

The Kercher Story – Concern for Their Only Child

By Cheryl Herrmann
October 2026

There are moments in every family's story when a single decision changes the course of generations.

For Friedrich Kärcher and his wife, Katharina, that moment came when they stood at the edge of the unknown—leaving behind everything familiar in Biblis, Germany, to seek a new life across the ocean. Their journey was not just one of miles, but of courage, sacrifice, and deep concern for the future of their only child.

In Biblis, a community in the Bergstraße district in southern Hessen, Germany, lived the Kärcher family. Friedrich Kärcher, son of Johann Heinrich Kärcher and Maria Eva Hoffmann, was born on 17 August 1812 in Biblis, the ninth of eleven children. His life reflects the trepidation and difficult choices required to leave his parents and homeland behind, and to immigrate miles across the ocean to a distant country.



Friedrich Kercher (1812 – 1897)
and
Katharina Kissel (1814-1893)
(Photo circa 1891)
photo courtesy of Leroy Kercher

Biblis lies in the Rhine Rift Valley, west of the Odenwald, a low mountain range spanning Hessen, Bavaria, and Baden-Württemberg. Darmstadt lies to the north, Mannheim to the south, and the city of Worms to the west. The town, known for its close-knit community and traditional timber-framed homes (Fachwerkhäuser), was a place where generations lived side by side. The 1720 map of Biblis reflects this tightly woven life—families clustered together, surrounded by the fields that sustained them. (Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblis>)



Surrounding cities around Biblis.

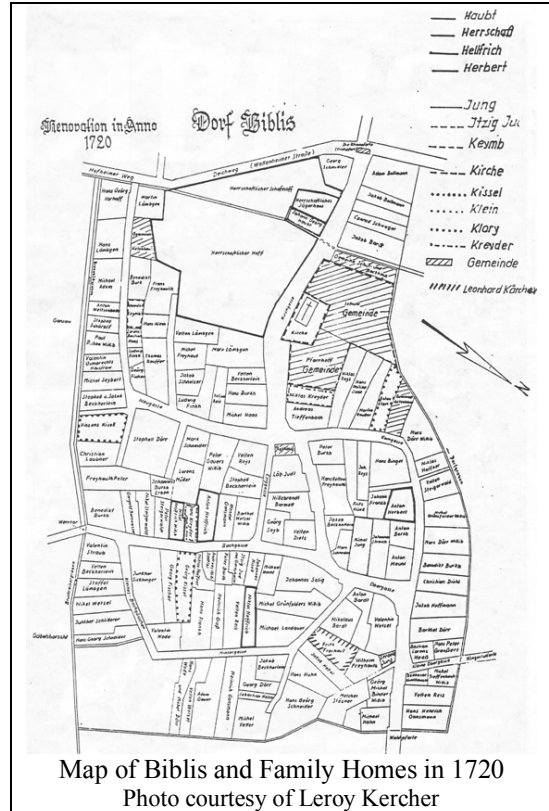
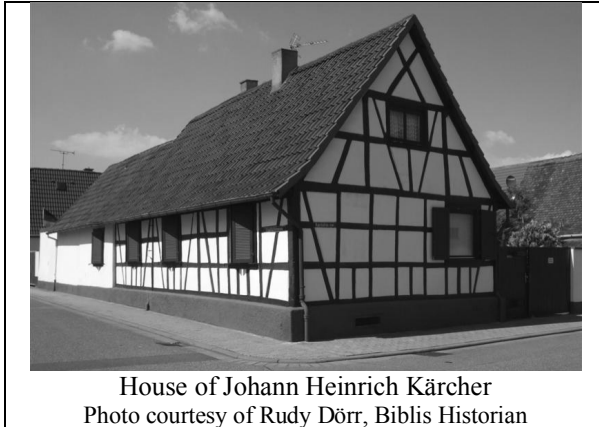
Source: www.weather-forecast.com/locations/Biblis



