves to deepen the mystery of a separate headstone existing for him in Camptown Cemetery. But it wasn't until April of 1882 that the Bunge and Swearingen families formed the Millheim Cemetery Association, with the first graves dating to 1884, when plots cost \$1.25. Given that Karl Schneider died in July of 1881, he could not have been buried there originally after his death.

Yet there is a marker there for Karl P.D. Schneider, but not a traditional tombstone or gravemarker. It is a large obelisk or possibly a cenotaph over ten feet high, topped by an urn covered by a veil, manufactured by Stolz in LaGrange. The south side is blank and footed by the inscription Schneider, the east side dedicated to Theresa Schneider, the north side to Alma Burroughs, their daughter who died at the age of 25 in 1902, and the west side to Karl P. D. Schneider. The inscription beneath Karl Schneiders translates to “As a husband, father, and friend, Rest Here, mourned by many, A Man who always practiced virtue, And loyalty and honest loved. Peace be with you.”

(These lines of verse are found also in „Wiederssehen! Eine Sammlung von 424 auserlesenen, zum Gebrauche besonders geeigneten Grabschriften, Prag, 1848.“ a book whose title translates as “Goodbye! A collection (of 424 exquisite sayings, especially suited for grave epitaphs,” published in Prague in 1848.)



Why Karl Schneider has a tombstone in Camptown Cemetery as well as a much more expensive and prominent marker in Millheim Cemetery remains a mystery. The most logical conclusion is that he was buried originally in Camptown and was later re-interred, or at least his memory commemorated, in Millheim Cemetery. If he was buried in Millheim at any time after it was established, his earlier tombstone did not transmigrate with him. But while this would explain a tombstone in two different graveyards, his burial over twenty five miles away in a different county also raises unanswered questions. One possibility is that as a merchant he died unexpectedly in Brenham while on a business trip and transporting his corpse in the heat of summer was not an immediate or feasible possibility.

But the most baffling aspect of the Camptown Schneider tombstone is the extremely unusual presence of

a well to do white man's grave in a black man's cemetery a county at a time when social equality between the races was not a consideration, despite the growth of post emancipation civil equality. But Schneider was also a German immigrant from an area of strong antipathy to slavery and secession prior to the Civil War, living in a house previously inhabited by a prominent abolitionist. Schneider's particular attitudes regarding the state of race relations in the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction are unknown, but the mystery of his marker certainly offers an opportunity to consider the interactions existing between German emigres and the post-Emancipation black community.