

Sophie Kaestli Jenkins

15 August 1869 - 23 January 1960

By Mary Louise Jenkins Lillian, May 2012

These writings about Sophie Kaestli Jenkins and her family are from the memories of her children and grandchildren; the 1895 SS Furnessia ship passenger list; census records; family photographs; and documents concerning the history of the Kaestli family.

History of Sophie Kaestli Jenkins

By Anna Ogden Jenkins, daughter-in-law, about 1960

Notes by Mary Louise Jenkins Lillian, 2012

Sophie Kaestli was born on August 15, 1869, in St. Margrethen, Switzerland, in the canton of St. Gallen, the third child and second daughter of Johann and Paulina Ruesch Kaestli. It is a beautiful and peaceful valley where the village of St. Margrethen is situated, with the Rhine River running down through it. At this point, it is a broad valley, with lovely rich farm lands spreading on both sides of the river and the beautiful mountains on both sides. When Sophie was a child, her father farmed a piece of land on the other side of the river, and that was in Germany. She used to go with her father and her brother and sisters--there was one younger than she was--to gather the hay and bring it home to store in the barn for feed for the cows and horses for the winter.

The Kaestlis had a large house, and they rented out rooms to people who traveled that way--a hotel, or guest house. They also served meals, and the girls learned to cook and help with taking care of the guests. Sometimes the sisters would sing and recite poetry to entertain the guests. A few times Sophie and her younger sister were asked to go to neighboring towns to be in plays, and these occasions were highlights in her life.

When Sophie was about 17 or 18¹, she and her mother and her younger sister, Frieda, heard the Gospel and it meant a great deal to them, and they were baptized. Her father, however, did not join the Church at this time.

Sophie was very close to her father, and spoke of her love for him many times to her children and grandchildren.

As a teen-age girl, Sophie went to the French part of Switzerland to cook and keep house for a wealthy family. While there, she learned to speak French, and she wrote many recipes in French. Her formal schooling consisted of a few years only, taken a few months at a time, when she could be spared from the farming work and the work of running the guest house. However, with such a meager education, she was well-educated in the sense that she could read and write well in German and possibly fairly well in French. Her arithmetic was as good as most any adult, and she had a keen, sharp mind in reasoning and logic. After she came to the United States, she learned English and spoke well and wrote the language fluently, although she never attended a class to learn the language. She had a lifelong appreciation of education and scholastic achievement, and was the motivating force behind her five sons, who all became Doctors of Medicine and practiced in that profession.

¹ Church records indicate that Sophie's mother, Johanna Paulina Ruesch Kaestli, was baptized in 1875 in Switzerland; that her sister, Frieda, was baptized in 1893; Sophie was baptized in 1894; her brother, Joseph, in 1898; and her father, Johann Kaestli, in 1899.

Not only did young Sophie learn to cook and run a household, but she was an excellent seamstress² and did lovely needlework, crochet work, and knitting.

Sophie's mother wanted to emigrate to the United States, to Utah, to be with the Saints, and her husband was not anxious to leave his homeland. Sophie said that she did not want to leave Switzerland, either, but would do as her parents did. Finally, the father agreed to leave, but at that time the property had not yet been sold, and he was going to let his wife and the daughters--the son and older daughter had left home and lived in Bern and in St. Gallen by that time, and did not join the Church--go with the missionaries and a group of converts on a boat that was leaving soon. But, at the last moment, he couldn't let his family go without him, but knowing that Sophie would do well in taking care of the business affairs, he decided to go with his wife and Frieda³ and Sophie stayed on to see to the disposal of the property. She eventually followed them to America, but the trip for her without her family was a very lonely one.

The trip from Switzerland to Utah was made by train to the coast of France, then by ship to New York⁴, and by train to Salt Lake City. Sophie told of being fearful of traveling by ship--the journey took 3 weeks on the water. She said the boat was crowded⁵, and most all day, the passengers were out on the deck. Sophie was afraid that the ship would tip over, and spent much time counting the number of people on each side of the boat so that she could go to the side with the fewest, to try to even up the load. She was traveling with some missionaries and converts, so she would enlist their help in keeping the ship on an even keel.

One thing that stood out in her memory about New York was that she saw her first banana there, and tasted it. She didn't like it. They had a long journey across the country by train to Salt Lake, and it was there that she saw a man in "overalls" for the first time. She didn't like that, either. She thought they were ugly. The train took her to Cache Valley, and when she got her first look at that Valley, she loved it, because it looked like her native Switzerland, more particularly, the valley of the Rhine River where she had grown up. Here, she was reunited with her loved father and mother and sister, and she was happy.

The Kaestli family settled in Providence, just south of Logan, and there they grew fruits and vegetables which they sold to the residents of Logan. Sophie was nineteen⁶, a tall, slim girl with brown eyes and dark brown hair. She soon got employment as a cook and housekeeper, and worked in this capacity for several prominent families in Logan, among them the Morrells.

² The passenger list for the S.S. Furnessia on which Sophie sailed from Scotland lists her as a seamstress.

³ A younger son, Joseph, also went with the father and mother and Frieda at this time.

⁴ She is listed as a passenger on the S.S. Furnessia sailing from Glasgow, Scotland to Ireland, and then to New York City. She arrived at Ellis Island on 1 May 1895.

⁵ There are over 700 passengers on the ship's list. Icebergs were sighted en route to New York which must have been an amazing sight for a young woman from Switzerland.

⁶ According to the date on which Sophie arrived in New York City, 1 May 1895, she was almost 26 years old when she arrived in Utah.



Sophie Kaestli
St. Gallen, Switzerland, about 1895



Johann Kaestli Family
Altstaedten, Switzerland, 1884



David and Sophie Kaestli Jenkins with Johanna Paulina Ruesch Kaestli and Joseph Kaestli
Logan, Utah, February, 1908, Johann Kaestli's funeral



Paulina (Paula) Kaestli, at right, St. Gallen, Switzerland, about 1900

When Johann and Johanna Paulina Ruesch Kaestli decided to immigrate to America, they left behind their two oldest children, Paulina (Paula) and Johann (John).

Paulina lived in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and from the photo it is assumed that she was a dressmaker in a shop she shared with several other women. Paulina Kaestli died in Switzerland in October 1916. The cause of death and location of her grave are unknown.

Johann (John) Kaestli lived in Bern, Switzerland, and it is believed that he married Anna Klara Steiger. They had one daughter, Paula Nelly Kaestli. She was probably born about 1920. John died in November 1945 in Switzerland.



Grave of Paulina Kaestli
Switzerland, 1916



Johann (John) Kaestli
Bern, Switzerland, about 1900



Paula Nelly Kaestli
Bern, Switzerland, 1937



Nelly, Anna Klara Steiger and Johann (John) Kaestli with friends
Switzerland, about 1937