Location of Biblis in Germany

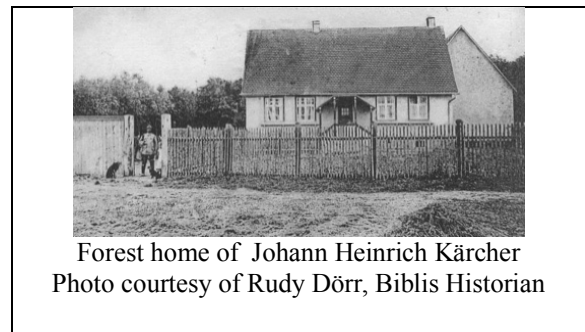
Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblis>

The Kärcher home, built in 1750 by Johann Heinrich Kärcher, still stands today—a lasting symbol of the family’s roots. Most homes were traditional German timber-framed homes (*Fachwerkhaus*), constructed using a sturdy skeleton of heavy wooden beams, primarily oak. Between these timbers, the empty spaces (*Gefache*) were infilled with woven branches covered in mud and clay straw, quarry stones, or bricks, and often finished with plaster.



Johann Heinrich Kärcher, a *Waldschutz* (forest warden), was tasked with protecting the woods. Despite his dedication, his work was made difficult by a crippled foot (*Stumpfuß*), which caused him great pain, especially in winter.

Appointed as a game preserver in 1823 by Mayor Marsch, he struggled physically to pursue poachers, yet remained committed to his duty.



Of the eleven children born to Johann Heinrich and Maria Eva Hoffmann, only four survived to adulthood: *Valentine*, *Peter*, *Katharina*, and *Friedrich*.

Valentine Kärcher married Elisabeth Jäger and remained in Biblis. *Peter* Kärcher also remained in Biblis to raise his family there.

Katharina married Johann Weber of nearby Einhausen. She died in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Kärcher On their wedding day, little did they know that their marriage would span two countries. They all lived together with his parents in the Kärcher house.

Church Record of the Wedding of Friedrich Kärcher and Katharina Kissel
at St. Bartholomew Catholic Church, Biblis, Hesse - 1840
Record courtesy of Leroy Kercher

Birth and Baptism record of Johann Kärcher,
St. Bartholomew Catholic Church, Biblis - 1841
Record courtesy of Leroy Kercher

Friedrich Kercher Pfeifer	Joseph Nicolaus
Johannes Kissel Gernsheim	Beneficiat to

Historical records from Biblis suggest that Johann Weber exerted a negative influence on Friedrich, and both men were accused of poaching. Though Friedrich's father, Johann Heinrich, bore no responsibility, these events led to his demotion to unskilled labor under a new game preserver, Adam Barth—an event that likely brought hardship and humiliation to the family.

Life in Biblis grew increasingly difficult. Between 1831 and 1837, many residents fell victim to cholera. Agricultural struggles and economic uncertainty weighed heavily on families. Meanwhile, letters from America spoke of opportunity, fertile land, and hope. Beginning around 1840, large groups from Biblis began emigrating, many bound for Indiana.

According to *Familien in Biblis* by Josef Bauer, over 100 families (approximately 300 residents) left this community of 1,100 residents in the mid-1800s and immigrated to the United States, most settling in southern Indiana.

The family surnames were:

Angert, Barth, Bauer, Baumgart, Beckerle, Beickert, Bender, Berg, Binz, Bitsch, Bolmann, Borgenheimer, Burck, Diefenbach, Diehl, Dietz, Dölger, Dörr, Drackert, Eberle, Eichhorn, Engert, Enghof, Franck, Franz, Freihaut, Fries, Gansmann, Gauer, Geisel, Gleich, Glück, Grieser, Griesheime, Haas, Häuser, Hahn, Hausenbauer, Hebling, Heimberger, Heiser, Helfrich, Hellrich, Herbert, Hertling, Hille, Höger, Hömerthe, Hofmann, Huba, Jakob, Janson, Kärcher, Kappel, Keil, Kemmerer, Kissel, Königfeld, Kreiter, Kunz, Lämbgen, Laubner, Lohrbacher, Lulay, Marsch, Maus, Mergler, Merz, Metz, Mischler, Mott, Montag, Müller, Münch, Neff, Nock, Ost, Platz, Rau, Raufert, Reiling, Reis, Ritzert, Roth, Schab, Scherer, Schmehlig, Schmitt, Schmitz, Schneider, Schorn, Schwind, Seib, Seibert, Stenner, Straub, Stromberger, Stumpf, Trageser, Vogt, Vorhof, Vormehr, Werr, Wetzler, Ziemer.
(Source: *Familien in Biblis*, Pages 606, 607)

For Friedrich and Katharina, the decision to leave was not easy. With their only son, Johann, to consider, the risks felt immense.

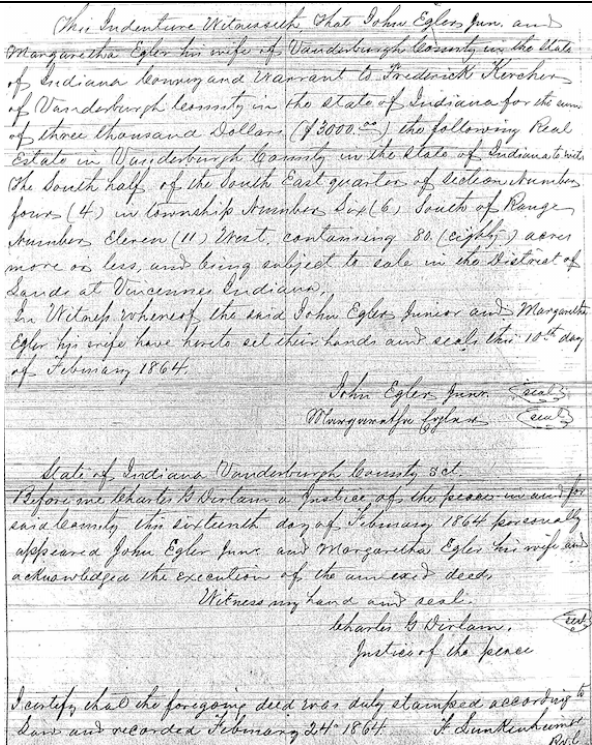
Yet Katharina's brother, Heinrich Kissel, had already settled in Indiana, and neighbors wrote encouraging letters describing the promise of a better life. At last, convinced the opportunity outweighed the fear, the family made their choice – “nach Amerika.”

2744	∞ 26.07.1840: <u>Friedrich Kercher</u> , * 17.08.1812 (aus 2737) u. <u>Katharina Kissel</u> , * 20.03.1814 (aus 2914). Kdr.Johann * 07.07.1841 Die Familie ist nach 1841 nach Amerika.
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Entry 2744 in *Familien in Biblis*, by Josef Bauer, Page 318

They departed from the Port of Havre, France, and arrived in New Orleans on 29 June 1846 aboard the ship Medford, under Captain Master Wilbur. There were 218 passengers on board, many from Biblis. It was during this journey that their surname was solidified as **Kercher**.

On 10 February 1864, Friedrich purchased 80 acres of land for \$3,000 from John and Margaretha Egler in Section 4, Township 6 South, Range 11 West. Margaretha (Kissel) Egler was Katharina's niece. Widowed young with four small children, Margaretha later remarried in 1874 to John Henry Tenbarge, a widower with 2 daughters.



Indenture for 80 acres of land purchased 10 Feb 1864, by Friedrich Kercher from John and Margaretha Egler for \$3,000, Section 4 of Township 6 South, Range 11 West;
Recorded in Vanderburgh County on 24 February 1864,
Book 14 Page 198.

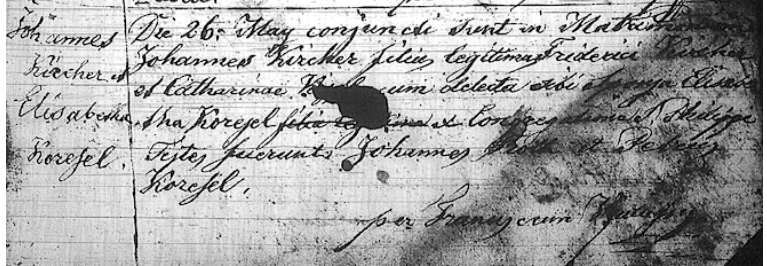


1880 Atlas, German Township
Vanderburgh County, Indiana



1899 Atlas, German Township
Vanderburgh County, Indiana

On 26 May 1868, Johann married Elizabeth Koressel in Vanderburgh County, the daughter of Katharina (Born) and Franz Koressel. It was a joyful celebration, marking the beginning of the next generation.



Marriage record of Johann Kercher to Elizabeth Koressel on 26 May, 1868, Holy Trinity Church, Evansville, Ind

Per the 1870 U.S. Census, Friedrich and Katharina remained on their farm, now valued at \$6,000, with a personal estate of \$800. Johann and Elizabeth lived next door with their son,

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Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

SCHEDULE I. Inhabitants in German Township, in the County of Vanderburgh, State of Indiana, enumerated by me on the _____ day of August, 1870.

Post Office: Evans Phil Drees, Ass't Marshal

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession	Value	Married	Single	Widow	Orphan	Deaf	Mute	Blind	Insane	Pauper	Foreign Born	Native Born
89	Kuchy, John	M	58	W	Farmer	above 800											
90	Kadarina	F	56	W	Keeping house												
91	Kuchy, John	M	27	W	Farmer	100											
92	Elizabeth	F	20	W	Keeping house												
93	Smith, John	M	1	W													

1870 U.S. Census - Indiana - Vanderburgh County - German Township

Surrounded by neighbors from similar German backgrounds, the community they once knew in Biblis, in many ways, had been recreated in Germantown, Vanderburgh County, Indiana, now known as Kasson. Nearby neighbors listed on the same census page were Michael Hartman, John Kern, Elizabeth Seibert, Christ Seibert, and Anton Schili.

[7-296.]

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Supervisor's Dist. No. 13

Enumeration Dist. No. 73

Note A.—The Census Year begins June 1, 1870, and ends May 31, 1880.

Note B.—All persons will be included in the Enumeration who were living on the 1st day of June, 1880. No others will. Children BORN SINCE June 1, 1880, will be OMITTED. Members of Families who have DIED SINCE June 1, 1880, will be INCLUDED.

Note C.—Questions Nos. 13, 14, 22 and 23 are not to be asked in respect to persons under 10 years of age.

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in German Township, in the County of Vanderburgh, State of Indiana, enumerated by me on the 7 day of June, 1880.

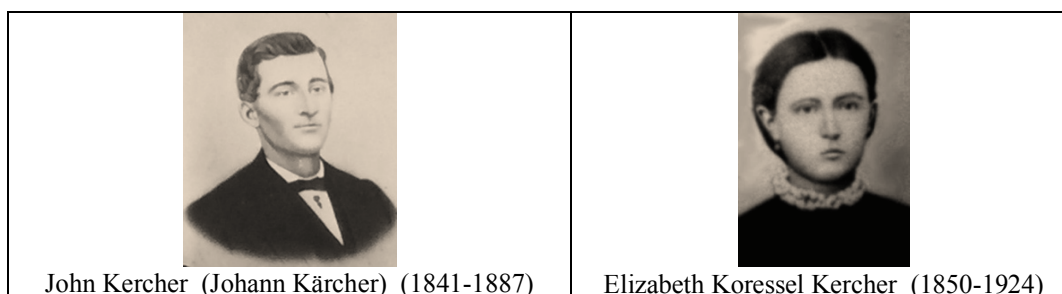
J. H. Hester, Enumerator.



Painting of the Kercher Homestead

According to his obituary, Friedrich, known warmly as “Fritz” among his many close friends, became one of the oldest and most respected residents of the West End of Vanderburgh County. To the children of the neighborhood, he was simply “Uncle Fred”—a beloved figure whose presence brought comfort and joy. He was welcomed in homes both humble and grand, a man whose kindness knew no boundaries. At the close of each day’s labor, he could often be found surrounded by eager young listeners, captivated by his stories of earlier times—of roaming deer and the days when Native Americans were still a familiar sight in Vanderburgh County.

Yet even a life so rich in community and affection was not without profound sorrow. On October 3, 1887, Friedrich’s only son, John Kercher, died at the young age of 46. He left behind his wife, Elizabeth, eight children, and another child soon to be born. The loss was devastating. The mother had already endured the heartbreak of losing a daughter, Elisabeth, who had lived only one week.



Todes-Anzeige. Starb: Am Montag, den 3. Oktober 1887, Nachmittags 12½ Uhr, unser innigst geliebter Gatte und Vater John Kercher, im Alter von 47 Jahren, 2 Monaten und 26 Tagen. Die Beerdigung findet am Mittwoch, den 5. Oktober, Morgens 8 Uhr, vom Trauerhause in German Township, in der Nähe von Fares' Place und um 9 Uhr von der Kirche in St. Joseph aus statt und sind dazu alle Verwandte und Bekannte ohne weitere Notiz eingeladen. Die tiefbetrübte Wittwe Elisabeth Kercher, geb. Koressel, nebst 8 Kindern. Death Notice in Taglicher Demokrat, October 1887	Translated Death Notice. Died: On Monday, October 3, 1887, at 12:30 p.m., our dearly beloved husband and father, John Kercher, at the age of 47 years, 2 months, and 26 days. The funeral will take place on Wednesday, October 5, at 8:00 a.m., starting from the family home in German Township (near Fares Place) and proceeding at 9:00 a.m. from the church in St. Joseph; all relatives and acquaintances are invited to attend without further notice. The deeply bereaved widow, Elisabeth Kercher (née Koressel), together with 8 children.
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In the shadow of this tragedy, and with advancing age upon him, Friedrich turned his thoughts to the future of his family. Prior to the upcoming birth of his grandson, Joseph, he made the solemn decision to prepare his last will and testament. Two weeks after John’s death, on the 18th day of October 1887, Friedrich bequeathed “all my property real and personal use fee simple” to his beloved wife, Katharina. The document was witnessed by Sebastian Heinrich and Joseph Heumel—a final act of care and responsibility for those he loved most.

Now in their seventies, Friedrich and Katharina took on the enormous responsibility of helping to raise their nine grandchildren—Frederick, John, Mary Anna, Henry William, Catherine, Barthel, Peter, George, and Joseph. Their home once again echoed with the sounds of childhood, even as their hearts carried the weight of loss. When young Joseph died at the age of three in

1891, the family endured yet another sorrow. Still, they persevered, sustained by faith, family, and resilience.

Even in his later years, Friedrich remained active and ever willing to lend a helping hand to neighbors and friends. On 16 June 1892, he narrowly escaped a fatal accident. As reported in the *Evansville Journal* and *Evansville Courier*, Friedrich had been trimming grapevines at the arbor of Mr. Helfrich, located at the corner of Michigan Street and Ninth Avenue. As he climbed a step-ladder to finish the task, the ladder suddenly toppled, throwing him violently to the ground. He lay unconscious for twenty minutes, and those who gathered feared the worst – he may have died. A physician was called and, through determined effort, succeeded in reviving him. Friedrich was then taken to his city residence at the corner of Wabash Avenue and Virginia Street to recover.

Friedrich had enjoyed remarkably good health for much of his life. However, at the age of 84, he fell ill with pneumonia, which led to his death on the 6th of January 1897. A lifelong member of the Catholic Church, he remained steadfast in his faith. He had not missed a service, a mass or a confession for years. His devotion was as constant as his character.

At his passing, Friedrich was remembered as one of the oldest and most well-known residents of the west side of Evansville. His funeral at St. Boniface Catholic Church drew a large gathering of family and friends.

Seven surviving grandchildren stood among those who came to honor a noble man remembered for his strength, kindness, and enduring spirit.

Four years earlier, at the age of 79, Katharina passed away on 9 July 1893, in Vanderburgh County.

Both are laid to rest at St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery in Evansville, Indiana.



Gravestone of Friedrich and Katharina Kercher

From the simple phrase recorded in *Familien in Biblis*—“Die Familie ist nach 1841 nach Amerika”—to a thriving farm in Vanderburgh County, Indiana, Friedrich Kärcher, later known as Fred Kercher, and his wife Katharina, followed a path shared by many immigrants, yet lived in a way that made this journey uniquely meaningful.

They sought land, opportunity, and a future for their family—and found all three.

The Kercher descendants continue to have reunions and small family gatherings since.

- In July 1947, his descendants gathered to celebrate 100 years in America. By then, the family had grown to more than 800 descendants, many still living near the original homestead.
- In 1994, an afternoon gathering of 150+ descendants at Twin Towers commemorated the approaching 150th anniversary of the 1846 immigration.



Grandchildren of Friedrich and Katharina Kercher
Henry, Fred, George, Barthol, Peter, Alma, Mary Ann, Kate
at the Kercher Reunion, July 1947
Photo courtesy of Leroy Kercher

- On Sunday, October 9, 2016, another reunion was held at Twin Towers, 3501 Mesker Park Drive in Evansville, Indiana, marking the Dodransbicentennial (175 years) in America.

A souvenir sheet, designed by Michelle (Hartmann) Crawford, was shared with attendees, along with the family history book, *Kercher Dodransbicentennial*.



Souvenir Sheet designed by Michelle Hartmann Crawford

What began as a difficult and uncertain choice—to leave Biblis and risk everything for a better future—became the foundation of a lasting legacy. Friedrich and Katharina’s courage ensured not only survival, but prosperity for generations to come. Their story is one of resilience, faith, and above all, love for their only child—a love strong enough to carry them across an ocean and into history.

The risk Friedrich and Katharina took in bringing their only son to America proved immeasurably worthwhile. From that single branch of 10 grandchildren and 42 great-grandchildren, grew a family tree of more than 1,200 descendants by 2026—a living testament to their courage, sacrifice, and enduring love.

Today, every descendant stands as living proof that their journey was valuable, as their sacrifice is remembered in every branch of the family tree that continues to grow.

Four Generations in Indiana

Friedrich Kercher (1812 - 1897) & Katharina Kissel (1814 - 1893)

Johann Kercher (1841 - 1887) & Elizabeth Koressel (1850 - 1924)

Frederick Kercher* (1869 - 1954) & Elizabeth Barbara Nurrenbern (1869 - 1897)

John Frederick Kercher (1892 - 1973) & Catherine Appolonia Beckerle (1894 - 1973)

Frederick Henry Kercher (1893 - 1971) & Aurelia Schentrup (1899 - 1941)

Bernhardt William Kercher (1895 - 1956) & Wilhelmina Mary Denning (1896 - 1982)

Frederick Kercher* (1869 - 1954) & Anna Mary Lindenschmidt (1861 - 1930)

Edward Kercher (1900 - 1978) & Therese Bender (1904 - 1990)

Leo Kercher (1901 - 1901)

Leo Anthony Kercher (1902 - 1943) & Veronica Catherine Wannemuehler (1902 - 1987)

Anne Elisabeth Kercher (1905 - 2002) & Esker Earl Chandler (1908 - 1939)

Infant Kercher (1908 - 1908)

John Kercher (1870 - 1922) & Katherine Schili (1871 - 1947)

Josephine Catharine Kercher (1891 - 1974) & Henry Frank Niemeier (1881 - 1963)

Elizabeth Kercher (1893 - 1980) & Louis Joseph Herrmann (1888 - 1971)

Infant Male Kercher (1893 - 1893)

Joseph Kercher (1894 - 1950) & Clara Reis (1896 - 1994)

Mary Magdalen Kercher (1895 - 1987) & Francis Anthony Goebel (1889 - 1975)

Eleanore M Kercher (1898 - 1972) & Henry Emil Herrmann (1894 - 1961)

George Kercher (1903 - 1957) & Mildred Mary Folz (1912 - 2004)

Catherine Kercher (1903 - 1998) & Frederick Kleitz (1898 - 1960)

John Adam Kercher (1907 - 1986) & Agnes Margaret Nurrenbern (1907 - 2006)

Louise Margaret Kercher (1911 - 1912)

Elisabeth A Kercher (1872 - 1872)

Mary Anna Kercher* (1874 - 1955) & John Joseph Loeffler (1873 - 1934)

Joseph John Loeffler (1894 - 1974) & Wilhelmina Elizabeth Waterman (1900 - 1997)

Mary Alvina Loeffler (1898 - 1984) & Edmund Groben (1894 - 1986)

John Frank Loeffler (1903 - 1985) & Katherine Ann Schele (1903 - 1954)

Louis William Loeffler (1907 - 1971) & Mary Jeanette Veneman (1908 - 1967)

Mary Anna Kercher* (1874 - 1955)

William John Kercher (1891 - 1891)

Henry William Kercher (1876 - 1961) & Anna Eva Klein (1882 - 1949)

John William Kercher (1902 - 1961) & Rose Margaret Nurrenbern (1903 - 1992)

Margaret E Kercher* (1903 - 1988) & Oscar H Schmidt (1898 - 1962)

Margaret E Kercher* (1903 - 1988) & Edward Mann (1897 - 1972)

Ida Margaret Kercher* (1906 - 1987) & George W Bittner (1900 - 1958)

Ida Margaret Kercher* (1906 - 1987) & Leslie Utley (1896 - 1991)

Marie Emily Kercher (1908 - 2006) & James T Derrington (1904 - 1996)

August Henry Kercher (1911 - 1986) & Esther Schweikhard (1909 - 1999)

Evelyn Magdaline (Olga) Kercher (1917 - 2014) & Clemens Aloyse Weiss (1914 - 2004)

		Catherine Kercher (1878 - 1957) & Anton Frank Schili Jr. (1874 - 1952)
		Elizabeth Schili (1903 - 1995) & Albert H Hillenbrand (1901 - 1963)
		Martha Katherine Schili (1914 - 1999) & Clarence Theodore Hartlein (1905 - 1981)
		Barthel Kercher (1881 - 1958) & Mary Katherine Niemeier (1883 - 1962)
		Unnamed Female Infant Kercher (1910 - 1910)
		Francis Anthony Kercher (1919 - 2011) & Teckla Bertha Baumgart (1919 - 1997)
		Peter Kercher* (1883 - 1961) & Ida Kathryn Rouff (1886 - 1910)
		Fredric John Kercher (1910 - 1988) & Julia Ann Radovan (1920 - 2012)
		Peter Kercher* (1883 - 1961) & Alma Jennie Dunham (1896 - 1975)
		Elma Jessie Kercher (1916 - 1998) & Floyd Wallace Starkey (1911 - 1984)
		Peter Craig Kercher (1918 - 2001) & Bessie Katherine Price (1920 - 2015)
		Paul Robert Kercher (1923 - 2016) & Margie Mae Kuckenbaker (1922 - 2012)
		Myrtle Jean Kercher* (1928 - 2008) & Peter J Koppenaal (1924 - 1985)
		Myrtle Jean Kercher* (1928 - 2008) & Lyle Lester Powers Sr (1921 - 1996)
		Bernice Alleen Kercher (1930 - 2012) & Ben Charles Francis (1931 - 2005)
		George Kercher (1886 - 1960) & Amelia Elizabeth Happe (1890 - 1970)
		Alvin Frederick Kercher (1914 - 1998) & Irene Hearin (1914 - 2005)
		Cletus August Kercher (1916 - 1994) & Lucy Catherine Hare (1917 - 1974)
		Dorothy Catherine Kercher (1917 - 2003) & Cletus George Schmitt (1915 - 1973)
		Joseph Kercher (1887 - 1891)

Note: * denotes more than one marriage

The End